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ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

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A PORTRAIT OF THE FAILED ARTIST. THE METAMORPHOSIS OF STEPHEN DEDALUS IN *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN* AND *ULYSSES*¹

Abstract: *This paper centres on the character of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's novels A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses. Joyce presents the late nineteenth-century Irish society and its complex sense of historical, political and religious forces which influence or reinforce an individual's perception and behaviour. Through the character of Stephen Dedalus, Joyce struggles to break free of Irish stereotypes, and thus, challenges the stereotypical relationships between church and state, religion and parishioner, family and tradition. Also, the paper focuses upon the shift in the sensibility and development of Stephen Dedalus. This shift enables him to expand psychologically and transcend beyond the fixity of the traditional ideas and values. The paper suggests that Stephen Dedalus is a modernist character – he seeks his own identity in the complexity of modern experience, choosing the hermetic life of an artist rather than accepting the role given to him by society and culture. However, his strong sense of identity later turns out to be no more than a delusion. He remains a brooding, apathetic young man whose creative muse seems to have let him down; he is a poet that barely rises above the level of mediocrity.*

Keywords: James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus, modernism, identity, artist.

The crucial difference between Stephen Dedalus' character in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses* rests upon his ability to acknowledge the importance of experience. In *A Portrait* he naively believes that personal genius alone is to carry him to the status of artist. *Ulysses*, a novel that begins after a brief self-exile in Paris, shows his re-

alisation that becoming an artist is not a purely natural process. Stephen, having left Ireland and returned, can now re-examine the shaping forces of custom on personal identity. His view of the artist is radically changed and it would be a mistake to perceive him as nothing more than an extension of the protagonist of *A Portrait*. "Despite his continuing feeling of isolation, he emerges as a figure unavoidably conditioned by his personal past and unconsciously moving toward reconcilia-

¹ Tekst je nastao u okviru masterskog rada *Stephen Dedalus as an Irishman and a Modernist*, Filološki fakultet u Beogradu, 2010.

tion with his cultural heritage. Yet even after one acknowledges the clear difference between the two characterisations, the problem remains of reconciling impressions of Stephen derived from *Portrait* with aspects of his nature emanating from *Ulysses*" (Newman and Thornton 1987: 125). In *Ulysses* we are presented with Stephen's reforming nature and his changing perspective of himself while he, like a fallen Icarus, broods over Dublin Bay. These recollections of his immediate past imply that his present condition only continues his unresolved conflicts. The opening scene of the novel contributes to the idea that Stephen's present is no more than a variation of his past. His apocalyptic attitude and vain assertions that he is trapped still cause him so much turmoil and confusion. The constraints of family, church and nation, and the pressure of his sexual urges, all of which he seemingly escaped at the end of *A Portrait*, are even more emphasised. The image of the alienated artist, cut off from society and rejected by it, seems to worsen the burden. Moreover, we find him deeply shaken by his mother's death and the guilt he feels about his refusal to pray by her deathbed. Again, his thoughts are obsessively preoccupied with the issues of authority and its oppressive mechanisms. He feels that he has been usurped by Buck Mulligan who reproduces the patterns of behaviour, which inflicted so much pain on Stephen in *A Portrait*. Mulligan opens the novel with an assault on Stephen's identity by questioning his name. In this dialogue with Mulligan, Stephen reveals self-hatred, loneliness and cynicism, "You behold in me, Stephen said with grim displeasure, a horrible example of free thought" (Joyce 1984: 16). In a sense, Stephen is back where he was at the beginning of the last section of *A Portrait* when "his heart [was] already bitten by an ache of loathing and bitterness" (Joyce 2005: 203). Now, living with Mulligan, a bitterly resented surrogate father, he is in the same

