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Gender Performance and Identity Formation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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ABSTRACT

James Joyce is noteworthy for his ability to elucidate different registers of consciousness through his characters. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Joyce does so through his semi-autobiographical recounting of a young man's efforts to realize his artistic potential. The interactions and disconnect between the novel's narrative perspectives, specifically free indirect discourse and first-person narration, provide different, and oftentimes contradictory, information about the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, and his developing sense of identity. While he receives, and in some ways accepts, a socially imposed male identity, glimpses into his occluded unconscious thoughts reveal his more natural inclinations toward female identification. The unconscious manifestations of socially gendered behaviors and thought patterns demonstrate the necessary fluidity of gender identity, as their presence renders the ability to consistently perform one end of the gender spectrum over another infeasible. This reality is grounded in the novel's shift to first-person perspective at its conclusion, in which Stephen undergoes a partial, but inconsequential, reckoning with his conception of masculine performance. By illustrating how humans experience different registers of consciousness, *A Portrait* incites its readers to reevaluate their personal understandings of gender development and performance, while delegitimizing gender binaries as socially constructed fallacies.

KEYWORDS

James Joyce, Gender Inversion, Gender Identity, Performative Masculinity, Agency, Compulsory Heterosexuality, Homosocial Enactment, Narrative Modes, Femininity, Identity Formation, Unconscious Mind, Sexuality

Throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, most of the novel's characters perform gender according to the constrictions of a gender binary. These characters either enact the socially prescribed gendered roles that correspond with their biological sex, or those of the so-called opposite sex. However, Stephen Dedalus, the novel's protagonist, fluctuates between these two binary ways of being, but most genuinely performs patriarchal definitions of female behavior. Most consistently, he exists as a passively impotent character with little agency, one who is heteronormatively subject to the penetrative workings of the world. However, the narrative's style, which vacillates unpredictably between different registers of consciousness through free indirect discourse, and ultimately, into first-person narration, provides contradictory information about Stephen's true gender existence within his social surroundings. The interactions between these narrative perspectives simultaneously display Stephen's feigned male performances while allowing glimpses into his occluded, inherently female identity. By divulging Stephen's incoherent perceptions of himself, other characters, and his surroundings alongside the filter of an unreliable narrator, the interactions between different registers of consciousness through free indirect discourse and first-person perspective complicate the narrative's portrayal of Stephen's experience as a young man, while elucidating how his sense of a gender identity develops and is reinforced.

Certainly, Joyce's writing is an extension of his particular experience as a man within a patriarchal hegemony. He conveys this reality through his semi-autobiographical recounting of his perceptions and experiences as a young man grappling with the process of achieving self-actualization, with a reckoning of his gender identity included in the process. Due to the necessary disconnect between author and protagonist, and the consequent complication of the relationship between the two, Joseph Valente in "Thrilled by His Touch: Homosexual Panic and the Will to Artistry in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*" reminds readers that "Stephen must, therefore, not only be seen as both Joyce and not Joyce, but he must also be seen as revealing Joyce precisely to the extent that he is *not* a self-depiction (being instead merely a portrait painted with feeling) and disfiguring Joyce to the extent that he *is* a self-depiction, altered by that feeling" (424). This disconnect between Joyce and Stephen allows the former to use his fictional surrogate as a vehicle for social critique and analysis. As for many of his male

contemporaries, Joyce's writing is not a mere regurgitation of the dominant ideology, but rather, a means to analyze and critique these structures from an insider's privileged vantage point.

As one who outwardly identified as existing along the masculine end of the gender spectrum, Joyce is not entirely capable of producing a reliable depiction of a genuinely female experience. In "The Artist and Gendered Discourse: Joyce and Muted Female Culture," Bonnie Kime Scott articulates potential, and valid, anxieties regarding Joyce's manipulation of gender in *A Portrait* when she anticipates, "A troubling possibility is the Joyce's writing of woman still serves a male author's ego, proving he can move into 'other' forms" (422). However, Joyce more so offers a text about a young man's attempts to diverge from socially imposed gender roles and norms while coming to terms with the ways in which he more closely, though unconsciously, identifies with feminine behaviors and ways of thinking, particularly over explicitly masculine demonstrations. Along this vein, Karen Lawrence in "Gender and Narrative Voice in *Jacob's Room* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*" contends in her analysis of the two texts that "The narrative strategies of the novels shed light on the writer's position in society and the effect of sex on that position" (382). Through the interplay between different registers of consciousness through free indirect discourse and first-person narration, Joyce uses his protagonist as a vessel by which to dissect how these dominant social structures influence both men and women's social development, but particularly male experiences of femininity and womanhood.

Joyce most obviously discloses Stephen's fluid sense of a gender identity through the protagonist's inarticulate and wandering meditations on corporeality and spirituality. Throughout the narrative, Stephen experiences his bodily and spiritual existences as mutually exclusive; he either relishes hedonism, particularly through his encounters with prostitutes, or practices near-ascetic levels of bodily deprivation, such as at the start of chapter four, when he mortifies each of his senses (115-6). The dichotomous nature of these two modes of being—as Stephen experiences them—mirrors the corresponding oppositional binary between femininity and masculinity that recurs and is challenged throughout the novel. In *A Portrait's* context, the dominant ideological gendering of bodily and spiritual existence as disparate experiences renders the former as female, while the intangible aspects of one's being, such as one's intellect, are

gendered male. Still, upon closer analysis, both Stephen's body and soul are gendered in ways that do not neatly conform to their socially prescribed parameters.

With regard to Stephen's soul, the narrator frequently refers to it with female gendered pronouns. This is particularly evidenced throughout chapters four and five, including the hypersexualized depiction in which "an inaudible voice seemed to caress the soul, telling *her* names and glories, bidding *her* arise as for espousal and come away, bidding *her* look forth, a spouse, from Amana and from the mountains of the leopards; and the soul seemed to answer with the same inaudible voice, surrendering *herself*; *Inter ubera mea commorabitur*" (Joyce 117, my emphasis). Not only does the narration impart Stephen's soul with female pronouns, thereby including it in the Biblical tradition of defining the soul as female, but even divulges the latent female anatomy of Stephen's soul, since the Latin translates to "He shall lie betwixt my breasts" (Belanger 217). Further, on the previous page, Stephen's soul is described as having "a sensation of spiritual dryness" which, in the context of his soul's female gendering, could be analogous to vaginal dryness, denoting a desire for insemination to spur the artistic realization Stephen yearns for. Similarly, Stephen's soul behaves in a biologically female way. The "inaudible voice" provides Stephen's passive and impressionable soul with guidance. His soul does not directly act, but submissively surrenders herself to the external will of another. At the same time, this notion of surrender is a means to agency for Stephen since it gives "him an intense sense of power to know that he could, by a single act of consent, in a moment of thought, undo all that he had done" (Joyce 117). In this way, the act of surrendering loses its connection to passivity and indecision, and takes on the potential to act as a guiding force. By a mere act of surrender, Stephen has the potential to alter the course of his life.

