
UNIT 1 CONTEXTS

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Ireland and Parnell
- 1.3 Joyce's life
- 1.4 The European Literary Context
- 1.5 English-language Modernism
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Glossary
- 1.8 Questions
- 1.9 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

Our primary objective in this unit is to touch upon the 'contexts' that affected the making of Joyce as a writer and the writing of *A Portrait*. Joyce's life and the literary context of *A Portrait* are also looked at here.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Joyce was an Irish 'modernist' writer with a largely Europeanized sensibility. He wrote in English and the 'tradition' that affected his 'individual talent' is as much English as it is European. His concern with language – its limitations as well as its potential – is a notable feature of his work. This concern and his being a city-writer (Dublin in this case) stamp him as a modernist. Your awareness of the poetry of another high priest of English-language Modernism T.S. Eliot should help you to appreciate Joyce's modernist sensibility.

Joyce's own life had a direct bearing on *A Portrait*. This is especially the case with how he reacted to Ireland and to Ireland's treatment of Parnell. In this context, you should remember that Joyce's attitude to nationalism and to the Irish Catholic hierarchy were both substantially affected by this awareness. Another thing that needs to be kept in mind is that developments in poetry and fiction worked in such close tandem at the beginning of this century that overlap, when talking of influence, is quite inevitable.

1.2 IRELAND AND PARNELL

Ireland, as you are probably aware, is a predominantly Catholic country. Charles Steward Parnell was a Protestant and yet his personal charisma made him the leading spokesman for the Irish Nationalist cause in the British Parliament. Another important public figure was Michael Davitt, a leader of the Irish Land League. What led to Parnell's downfall was a divorce case filed by Captain O'Shea, a member of Parnell's party, who accused Parnell of having had a clandestine affair with his wife Kitty O'Shea. In this period of crisis, the then English Prime Minister Gladstone and the leaders of the Catholic Church in Ireland both dissociated themselves from Parnell. As you read the opening section of the novel you would appreciate how this 'betrayal' of Parnell (and figures like Davitt) was a part of the Irish psyche of those times. That this betrayal stayed inprinted in Joyce's (and Stephen's) mind becomes obvious in the closing sections of *A Portrait*.

Joyce had a firm belief that political subjection had led the Irish people to have a slavish mentality. What Ireland needed was an expansion of consciousness. Around that time there were strong revivalist tendencies manifesting themselves in Ireland. Joyce had an attitude of deep distrust towards such tendencies. For example, the general enthusiasm generated by the founding of the Irish National Theatre Society in 1901 and the coming into existence of the Abbey Theatre Company was not shared by Joyce.

Parnell and the Irish situation in general have a direct bearing on the Christmas dinner scene in *A Portrait* and on the exchanges between students in the closing stages of the novel where Stephen says to Davin with odd violence:

Do you know what Ireland is? ...Ireland is the old saw that eats her farrow.
(p.220)

1.3 JOYCE'S LIFE

On account of the autobiographical element present in *A Portrait*, a quick look at the salient details of Joyce's life comes to be important. Here, I shall concern myself largely with those details that find an echo in the novel.

The first of ten children of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Murray Joyce, James Joyce was born in Dublin on 2 February 1882. The Joyce family's frequent changes of residence is an important aspect of Joyce's life that has a bearing on the novel. When Joyce was four, the family moved to Cork and stayed there till 1892. For about a year after that they lived in Blackrock. The family was often on the move within Dublin (they moved house at least a dozen times in Joyce's early years). Between 1888 and 1902 Joyce's education was first at Clongowes Wood College (early schooling), Belvedere College, Dublin (subsequent schooling) and University College, Dublin (from where he received his B.A. degree in 1902). He then went to Paris to study medicine but that did not work out as they required fees to be paid in advance. The one year Joyce still spent in Paris meant reading in public libraries and living on small remittances from home and occasional fees that he received from reviewing books.

In 1903, Joyce's mother was on her deathbed in Dublin. That made him rush back to Dublin. This stay in Dublin was of a little more than a year. In 1904, Joyce left for Paris in the company of Nora Barnacle (the 'marriage' between the two came to have 'official' status only in 1931 and that too 'for testamentary reasons'). What Joyce found attractive in Nora was a striking combination of innocence and earthiness. In

1905 Joyce moved to Trieste where he taught at the Berlitz School. His son Giorgio was born in 1905. His daughter Lucia was born in 1907. The year 1906 saw Joyce doing a short stint as a foreign correspondent in a bank in Rome and later visiting Ireland where he stayed on till 1910.

The war made the Joyce family move to neutral Zurich (in 1915). The only other place where Joyce had a longish stay (apart from Zurich and Trieste) was Paris where Joyce had moved on Ezra Pound's advice around the time of the publication of *Ulysses*. The outbreak of the Second World War brought him back to Zurich in 1940 where he died and where he was buried.

As regards the publication of Joyce's works of fiction, *Dubliners* (a collection of stories) was published in 1914, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1916, *Ulysses* in 1922 and *Finnegans Wake* (taking about 16 years to complete and interestingly called *Work in Progress* during this period) in 1939.

Knowing salient details of Joyce's life will help you with the novel because the autobiographical element has a strong presence in it. The novel's status as "aesthetic autobiography" is taken up in Unit 2 while considering the question of its 'genre'. Here it will suffice if you remember that the aspects of Joyce's life that find more or less a direct echo in the novel are: the large size of Joyce's family (his brothers and sisters) the family's poverty and its frequent changes of house. Joyce's love of city life and his Europeanized outlook; his distrust of violent politics, his flair for languages; and his general unease with institutions of various kinds.

1.4 THE EUROPEAN LITERARY CONTEXT

As I stated in the 'introduction' to this unit, Joyce's was a largely Europeanized sensibility that felt much more at home with cosmopolitanism than with provincialisms of various kinds. This gave him an affinity with T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (all three can be seen as among the leading 'Makers of the New' in English around 1914). Joyce's reading in European literature was extensive and he came to know some European languages quite well. He admired Ibsen's work and translated Hauptmann. He almost started thinking of himself (at a young age) as being in a line of writing represented by Ibsen and Hauptmann. Another decisive influence on him was Arthur Symonds's 1899 book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. Stephen Mallarme and Charles Baudelaire were two of the leading figures of French Symbolism. Baudelaire gave a new dimension to poetry related to the city and Mallarme's symbolism contained within itself a shift from a Romantic to a modern ironic aesthetic. The Naturalism that Joyce inherited from Ibsen (and Emile Zola) came to be thus tempered by Symbolism. Another important trend of the times was Impressionism and it also influenced Joyce though not as directly as Naturalism and Symbolism did. Impressionism was important to the extent it made language an experiential activity rather than a description of activity. In this respect it paved the way for the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique. A version of this technique was partially used by Joyce in *A Portrait*. *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* were to put this technique to a much more extensive use. This term stream-of-consciousness applies, broadly speaking, to a process, in which, according to the psychological principle of association, a series of thoughts or images, one leading to the next, are joined in what may, in simpler terms, be called a 'train of thought'. With the form of narrative called 'interior monologue' that employs the associative process, the author's intrusion into his narrative gets reduced to a minimum. Virginia Woolf was to later use the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique in novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

The mix that Joyce evolved out of his tempering of Naturalism with Symbolism was further affected by his deciding not to step fully out of the broad Realist tradition.

His pursuit of evocation is minus the insubstantiality and softness which sometimes entered the work of Symbolists. The hardness that Joyce's style exhibits most of the time was due to the influence of the French novelist, Gustave Flaubert (1821-80), the famous author of *Madame Bovary* (1857).

1.5 ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MODERNISM

With the English-language Modernism of his times, (represented by Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot among others) Joyce's relationship was more of a benefactor than a beneficiary. But benefit he did from the general intellectual climate created by Pound, Eliot and the others collectively. This climate encouraged experimentation and the imperative 'Make It New' was very much in the air. Pound's advocacy of first Imagism went a long way in focusing on concretion, immediacy and on toughness of attitude and all this contributed to the 'scrupulous meanness in style' that Joyce cultivated so successfully.

The important thing to keep in mind regarding all the influences that were then in the air is that people as extraordinarily talented as Joyce and Eliot benefited from these influences in a very eclectic (freewheeling) kind of way. There was such a criss-crossing of influences and the desire to do something unusual stylistically was so great and the complexity of experience and of sensations offered by city-life so tremendous that people received 'influences' in ways that were not only direct but also indirect and as often subtle as crude. Monroe K. Spears is a critic who is among the better chroniclers of those exciting times. One of the statements he makes in his 1970 book *Dionysus and the City* has more of a bearing on modernist poetry in general and on Eliot's work in particular but tells us enough about the eclectic way 'influences' worked at that time. I reproduce here a part of that statement to give you an idea of how it was. Spears writes:

The tradition in fiction of which Stendhal was the forerunner and Flaubert the founder, variously described as Symbolist, Naturalist, or more often, Impressionist (the exact, not the soft or blurred kind) reached a kind of fulfillment in James's three great novels just after the turn of the century and in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostramo*... Eliot like Pound, was imbued in James and Conrad, and we have already seen the powerful influence that Joyce exerted on him after 1914 (p.114).

The point that Spears's statement just quoted makes is that Eliot, Pound and Joyce benefited not from a single influence but a composite of a variety of influences and that Joyce, benefiting from the various artistic and literary tendencies operating at that time then went on to influence Eliot. It also tells us that what affected fiction affected poetry also and vice versa and that most writers of the time (poets and novelists alike) were quite eclectic in their borrowings.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

The various 'contexts' that went into the making of *A Portrait* are:

- i. Joyce's own life
- ii. His admiration for Parnell
- iii. European literary influences
- iv. The intellectual climate associated with English-language Modernism of which Joyce, Eliot and Pound were the leading lights.

French Symbolism/Symbolist Movement:

For most literary historians (and for our present purposes), the term 'Symbolist Movement' refers specifically to a group of French writers – Charles Baudelaire, Stephen Mallarme, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud and others. Broadly speaking, these poets exploited an order of private symbols in a poetry of rich suggestiveness rather than explicit signification. A major contribution of this group to twentieth century literature was that they brought the Modernist city into focus.

Impressionism:

The Impressionists were a school of painters who wished to depict the fleeting impression from a subjective point of view. Precise representation was not such a great concern with them. The consequence that Impressionism had for fiction-writing was the transfer of interest from external reality to the inner life of the characters.