mood. Thinking of Mulligan's patronising attitude to him and his own dependence, Stephen chastises himself for being "a server of a servant" (Joyce 1984: 9). It seems that the liberation of the concluding pages of *A Portrait* has not occurred and that he accedes to Mulligan's dominance. He has been wearing black since his mother's death and is still imprisoned in bitterness, self-pity and melancholy. Like Hamlet with whom he identifies, Stephen realises that he is helpless but does not know how to overcome his loneliness and isolation. This difficulty also manifests itself through the presence of Haines and his problematic pose as an Englishman engaged in Irish folklore. His work emphasises the stereotypes of the islanders pervasive at the turn of the century while he himself represents the mediocre and materialistic English culture that is infesting Ireland. Furthermore, Stephen sees himself as a "servant of two masters" – "the imperial British state" and "the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church" (Joyce 1984: 17). He defines "the cracked looking glass of a servant" as the symbol of Irish art, which demands his selfless devotion and obedience. We see that there is really no freedom in "silence, exile and cunning" (Joyce 2005: 286). This new knowledge adds a touch of irony to his current situation; no longer the rebellious student, he is now a history teacher at Garret Deasy's school for boys in Dalkey. He does not take comfort from this position; it only aggravates his sense of isolation and loneliness. However, his idea to maintain this alienation, and thus, his individuality diminishes as the novel progresses. For instance, he feels sympathy for one of his students, the ineffectual Cyril Sargent. Although he is not a mirror image of Stephen, Sargent is used to call attention to Stephen's changing attitudes towards his past. He finds in Sargent the same weakness he had while he was at Clongowes, "Like him was I" (Joyce 1984: 23). The description of Deasy's boys playing field hockey, the game

Sargent has been trying to avoid, recalls little Stephen “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” (Joyce 2005: 8). These sympathetic recollections also suggest a softening of his feelings towards the family. He creates an impressive picture of Sargent’s mother with musings on his own parents, “With her weak blood and wheysour milk she had fed him and hid from sight of others his swaddling bands” (Joyce 1984: 23). Echoes of Stephen’s youth persist throughout Nestor, pointing out a new facet of his nature. The chaotic situation of the classroom, his empathy with Sargent and Deasy’s request “to wait in [his] study for a moment” (Joyce 1984: 23) make Stephen look like a vulnerable, sensitive child. Moreover, his wages and previous paydays, “three nooses round [him]” (Joyce 1984: 24), call to mind the nets he wanted to fly in *A Portrait*, but now pro-British rather than Irish institutions oppress and enslave him. This clarifies the nightmare that Stephen now wants to escape as the version of history created by British colonialism. His disdain for Deasy’s anti-Semitism reflects his reluctance to be affected by English dominance, suggested by his attitude towards Haines’s idea on Ireland and on Jews in England in the preceding chapter. Although he still rejects the authority and insularity of his compatriots, he is now able to perceive the importance of his cultural identity.

After the examination of the first two chapters dealing with Stephen’s social and personal self, Proteus provides new insights into his artistic tendencies – “a record of aesthetic impressions emphasising his facility for enlarging casual sensations into lyrical descriptions” (Newman and Thornton 1987: 130). In Telemachus and Nestor Stephen’s thoughts are generated more or less on the spur of the moment and based on ideas imposed by people around him: Mulligan’s remarks about Clive Kempthorpe create a picture of Ox-

ford students bullying a classmate; Deasy’s racial comments form an image of Jews at the Bourse. “In this chapter similar but more personal sketches come in rapid succession as Stephen reforms his own random thoughts into arresting descriptive passages. Like the creative fashes hinted at in the diary material from the closing pages of *A Portrait*, these interludes derive their significance from their Irish background, but in *Ulysses* Stephen’s perceptions of that background have changed. Now there is an easy acceptance, a lessening if not a total absence of the scorn and the apprehension that characterised Stephen’s imagined picture of Cranly’s father or his meditations on the old man whom John Alphonsus Mulrennan encountered” (Newton and Thornton 1987: 131). Although Stephen does not seem to think of them as serious creative impulses, these ideas refer to Stephen’s evolving artistic consciousness. The depiction of an imagined visit to Aunt Sally and Uncle Richie in Strasbourg Terrace shows his father, uncle and cousin summarising the hopeless financial situation of the Goulding family. This scene underlines Stephen’s emerging skill as an artist while his agitated soul and its turbulent imagination distort his view of reality. His daydreaming brings back his memories of Paris and of the expatriate Kevin Egan. Unlike Egan, Stephen has returned to his homeland and its daily routine, “My people ... Their blood is in me, their lusts my waves. I moved among them on the frozen Liffey, that I, a changeling among the spluttering resin fires. I spoke to no-one: none to me” (Joyce 1984: 35). The creative force of his personal experience, social and cultural conditions is also described through the images of the bloated body of the man drowned nine days earlier in Dublin Bay. Stephen’s self-conscious efforts evoke his earlier moments of artistic awakening in *A Portrait*. The setting on Sandymount Strand reflects the epiphanic site of Dollymount, although