Through the narration's labelling of Stephen's soul as female, Joyce creates uncertainty as to whether or not Stephen is conscious of his soul's female gendering. On the one hand, if Stephen is included in this opportunity for gender assignment and confirmation, he could be said to be defining the intangible aspects of his identity according to his own terms, rather than those of external forces or his peers, thereby demonstrating a heightened sense of personal agency regardless of his femininity. However, it is more likely that Stephen is not consciously aware of his soul's gendering. This alternative reinforces social notions of female passivity and receptivity

while aligning with the reality of women's anatomical position in heterosexual transferences. Regardless of Stephen's level of consciousness of his soul's gendering, he understands his body to be viewed externally as male, and instinctually acknowledges when other characters refer to him with masculine gendered pronouns. The male gendering of his body simultaneously makes it the site of external challenges to, but also affirmation of, his masculinity. He cannot define his physical presence, which has already been predetermined as male, and instead must passively receive the social imposition of masculinity, in the same way he perhaps would unconsciously receive Catholic discourses on the female gendering of his soul. Although Stephen is granted social power through his socially imposed masculine definition, he is also deprived of autonomy in self-identification. Definition along either end of the gender binary does not necessarily denote personal agency and autonomy.

Stephen's own perceptions of his body and soul situate the two modes of being as existing distinct from and independent of each other. When the two do engage, however, the interactions between his soul and body establish a sort of heterosexual relationship between the feminine soul and masculine soma. The scene near the novel's conclusion, in which Stephen experiences a wet dream while unconsciously thinking about his crush, Emma Cleary, is particularly telling of the sexualized relationship between Stephen's body and soul. At the surface, this scene presents itself as a standard performance of heteronormativity—a male teenager fantasizes about his female crush and his body responds accordingly by ejaculating. However, Stephen's fantasy occurs entirely at the unconscious level, via a dream. It is Stephen's mind that intimately engages with his construction of Emma Cleary. Because Stephen's soul, i.e. the non-corporeal aspect of his being, is gendered female, Stephen's unconscious fantasy about Emma takes on a queer element—his female soul desires his construction of Emma's anatomically female body. Though Stephen's wet dream initially appears as an instance of masculine performance, it is only Stephen's mind that acts upon his idea of Emma, rather than he who actually acts upon her. Emma remains unaware of his thoughts, with the use of free indirect discourse selectively illuminating only Stephen's awareness of the event. Though Stephen is superficially masculine, he remains ineffectual and impotent while performing heterosexual, male tropes.

This scene grows more complicated upon Stephen's awakening. As he becomes increasingly conscious, his potentially homosexual fantasy morphs into a heterosexual, solipsistic masturbation. Once Stephen becomes aware of himself, in exchange for dreaming of another, that is, Emma, the narrator imparts how Stephen's "soul was all dewy wet" (Joyce 167). Stephen's physical, socially masculinized body ejaculates upon his femininely receptive soul. Consequently, he experiences a reluctance to separate himself from the relative freedom of female self-identification that his unconsciousness allows him to experience. His soul wakes "slowly, fearing to wake wholly" (167), since he seems to be more comfortable in a state that is unfettered by patriarchal constrictions. Correspondingly, as he becomes increasingly more conscious, Emma disappears from the scene. Stephen's sexuality thereby reveals itself as a form of self-aggrandizement rather than a means to establish connections with others, so much as women. His unconscious masturbation exists as an acceptance of self-centric performances predominantly associated with masculinity, disguised as a façade of outward heterosexuality and a desire to connect with others.

Nearly all of Stephen's interactions with women are presented as mere engagements with his constructions of them. These instances with women therefore prove to be unreliable reflections of reality since the women he associates with exist as his flawed conceptions of what it means to be female. Rather than understanding the women as complex individuals, he confines them to the Madonna-Whore trope. The prostitutes he engages with, unsurprisingly, fall on the Whore end, while his crushes are idealized Madonnas. Emma Cleary is one of his most notable Madonnas. She has the potential to grant Stephen salvation despite his sinful tendencies. For instance, Stephen fantasizes that the Virgin Mary absolves the pair of sinful culpability when she forgives, "Take hands, Stephen and Emma. It is a beautiful evening now in heaven. You have erred but you are always my children. It is one heart that loves another heart" (Joyce 89). Emma, being incorruptible, is not offended by Stephen's sinfulness. Her purity grants Stephen immunity from the sin of lechery.

In his earlier years, Stephen fantasized about Mercedes, an actual fictional character who was similarly created by a male author, Alexandre Dumas (Notes 206). During one of his daydreams about their union, he imagines that "They would be alone, surrounded by darkness

and silence: and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured. He would fade into something impalpable under her eyes and then in a moment he would be transfigured. Weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in that magic moment” (Joyce 49). Stephen has a pattern of surrendering himself to his constructions of femininity. Here, he willfully disregards his senses of sight and sound, his means to interact with others and the world. The narration of Stephen’s surrender occurs in passive tense, emphasizing the ways in which Stephen is acted upon by an intangible woman. He projects his desires for fulfillment and a sense of self onto this fantasy of Mercedes, who he believes can grant him salvation. This initial fabrication of a love interest has the potential to spur greater change in Stephen than his immediate will, and he imagines that his fantasy of womanhood can serve as a means by which to become more masculine, through the shedding of “weakness and timidity and inexperience.” However, throughout his future encounters with women, he maintains a consistently passive and receptive stance.

Stephen’s introduction to Mercedes as a fictional love interest sets the template for his following conceptions of femininity that take place with actual, existing women, including Eileen, Emma Cleary, and all of the other female characters who become subject to Stephen’s fantasies of womanhood. Rather than altering his perceptions of women and femininity to correspond to reality, Stephen merely transfers his fabricated understanding of femininity unto reality because “He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld” (Joyce 48). Even into the fifth chapter, Stephen understands literature more than he understands himself, reality, and his potential to engage meaningfully with the world. Therefore, he projects the opportunity for disconnect from the real world that fictionalization offers onto his interactions with other characters. In an instance of irony, Stephen unknowingly defines his own existence in *A Portrait* when he explains the following:

Even in literature, the highest and most spiritual art, the forms are often confused...the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of

the artist passes into the narrative itself, flowing round and round the persons and action like a vital sea (Joyce 165-6).