Naturalism:

In fiction, Naturalism is associated mostly with the work of the French novelist Emile Zola (1840-1902). It was an offshoot of Realism and aimed at offering an even more accurate picture of life than Realism did. The Naturalists believed that the novel should be based on scientific knowledge and the writers themselves should be scientifically objective and exploratory in their approach to work. This also implied that the environment being portrayed should be treated with exactitude.

Stream-of-consciousness:

William James used the phrase in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) to describe the unbroken flow of perceptions, thoughts and feelings in the waking mind. The term later came to be adopted to describe a distinct narrative method in modern fiction. The novels of Dorothy Richardson, Joyce and Virginia Woolf are often seen as examples of this method. Somewhat influential in bringing about this approach to fiction writing were some of the time-related theories of William James himself and of the French thinker Henri Bergson.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship between Irish national consciousness and Charles Steward Parnell?
2. What aspects of French Symbolism and of Naturalism affected Joyce's fictional style?
3. Is there any connection (direct or indirect) between Eliot's poetic practices and Joyce's fiction?

1.9 SUGGESTED READING

Four general books you should read if you want to be familiar with the general climate in which modernism operated are, Malcolm Bradbury (ed.) *Modernism*; Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*; Monroe K. Spears's *Dionysus and the City* and Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image*. Chester Anderson's illustrated book *James Joyce and His World* will give you a good idea of the then Irish situation and of Joyce's life.

UNIT 2 GENRE, OVERALL STRUCTURE AND POINT OF VIEW

Structure

- 2 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Genre
- 2.3 Overall Structure
- 2.4 Point of View
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Questions
- 2.8 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall look at the generic status of *A Portrait* and at its overall structure. The question of 'Point of View' is to be taken up too. This unit will introduce you to terms like 'Bildungsroman' or the novel of growth. An important matter to be considered here would be how much of 'distance' and what kind of 'distance' Joyce maintains from his hero Stephen Dedalus.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Your reading of *A Portrait* is going to make it quite obvious to you that narration in the first four chapters of the novel is more indulgent toward Stephen and in the fifth chapter there is greater detachment between the narration and the hero. In the first four chapters irony, even when deployed, is quite sympathetic (by and large) to Stephen. Stephen's 'errors', in this portion of the novel, are treated merely as the exuberance of youth. Chapter five makes the narration more distant.

A Portrait is marked by the use of a consciousness that is at least dual. First, there is Stephen's consciousness that helps in capturing the intimacy that a first-person narrator normally enjoys. Then there is a maturer consciousness that runs parallel to Stephen's point of view. It works to qualify Stephen's consciousness mainly through humour and irony.

A Portrait, in terms of genre can be seen as 'aesthetic autobiography' in the tradition of the 'Bildungsroman' (it has something in it of the 'Künstlerroman' – 'artist novel' – as well). You will realize that determining the novel's generic status helps us to tackle some other aspects of the novel with a greater sense of awareness.

2.2 GENRE

Patrick Parrinder in his 1984 book *James Joyce* calls *A Portrait* an 'ironic autobiography' and Suzanne Nalbatian in her 1994 book *Aesthetic Autobiography* calls it "aesthetic autobiography". The qualifiers used by Parrinder and Nalbatian underline the fact that though autobiographical elements are strongly present in *A Portrait*, it is not straight autobiography. As such Stanislaus Joyce, the writer's brother has stated:

My brother was not the weak infant who figures in *A Portrait of the Artist*. He has drawn it is true very largely upon his own life and his own experience....But *A Portrait of the Artist* is not an autobiography, it is an artistic creation. As I had something to say to its reshaping, I can affirm this without hesitation.

(Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, p.17)

As *A Portrait* has in it elements of both Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman let us look a little at some examples of these. Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (a novel, that you must already have looked at), Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* are all examples of the broad category Bildungsroman whereas Marcel Proust's monumental novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*) can be seen as an example of Künstlerroman.

The original version of *A Portrait* was *Stephen Hero*. In the ten years separating the two projects, Joyce's endeavour was to move the subject matter of his life largely from the "lyrical" to the "dramatic" mode. The progression from *Stephen Hero* to *A Portrait* is from 'the novel of the overt and partisan manager' to that of the "invisible and impersonal director" (Joseph Prescott "Stephen Hero" in William M. Scutte (ed.) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.25) The technique of *Stephen Hero* is indeed explicit and ploddingly documentary. What happens in *A Portrait* is that the autobiographical element which is otherwise its very significant ingredient is consciously and painstakingly recast into a mode of depersonalisation, objectification and mythification. Joyce is able to heighten naturalistic detail onto a dramatic plane of symbolic art.

2.3 OVERALL STRUCTURE

The **first chapter** of *A Portrait* shows Stephen's development from infant awareness to the first assertion of his identity in an act of protest against injustice. The **second chapter** shows the growing isolation that comes with his adolescence. It culminates in the encounter with the prostitute. The **third chapter** represents the crisis of adolescence and a temporary toying with the idea of taking up priesthood as a vocation. The **fourth chapter** represents the climax of the development in his recognition of his true vocation. The **fifth chapter** shows the completion of his development and the declaration of his creed of freedom. If we take the first two chapters as a structural unit then we find that these two chapters together trace the awakening of religious doubts and sexual instincts culminating in the physical experience with the prostitute. The next two chapters together (as another structural unit) continue the cycle of sin and repentance. The fifth chapter as a structural unit stands a little apart, in terms of ironic 'distance'. This chapter brings Stephen to the verge of exile and brings to the fore his aesthetic theory and his life's goals. Here the spotlight is on his University days. University life in general is also taken up admirably well.

Looked at another way, the novel can be seen to divide itself into nineteen smaller units marked off through typographical marks. These reveal to Stephen the character of the world that he lives in, the demands this world makes on him and the corresponding movements within himself that push him towards either succumbing to these demands or rejecting them. Each broad stage of his growth – awakening of the body, literary vocation, farewell to Ireland – leaves him lonelier than before. Some of the other metaphors used to describe the novel's alternations between varying moods are the metaphor of 'troughs' (depressions) and 'crests' thus underlining the wave-like pattern of depression and triumph. The fifth chapter can thus be seen as coming up with a relatively static calm of (relatively) smooth sailing (as compared to the kinetic frenzies of the preceding four chapters) on which the emergent artist rationalises his position and assumes his new role.

A major structuring device is memory. Each smaller unit (a phase in what Joyce himself called a 'fluid succession of presents') is a tightly constructed narrative unit. The linking of the episodes is achieved through a series of evolutionary chains of images and themes. This evolutionary process is tied up with phases in the development of Stephen's identity and with his accumulated memory. The instances of structural repetition that we find in the novel are mostly cases of incremental repetition—a favourite device of modernists – where the motif repeated gets a sort of snowballing in symbolic significance as the work proceeds. This, however, is more of a technique-related matter and the section on 'Repetition' in Unit 4 will give you details of how repetition helps the structure and texture of the novel.

To those not familiar with the 'modernist' approach to literary structure some part of *A Portrait*, (especially the early pages and the last pages of the novel) may give the impression of disjointedness (T.S. Eliot's poetry also gives the same impression to a reader) but this 'disjointedness' is actually quite carefully structured. You may have already read poems like Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Preludes'. If you haven't, then please read them as a way of familiarizing yourself with modernist structure.

2.4 POINT OF VIEW

The problem of 'point of view' in *A Portrait* is a function of Joyce's attempt at objectivity. The question of where an author 'stations' himself/herself in relation to his/her main character is quite a crucial one in fiction. A look at Jane Austen's *Emma* is helpful here. Austen treats Emma with irony and her attempt at objectivity is quite obvious and yet a kind of identification is inescapable. In Joyce's case, the identification is even more inescapable because his stake in the proceedings is greater. Then there is the additional dimension provided by Joyce's attempt at universality. In a sense one can say that in offering us the growth and development of Stephen Dedalus, Joyce was not exclusively concerned with getting to the heart of his own young self or an imaginary equivalent of that, but in getting to the heart of the young artist as such. The destiny we are brought face to face with, could be any young man's destiny in Catholic Ireland. Especially, if the young man was sensitive and had artistic ambitions or pretensions!

The viewpoint in the book is often Stephen's and Joyce does employ a rhetoric which indicates direction to the reader. And yet quite often, an ironic discrepancy between Stephen's naïve view of his predicament and the sophisticated readers' view of it is allowed to slip in. Sometimes inflated images are brought in to make us aware of a discrepancy. Quite often the reader is in deep sympathy with Stephen's thoughts and feelings. At other times, he is amused by Stephen. Sometimes Stephen's immaturity and wrong-headedness is annoying too. His vanity, his way of taking himself too seriously, and his fanciful romantic dreams are a constant source of amusement and

yet Joyce's own irony is held back quite often. But this irony is at work too at a number of places. Joyce later was so conscious of the way in which his novel's protagonist comes under judgement that he said, "I may have been too hard on that young man."

The novel is under no obligation to imply that Stephen will be a successful artist. Also, one must be on one's guard against judging *A Portrait* on the strength of what happens to Stephen in *Ulysses*. It is enough that Joyce has laid down the conditions for the artist and that Stephen had found salvation in deciding on the aesthetic rather than the social, nationalistic, or religious orientations in life. Stephen's character does not so much change as it develops and that too from a firm basis in a temperament. Reserve becomes independence, pride grows into the self-assertion of individuality and sensitivity develops into the artistic personality which, in the closing stages of the novel (University days), is sufficiently tolerant of others. This development is traced by me in Unit 3 at some length.

Joyce's distance from Stephen is never too great and yet a modulation of attitude through language goes on all the time. A passage like the following is a good example:

He too returned to his old life at school and all his novel enterprises fell to pieces. The commonwealth fell, the loan bank closed its coffers and its books at a sensible loss.(p.104)

There is uncomplicated ironic humour here but the passage is not without sympathy and without an attempt to show Stephen as quite human. There are a number of places (especially in chapter five) where the good-natured and generous side of Stephen's personality is stressed. A good example is the way he takes in his stride the banter directed at him by his fellow students. The unit dealing with 'Technique' (Unit 4) takes up this side of Stephen in some detail.