the gypsy woman who “trudges, schlepps, trains, drags, trascines her load” (Joyce 1984: 37) lacks the beauty of the birdgirl. This difference serves to indicate a certain development in his nature. In *A Portrait* “he behaves intuitively and solipsistically as a visionary exulting in what he feels without translating it into an experience that can be shared; [in *Ulysses*] he acts like a working artist, a creative writer who recognises the possibility for deriving profoundly moving emotions from banal occurrences, and he attempts to convey those feelings through his art” (Newman and Thornton 1987: 132). However, his poem with loose and chaotic phrases lacks the coherence and assurance of his previous ideas. Its stilted tone depicts the sort of art that Stephen naively believes he should produce. This self-conscious verse inevitably calls to mind the poem of chapter 5 of *A Portrait*, written a few years earlier. This second poem, derivative and immature, underlines the mediocrity established by the first, and it points up Stephen’s stagnation as an artist. Nevertheless, his artistic ambitions change from the moment he arrives at the offices of *The Freeman’s Journal*. In the first three chapters of the novel “Stephen has remained self-absorbed with his art, disdaining to perform for either the English Haines or for the Anglo-Irish Deasy. Now among his fellow Dubliners Stephen moves from one public building to another – newspaper office, library, hospital – in search of a forum for his art, seeking stimulus and recognition” (Newman and Thornton 1987: 132). His actions suggest new dimensions of his artistic development. Leaving the newspaper office, Stephen speaks highly of his native city, “Dublin. I have much, much to learn” (Joyce 1984: 106). He tries to convert his experiences into art, and thus, he constructs his story from his memories of the two old women that he met on Sandymount Strand. As he speaks, Stephen has to ignore various distractions and interrup-

tions. His persistence makes apparent his strong desire to secure his position in front of the audience, stumbling only in his conclusion with the two women, “spitting the plum stones slowly out between the railings” (Joyce 1984: 109). His composition with the abrupt and disappointing ending creates confusion among listeners and sadly indicates that he fails in his attempt to emulate the style of an impressive storyteller. Also, his story serves as an ironic remark on the Irish Literary Revival and its sentimentalism, but, at the same time, it stands as evidence of Stephen’s reconciliation with his environment. His sense of competitiveness increases his ambitions. He has been listening to various orators and tale-tellers and he has been provoked by Crawford to demonstrate his artistic skills, “I want you to write something for me, he said. Something with a bite in it. You can do it” (Joyce 1984: 99). However, his story seems to be an unsatisfactory answer to Crawford. “The Parable of the Plums” disappoints both MacHugh and Crawford for it lacks the punch line that they have expected. In the National Library he gives a different kind of performance and again he has to contend with the hostile remarks of another group of mockers, John Eglinton and A. E. In response to their criticism, he collects himself and silently calls upon his Jesuit teachings and his retreat master, Father Arnall. In *A Portrait* Father Arnall delivers his sermon about hell, rephrasing the abstract concept of divine punishment. Similarly, Stephen uses composition of place to support his argument but he also uses it to make a highly personal point about his own position in the society. His internal monologue underlines his basic concern – the influence of the past on his own consciousness. When A. E. comments on his “prying into the family life of a great man,” Stephen silently examines his life in a way he had never done in *A Portrait*. He contemplates how he squandered the money in a whore-

house and then how he is to evade these legally incurred debts and then he finally acknowledges the idea that his obligation is not simply to A. E. but to his Irish heritage. Stephen's thoughts illustrate his own recognition of how the past controls one's present. He realises that to deny the past is to deny the very self.