Stephen confuses numerous dichotomous forms throughout the narrative, such as the spiritual vs. corporeal, masculine vs. feminine, agent vs. object, etc. In his confusion between the personal and external, and well as reality and fiction, the women that Stephen engages with consistently exist as mere constructions whom Stephen can never fully approach. He can only see himself “as the centre of an epical event,” that event being his own life. As the self-proclaimed artist, Stephen projects his personality onto other characters, particularly the novel’s women, who have little opportunity to define themselves. His solipsism is consistent and thorough.

For this reason, during the tram ride with Eileen, Stephen remains unable to fully engage with her. He imagines, that “she too wants me to catch hold of her... That’s why she came with me to the tram. I could easily catch hold of her when she comes up to my step: nobody is looking. I could hold her and kiss her.” The narration follows by revealing that “he did neither: and, when he was sitting alone in the deserted tram, he tore his ticket into shreds and stared gloomily at the corrugated footboard” (Joyce 52). This interplay between first-person perspective and free indirect discourse situates Stephen’s desires and capabilities as being at odds with each other. He at once wants to be involved with women, yet remains unable to meaningfully interact with them. Stephen, yet again, takes on the role of passive observer and remains impotent when faced with the possibility of engaging with his love interests.

Further, the novel’s inconsistent perspectival style causes Stephen to mentally represent all of these women as ephemerally flitting in and out of the narrative. Their insubstantiality and unpredictability thereby render them unattainable for the reader, who is only provided with Stephen’s unreliable and underdeveloped constructions of female existence. While Stephen is unable to conceive of the women as complex beings, the reader is similarly denied access to their potentially more substantial identities. There is little to no insight into these women’s true feelings or thoughts, only mere representations of how Stephen perceives them. In this way, at the surface, they are too “shadowy and insubstantial” (Valente 436), just like the “silver line” or “white spray” (Joyce 117) that Stephen’s semen takes the form of. While both have minor

physical existences, the unconscious presence of the women and Stephen's masculine projections are certainly more substantial. Therefore, they certainly impress heavily upon the reality of Stephen's identity formation and personal development, whether he realizes it or not. These instances of inconsistency between Stephen's unconscious experiences and the physical reality behind them demonstrate some of the story's most overt sources of dissonance between its three narrative styles.

The narcissistic reality of Stephen's fantasy for Emma comes as no surprise, since his solipsistic tendencies were presupposed by his father. Simon's story that took place on the story's first page immediately situated Stephen as the central character of not only his father's simple narrative, but the central character of *A Portrait*, as a whole. Scott contends that, "By making "Baby Tuckoo" or Stephen the subject or center of his narrative, Simon encourages the self-centered, egotistical, solipsistic narrative so obvious throughout Stephen's artistic development" (409). Such instances in which other characters do acknowledge Stephen's body and his corresponding interactions with the bodies of others, in contrast to his fantasies of others engaging with his body, provide further insight into Stephen's perception of his complicated gender identity. The narrative begins with Stephen finding out who he is through his father's story, "a nicens little *boy*" (Joyce 3, my emphasis). By the conclusion of the novel's first sentence, Stephen is explicitly gendered male. He goes on to innocently explore the anatomy of the female sex by hiding under the family dinner table and peering up his aunt's skirt. Because this scene appears long before Stephen is capable of developing a coherent sense of a gender identity, it is ambiguous whether the scene implicates his soul's potential queerness, stands as a testament to an unconscious self-identification—as his nascent female soul explores that which is anatomically female—or merely serves as an instance of enacted masculine curiosity.

In response to Stephen's investigation, his female relatives instantly confine him to a male existence, as well. Most obviously, his mother and aunt follow Simon's example by referring to Stephen with masculine pronouns and punishing him for what they perceive as male perversion. They threaten to preemptively castrate him by pulling out his eyes so that his potentially penetrative gaze cannot further violate the anatomically female body. Stephen's mother and aunt exist as immediate foils to the overtly masculine, oratory father with a "hairy

face” (Joyce 3) and who enacts the “Lacanian theory” of associating the “paternal phallus with the *logos* or word” (Scott 409). In behavioral contrast, “Mrs. Dedalus has had most of her performances edited out of *A Portrait*. Dialogues are recalled, not recorded at length. She complies generally with stereotypically feminine roles of accompanist and observer, displaying a muted and inhibited discourse” (Scott 410). Still, as the novel progresses, Stephen’s mother does make a number of attempts to steer her son away from toxically masculine behaviors, almost as if she recognizes her deterministic fault in immediately characterizing her son as male. And while the narrative omits much of Mrs. Dedalus’s opportunities to assert herself as an agent, Simon Dedalus similarly remains absent throughout his son’s development. During Stephen’s scolding by his female relatives, Simon stands in the narrative’s background, even though, as Hélène Cixous, in “Reaching the Point of Wheat, or a Portrait of the Artist as a Maturing Woman,” points out “the first adult character who comes to the page is the father” (365). This absence foreshadows how Stephen will have little to no male guidance throughout the duration of the novel, though the pressures of patriarchal constraints will influence him, regardless. The women in Stephen’s life set a limiting template for the continued imposition and reinforcement of masculinity, which male characters continuously draw from throughout *A Portrait*.

Although these external forces instantly, and continuously, attempt to assert Stephen’s male gender, glimpses into his personal thoughts, by way of free indirect discourse, divulge his inherent femininity. For instance, shortly succeeding his bombardment with the aforementioned masculine characterization, Stephen ponders conventionally feminine subjects, like flowers (which Scott refers to as “usually a female emblem” (406), and soft pastel colors. He thinks,

“White roses and red roses: those were beautiful colours to think of. And the cards for first place and second place and third place were beautiful colors too: pink and cream and lavender. Lavender and cream and pink roses were beautiful to think of” (Joyce 7). Stephen’s reflection is quite tender and frank since he seems to understand that his thoughts are one of the few places of refuge from external masculine imposition and compulsory masculine performance. In this way, Stephen asserts a sense of agency and self-definition through his thoughts. But certainly, these thoughts remain confined to his personal awareness and, therefore, do not produce a tangible effect upon the world. Although his feminine thought patterns grant

him a sense of personal contentment and potential liberation, their external limitations contribute to Stephen's prevailing characterization as impotent and passive.

Likewise, characters outside of Stephen's immediate family consistently challenge and/or confuse his gender identity. For instance, just preceding the Harold's Cross children's party, an old woman mistakes Stephen for a young girl named Josephine and, embarrassed though perhaps not entirely surprised by her mistake, goes on to repeat her confusion a number of times. Afterwards, Stephen enacts his default response to social discomfort—he retreats into the comfort of solitude and isolation. His isolation both acts as a maternal source of comfort, and an example of his solipsistic tendencies toward masturbation. Stephen “withdraw[s] into a snug corner of the room,” a vaginal metaphor, to “taste the joy of his loneliness” (Joyce 51). In contrast, just after the party, Stephen enacts what Valente refers to as “compulsory heterosexuality” (433) through an instance of gender inversion with Eileen. Once he comes into contact with her, “he assumes what was though [*sic*] to be the essentially, even *definitively* feminine role of sexual passivity and withdrawal, receiving without responding to her sexual advances” (432). Whether in social settings or when confronted by a love interest, Stephen is unable to engage meaningfully with the world, or others, due to his natural state of passivity and impotence.