Despite his preference for a certain classicism in matters of style, Joyce remained a kind of incurable romantic in his life. There are a number of places in the novel where romantic heroism gets underlined without a trace of irony directed against Stephen. One area in which this is quite obvious is in his preoccupation with language and in his faith in language being some kind of vehicle for transcendence. Stephen's yearning for other places is a part of his temperament:

The vastness and strangeness of the life suggested to him by the bales of merchandise stocked along the walls or swung aloft out of steamers wakened again in him the unrest which had sent him wandering in the evening from garden to garden in search of Mercedes.(p.69)

This kind of imaginative transport and his awareness of Europe have a lot to do with Stephen's final exile. The sight of the slow drifting clouds, 'dappled and seaborne' makes him think of Europe:

They were voyaging across the deserts of the sky a host of nomads on the March, voyaging high over Ireland, westward bound. The Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish sea, Europe or strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races.(p.181)

The call of the unfamiliar is there always and Stephen responds to it most of the time. It is thus quite apt that the epigraph of *A Portrait* is from Ovid and denotes the Dedalus theme. "And he set his mind to work upon unknown arts". Here the boundary between Joyce and Stephen comes to collapse almost.

So we can conclude that Joyce, in *A Portrait* keeps varying his distance from Stephen. Sometimes the two personae almost merge but quite often a distance is kept though it is never too great. This kind of management of distance allows Joyce to bring irony also into play (at places) but even that is never allowed to become too hard-hitting.

Genre, Overall
Structure and Point
of View

2.5 LET US SUM UP

A Portrait can be seen as a Bildungsroman and as 'aesthetic autobiography'. In the matter of 'stationing' himself, Joyce keeps varying his distance from Stephen but never does so drastically. The novel's overall structure has three broad movements. The fifth chapter is a separate movement preceded by two movements constituting two chapters each.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Bildungsroman : The term refers to a novel which describes the youthful development of the central character. Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* are examples of this kind of novel.

Point of view : The term refers to the perspectives from which events in a narrative are seen and narrated. In modern treatments of the art of prose fiction 'point of view' has been a consistent concern. Thanks largely to the theorizing offered by Henry James in the 'Prefaces' he wrote for his novels (these were collected in 1934 as *The Art of the Novel*). Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1926) also offered extensive theorizing on this aspect of novel-writing.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are the three broad movements going into the overall structure of *A Portrait*?
2. Would you consider 'aesthetic autobiography' a satisfactory description of the genre of *A Portrait*?
3. How does Joyce establish some distance between himself and Stephen? Does this distance stay static or is it varying?

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

Harry Levin's basic book *James Joyce : A Critical Introduction* offers a good starting point for all aspects of the novel including the ones treated in this unit. Specifically, the question of genre is given good treatment in Suzanne Nalpatian's *Aesthetic Autobiography* and Patrick Parrinder's *James Joyce*. Morris Beja's 'Introduction' to the Casebook on *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* offers a sympathetic angle on the question of "point of view". For a treatment of "point of view" which is largely hostile to

A Portrait

Joyce, you can look up Wayne C. Booth's book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Hugh Kenner's *Dublin's Joyce*. In her book *English Novel : Form and Function*, Dorothy Van Ghent has a chapter on *A Portrait*. This chapter is useful for a consideration of the novel's structure.

UNIT 3 STEPHEN'S GROWTH AND PERSONALITY

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 A section-by-section Mapping
- 3.3 Stephen's Aesthetic Theory
- 3.4 Stephen and Women
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions
- 3.7 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

As *A Portrait* is, among other things, a 'novel of formation' and an 'artist-novel', this unit looks at the stages of Stephen's growth from infancy to manhood through a section-by-section 'mapping' covering all the 19 sections that constitute the five chapters. Stephen's aesthetic theory is examined and his relationship with women is looked at too. The thing to note is that Stephen's aesthetic theory is not quite Joyce's aesthetic theory and that his attitude to women cannot and should not be equated with Joyce's attitude to women.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A Portrait concerns itself both with growing up and with the early life of an artist. The novel traces the two together, but you must remember that it also deals implicitly with the relationship between these two. There are certain tensions occasioned by the different demands that growing up and Stephen's stance as an artist make on him. The novel deals with these tensions and constantly takes into account the conflicts between Stephen's drive towards adulthood and his drive towards becoming an artist. Stephen's attempt to resolve the struggle between these two kinds of drives also deserves attention.

3.2 A SECTION-BY-SECTION MAPPING

The five chapters of the novel are divided into nineteen sections in all. Let us take a quick look at what 'happens' in each of them.

The **first section** of Chapter one shows Stephen at home in his infancy. There is a bedtime story and a song. Stephen is 'baby-tuckoo'. There is a reference to bed-wetting and the warm and cold feelings that go with it. His father's hairy face and his mother's smell (nicer than his father's) are catalogued. Uncle Charles and Dante are introduced. Dante's two brushes follow a pattern based on colours. One has a black velvet back. That is for Davitt. The other one with a green velvet back is for Parnell, the Irish Home-rule leader who was betrayed by the church. The Vances are introduced. They are Eileen's father and mother. There is a repetition of the imperative: 'Apologise'.

Section two shows life at Clongowes School. A football game is on. Stephen keeps on the fringe of his line, out of the sight of his prefect, out of the reach of their rude feet. He 'felt his body small and weak'. He is "caught in a whirl of a scrimmage and is fearful of the flashing eyes and muddy boots." One of Stephen's thoughts is that it "was mean of Wells to shoulder him into the square ditch because he would not swoop his little snuff-box for Wells's seasoned backing chestnut." The coldness of the water of the ditch stays with Stephen. A whole series of associations is triggered by the word "suck". Wells' bullying him about whether Stephen kissed his mother before he went to bed brings back memories of the ditch. Then there is a geography lesson. The atmosphere in the Chapel where night prayers were held is evoked. Once again Stephen thinks of smells (these include the smell of old peasants who knelt at the back of the chapel at Sunday Mass.). There is the memory of a train-ride homewards and the welcome received at home. But actually Stephen is sick. On the way to the Infirmary he remembers 'with a vague fear the warm turf-coloured bog water, the warm moist air, the noise of plunge, the smell of the towels like medicines'. He visualises his own dying. The section closes with the news of Parnell's death, an event that serves as a significant recurrent motif in the novel.

The third scene of chapter one is a Christmas Dinner at home. Mr. Casey is a guest. Talk of Parnell leads to a violent quarrel. In the course of the quarrel, Dante says (quite hotly):

O he'll remember all this when he grows up The language he heard against God, and religion and priests in his own home. (p.33)

Mr. Casey's retort (equally hot) is:

Let him remember him to The language with which the priests and the priests's pawns broke Parnell's heart and hounded him into his grave. (p.33)

Stephen's father now says:

Sons of bitches When he was down they turned on him to betray him and send him like rats in a sewer. Low-lived dogs! And they look it. (p.33)

The close association of coldness and whiteness is cemented further in Stephen's mind by another thought:

Eileen had long white hands. One evening when playing tig she had put her hands over his eyes; long and white and then cold and soft. That was ivory, a cold white thing. (p.35)

Stephen's father calls the Irish a "priest-ridden race" and Dante says about Parnell:

A traitor to his country. ... A traitor; an adulterer! The priests were right to abandon him. (p.38)

Towards the end of the scene, she says of Parnell:

Devil out of hell! We won! We crushed him to death! Fiend. (p.39)

Stephen's Growth
and Personality

Mr. Casey cries with a sob of pain:

Poor Parnell ... My dead king. (p.39)

Stephen's father's eyes are also full of tears.

In the **fourth section** of the first chapter Stephen is unjustly caned by Father Dolan. Stephen's glasses were broken and he was exempted from classwork by Father Arnall. Father Dolan pays no heed to it and goes on to cane Stephen: also calling him "a lazy, idle little loafer." The humiliation Stephen feels is great. He complains to the prefect of studies who is sympathetic. The boys take it as a victory of sorts.

The sound of the cricket bats from the playground goes 'pick-pack -pock-puck, like drops of water in a fountain falling softly in a brimming bowl.' This beautiful simile closes the first chapter.

Section one of the second chapter is again set in Stephen's home at Blackrock. He is also shown in the company of Uncle Charles and accompanying his father and his grand uncle as they took their constitutional:

Trudging along the road or standing in some grimy way-side public house his elders spoke constantly of the subjects nearer their hearts, of Irish politics, of Munster and of the legends of their own family, to all of which Stephen lent an avid ear. (p.64)

Reading *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Stephen muses on Mercedes. With a boy called Aubrey Mills, he founds a gang of adventurers. The two also take rounds with the milkman. When Stephen's thoughts returned to Mercedes, "a strange unrest crept into his blood"

He felt different from other boys even more than he did at Clongowes. He "wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld." If he managed to meet the image "weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in that magic moment." (p.67)

Section two of the second chapter begins with the removal to Dublin (another instance of the family being always on the move).

The sudden flight from the comfort and revery of Blackrock, the passage through the gloomy foggy city. The thought of the bare cheerless house in which they were now to live made his heart heavy....(p.68)

Dublin for Stephen was "a new and complex sensation". The vastness and strangeness of the life suggested to him by the bales of merchandise stocked along the walls or swung aloft out of the holds of steamers wakened again in him the unrest which had sent him wandering in the evening from garden to garden in search of Mercedes. Later, the scene shifts from him to Stephen sitting in the midst of a children's party at Harold's Cross. By now his silent watchful manner had grown upon him. Later Stephen has a tram ride with Emma:

She came up to his step many times and went down to hers again between their phrases and once or twice stood close beside him for some moments on the upper step, forgetting to go down and then went down. His heart danced upon her movements like a cork upon a tide. (p.72)

A little later in the same section, there is news of a place for Stephen at Belvedere College. Stephen's father talks to his wife about how Stephen's protest at Clongowes

was laughed at. The rector had told Stephen's father that he and Father Dolan had had a hearty laugh over the protest.

Section three of chapter two describes life at Belvedere. There is to be a play and Stephen has a role in it. He looks forward to Emma being a part of the audience but feels let down when she does not come. A little before this, Stephen's declaring his preference for Byron over Tennyson brings from Heron a bullying reaction. Heron and another boy Boland intimidate Stephen through physical violence and ask him to "admit" that Byron was "no-good". Stephen does not yield. Feeling let down by Emma, Stephen after the play rushes into the city. After the first flush of anger and frustration is over, things clear up a bit:

He stood still and gazed up at the sombre porch of the morgue and from that to the cobbled laneway at its side. He saw the word "Lotts" on the wall of the lane and breathed slowly and sank heavy air.