How now, sirrah, that pound he lent you when you were hungry?

Mary, I wanted it.

Take thou this noble.

Go to! You spent most of it in Georgina Johnson's bed, clergyman's daughter. Agenbite of inwit.

Do you intend to pay it back?

O, yes!

When? Now?

Well...No.

When then?

I paid my way. I paid my way.

Steady on. He is from beyant Boyne water. The northeast corner. You owe it.

Wait. Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound.

Buzz. Buzz.

But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under ever-changing forms.

I that sinned and prayed and fasted.

A child Conmee saved from pandies.

I, I and I. I.

A. E. I. O. U. (Joyce 1984: 140)

Stephen's comments about the discussion in the library indicate a strong connection between his discourse and his personal concerns. In depicting Shakespeare's relations with his wife as an integral part of the creative process, Stephen analyses the same strong urges he tries to suppress – his sexual energy and remorse caused by his mother's death. His "agenbite of inwit" over his mother is accompanied by his guilt of yearning for Georgina Johnson's bed. Trying to articulate these

feelings, he distances himself from the past and, once again, represents the idea he chose at the end of *A Portrait* – escape. This time he uses Shakespeare as his surrogate, "He carried a memory in his wallet as he trudged to Romeville whistling *The girl I left behind me*" (Joyce 1984: 141). As the sardonic allusion suggests, escape could not soothe Stephen's feelings. He repeats lines from Nestor, revealing his own guilt, "*Amor matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life" (Joyce 1984: 153). With the reappearance of Cranly's attitudes, Stephen again turns to the ideas apparently rejected in *A Portrait*. Therefore, he can refer as much to himself as to Shakespeare in saying "[a] man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of the discovery" (Joyce 1984: 140). Having claimed his freedom from the influence of history and tradition, Stephen now sees his past as a source of inspiration and examines his previous experience in terms of this new perspective. The discussion in the National Library also draws out Stephen's awareness of his isolation. His sensibilities are shattered by his feeling of separation and further aggravated by the knowledge of being excluded from George Moore's party. His sense of rejection and his impulse to re-examine his personal past increase dramatically. Eglinton, like Mulligan and Nasty Roche before him, sadly reminds Stephen of his failure, "Fabulous artificer. The hawklike man. You flew. Where to? Newhaven-Dieppe, steerage passenger. Paris and back. Lapwing. Icarus. *Pater, ait*. Seabedabbled, fallen, weltering. Lapwing you are. Lapwing be" (Joyce 1984: 156). This acknowledgement, once again, suggests his impotence to gain the position he seeks. As Mulligan says, "Stephen has not yet learned to 'do the Yeats touch' to curry the favour of those whom he wishes to impress" (Newman and Thornton 1987: 136). In his last attempt to achieve public acclaim, he joins a group

of medical students at the Holles Street Hospital. Stephen with the “mien of a frere...at head of the board” wants to give a performance similar to the one he had earlier in the afternoon but the drunken and disorderly behaviour of the students makes any such attempt impossible. The conversation turns to issues of sexuality, creativity and the essence of the self but Stephen himself remains uncertain of his subject. He wavers between physical and metaphysical ideas but settles on neither. This indecisiveness prevents him from further discussion, and therefore, he tries to make his presence felt by emulating Simon Dedalus, a man he dismissed in *A Portrait* as “a medical student, an oarsman, a tenor, an amateur actor, a shouting politician, a small landlord, a small investor, a drinker, a good fellow, a storyteller, somebody’s secretary, something in a distillery, a tax gatherer, a bankrupt and at present a praiser of his own past” (Joyce 2005: 279). In spite of his desire for public attention, he still keeps himself aloof from the heated atmosphere of the room. However, he is exposed to the severe criticism of spongers like Vincent Lynch when he attempts the sort of self-glorification that he had despised in his father.