Later on in the narrative, when Stephen's father does exert more influence on his son by directly acknowledging Stephen's bodily existence, he treats Stephen as female in a way that contrasts his mother and aunt's understanding of the protagonist's gender. Simon and his friends castrate Stephen by ascribing him as “a boy who doesn't bother his head about that kind of nonsense” (Joyce 71), meaning flirtations with women. This castration does not denote asexuality, but rather, unmanliness. Stephen's father considers his son's body less than and in direct opposition to his own. He challenges Stephen physically by proclaiming “I'll sing at tenor song against him or I'll vault a five-barred gate against him or I'll run with him after the hounds across the country as I did thirty years ago along with the Kerry Boy and the best man for it” (Joyce 72). Stephen is not only symbolically castrated through the dismissal of his masculine sexuality, but rendered increasingly impotent through his physical weakness. He passively observes, while the world and others assert a penetrative, emasculating force upon him. The

different ways in which Stephen's parents characterize him demonstrate how Stephen is neither male enough, nor female enough, for conventional readings of gender. Though outside forces attempt to confine Stephen to one end of the gender spectrum or the other, their consistent failure to do so reveals the tenuous nature of gender binaries.

Rather than responding to his father's verbal attack upon his physicality, Stephen passively allows Simon to deride him. Simon's male counterparts are the ones to actively stick up for Stephen by noting his superior intellect. One of the men notes, "But he'll beat you here" while "tapping his forehead" (Joyce 72). Still, Stephen's intelligence does not make him any more masculine in this situation, nor later on within the novel, despite the intellect's associations with masculinity in the novel's context. Just like Stephen's meditations on flowers and pastel colors, his intelligence contributes to his impotence and passivity. It does not allow him to assert himself as indignantly witty or righteously defensive; rather, it contributes to his debilitating inclinations toward self-isolation. In this way, Stephen's intellect manifests as stereotypically female. It is a reflection of his inability to act upon and engage meaningfully with the external world.

Stephen's acceptance of, and in some ways reverence to, the intellect, academia, and predominantly male institutions are telling of his complicated gender alliances. Though he unconsciously internalizes himself as female, there are numerous instances in which he desires to be accepted within patriarchal institutions, particularly academia and the priesthood. With regard to the former, Stephen certainly benefits from the consequences of his involvement with academia. His "reputation for essay writing" leads him to be "elected secretary to the gymnasium" (Joyce 55), thereby granting him social mobility. His erudition through patriarchal participation manifests as a means for personal advancement. Regardless, he develops a sense of suspicion toward academia. In chapter four, he professes, "The university! So he had passed beyond the challenge of the sentries who 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" (Joyce 126). He seems to have an awareness of the masculine gendering of knowledge and the intellect, and considers academia's role in attempting to similarly gender him male. However, his suspicions remain ambiguous. At the same time that he fears male characterization, he is suspicious of

academia's potential to render him subservient, i.e. feminine. Stephen considers how the notion of serving could relegate him to the role of dutiful female companion. He understands that his involvement with academia would not grant him the honorary benefits of patriarchal participation, but would leave him a subordinate subject to the negative, limiting consequences of such a partnership. Aware of the freedom that his separation from male institutionalism has the potential to grant Stephen, the narrator conveys "His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her graveclothes. Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul" (Joyce 130). Stephen does not see academia as a means to foster his own creative desires, but as a self-involved institution that detrimentally molds men into serving its own deterministically patriarchal means.

With regard to Stephen's brief consideration of participating in religious institutionalism, he similarly humors the opportunity for social advancement that his engagement could provide for him. When the priest entreats Stephen to consider joining the order by focusing on the extensive power it will grant him, a power that "No angel or archangel in heaven, no saint, not even the Blessed Virgin herself" has, Stephen initially feels an intense sense of excitement. As Stephen hears "in this proud address an echo of his own proud musings" (Joyce 121), he forgets his allegiance to women and female religious figures, the Virgin Mary included, who the narrator had entreated for aid in Stephen's atonement in chapter three by begging, "O Mary, refuge of sinners, intercede for him! O Virgin undefiled, save him from the gulf of death" (Joyce 96). This instance serves as yet another instance of disconnect between the protagonist and narration. While the narration more consistently refers to Stephen as female, the protagonist vacillates between modes of gender expression and allegiance. Therefore, Stephen muses over a reality in which he is superordinate to even biblical women. The protagonist's inconsistency further reflects his pervasive solipsism. Once he experiences yet another affirmation from the outside world of his self-indulgence, he reverts to conventionally masculine behaviors and ways of thinking.

When Stephen confesses his indulgences in lechery to a priest, another form of a father, Stephen is met with yet another instance of weak male guidance. Rather than simply absolving Stephen of his believed sins, the priest lectures him on masculinity by entreating, "Give it up, my

child, for God's sake. It is dishonorable and unmanly. You cannot know where that wretched habit will lead you or where it will come against you" (Stephen 111). Stephen's correspondence with the priest serves as yet another form of symbolic castration, with this instance more closely mirroring that which was enacted by Stephen's female relatives. It is sexually reactionary—the priest terminates Stephen's phallic potential precisely because Stephen does exist as a sexual being. Unlike Stephen's father, the priest describes sexuality as denoting a lack of masculinity. He sees Stephen's inability to control his libidinal urges as a larger inability to enact agency.

With regard to Stephen's particular case, the priest is not wrong. When Stephen does enact his sexuality through his encounters with prostitutes, he maintains a passive, female position within an imbalanced sexual power dynamic, what Valente refers to as "a literal and symbolic inversion of the phallic mode of heterosexual activity" (433). While Simon stood as a masculine orator, his son has difficulty communicating. Scott explains how "Stephen begins with an effort to control the situation by speech but the prostitute's own 'vehicle of vague speech' moves him to uncharacteristic silence, submission and almost to hysterical weeping," the last of which is "a negative symptom attributed particularly to women by Freud" (418). Stephen cannot speak, and by extension cannot meaningfully engage with the world or assert his agency. The prostitute instead asserts a penetrative force upon Stephen through "the dark pressure of her softly parting lips" which "pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech" (Joyce 77). Stephen receives without so much as responding. Valente refers to "Stephen's entry into nominally heterosexual activity, from courtship rituals to whoring practices" as "forms of gender inversion" (431) since he and the prostitute trade gender roles in their sexual encounter. The prostitute, through her submission of Stephen's consciousness, has the power to control him more than just physically—she is able to deprive him of his esteemed intellect. Stephen does not form his own conception of this power dynamic; rather, it is only the narrator who provides readers with a descriptive portrayal of the scene's happenings. The narration thereby forces the reader to parse through the implications of Stephen's experiences with gender inversion, a phenomenon that Valente describes as "a progressive overlapping and interfolding of sexual preferences that is registered at one level of self-narration only to be denied or externalized at another" (433). Even when Stephen is engaging in explicit bodily

activity, he remains confined to disparaging notions of femininity. He is acted upon, rather than one who acts. In this way, Stephen's experience with the prostitute challenges the notion that sexual power exists solely in the masculine realm. A woman, through the visibility of her anatomically female form, is able to paralyze a male body.