That is horse piss and rotted straw, he thought. It is a good odour to breathe. It will calm my heart. My heart is quite calm now. I will go back. (p.91)

In **Section four** of chapter two Stephen visits Cork with his father. There is a train ride and as his father talks of Cork and of scenes of his youth, Stephen listens without sympathy. Later they are at the Victoria Hotel. His father sings a song and

The consciousness of the warm sunny city outside his window and the tender tremors with which his father's voice festooned the strange sad happy air, drove off all mists of the night's ill humor from Stephen's brain. (pp.93-94)

Father and son visit Queen's College. The sight of the word 'foetus' cut several times in the dark stained wood of a desk in the anatomy theatre has a powerful effect on Stephen. A vision of the life of the absent students of the college springs up before him out of the word cut in the desk. It shocked Stephen to find in the outer world "a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his own mind." His father takes him round pubs that he frequented in his youth but the overall effect of the visit is to somehow put a distance between father and son. There is also a stocktaking of sorts on Stephen's part when he thinks of his infancy but the stocktaking only accentuated his apartness.

An abyss of fortune or of temperament sundered him from them. His mind seemed older than theirs.... No life or youth stirred in him as it had stirred in them. (pp.101-2)

In **Section five** of chapter two Stephen wins a prize and the prize-money leads to short-lived euphoria. He treats his family but soon the euphoria is over as his household returned to its usual way of life. His restlessness persists.

He returned to his wanderings. The veiled autumnal evenings led him from street to street as they had led him years before along the quiet avenues of Blackrock. (p.105)

Fires of lust wasted Stephen:

His blood was in revolt. He wandered up and down the dark slimy street peering into the gloom of lanes and doorways, listening eagerly for any sound. He moaned to himself like some baffled prowling beast. He wanted to sin with another of his kind, to force another being to sin with him and to exult with her in sin. (p.106)

It is in this state of mind that he finds himself confronted by a prostitute, who detains him and gazes into his face. What weakens his resistance is that her room was 'warm and lightsome':

Her round arms held him firmly to her and he seeing her face lifted to him in serious calm and feeling the warm calm, rise and fall of her breast, all but burst into hysterical weeping. Tears of joy and relief shone in his delighted eyes. (p.107)

When she asks him to give her a kiss, Stephen's usual resistance to imperatives is there:

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. (p.107)

When the resistance finally goes,

He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind, conscious of nothing in the world but the dark press of her softly parting lips. They pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech, and between them he felt an unknown and timid pressure, darker than the swoon of sin, softer than sound or odour.

The first two chapters complete the first major stage in Stephen's growth with his proper initiation into sexuality. The larger part of the following two chapters shows him feeling guilty on this score. There is the brief attraction that Stephen feels for priesthood as a vocation but it is his rejection of this option that opens the way for his embracing his role as an artist.

At the beginning of **Section one** of chapter three, Stephen is still not out of his nocturnal wanderings in the squalid quarter of the brothels. His life at school is listless. Then 'retreat' i.e. a period of withdrawal from worldly activities and of spiritual recollection under discipline, is announced, to be followed by confession. The rector talks to him at some length. As he (the rector) looks keenly at his listeners out of his dark stern eyes, 'Stephen's heart had withered up like a flower of the desert that feels the simoom coming from afar.' (p.116)

Section two of chapter three contains the three sermons given on successive days. The introductory sermon stirs self-disgust in Stephen. That is the first day. On the second day sermons on death and judgement bring the agony of shame. This is temporarily relieved by a day-dream of forgiveness, hand-in-hand with Emma. The third day is the most traumatic for Stephen. Sermons on hell overwhelm him completely.

In **Section three** of chapter three, Stephen returns home in self-disgust and terror. He is physically sick too. He prays and the result of this is:

His eyes were dimmed with tears and, looking humbly upto heaven, he wept for the innocence he had lost. (p.150)

Then, comes confession in a chapel but this is preceded by his walking in the streets as in a daze. When the priest enters the box and two other penitents take their turn at confession, the effect on Stephen is striking:

His blood began to murmur in his veins, murmuring like a sinful city summoned from its sleep to hear its doom. (p.153)

When Stephen's own turn for confession comes,

His sins trickled from his lips, one by one, in shameful drops from his soul festering and oozing like a sore, a squalid stream of vice. The last sins oozed forth, sluggish, filthy. There was no more to tell. He bowed his head overcome. (p.156)

Once Stephen is absolved, he finds relief and peace:

He knelt to say his penance, praying in a corner of the dark lane, and his prayers ascended to heavens, from his purified heart like perfume streaming upwards from a heart of white rose. (p.157)

The muddy streets were gay. He strode homeward, conscious of an invisible grace, pervading and making light his limbs. In spite of all he had done it. He had confessed and God had pardoned him. His soul was made fair and holy once more, bold and happy. (p.157)

At college he has the sense of 'another life', life of grace and virtue and happiness – made possible by his spiritual experience.

In **Section one** of the fourth chapter there is a change in Stephen's day-to-day life. He follows a rigorous discipline of prayer and self-mortification. He attends mass daily and carries rosary beads in his pocket. On successive days of the week he prays for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to counter the defilement of the Seven Deadly Sins. Here Joyce shows Stephen drifting further and further away from reality. The whole programme of self-discipline amounts to subordinating the real to the ideal.

In **Section two** of the fourth chapter the Director of Studies summons Stephen for an interview. The possibility of priesthood as a vocation is suggested to him. The director tells him that priesthood is the greatest honour that God can bestow and that its authority surpasses all earthly authority. The effect of the director's words on Stephen is:

A flame began to flutter again on Stephen's cheek as he heard in this proud address an echo of his own proud musings. How often had he seen himself as a priest wielding calmly and humbly the awful power of which angels and saints stood in reverence. (p.171)

The temptation exercised by priesthood is however temporary. As he is at the door taking leave of the director four young men stride past, arms linked, singing to a concertina. The contrast between that sight and the mirthless mask of the priest's face stirs in Stephen an instinct of recoiling from the cold orderliness of Jesuit life. The threat to his freedom that such a vocation stands for decides him against it. Stephen realises that (in priesthood) it was "a grave and ordered and passionless life that awaited him, a life without material cares". He wondered "how he would pass the first night in the novitiate and with what dismay he would wake the first morning in the dormitory". He "smelt again the warm moist air which hung in the bath in the Clongowes above the sluggish turf-coloured water". Some instincts waking at those memories, "stronger than education or piety, quickened within him at a very near approach to that life, an instinct subtle and hostile, and armed him against acquiescence. The chill and order of the life repelled him. What fortifies him further in his rejection of priesthood is the awareness that his destiny "was to be elusive of social or religious orders. The wisdom of the priest's appeal did not touch him to the quick. He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn from the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world". The snares of the world were its ways in sin. He would fall. Not to fall was "too hard, too hard."

Back home, after crossing the bridge, over the Tolka, he smiles to think that it was "this disorder, the misrule and confusion of his father's house and the stagnation or vegetable life, which was to win the day in his soul."

Section three of the fourth chapter shows Stephen waiting for his father who was making enquiries for him about a place at the University. That possibility has a strong appeal for Stephen. Turning towards the sea to cross the bridge, to the island called 'The Bull' he meets a group of Christian Brothers coming from the opposite direction.

Meanwhile, we are told that his mother was hostile to the idea of his going to the University. He sees it as her disloyalty and something makes him aware dimly and without regret of "a first noiseless sundering of their lives." The voices of the students bathing nearby are heard. They mock his name. He senses the destiny prophetically represented by Dedalus. Dedalus is a figure from Greek mythology, a craftsman who built the labyrinth of Crete. He also made wings for himself and his son Icarus. The University, in Stephen's eyes, amounted to his having passed beyond the challenge of the sentries who had stood as guardians of his boyhood. So the name is associated with transcendence of sorts.

He takes from his 'treasure' a quotation from Hugh Miller and speaks it softly (and inaccurately) to himself. 'A day of dappled seaborne clouds'. The actual clouds that he sees "voyaging across the deserts of the sky" make him think of Europe. The Europe these clouds had come from "lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and woodlegirt and citadeled and of entrenched and marshalled races".

Later Stephen takes off shoes and stockings and gets down to the sand. He sees a girl wading in midstream staring out to the sea. She has a striking girlish beauty and she looks at him, lingeringly. Her legs and thighs are bare. 'Heavenly God' cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy. This is followed, a little later by 'Her image had passed into his soul forever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. The message is clear: to live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life.' (p.126)

The effect on Stephen's soul is quite remarkable:

His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by clouds, shapes and beings. (p.187)

What had made Stephen receptive to this 'experience' is mentioned a couple of pages prior to this climactic experience:

He was alone. He was unheeded happy and near to the wild heart of life. He was alone and young and wilful and wildhearted. (p.185)

This 'experience' is almost a 'resurrection' for him.

In **Section one** of the fifth chapter, Stephen is first shown having breakfast at home. He is shown fiddling with tickets for the clothes that the family had pawned under false names. As he walks to the University, his morning walk through Dublin carries literary associations evoked by his surroundings. He reaches college late and finds the Dean of Studies trying to light the fire in the Physics theatre. The two talk for some time.

Later there are conversations with MacCann, Temple and Davin. Talk of the nationalist cause makes Stephen talk of Parnell's betrayal by the Church. Stephen sees Father Moran, the instructor, flirting with Emma and this angers him. The unlikely audience that Stephen now finds for expounding his aesthetic theory is Lynch, who does not have much interest in things of this kind. At the end of this section Emma is seen under the library arcade. Brooding on her leads Stephen nowhere.

In **Section two** of chapter five we have from Stephen a poem to Emma that is an artificial product of literary and religious verbalism. In **Section three** we find Stephen standing on the steps of the library watching the birds crying and circling above. When, Emma comes out of the library, in response of Cranly's salutation, she bows to him and ignores Stephen. Stephen starts thinking about Cranly's possible interest in her. Yet the sight of Emma in the failing light makes Stephen stroll away from the group with a kind of inner peace. His reverie as he moves away is first literary then erotic. A kind of severance from Emma is nevertheless made. He comes back to the group and takes Cranly away with him on a walk.

Stephen and Cranly talk about Stephen's mother and his family situation. Stephen's decision to leave is of course final. When Cranly suggests to Stephen the impracticality of his notion of unfettered freedom, Stephen comes out with a clear-cut statement of his new faith:

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 defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile and cunning.
(p.268-9)

'Cunning' here refers to cultivating craftsmanship and the other two terms ('silence' and 'exile') refer to his not being afraid of being isolated on his quest of the freedom he sees essential for the artist.