I Bous Stephanoumenos, bullockbefriending bard, am lord and giver of their life. He encircled his gadding hair with a coronal of vineleaves, smiling at Vincent. That answer and those leaves, Vincent said to him, will adorn you more fitly when something more, and greatly more, than a capful of light odes can call your genius father. All who wish you well hope this for you. All desire to see you bring forth the work you meditate, to acclaim you Stephaneforos. I heartily wish you may not fail them. (Joyce 1984: 309)

As the chapter progresses, Stephen fails in his attempt to be an entertainer, alienating himself from language and listeners. His desultory conversation only suggests more drinking, “Burke’s!” (Joyce 1984: 316). Just as Proteus outlines the themes of the opening chapters, presenting us with

Stephen’s stifling creativity, Oxen of the Sun, pointing out his futile performances, shows Stephen still trying to find a form for articulating his art. At this point, his power of expression has been significantly blunted by physical and mental fatigue. Still, at various occasions when he wants to capitalise on the attention of his listeners, he turns to the past in the hope of providing sources for his performances. He attempts a reprise of his speech on aesthetics which he had with Lynch in *A Portrait*, “So that gesture, not music not odour, would be a universal language, the gift of tongues rendering visible not the lay sense but the first entelechy, the structural rhythm” (Joyce 1984: 321). His discussion of art, however, is even denser than the previous one and his own senses are too dull to excite Lynch’s interest and curiosity, “Damn your yellow stick. Where are we going?” (Joyce 1984: 321). Later, when he tries to describe life on the Continent, he presents a disjointed sketch of Parisian bestiality. His description conveys little of the sensitivity of his earlier ideas, “In Rodot’s Yvonne and Madeleine newmake their tumbled beauties, shattering with gold teeth *chaussons* of pastry, their mouths yellowed with the *pus of flan breton*” (Joyce 1984: 33). What we see in the end is an apathetic Stephen shying away from human contact and any further exchange. It seems that he has not yet come to grips with his strengths and weaknesses. His condition, once again, encourages speculation as to what he may become – “[he] is another now yet the same... a server of a servant” (Joyce 1984: 9). True to his self-absorption, he still feels the inferiority of his position and, in the event, he is much “the same” as in *A Portrait* – self-opinionated, still in a servile position, still to the side of events and actions.

Creating the character of Stephen Dedalus, who in many respects represents his internal division, Joyce gives a sad commentary on the futility of the times. Throughout *A Portrait*, he traces Stephen’s

development from his early age to the point where he decides to cast off his political, social and religious affiliations for the sake of a life devoted to art. Therefore, Stephen becomes wholly submerged in his own world of solipsism; but however isolated he feels and however much of an individualist he proclaims himself to be, he never ceases to be socially constructed. In *A Portrait* we see the concept of an ideology within one's consciousness as well as the struggle entailed in criticising and opposing that ideology. He refuses to be a part of that pathetic cliché and the consequences of this choice can be seen at the end of the novel, where Stephen, having cast off the cloying prose, is reduced to the fragmentary recollections of the fragmentary reality. We see all the forces that produce the Stephen Dedalus who finally decides to step out of the novel to forge the new conscience. Furthermore, Stephen's glib comments about his environment sum up the images of decay which have accompanied the growth of his mind. To a certain extent, this is Stephen the romantic idealist, averting his eyes from the misery of his present condition, escaping through art to the more agreeable reality. Also, he obscurely resists the ideology that suppresses his individuality. He perceives even his country as an "isle of dreadful thirst" (Joyce 1984: 32) paralysed with alcohol and self-regard. He grasps the nature of his own ideological imprisonment and servility within colonial Ireland. This lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression, leads him to the constant tendency to indulge in certain kinds of value delusions and corresponding value judgements. Therefore, he can only find the "ineluctable modality of the visible" by withdrawing from everything known to him; he realises that the world is "there all the time without [him]: and ever shall be, world without end" (Joyce 1984: 29). For this reason, he becomes alienated from the ordinary world, willingly and even contemptuously choos-