Stephen's deprivation of his oral capacities has implications for his similarly deprived sense of taste. Cixous argues that "Taste is the first act of knowledge, for women and for all men who are women. And the price of it has been exile, death, but also work, art, and creation" (362-3). Stephen, still as a nascently developing woman, through the deprivation of his oral capacities, cannot taste, and therefore cannot yet act as an intellectual, an artist, or a creator. In contrast, the prostitute can taste. Her overt physicality transcends Stephen's ability to think and leaves him paralyzed, vulnerable to her whim. Her phallic tongue penetrates his willfully submissive body in a way that mimics imbalanced heterosexual power relations. Because Stephen is deprived of one of his most valuable assets, his intellect, he becomes not only less masculine in these encounters, but less human. Just before this particular encounter, but after he has already allowed his sexual impulses to take hold of him, he "moan[s] to himself like some baffled prowling beast" (Stephen 75). The priest he had made confession to almost knowingly diagnosed not only Stephen's passivity and consequent emasculation, but his simultaneously dehumanization. At the same time, he unknowingly contradicts Stephen's scattered perceptions of how masculinity functions and its ties to sexuality. This recurring absence of strong and positive guidance from male figures within Stephen's life, for better or worse, leaves him unable to form a coherent idea of how masculinity functions.

But ultimately, although Stephen is interested in the patriarchal institutions of academia and church, he excludes himself from them. Lawrence, in comparing the protagonists of *Jacob's Room* and *A Portrait* observes that "the young sons of Ireland and England do not take up the mantles of their fathers" (382). Stephen's idealized affinity for the consequences of patriarchal institutions, such as classical literature and advanced education, are extensions of his own self-interest, and not indicative of an interest in the institutions themselves. His consideration of joining the priesthood is not a desire for masculine acceptance and power, but rather proof of his inclinations toward self-aggrandizement and isolation—still a typically masculine way of

thinking and existing. For this reason, Stephen's interest in the brotherhood is fleeting. He becomes dissuaded by the tangible consequences, the "grave and ordered and passionless life that awaited him, a life without material cares" (Joyce 123), which would have resulted from his acceptance into the order, though he remains unsure of the reasons for his refusal. His consequent, physical passing of the Christian brothers as he walks along the bridge symbolizes his tendency to outwardly go against male camaraderie and institutionalism. Though the prospect of participating in dominantly male institutions, and the power they could potentially grant him, titillate Stephen, his gradual reckoning with his more genuinely female gender identity exposes the self-serving disingenuousness of his interest in these institutions.

Stephen's denial of institutionalized forms of masculinity results, in part, from the fact that "Joyce (as well as Stephen) felt oppressed by institutions that sought to include him." He therefore conveys this reality through Stephen, his semi-autobiographical self. Lawrence elaborates that Stephen's "artistic consciousness is preempted by the patriarchal institutions seeking to include him" (Lawrence 389), meaning the institutions serve as barriers to him realizing his sense of identity and consequent artistic capabilities. Stephen's reluctance to use these tools of patriarchal power therefore limits his ability to assert his creative autonomy. He understands himself as being "destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world" (Joyce 124). In this way, Stephen not only imagines a future of willful isolation, but also classifies himself as prey through his feelings of suspicion and unease. He is weary of masculine institutions and situates them as forms of male predation and aggression that he is vulnerable to, since these masculine institutions assert a penetrative, inhibiting force on the receptive protagonist. His reluctance to participate in institutions of patriarchal hegemony is for the sake of fostering his own means of artistic expression, and thereby an attempt at achieving a sense of autonomy.

The narration's portrayal of Stephen's creativity uses maternal, rather than paternal, language to convey his productivity. The protagonist's most overt instances of creative potential occur during moments of relative compassion, when he is not preoccupied with his fantasy of self-isolation, since it is in these moments that Stephen is his most feminine. One particular moment of compassion leads Stephen to feel as though he is with child. It is "only then for the

first time since he brooded on the great mystery of love did he feel within him a warm movement like that of some newly born life or virtue of the soul itself” (Joyce 115). Similarly, after firmly resolving not to join the priesthood, and as he contemplates his creative, maternal potential, he likens the process of artistic creation, yet another way to “to recreate life out of life” (Joyce 132), to birth. For Stephen, the process of bringing art into the world is near synonymous to the creation of a human life. He is therefore most able to create when he identifies closely to femininity and womanhood.

His eagerness to exist as an artist, and thereby more female, does not come without apprehension, though. While his femininity signals greater expressive freedom, it has gender based oppression and harassment as a side effect. One of his most overt instances of maternal anxiety occurs in chapter two, when Stephen experiences an acute bout of uneasiness upon finding a carving of the word “foetus.” Stephen gives life to an entire construction of a scene in which “A broad-shouldered student with a moustache (i.e. a hyper-masculine student) was cutting in the letters with a jack-knife, seriously” while a cohort of rowdy students’ watch. The mere sight of the word “foetus” imposes a strong sense of maternity upon Stephen, since it causes him “to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his own mind.” The transference of Stephen’s anxieties into a semi-physical—the scene is real enough to the deeply distraught Stephen—apparition acts as a symbolic birth of a squadron of sons. This scene is particularly telling of Stephen’s identification with maternity since it directly succeeds an instance of paternal failure, in which his father was “duped by the servile manners of the porter” (Joyce 68) that accompanied the pair.

Stephen’s discomfort over his fabrication of the wood carver and his entourage of supportive men, in part, also comes from his disinterest in male social bonding, something that had manifested at an early age. Shortly before the foetus scene, while Stephen is witnessing the antagonistic tendencies of his male peers, the narrator observes, that Stephen “mistrusted the turbulence and doubted the sincerity of such comradeship which seemed to him a sorry anticipation of manhood” (Joyce 63). Stephen is skeptical of male performances of masculinity, and he readily notes the disingenuousness of them. However, his disinterest is in part a defense mechanism, since he is aware of his exclusion from male homosocial bonds. Stephen’s fellow

students know him to be relatively feminine and deliberately exclude him from their male-centric merrymaking because of it. In fact, his school mate Heron accurately characterizes Stephen as “a model youth” who “doesn’t smoke and he doesn’t go to bazaars and he doesn’t flirt and he doesn’t damn anything or damn all” (Joyce 57). Stephen’s peers readily classify him as one who does not act upon the world.