Finally in **Section four** of chapter five (the last of the nineteen sections that the novel is built around) we have scraps from Stephen's journal for the time prior to his actual departure from Dublin. Those who figure in these jottings are friends like Cranly and Davin (mainly Cranly), Emma and Stephen's mother. The decision to leave is of course irrevocable. It only gets reaffirmed in a variety of ways. This section shows Stephen poised for the flight.

The overall '*portrait*' that emerges from the novel as a whole is of an extrasensitive, proud, isolated individual who nevertheless has in him what is supposed to go into the making of an 'artist' rather 'the artist'. His continuous search is for warmth, for experience for its own sake, for 'transcendence' of a kind, for getting away and for being 'on the move'. Beauty of a certain kind is also something that he reaches out for. At the same time he would rarely do things under coercion. That is the rebellious streak in him. Squalor bothers him, poverty bothers him, but certain kinds of orderliness bother him still more. He likes to be on his own and prefers learning things first hand. He visualises himself as 'a priest of the imagination' and as some kind of wordsmith and 'maker'

The diary fragments in the closing sections of the novel are seen by some as a kind of comedown. Actually they represent the artist's attempt to grapple with subjective reactions by setting them down. They show the beginning of the creation of an 'objective world' from inner experience. These entries are a way of resisting a regressive decline into subjectivism. They refer to certain life facts that are yet to be elaborated and are left like that. These facts mark a turning point in Joyce's life away from crisis towards the establishment of an identity independent of restrictive locales.

As already noted, Hugh Kenner tells us that the pattern which each chapter of the novel exhibits is one of dream nourished in contempt of reality, put into practice, and dashed by reality. The movement of *A Portrait* in the light of this could be seen as a sort of vicious spiral, since each chapter closes with a synthesis of triumph. That in turn feeds the sausage-machine, set up in the next chapter. In each case the 'synthesis of triumph' can be seen as an approximation to the cry that Stephen finally utters at the end of the book: 'Welcome O life!' Thus the first chapter ends with his

successful appeal against injustice which leaves him feeling 'happy and free' and hearing the sound of cricket bats 'like drops of water in a fountain falling softly in the brimming bowl'. The second chapter ends with a new awakening and an image of life. The end of the third chapter reads: Another life! A life of grace and virtue and happiness. Near the end of the fourth chapter Stephen exclaims, 'To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life.' Thus when at the end of the book Stephen announces that he is going, 'to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience' it is already the fifth in an exhilarating sequence of new starts.

3.3 STEPHEN'S AESTHETIC THEORY

The three main principles of the theory of aesthetics put forward by Stephen are:

- i. Art is a stasis brought about by the formal rhythm of beauty;
- ii. Art of beauty divorced from good and evil is akin to truth, therefore, if truth can best be approached through intellection, beauty or art is best approached through the three stages of apprehension.
- iii. The three qualities of beauty which correspond to the three stages of apprehension are in the terms of Aquinas, *integritas* (wholeness), *consonantia* (harmony), and *claritas* (radiance).

The two main principles of his theory – art as stasis and the separation of beauty and evil are based by Stephen on one sentence by St. Thomas Aquinas, a 13th century saint which he translates 'that is beautiful the apprehension of which pleases'. The significance of the association of beauty with truth, of the stages of apprehension with the qualities of beauty is that it helped Joyce/Stephen to suggest that pure art exists as a delicate balance between the art-object and the one who perceives it. What Joyce does here is to secularize the Thomist insistence on the moral obligations of the artist by demanding instead intellectual or psychological obligations (by 'Thomism' is meant the thought of Thomas Aquinas).

Where the three qualities of beauty are concerned, Stephen's interpretation of 'consonantia' accords generally with the 'due proportion' that Aquinas notes as a characteristic of beauty. Here the important difference to be noted is between Aquinas's concept of form and rhythm as a manifestation of being and Joyce's more mundane mechanistic interpretation. With 'claritas' Stephen sharply diverges from the orthodox interpretations of Saint Thomas. When Stephen is talking of *claritas* in *A Portrait*, there is a substitution of 'quidditas' for 'claritas'. The purpose seems to be to avoid the spiritual connotation of the latter. In Stephen's scheme of things 'quidditas' means the 'whatness' of a thing. As for 'integritas' Stephen translates it as 'wholeness', but what is nearer to his meaning is 'perfection.'

Stephen consistently secularizes Aquinas. He adheres to Thomist categories but his interpretation of them is suited to his own purposes. One doctrine which he accepts completely is the identification of truth as the conformity of mind and object. He finds it especially useful because it provides him with a justification of absolute, psychological standards for art. It also offers him a defence against the charge that his theory is that of an art for art's sake votary. His major difference with Aquinas is that he sees the art-work as a world in itself, with the appropriate standards of completeness, harmony and clarity, rather than as a fragment or a symbol of a broader, more extensive unity. Aquinas was helpful to Joyce to the extent Joyce could use the scholastic method of logical argument against the vague generalities of the moralists or the diletantes.

Another important aspect of Stephen's 'theory of art' is his explanation of the three forms of art. The lyrical, the epical and the dramatic. Aquinas does not come in here. This can best be read as simply a commentary on Stephen's (and Joyce's) artistic

development, which is clearly a progression from the lyrical to the dramatic. In a sense, Stephen's aesthetic is made to grow and change as Stephen himself grows and changes. Some parts of the aesthetic, however remain constant.

In essence the theory offered by Stephen is that the beautiful is what can be pleasurable, apprehended by the senses or the mind. Static reception of this pleasure precludes the moral element which, instead of offering satisfaction, stirs feelings of desire or loathing. Truth satisfies the intellect, while beauty satisfies the imagination. The beautiful affects the mind in this respect that the mind is seized by its wholeness, fascinated by its harmony and enchanted by its radiance.

3.4 STEPHEN AND WOMEN

Apart from his mother and Dante, the first person from the opposite sex who figures in Stephen's life is Eileen. It is her white hands and golden hair that first stir his boyish notion about girls. His relationship with Eileen is not shown as amounting to much in the ultimate analysis. Then there are the romantic dreams about Mercedes (a character from the novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas. She is the beloved of the novel's hero Edmond Dantes). Stephen pictures himself grandly rejecting her because she had earlier slighted his love. The next person from the opposite sex to figure in Stephen's life is Emma whom he meets at the party at Harold's Cross. Withdrawing from the other children, he relishes his isolation. Emma glances repeatedly and invitingly in his direction. She gives rise to a feverish excitement in him. Together they take the last tram home. They stand on the steps of the tram. He is on a step above hers. As they talk, she keeps coming up to join him on his step. He knows that she is making an advance to him. And yet he is unable to respond in kind. The failure bothers him but all that comes out of it is an attempt to write a poem to Emma.

Two years later, there is a school-play in which Stephen figures. He works himself up into an excited romantic mood anticipating a meeting with Emma after she has seen the play. The whole thing collapses when he does not find Emma in the audience. The sexuality that might have found an outlet through this relationship is diverted elsewhere culminating in his experience with the prostitute. In this experience he is able to find not only relief from the goadings of his lust but a new self-assurance. After a cycle of sin and guilt, the wading girl becomes for him a way out of his dilemma. She becomes the catalytic agent for creativity.

In the final chapter Stephen imagines that Emma flirts with Father Moran. And yet the sight of her near the entrance of the library gives rise to the thought that she may be innocent. There is a surge of emotions but again much does not come out of it. He does write a poem to her and pictures her in remorse. When Emma ignores him outside the library he thinks that she is consciously rebuffing him and that Cranly is pursuing her. The diary jottings at the end tell us that she has been wanting to make contact with him. She wants to know why she sees so little of him and whether he still writes poems. His reply is a rebuff aimed at embarrassing her. And yet he cannot fully get over the attraction he feels for her. It is another thing that the call for exiling himself to which his soul responded makes him push her (temporarily) to the back of his mind.

Essentially Stephen's inability to connect fully with girls of his age is tied up with his aloofness from most of his compatriots at school and university. It is partly timidity and partly a feeling of self-importance which prevents him from reaching out to people. His 'notions' about what an 'artist' should be like, also contribute to his isolation. In general, his encounters with girls are awkward and unsatisfactory. The fallout quite often is that he submits to crude sexual fantasies.

Stephen has not only a powerful imagination but an overpowering sensuality. When his sexual yearnings are frustrated, fantasizing takes over quite often. The vaguely idealized notion of a tryst represented by the sentimental fantasy over Mercedes is among the first projections of Stephen's sexuality. This sexuality gets physically transfigured into the idea of Emma. Stephen's enigmatic use of her initials for his poem (even in the poem she remains a vague, distant figure) helps to underline her elusiveness. So while one can grant something of a search for love in Stephen's agonized, agitated yearning (aggravated by the kiss that he wanted, not really materializing), it is lust, not love, which finally gets gratified in the scene with the woman in the brothel. The woman is in many ways, the end of his searching, promising release as well as rest. The encounter also promises a kind of knowledge and with that some amount of certainty.

Regarding Emma's presence in the rest of the novel there is a slight shift towards the end of the novel. There is Stephen's fear that he has misjudged her, that his mind breeds 'vermin' and that she is beyond the images he projects on her. Stephen's sharp recognition, in the closing lines of the novel, of how he had been distorting her is also a recognition, significantly, of patterns of delusion that have clouded his mind from the early parts of the novel. At the same time, we should not overlook the fear that bothers Stephen that Emma would keep his soul at home in a sterile Ireland if he did not abruptly get away from her and from thinking of her.

For the larger part of the novel, Stephen is unable to think of woman except in fixed, polarized terms. Most of the time Stephen is able to come to terms with woman symbolically as a strong maternal figure (even the prostitute, in a sense, mothers him). His clumsy response to Emma towards the end of the novel is a function of a monklike withdrawal into the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus that he has. The preeminence of the virgin/mother model prevents Stephen from approaching woman on more comprehensive and inclusive terms though woman is represented in *A Portrait* in a wide range of figures and images.