ing exile. As Kenner writes, "all his thought derives from himself, returns to himself" (1987: 58). His brooding melancholy ties into a broader sense of personal unfulfillment. He becomes inevitably aware of his own subject status and the subject status of what he calls "my people", with whom he identifies, although with reservation. This bleak, inward struggle presents, once again, a powerful anatomy and exposure of English cultural hegemony over Ireland. Therefore, Stephen seems to be the Irish artist who speaks with "the voice of Esau" since his birthright has fallen into the hands of the "usurper" (Platt 1998: 49-59). With a more or less mute *non serviam*, he resists any kind of patronage, influence or compromise. In his reflections he curses the system and its stark brutality but the trouble for him is that, however convincing such reflections may seem, they are still abstract. He is trapped once more in what he experiences as a squalid and suffocating Dublin reality. Also, his high-flown ambitions as an artist still await fulfilment. Actually, he remains in a state of creative suspension. His poetic activity in *Ulysses* seems to be limited to scribbling words on a piece of torn paper in Proteus, in a faint echo of an ecstatic moment of artistic revelation experienced some time previously in *A Portrait* (Gibson 1996: 90). His identity mirrors his actual entrapment, the limitations which hold him back from artistic creation, from a transformation of the self in art. He sees himself as a servant, a dispossessed son. This self-image asserts his refusal to serve and his determination to reject home comforts and conformity to social expectations. This seems to be a vivid illustration of the self in crisis, fragmented and fluid in its desires for freedom, intellectual beauty and harmony. He gradually becomes aware that all his attempts are likely to prove futile. Taking the first step toward becoming an artist, he discovers a true nature of the stories and ideologies that create life in Ireland. He makes an

extensive effort to understand the world outside him but his game of intellectual brinkmanship collapses and leaves him deluded. He is as alienated from every particular image of himself as he is from those of others. Alone and aimless, apparently killing time, he realises that he cannot achieve anything new. "He is dispossessed and in servitude, for all his stance against Church, state and nation" (Gibson 1996: 128). His fate remains bound to the dominant ideas of the cultural dualism he rejects. Moreover, he no longer appears as a heroic artist but as an exhausted and even pitiful stereotype of the aesthete. His attempt at creativity having come to nothing, this once enthusiastic young man now imagines himself as just another prisoner in Dublin's "houses of decay" (Latham 2003: 154). Tormenting and being tormented – so is Stephen. "He has a shape that can't be changed."²

² Joyce's comments on his making of *Ulysses*, "I just got a letter asking me why I don't give Bloom a rest. The writer of it wants more Stephen. But Stephen no longer interests me to the same extent. He has a shape that can't be changed." http://www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/j/Joyce_JA/quotes/quotes3.htm

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Портрет неоствареног уметника. Метаморфоза Стивена Дедалуса у Портрету уметника у младости и Уликсу

Резиме

У овом раду разматра се лик Стивена Дедалуса у романима Џејмса Џојса Портрет уметника у младости и Уликс. Џојс приказује ирско друштво касног деветнаестог века и његове сложене историјске, политичке и религијске односе који утичу на појединца и мењају његову перцепцију и понашање. Кроз лик Стивена Дедалуса Џојс покушава да се ослободи ирских стереотипа, истичући односе између цркве и државе, религије и свештенства, породице и традиције. Такође, у раду се истражује и промена у сензибилитету и самој личности Стивена Дедалуса. Ова промена му омогућава да се психолошки развије и превазиђе ригидност традиционалних идеја и вредности. Стивен је представљен као модернистич-

ки лик – он тражи сопствени идентитет у сложености модерног искуства, опредељује се за усамљенички живот уметника, не прихватајући улогу коју му друштво додељује. Ипак, испоставиће се да је Стивенов снажан осећај (не)припадности ништа друго до пука илузија. Он остаје контемплативни апатични младић кога је креативна муза изневерила; он је песник који једва да премашује границе медиокритета.

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