In particular, Stephen frequently refers back to when Wells “had shouldered him into the square ditch the day before because he would not swop his little snuffbox for Wells’s seasoned hacking chestnut.” This larger, more masculine boy pushes the effete Stephen into a cavernous ditch, a vaginal symbol for where Stephen anatomically belongs. Wells’s heightened sense of masculinity is so at odds with Stephen’s relative femininity that Stephen cannot even “raise his eyes to Wells’ face” (Joyce 9) to conjure an image of his bully’s mother. Further, Wells’s motive for bullying Stephen is comparably gendered. Joseph Valente explains how Stephen “will not trade his dandyish ‘little snuffbox’ for Wells’s macho ‘hacking chestnut, the conqueror of forty,’” and elaborates that “the box and the nut function as genital symbols for the respectively feminized and masculinized positions of Stephen and Wells” (426). Stephen is unwilling to trade in his femininity for a symbol of masculinity. Wells’s desire for the little snuffbox is telling of masculinity’s tenuous grasp on not only Stephen, but his peers as well, who seem to be searching for modes of escape from masculinity. Even Wells’s name alludes to vaginal anatomy, or a similarly cavernous orifice. Stephen, solipsistically unaware of the similar turmoil experienced by his peers, therefore attempts to reclaim his pride and social standing through a masculine demonstration—by willfully separating himself from them. Stephen and his peers’ disinterest in performing conventional masculinity reveals the tenuous grasp that masculinity has upon its subjects, as well as the ways in which masculinity fails for other characters. It comes as no surprise then, when Stephen and his peers feel a sense of discomfort and defensiveness in response to the gipsy student’s celebration of “universal brotherhood.” Rather than joining in on the cheer, Stephen does not engage and Temple uneasily glanc[es] about him” (Joyce 152).

Even Simon Dedalus, a strong proponent of masculinity, seems to have an awareness of its fragility, as evidenced by his anxieties regarding his son’s, and by extension his own, masculine failure. If Simon is incapable of producing and raising a properly male son, this failure

reflects poorly upon his own vulnerable masculinity. He seems to acknowledge his inability to produce a proper son when he disparagingly addresses Stephen as “your lazy bitch of a brother” to one of Stephen’s sisters. The accusation of laziness alludes to Stephen’s passivity and impotence, while “bitch” quite explicitly genders him as female, and negatively so. Stephen, in one of his most explicit displays of self-respect, cleverly retorts, “He has a curious idea of genders if he thinks a bitch is masculine” (Joyce 135). However, Stephen’s jab at his father is not exactly self-aware. While he may be noting the oxymoron of combining “bitch” and “brother” as an insult, he more likely seems to view himself as male, and wants to label himself as such.

Further, Stephen’s father is unable to perform his role as a patriarch, despite his aggressive insistence on his physicality. Most notably, he is constantly in debt and unable to provide his family with a sense of stability. Aware of his father’s failures, Stephen concedes early on in *A Portrait* that “he felt sorry for him that he was not a magistrate like the other boys’ fathers” (Joyce 18). Even at a young age, Stephen has an idea of how masculinity functions within society and how his father fails to adhere to his expected, gendered parameters. Despite Simon’s financial failures, he attempts to uphold his façade as masculine model. Scott contends, “When he can no longer afford to send Stephen to prestigious Clongowes Wood College, Simon takes pride in having arranged with Father Conmee for Stephen’s place in the local Jesuit school, Belvedere. His self-satisfaction comes from a sense of knowing and manipulating a systems and implies complicity in social and intellectual hierarchies and male networks” (411). While male institutions exclude Simon, he still wishes to ensure a place of acceptance for his immediate male heir within them. This example of masculine inconsistency is just one of many instances in which Stephen receives mixed signals about masculinity from inadequate male models.

In this way, Stephen’s confusion regarding masculine performance, at least in part, stems from his parents’ contradicting ideas of male camaraderie. Simon reveres the idea of male camaraderie, as previously demonstrated by his relationships with his male friends. To “facilitate Stephen’s male-bonding at school” (Scott 410), Simon advises his son “never to peach on a fellow” (Joyce 5), and much later on in the narrative pushes Stephen to join rowing club (Joyce 194), making Simon’s pressuring of Stephen to be masculine quite consistent throughout the novel. His insistence on masculine performance sets the precedent for Stephen’s overarching

tendency to isolate himself and stifle of his emotions. By advising his son not to “peach on a fellow,” Simon socializes Stephen to internalize his feelings, rather than process and share them. In fact, later on in the narrative, when Stephen makes an effort to let his feelings be known to others, he is mocked for it. Stephen eventually does peach on a fellow, that fellow being Father Dolan, who hit him with the pandy bat, the symbol of “phallic power” exercised over Stephen’s “castrated vision” (Scott 405) after he failed to complete his schoolwork due to impaired—that is, castrated—vision. In this way, Dolan asserted an act of masculine domination over the hyper-feminized Stephen. The consequences of betraying his fellow man reinforce Stephen’s belief that he should have listened to his father by isolating himself emotionally.

In contrast, the guidance that Stephen receives from his mother directs him to avoid male homosocial bonding. She encouraged isolation from men when she “told him not to speak with the rough boys in the college” (Joyce 5). Stephen’s mother rejects performative masculinity, and Stephen praises her for it (“Nice mother!”), even before he has a clear understanding of why his peer’s demonstrations of masculinity are socially undesirable. His mother sets the precedent for proper behavior by giving Stephen guidance, while his father only gives him “five-shilling pieces for pocket money” (Joyce 5), with currency acting as paternalistic symbol in place of proper guidance. Still, the pressures of masculine performance create a strong impression upon Stephen, even early on. He follows by avoiding looking at his mother when she cries while saying goodbye to him because of his unwillingness to process and experience emotion.

Ultimately, though, near the novel’s conclusion, Stephen begins to perform masculine behavior in front of his male peers naturally. For instance, when Cranly asks him if he would “deflower a virgin,” Stephen replies, “is that not the ambition of most young gentlemen?” (Joyce 190). Though his response is outwardly direct, his feelings remain ambiguous. He may exclude himself from the category of “most young gentlemen,” or he may consider himself as part of this social group. When Cranly presses Stephen for a less cryptic response, Stephen continues to avoid the question and instead addresses an issue that he finds more pressing, his unwillingness to “serve that in which [he] no longer believes” (Joyce 191). He deliberately neglects the conversation that Cranly is trying to have with him, in favor of shifting the conversation to his own point of interest—himself and his convictions. Though Stephen remains unable to engage

properly with others and continues to indulge in his solipsistic tendencies, he seems to have an understanding of how to manipulate homosocial interactions to feign an appearance of masculinity.