We can conclude that, in general terms, 'woman' as image can be seen as having two contradictory (and almost mutually exclusive) sets of meaning. At one level 'woman' is possessive and a kind of stumbling block where Stephen's progress toward freedom and creative art is concerned. His mother largely and Eileen, Mercedes and E.C. partly belong here. At the other level 'woman' is a source of freedom and 'enlightenment'. The wading girl and before her the prostitute belong to this category.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

Stephen's growth into adulthood and his evolution as an artist are captured by Joyce quite competently though the two thrusts are often at variance. Stephen's aesthetic theory is influenced substantially by St. Thomas Aquinas. His attitude to women is inadequate partly on account of his general inability to relate to people in general and partly on account of the virgin/mother fixation that he suffers from. Upto a point, the prostitute is the end of his search because she offers him release, certainty and knowledge in a variety of ways.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the Christmas dinner scene in *A Portrait*? Who are the main participants in the discussion?

2. What effect does Stephen's experience with the prostitute have on him?
3. What is the relationship between Dublin and Stephen especially in the light of his wanderings in the city?

3.7 SUGGESTED READING

As suggested earlier, Harry Levin's *James Joyce : A Critical Introduction* offers a good starting point. You should also read William York Tindall's *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce*. For a treatment of Stephen's aesthetic theory, a good place is William T.S. Noon's book *Joyce and Aquinas*. Some idea of Stephen's relationship with women and of Joyce's general treatment of women can be had from Suzette Henke and Elaine Unkeles (eds.) *Women in Joyce*.

UNIT 4 TECHNIQUE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Variety of Styles
- 4.3 Repetition/Symbolism
- 4.4 Stream of Consciousness and Epiphany
- 4.5 Linguistic Features .
- 4.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.7 Questions
- 4.8 Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Our objective in this unit is to look at Joyce's technique in *A Portrait*. As you know all modernists attached a lot of value to technique, the 'how' of a work as distinguished from its 'what'. The slogan 'Make It New' had a special significance for every modernist writer. Joyce is no exception. In this unit you will see how the 'stream-of-consciousness' technique which was touched upon in the unit on 'Contexts' actually operates in *A Portrait*. You will also see the variety of styles used by Joyce and become aware of the exploitation of repetition as a stylistic device. This section will cover repetition of image, symbol and motif.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In terms of influence exercised on future practitioners of his craft and in terms of range and audacity of experimentation, Joyce has been perhaps the tallest figure in modernist literature written in English. The whole range of his stylistic daring becomes clear to one only after one has encountered *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as well but *A Portrait* by itself is enough to stamp him as a dexterous user of English and as one aware of the possibilities as well as limitations of the language. The subject of the novel is conveyed to us both by the surface narration of events and by dialogue as also by a deliberate carefully woven network of verbal associations incorporated into the text. The language strives towards a kind of radiance and textural richness and density throughout and there is an exactitude, tautness and economy about it which is really striking. The best lessons of Realism, Naturalism and Symbolism are evidently internalised quite well by Joyce and he adds a lot of his own special technique to the cumulative and composite legacy represented by these influencing trends.

4.2 VARIETY OF STYLES

One of Joyce's major stylistic achievements in *A Portrait* is the modulation of styles throughout. As you read the novel, you are going to realize that Joyce uses a different style in each section to underline each stage of Stephen's development. Each style is meant to represent a different stage in Stephen's progress towards the final realization of his true vocation. The changes in style are deliberately foregrounded (highlighted).

The novel is set in motion by the formula one would use for starting a fairytale. By a selection and patterning of language, Joyce is able to mimic the growth of the child's mind:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo....

His father told him that story : his father looked at him through a glass : he had a hairy face.

He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived : she sold lemon platt.

O, the wild rose blossoms
On the little green place.

He sang that song. That was his song.

O, the green wothe botheth.

When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell.

His mother had a nicer smell than his father. She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance. He danced:

Tralala lala
Tralala tralaladdy
Tralala lala
Tralala lala

(p.3)

The usual narrative links are replaced to a large extent by verbal echoes and associations. There is a direct representation of sensations, feelings and impressions. The suggestion of party recitations helps to evoke family life in the parlour. Sensations of wet and dry, the sense of a ministering mother and the contrast in the child's mind between father and mother are all introduced here. As the child grows, the idiom changes and the range of interests becomes wider. Now the language and perceptions are those of a schoolboy. Further we come across a mind becoming aware of itself and of the body:

He kept on the fringe of his line, out of sight of his prefect, out of the reach of the rude feet, feigning to run now and then. He felt his body small and weak amid the throng of players and his eyes were weak and watery. (p.4)

The schoolboy slang now introduced into the novel richly reinforces and enlivens Joyce's rendering of school life. There are words like 'scut', 'feck', 'rump', 'stink', 'dog-in-the-basket', 'smuggling' and these bring about a subtle alteration in the language amidst which Stephen grows.

For the Christmas dinner episode we find Joyce taking recourse to a dramatic, impersonal mode. In a sense, the world of adults takes over here. Later the style returns to Stephen's subjective viewpoint around the pandying incident but the pandying is described by way of an intrusion of external reality. Stephen's thought patterns and the associations of 'cruel and unfair' and the internal monologue that Stephen has is pitched at a high level of tension. It is defused after the interview with the rector. The mood now changes to the dramatic and the form reflects that.

A detailed cataloguing and sampling of the great variety of styles is not possible here so let me give you an indication only of some of the broad stylistic shifts mostly coinciding with transitions from chapter to chapter.

The second chapter traces Stephen's adolescence from the first awakening of sexuality and his growing isolation from family. In the first section of this chapter we find Stephen nauseated with the reality of his life as well as with avenues of escape that are available to him. He now thinks of a meeting with an idealized woman. This hope is presented to us in a parody of sentimental romantic fiction. The style matches Stephen's cultivated posturing and his romantic reading: '... in secret he began to make ready for the great part which he felt awaited him...' (p.64)

Later when Stephen roams the backstreets of Dublin's brothel district, there is a subtle change in style as the coarse insistent external reality makes its presence felt. In the third chapter the external reality and its grossness take over for a while:

He hoped there would be stew for dinner, turnips and carrots ... stuff it into you, his belly counselled him. (p.109)

When we come to the sermons, a different kind of rhetoric takes over. One example would suffice:

I pray to God that my poor words may have availed today to confirm in holiness those who are in a state of grace, to strengthen the wavering, to lead back to the state of grace the poor soul that has strayed if any such be among you. (p.145)

The rhetoric here relies as much on sound as on meaning for its effect. Once Stephen has confessed, the mood changes and the prose reflects the change:

The muddy streets were gay. He strode homeward, conscious of an invisible grace pervading and making light his limbs. In spite of all he had done it. (p.157)

One of the climactic epiphanies in the novel is represented by the sight of the wading girl and its effect on Stephen. The prose with its buoyancy lives up to the demands of the occasion quite well:

Heavenly God! cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy.

He turned away from her suddenly and set off across the strand. His cheeks were aflame; his body was aglow; his limbs were trembling. On and on and on he strode, far out over the sands, singing wildly to the sea, crying to greet the advent of the life that had cried to him.

Her image had passed into his soul forever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! A wild angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to

throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory. (p.186)

The buoyancy of style is reminiscent of the simile used earlier by Joyce to indicate Stephen's state of mind when he and Emma take a tram-ride home after the children's party at Harold's Cross:

His heart danced upon her movements like a cork upon a tide. (p.72)

In the final section of the fourth chapter the style that takes over is (most of the time) exultant, almost riotous. A boisterous energy seems to be driving the language. The cumulative rhetorical effect of the resonances of words come to be of great importance in such a linguistic situation.

In the opening paragraph of the fifth chapter we get a taste of Joyce's great ability handle uncomfortable detail through cataloguing and through tight structures of modification:

He drained his third cup of watery tea to the dregs and set to chewing the crusts of fried bread that were scattered near him, staring into the dark pool of the jar. The yellow dripping had been scooped out like a boghole and the pool under it brought back to his memory the dark turfcoloured water of the bath in Clongowes. (p.188)

Later in the fifth chapter Joyce's mastery of dialogue and of dramatic form is strikingly at work in his evocation of life at University College, Dublin. Bantering between students is handled with great dexterity and there is, at the same time, remarkable warmth and humanity beneath the surface ribaldry and word-play. Innuendos that the students direct at each other are an example of the vital sources of native humour which sustained the liveliness of Joyce's prose throughout his career. One example will suffice. When Lynch has a hearty laugh on something Cranly says, Cranly comes up with:

Lynch is awake. (p.218)

'The most notable thing about linguistic play in the fifth chapter is that Stephen (tacitly or otherwise) is now very much a part of it all:

His fellow student's rude humour ran like a gust through the cloister of Stephen's mind, shaking into gay life limp priestly vestments that hung upon the walls setting them to sway and caper in a sabbath of misrule. (p.208)

In response to Cranly's words, 'Lynch is awake', Lynch straightens himself and thrusts forward his chest. Stephen's comment on this is:

Lynch puts out his chest....
As a criticism of life. (p.218)

So, we can conclude that the variety of styles that we come across in *A Portrait* is quite functional and tailored to the different stages of Stephen's growth. The broad progression of the style is from a kind of 'interior monologue' of the infant, through growing objectivity, to the adolescent lyricism of the vision of the wading girl. Then there is broad humour and finally there are the diary jottings that amount to some kind of shorthand for the 'interior monologue' form associated with 'stream-of-consciousness' and used more extensively in *Ulysses*.

Repetition as a stylistic and structural device is used by most modernist writers. *A Portrait* also uses it quite effectively. It offers endless difference in sameness and reminds us of the ways in which variety can be organised around some governing preoccupations. At the same time, you should keep this in mind that the function of the repetition of image, symbol and motif in *A Portrait* is most of the time only suggestive, not definitive. The use of some of the key motifs in the very first section of the novel thus has in it as much of fluidity as fixity of connotation. This fluidity then embraces the whole novel.

Birds, water and colours are chief among the symbols that Joyce has woven into the structure and texture of *A Portrait*. First let us look at **water**. Associations of wet and dry are there right at the start in the bedwetting episode. The bog water with which the water of the square ditch into which Wells pushes Stephen comes to be associated, has a way of returning to Stephen's consciousness. It does so not only as 'watery tea' but as the squalor of the kitchen at home and as the turf-coloured bath water. And yet the same water comes to have very different and liberating connotations for him in the episode relating to the wading girl. Moving now to '**colours**' we find the first colours of infant awareness, the green of Ireland and Parnell and the red of the family hearth are both joined in the ivy and holly of the Christmas dinner and then go on to be reflected in the colours of the seaweeds through which Stephen wades. The wading girl's colours are also significant; thighs of ivory, dress of blue and white, and hair of gold. Interestingly, ivory and white also tie up with Eileen's hands. Finally there is the symbolism associated with **birds**. It starts with the eagles that will pull out the infant Stephen's eyes. Then there are the 'talons' of the young Jesuit prefect Mr. Gleeson. The bird image later comes to be associated with flight, liberation and transcendence. First there is the figure of Icarus rising above the waters. Still more significant is the wading girl who is envisioned as having been transformed into a sea-bird with the delicate legs of a crane, standing in the water as if poised for flight. Her bosom is like the plumage of a dove.