Their exchange takes place in free indirect discourse, so the reader is simultaneously presented with a sense of Stephen and Cranly's thoughts, as well as the narrator's presentation of them. The protagonist's next example of feigned male performance, occurring in first-person and within the security of his journal, provides a different portrayal of Stephen's gender performance. While accompanying Lynch, the two "followed a sizeable hospital nurse." Stephen likens the experience to "Two lean hungry greyhounds walking after a heifer" (Joyce 192). In Stephen's mind, conveyed through the first-person, he is no longer victim to "the snares of the world" (Joyce 124) and instead can assert himself as a predator to relatively vulnerable women. The incessant weight of the socially imposed pressures that he experienced throughout his youth lead him to act in a way that corresponds to the more toxic inclinations of his biological sex, and in contrast to his femininity. He has some awareness of this reality and labels himself as "handicapped by [his] sex and youth" (Joyce 192), but makes little effort at the novel's conclusion to restructure his harmfully masculine ways of thinking and behaving.

Stephen's instances of performative masculinity that occur near *A Portrait's* conclusion are in direct contrast to his earlier defense of Emma Cleary's affections, as well as a later instance in which he attempted to defend his construction of her from his corrupted perception of himself. In this second situation, "The image of Emma appeared before him, and under her eyes the flood of shame rushed forth anew from his heart. If she knew to what his mind had subjected her or how his brute-like lust had torn and trampled upon her innocence! Was that boyish love? Was that chivalry? Was that poetry?" (Joyce 88). Stephen questions the stereotypes of masculine roles and experiences an acute sense of shame when he sees himself performing masculine tropes. The contrast between Stephen's overtly predatory toward the hospital nurse and Emma also calls into question the notion of masculine possession and entitlement. In this sense, Stephen only experiences compassion for Emma since he is able to conceive of her in relation to himself, as she is *his* love interest. His relative tenderness toward her is therefore yet another

manifestation of his solipsistic tendencies. Stephen does not share a personal connection with the hospital nurse, on the other hand, and therefore feels at liberty to harass her.

If Stephen's engagement with spoken language is female, as evidenced through his debilitating encounters with prostitutes, his relationship to the written word takes on a more masculine attribution. The protagonist's inability to transpose his thoughts genuinely, even in the security of a journal, is telling of just how entrenched his unconscious fears of being exposed as feminine are. His writing exists as an extension of his perception of masculinity. The protagonist transcribes his thoughts into the physical world, with a phallic symbol that imposes itself upon a passively inert, receptive surface. Therefore, writing gives him the opportunity to enact materially what he cannot do in social settings. The transformation of his thoughts into physical existence compromises their unconscious, feminine integrity. This transition from thought to physical impression that his consciousness undergoes mirrors the spirituality versus corporeal dichotomy that respectively corresponds to femininity and masculinity, since Stephen's thoughts take on a masculine quality when they enter the physical world. Stephen can no longer express himself frankly, for fear that someone else may stumble across his writing. Joyce's protagonist, as an extension of himself, was almost presciently (and humorously) reserved, as evidenced by the finding and release of much of Joyce's personal written correspondence, particularly his explicit letters to his wife, Nora Barnacle.

Stephen accepts other manifestations of masculinity through writing, as well. Most prominently, he takes on the namesake of Daedalus, the "old father, old artificer." Stephen's reverence to a figure of classical literature is also telling of his lingering, partial affinity for male institutionalism. He believes that this literary connection will allow him "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race" (Joyce 196). At the same time that Stephen rejects his biological father's brand of paternity, he eagerly accepts other forms of masculinity and fatherhood in contrast to his more maternal tendencies. Through his grandiose desire to father this race, he takes on a paternal instinct. Although Stephen is skeptical of male dominated institutions, he recognizes their historical power since he creates a connection between himself and a figure of classical narration.

However, Daedalus's relationship with his son in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, is more maternal figure than paternal, and reveals yet another layer of Stephen's complicated gender identity and the disconnect between his desires and reality. Daedalus is openly compassionate and affectionate to Icarus. As he fastens the wings he created onto his son, his "cheeks were wet with tears, and his fatherly affection made his hands tremble. He kissed his son, whom he was never to kiss again: then, raising himself on his wings, flew in front, showing anxious concern for his companion." Daedalus becomes overwhelmed by his feelings of concern and tenderness for his son and performs a number of demonstrations of motherly love. The narrator goes on to liken Daedalus to a female bird when describing Daedalus as "just like a bird who has brought *her* tender fledgelings out of their nest in the treetops" (Ovid 185, my emphasis). In this way, Stephen does not necessarily take on Daedalus's name in an effort to legitimize himself through a connection to a legacy of masculine excellence, but instead desires to achieve Daedalus's sense of genius alongside his ability to meaningfully experience humanity and compassion.

Stephen's most explicitly masculine demonstrations, then, occur through his expressions of anger. Early on in the novel, after Stephen had incorrectly been pandered by Father Dolan, he makes one of his first aggressive retaliations against gender by attacking what he perceives to be a female name. While still thinking about how Father Dolan could not remember his last name, Stephen reasons, "The great men in the history had names like that and nobody made fun of them. It was his own name that he should have made fun of if he wanted to make fun. Dolan: it was like the name of a woman who washed clothes" (Joyce 41). Stephen again recalls his connection to a paternal legacy and the powerful men of the classics that he reveres, who are testaments to his esteemed erudition, as a form of self-legitimization. He is aware of gendered societal hierarchies and intentionally uses the imbalanced social dynamic between men and women to delegitimize Dolan. Scott notes Stephen's acceptance of gendered and classist norms when she explains that "Stephen has learned that women in domestic service deserve low regard; great men in history are respectable" (406). For this reason, Stephen disparagingly resorts to tired old tropes of female and domestic intellectual incompetence in order to insult Dolan—by connecting Dolan to women, i.e. unintelligent women, Stephen feels as though he can assert himself as superior in two realms of being, both the physical and intellectual.

Further, one of the few times someone overtly refers to Stephen as a man, in contrast to a bitch, for instance, is during one of Stephen's fits of rage. Cranly says to Stephen, "Go easy, my dear man. You're an excitable bloody man," in response to Stephen's assertion that he "will not serve" (Joyce 184) his mother's desires. For Cranly, then, masculinity denotes asserting one's will, or in Stephen's case, not asserting the will of another, particularly when that person is a woman. Therefore, it is not so much Stephen's anger that makes Cranly refer to Stephen as a man, but more so his inability to feel compassion for someone who had most consistently fostered, if not Stephen's femininity, at least his dismissal of masculinity. After all, it was Stephen's mother who he reached out to with a letter when he was sick at Clongowes and wanted care and affection—a rare instance in which he put his vulnerability on display. Cranly's interpretation of Stephen and his gender performance is omnisciently consistent with the overarching narrative portrayal of Stephen's complicated gender identity.