Along with the chief symbols two more things have symbolic significance. These are **flowers** and **roads**. Both play an important role in Stephen's mental make-up and baggage. The rose symbolism in the novel is complex. The associations of roads are tied up with walks and wandering. These are also a part of the topography of Dublin (in actuality and as part of Stephen's internal landscape).

Samuel Beckett once warned readers against the danger of excessive 'neatness of identification' where Joyce's use of symbols was concerned. You would do well to keep in mind the fact that Joyce mostly keeps his symbolism in a fluid state so that the connotations keep changing most of the time.

4.4 STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND 'EPIPHANY'

Some indication of the implications of the term 'stream-of-consciousness' has already been given to you by equating it (roughly speaking) with a 'train of thought'. The method is in evidence at many places in *A Portrait*, more so in the opening and the closing pages of the novel. The emphasis in the 'stream-of-consciousness' method is on the psychic being of the characters and the associative mode is kept in the forefront of Stephen's consciousness. This is at the heart of the novel as it is both its subject-matter and its major structuring mechanism. In the opening and the closing pages, the inner aspect of this consciousness is on view. At the start, the reader is rushed back and forth through sudden disruptions. The story of the moo-cow

is linked in Stephen's consciousness with Byrne's sweetshop. A memory of his father leads to a memory of his mother. Associations lead us to Eileen. The coldness of the bed and its wetness are all part of associative processes as are the smells exuded by Stephen's parents.

Another good example of the method is when Stephen is on the football field. He is in the midst of a scrimmage and is thinking of going home for the holidays. He longs for the warmth of the room where he has pasted at his desk the number of days still remaining between then and the holidays. His thoughts on the field move in quick succession from his cold hands, to the various meanings of the word 'belt', to nasty expressions used by the boys, to his mother's warning not to speak to the rough boys and so on.

The way associative processes are pressed into the service of the weaving together of recurrent motifs is quite obvious in the episode related to Wells and the discomfiture it causes everytime it comes back to Stephen:

He shivered as if he had cold slimy water next to his skin. That was mean of Wells to shoulder him into the square ditch...How cold and slimy the water had been! (p.7)

The motif of wetness and coldness stays with him:

He felt his forehead warm and damp against the prefect's cold damp hand. That was the way a rat felt slimy and damp and cold. (pp.19-20)

There are many other examples in the text where associative processes are at work. You should locate them and see how they tie up with Joyce's overall technique. You will find that Joyce mostly sticks to a kind of realist-naturalist style with symbolic motifs interwoven into the narrative. In the first and last pages the technique is more or less exclusively 'stream-of-consciousness'. The diary-jottings at the end are syntactically much closer to the style of *Ulysses* due to their being more fragmentary. In the opening pages the 'train of thought' is expressed in complete sentences and regular syntax.

Let us now look at the role of 'epiphany' in *A Portrait*. The concept of 'epiphany' is basic to the appreciation of Joyce's general approach in *A Portrait*. By an epiphany Joyce meant a sudden spiritual manifestation or 'showing forth'. With some stretching of the connotations of the word, it is possible to see *A Portrait* (as many critics have done) as incorporating a sequence of related epiphanies in the form of a forward-moving narrative. The 'showing forth' that Joyce had in mind was the reality (the 'whatness') of an object, person, an event. The estuary epiphany is the most notable example of the kind of 'showing forth' that Joyce had in mind. What happens here is that Stephen, in a flash of insight, recognizes the call of his artistic vocation, transfigured into the form of the wading girl who becomes for him (then) the embodiment of art and beauty. The second thing to note is that another aspect of epiphany (the joy or the sense of enlightenment it creates) is conveyed to us in the wild transport of delight experienced by Stephen at the sight of the girl. The two aspects have a way of reinforcing each other. They resonate and bring the fourth chapter to its rapturous climax. The interview with the Jesuit director also has in it strong elements of epiphany. That episode needs to be seen in its totality (its before and after included) to realize its epiphanic status.

4.5 LINGUISTIC FEATURES

To the extent Joyce's style in *A Portrait* retains naturalistic tendencies, it tends to be

up with this linguistic thrust is that there is a preponderance of tight structures of modification (adjectives, adverbs, adjective phrases, adverbial phrases and adjective clauses and adverb clauses) occurring both in pre-head and post-head positions. The aim is to give us as exact a description as possible. Three examples of varying length will illustrate this linguistic tendency. The first is:

The sad quiet grey blue of the dying day came through the window and the open door, covering over and allaying quietly a sudden instinct of remorse in Stephen's heart. (p.176)

The second example is:

Near the hoardings on the canal he met the consumptive man with the doll's face and the brimless hat coming towards him down the slope of the bridge with little steps, tightly buttoned into his chocolate overcoat and holding his furled umbrella a span or two from him like a divining rod. (p.191)

The third example is:

He passed unchallenged among the docks and along the quays wondering at the multitude of corks that lay wobbling on the surface of the water in a thick yellow scum, at the crowds of quay porters and the rumbling carts and the ill-dressed bearded policemen. (p.69)

In the first example, the word 'blow' is modified by three adjectives (sad, quiet, grey) and the verb 'came through' is modified by the participial phrase 'covering over and allaying quietly a sudden instinct of remorse'. In the second example, the noun phrase 'consumptive man' is modified by 'with the doll's face and the brimless hat' and the whole phrase taken together is tied up to the participial phrase 'coming towards him down the slope of the bridge with little steps'. This modified structure is further modified by 'tightly buttoned into his chocolate overcoat and holding his furled umbrella a span or two from him like a divining rod'. In the third example, the verb 'passed' is modified first by 'unchallenged among the ducks and along the quays' and further by 'wondering at the multitudes of corks'. The 'corks' themselves are further modified by 'that lay wobbling on the surface of the water in a thick yellow scum'. 'Mean scrupulousness' is the expression which is quite appropriate for this kind of nagging accuracy and this accuracy works very well in the service of the modernist preoccupation with city-life, with concretion and with immediacy and complexity.

4.6 LET US SUM UP

As with other great modernists, technique is an extremely significant part of Joyce's novelistic art and most technical devices are there to add novelty as well as accuracy to the presentation. The variety of styles in the novel is extraordinary and each change of style conforms to some stage in Stephen's growth. 'Stream-of-consciousness' is used less extensively here than in *Ulysses* and epiphany is used to remarkable effect. Tight structures of modification mark the syntax of the novel at most places.

4.7 QUESTIONS

1. What kind of style does Joyce use to convey the workings of Stephen's mind as an infant in the opening pages of *A Portrait*?

2. What do you understand by the term 'stream-of-consciousness'? Which works of Joyce use it more extensively than does *A Portrait*?
3. Write a short note on associative processes in *A Portrait* in terms of the random working of memory leading from one thought/image/impression to another.
4. How does the use of tight structures of modification (adjectives, adverbs, adverbial and adjectival phrases and adverb and adjective clauses) help Joyce in giving textural density to his style in *A Portrait*?
5. Give at least one example of 'epiphany' from *A Portrait*.

4.8 SUGGESTED READING

A good introductory book on matters related to the technique of *A Portrait* is Christopher Hanson's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969. You will find Patrick Parrinder's book *James Joyce* quite useful in the matter of shifts on and variety of styles. Anthony Burgess's extensive writings on Joyce are useful in the matter of throwing light on Joyce's linguistic virtuosity. His 1980 book *Joyceprick* is quite helpful.

UNIT 5 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES : A BRIEF SELECTIVE OVERVIEW

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Early Critical Reception
- 5.3 Subsequent Criticism
- 5.4 The Advantages of a Psychoanalytic Approach to *A Portrait*
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 A Select Bibliography

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall look at the criticism related to a *A Portrait* first in terms of its immediate critical reception and then in terms of criticism from the forties onward. We shall also see how one recent approach – the Psychoanalytic approach – is likely to prove more fruitful with this novel.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In terms of its critical reception *A Portrait* has had its share of detractors and its admirers. Foremost among those attacking the novel are those who see it as an artistic failure on account of Joyce's inability to properly handle 'point of view'. These believe that Joyce has failed to consistently manage his 'distance' from Stephen. Those who see the novel as an artistic success believe that the problem of 'distance' has been handled quite well by Joyce in *A Portrait*. More recent approaches have by and large, stopped seeing the 'distance' problem as all that important.

5.2 EARLY CRITICAL RECEPTION

A number of its early reviewers saw *A Portrait* as a seriously flawed book. They saw in it 'lack of organisation.' Some had problems with what they saw as its prurient realism and its frankness about physicality. Some saw the discussion of aesthetics and the sermons as not fully integrated into the organic structure of the novel. Some saw Joyce as a realist but thought that his method was too chaotic to produce the effect of realism.

Quite a few people saw positive merit in *A Portrait*. The poet Hart Crane found it 'spiritually inspiring.' H.G. Wells saw it as 'by far the most living and convincing picture that exists of an Irish Catholic upbringing' (*Nation*, XX (24 February 1917)). Francis Hackett in a review in *New February*, X, No 122 (3 March 1917) saw *A Portrait* as not entirely pleasant but thought it 'has beauty, such love of beauty, such intensity of feeling, such pathos, such candor it goes beyond anything in English that reveals the inevitable malaise of serious youth'. John Macy in a review in *Dial* IX ii, No 744 (14 June 1917) thought *A Portrait* was outspoken, vigorous, original, . . . beautiful.'

5.3 SUBSEQUENT CRITICISM

The broad division in subsequent criticism of *A Portrait* has been between those like Hugh Kenner and Wayne Booth on the one hand who attack the novel on some counts and those on the other hand who are quite enamoured of it. Both Booth and Kenner fail to appreciate fully the novelty of Joyce's effort. Kenner believes that the vagueness we come across in *A Portrait* regarding Joyce's precise attitude to Stephen is calculated and that this vagueness answers the imperatives of a nearly solipsistic novel. Booth thinks that Joyce fails in properly managing the problem of 'distance'.