The protagonist's dependency on his mother is consistent throughout the narrative. At the start of chapter five "he allowed his mother to scrub his neck and root into the folds of her ears and into the interstices at the wings of his nose" (Joyce 134). Stephen's mother takes care of him even when he believes himself to be self-actualized and grown up. She is, as Cixous claims "the classical anal mother—that is, she makes him clean, body and soul" (365). The cleaning is thorough, since his mother roots into his sensory crevices. Her points of fixation, as orifices for sensory experience, symbolize her desire to aid Stephen in his independence. She attempts to make him more receptive to the world by de-clogging his means for sensation and perception and thereby decreasing his dependency upon her. Still, the narrator places agency upon Stephen in this encounter, since it is Stephen who allows the washing to take place. Stephen claims altruism by contending, "But it gives you pleasure" (Joyce 134). His pseudo-act of compassion is in response to something that ultimately benefits him more than it benefits his mother. With regard to agency, Stephen's mother exerts her will to clean him while Stephen passively receives the necessary washing. In response, she claims that "it's a poor case...when a university student is so dirty that his mother has to wash him" (Joyce 135). The Oedipal complex that was present when "he [was] ill and want[ed] to return to his primary source of nurture" (Scott 416) remains even into the final chapter of a novel about a young man's process of growing up.

In contrast, Stephen's early demonstrations of anger ally him with femininity. When Stephen's classmates are making fun of Emma's affections toward Stephen, the narrator divulges that "A shaft of momentary anger flew through Stephen's mind at these indelicate allusions in the hearing of a stranger. For him there was nothing amusing in a girl's interest and regard" (Joyce 58). He reacts with anger and defensiveness when his male peers takes a jab at women or femininity since he treats that mode of gender expression as a personal issue of his. At the same time, he takes on a paternal, protective quality through his desire to defend Emma. For this reason, his anger is a shaft, or a phallus. He cannot control these angry impulses, which act as independent of and separate from Stephen, as though they are disconnected from the more genuinely feminine quality of his consciousness. Perhaps, however, Stephen's inability to control his passions offers an opportunity for one of the most sympathetic readings of his complicated gender identity. Who has not been deeply penetrated and perhaps even objectified by their own anger?

In this way, much of Stephen's anger is not so much an extension of his subjectivity, rather, it is an external masculine force that penetrates his consciousness. During an instance of smug superiority over a fellow classmate who he believes to be dull, the narrator refers to Stephen's meanness as a phallic "shaft of thought" (Joyce 149). Though Stephen claims superiority over his peer, he, ironically, fails to master his own thoughts. It is the classmate, "the oblong skull beneath" which does "not turn to meet his shaft of thought." Instead, "the shaft [comes] back to its bowstring" (Joyce 149), meaning Stephen is forced to reckon with his own unpleasant attitude while the classmate remains unaffected. Stephen's inability to control even his own thoughts emphasizes just how little control he has over others and the outside world.

Stephen had attempted to reckon with anger's penetrative force earlier in the novel, since he was seemingly aware of the debilitating effects that it was having on his sense of subjectivity. The narrator divulges:

A brief anger had often invested him but he had never been able to make it an abiding passion and had always felt himself passing out of it as if his very body were being divested with ease of some outer skin or peel. He had felt a subtle, dark, and

murmurous presence penetrate his being and fire him with a brief iniquitous lust: it, too, had slipped beyond his grasp leaving his mind lucid and indifferent. This, it seemed, was the only love and that the only hate his soul would harbor (Joyce 114-5).

The heterosexual connotations of his relationship to anger are explicit. His anger not only penetrates his receptive consciousness, but also castrates him by symbolically divesting him of “some outer skin or peel,” a possible allusion to foreskin. His anger acts upon him while he passively witnesses its effects. This anger, though it briefly corrupts him with “a brief iniquitous lust,” has a tenuous grasp upon him since it is consistently fleeting. Its consequence is indifference.

Though Stephen’s anger occasionally consumes him, his rage always remains confined to his thoughts. He never actually allows his behavior to reflect his moments of internal aggression and he consistently refuses actual violence. When journaling about the dean of studies and his continued fixation on the word *tundish*, Stephen is troubled by his angered thoughts. He considers, “Is it with him I must struggle all through this night till day come, till he or I lie dead, gripping him by the sinewy throat till... Till what? Till he yield to me? No. I mean no harm” (Joyce 195). The disproportionate intensity of his thoughts regarding the dean of studies leads Stephen to resolve to brush away his brief consideration of violence. His refusal of outward demonstrations of aggression is also apparent in how he chooses to use for his only defense “silence, exile, and cunning” (Joyce 191), arms of not only inaction, but personal retreat.

The familial relationship between narrator and protagonist similarly acts as an extension of Stephen’s suspicion for masculine demonstrations and patriarchal authority. Lawrence argues that “the relationship between narrator and protagonist can be described as paternal: the male narrator/author fathers forth the image of himself as the young man” since, “as technically unobtrusive and withdrawn as he may appear, the narrator of *A Portrait* enjoys certain authority” (383). However, the limitations of the narrator’s status as father further the precariousness of masculinity within the narrative. For instance, the narrator is similarly impotent. He cannot influence the happenings of the story, nor may he obtain absolute access to Stephen’s consciousness. The method of free indirect discourse produces a porous narrative border in

which the narrator and protagonist simultaneously contradict and closely identify with each other, with one not necessarily existing as superordinate to the other. Lawrence explains that, through the narrator and Stephen's near equality, "the self-conscious abdication of authority suggests a further purpose here: an experiment with a feminine alternative to egotistical narration, a transformation of cultural exclusion into an aesthetic boon" (387).

Joyce's illustration of Stephen's conceptions of gender identity by way of free indirect discourse and first-person narration reflects the reality of how gender is social constructed. Information regarding socially gendered expectations is either withheld from or provided to the protagonist, and in the case of the latter, this information is not always reliable, leading Stephen to develop an unstable conception of personal identity. At the same time, the protagonist does not consciously register many of the external sources of influence for his gender identity's formation, demonstrating the infeasibility of consistently performing one end of the gender spectrum over another. Nevertheless, Stephen attempts, even if clumsily, to create for himself an understanding of identity through his relative awareness that he does not fit within socially delineated parameters of gender. These efforts are aided by his unconscious inclinations toward behaviors conventionally associated with the female gender. In this way, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* teaches its readers to reevaluate their personal understandings of gender development and performance, while delegitimizing gender binaries as socially constructed fallacies.

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