Both these criticisms all simplistic in that they fail take into account Joyce's modernism, his handling of and mastery of a multiple perspective and his subtle modulation of tone and attitude. As an answer to the Booth Kenner approach, those sympathetic to Joyce's method take the position that *A Portrait* uses at least a 'dual consciousness'. One part of the duality is that which, from Stephen's point of view, enables Joyce to capture the intimacy of a first-person narrator, recording and observing, experiencing at different levels, ages and sensitivities. The other part of the duality from the point of view of the mature narrator, allows Joyce to retain legitimate control of the form and to comment indirectly on the subject matter.

Harry Levin's 1941 book *James Joyce : A Critical Introduction* is in the forefront of sympathetic treatments of *A Portrait*. Some of the major points Levin makes are:

- a. The Stephen we finally meet is more sharply differentiated from his surroundings than the figure Joyce set out to describe;
- b. Joyce's notable contribution to English prose is to provide a more fluid medium for refracting sensations and impressions through the author's mind – to facilitate the transition from photographic realism to aesthetic impressions.
- c. Joyce's use of conversation is one of the most vital elements of Joyce's writing.

James Atherton's "Introduction" to his edition of *A Portrait* for the Heinemann Modern Novel Series in 1964 is another good example of criticism that is sympathetic to Joyce's overall achievement. The most remarkable thing Atherton's "Introduction" does is to draw attention to cinematic elements in Joyce's narrative technique in *A Portrait*.

Seeing *A Portrait* in the light of technical and stylistic innovations initiated by Modernism is a big help in arriving at a sympathetic view of the novel. Most books on Joyce that appeared before poststructuralism came on the scene (around 1966) are informed by this modernism-sympathetic attitude. Colin MacCabe's 1979 book *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* was the first full-length attempt to see Joyce's writings from a poststructuralist perspective. John Paul Riquelme and Maud Ellman are other notable critics who have brought a broadly poststructuralist perspective to bear on Joyce's works. The broad shift brought about by poststructuralist perspectives collectively is to orient Joyce criticism towards

questions related to identity, naming and patriarchy largely in the light of theories brought into currency by the work of the French psychoanalytic thinker Jacques Lacan.

**Critical Perspectives:
A Brief Selective
Overview**

But then literary theory (in relative terms) has paid much more attention to *Ulysses* and to *Finnegan's Wake* than to *A Portrait*. Those two novels provide much more fertile ground for many of the more recent critical trends. In the wake of the relative falling out-of-favour of the New Critics in particular and of Formalism of various kinds in general, a text like *A Portrait* has suffered some relative neglect but for anybody seriously interested in the formative stages of early English-language Modernism and for those interested in fiction-writing as a craft, it remains a virtual goldmine. Only when a reader approaches this novel in a spirit of appreciating Modernism in general is he/she able to fully realise the reach and full impact of the remarkable things Joyce did with language in his novel and the extraordinary economy and compression and radiance with which he was able to do that. If, on the other hand, ideology and gender-related issues make a reader hostile to everything 'Modernistic', then part of that hostility gets transferred to the reading act itself but that is seen by many as an affordable loss in this period of reader-empowerment. At the same time, we should not forget that some of the ideological and feminist readings are quite likely to go against the grain of this novel.

The approach that is likely to work best with this quintessentially 'Modernistic' novel is one combining close stylistic and formal analysis with Psychoanalytic insights of the kind provided by the theories of Jacques Lacan. One such extremely useful insight is tying up selfhood with the unconscious. The idea of the self as a stable amalgam of consciousness is sought to be replaced in Lacan by seeing novelistic characters as assemblages of signifiers (always mobile) clustering around a proper name.

It is in areas related to growing and the acquiring of identity and to 'otherness' that Lacanian theories are most relevant for our present purposes. One of Lacan's most important texts is 'The Insistence of the letter in the Unconscious.' One question Lacan poses in this essay (anthologised by David Lodge in his 1988 *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*) is;

Then who is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself since at the heart of my own assent to my own identity it is still he who wags me?
(Lodge, p. 102).

In the same essay Lacan insists that the Freudian discovery of the unconscious be followed through to its logical conclusion, which is the self's radical ex-centricity to itself. (Lodge p. 101). Stephen too is preoccupied with 'otherness' and the nature of Stephen's existence and of the shape of his character, always depends on the other end of his thinking. Personality, seen from this viewpoint, is not something static but a succession of phases. Because the different modes of Stephen's thought react to his environment, the arrangement of the overall structure is already an arrangement of technique as different situations entail different rhythms and modes of thought. Each chapter in the novel tries to offer a coherent image of Stephen but the real focus is on the 'movement' which involves the shift between the moment of stasis at which perception fixes on epiphanies at the end of each narrative unit. The distant attitude that Joyce has toward Stephen early in each unit corresponds to the naturalist view of the figure trapped by his social system. And yet each chapter ends with a sense of passing through or passing on and Stephen achieves a transcendence (at each such point) that brings him close to Joyce.

The cycles of Stephen's progress in *A Portrait* are rites of sundering and reconciliation. The word 'sundering' is extremely important in *A Portrait* because in the Psychoanalytic approach 'sundering' it tied up with 'lack' and 'desire'. Sin for

Stephen comes to be an activity through which he develops himself by being shaken loose from an established context so that he can gain entry into a realm of semiotic shifting that expands his range of linguistic structuring. Shaped by the self that he is yet to become, Stephen (at fourteen or fifteen) already begins to understand the process by which he is creating that self. The movement toward clarification of his own self in Stephen's case comes about through expanding into language.

A sense of separation and loss expand Stephen's language in the action of each chapter. His mind at the same time, moves back and forth between an attractive maternal image and a threatening paternal one. Whenever he settles into a somewhat stable relationship with his maternally-oriented environment he perceives a male figure as threatening this stability. His usual reaction is to set off in a new direction to find a new world involving a transformed maternity, a shifting of language. The shifting expands his perception into a new world of images. These images not only become a new wing of his mental development, they in fact constitute him as a new person. Seen from this angle, the linguistic flow, imaged as moving liquid or material embrace at the end of each cycle gives Stephen a new enhanced potential for language. Contact with maternal flux has a way of energizing Stephen at crucial points in the text.

The characteristic mode of Stephen's involvement with the world is complex. A very interesting aspect of the vision Stephen has of himself as an artist is that by projecting himself outward as a narrator, he generates a creative power that returns to expand the mind that sent it. Insofar as he creates his object by shaping his story, he creates himself.

This kind of psychoanalytic line on Joyce's works as a whole is spelt out quite well by Sheldon Brivic in his 1991 book *The Veil of Signs*, reference to which has already been made elsewhere in this unit. My summary of Brivic's argument regarding *A Portrait* is a little simplistic but it is sure to go some way in indicating to you how such a broad approach helps considerably, especially in the case of an identity-oriented and language-oriented a novel as *A Portrait* is. Most other current approaches have in them the potential of being either a misreading or an overreading or a reading against the grain of the novel. In any case, a very large part of feminist criticism is informed by Lacanian insights to such a remarkable degree that the Lacanian approach is bound to be a more comprehensive one. As readers you are free to go in for any one kind of reading which would be more in keeping with your own ideological or readerly preferences. The text that you then create will be your text in keeping with the 'reader-response' notion that a text gets created only in the process of reading. This could be quite subjective. That subjectivity also needs to be checked through conventions of reading or through protocols of reading.

To succeed better with Joyce's novel you need to be aware of the technical side of the modernist enterprise as a whole (with some idea of Imagism, Symbolism, Modernism). You also need some minimum awareness of some later development like poststructuralism. Finally, you need to come to *A Portrait* with a relatively open mind. Then it will be easier to understand the full implications of the kind of glowing tribute that Derek Attridge pays to Joyce:

Far more people read Joyce than are aware of it. Such was the impact of his literary revolution that few later novelists of importance in any of the world's languages have escaped its aftershock, even when they attempt to avoid Joycean paradigms and procedures. We are indirectly reading Joyce, therefore, in many of our engagements with the past half century's serious fiction – and the same is true of some not so serious fiction too.... In television and video, film, popular music and advertising, all of which are marked as modern genres by the use of Joycean's techniques of parody and pastiche, self referentiality, fragmentation of word and image, open ended

narrative, and multiple point of view. And the unprecedented explicitness with which Joyce introduced the trivial details of ordinary life into the realm of art opened up a rich new territory for writers, painters and film makers, while at the same time it revealed the fruitful contradictions at the heart of the realist enterprise itself. (Derek Attridge. *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, p1)

5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this final Unit of our study material on *A Portrait* we have briefly looked at some of the critical responses that the novel generated – upon publication and subsequently over the years. Joyce criticism has become something of an industry as generations of readers try to unravel the complexities of the writer's mind and his technical virtuosity. While this Block deals with some of the basics of *A Portrait*, it is meant to lead you on to a more extensive and intensive reading of other available critical material for a more incisive understanding of Joyce's novel.

5.6 A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chester G. Anderson, *James Joyce*, Thomas and Hudson, 1986

Morris Beja (ed.) *James Joyce: Dubliners and A Portrait: A Casebook*, Macmillan, 1973.

Sydney Bolt, *A Preface to James Joyce*, Longman, 1981.

Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.) *Modernism*. Penguin Books, 1976.

Sheldon Brivic, *The Veil of Signs*, University of Illinois Press, 1991.

Anthony Burgen, *Joyceprick*, Clarion Books 1980.

Richard Ellman, *James Joyce*, Oxford University Press, 1982 (revised edition)

John Cross, *Joyce*, Fontana, 1971.

Christopher Hanson, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Basil Blackwell, 1969.

Suzette Henke and Elaine Unkeles (eds.) *Women in Joyce*, University of Illinois Press, 1982.

Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, Faber & Faber, 1982.

Harry Levin *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*, Faber & Faber, 1969 (revised edition)

Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce*, Chatto and Windus, 1955.

William T. Moon, *Joyce and Aquinas* Yale University Press, 1957.

Patrick Parrinder, *James Joyce*, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

John P. Riquelme, *Teller and Tale in Joyce's Fiction*, John Hopkins University Press, 1983.

William M. Schute (ed.) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Prentice Hall, 1968.

Thomas F. Staley and Bernard Benstock (eds.) *Approaches to Joyce's Portrait : Ten Essays*, University of Pittsburgh, 1976.

William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce*, Thomas and Hudson, 1960.

Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931.