

## A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN AND THE "INDIVIDUATING RHYTHM" OF MODERNITY

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*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* concludes with a brief post-script: "Dublin 1904 Trieste 1914."<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the similar phrase that James Joyce would later append to *Ulysses*, the two terms of this addendum aren't connected by hyphens indicating a spatiotemporal continuity, but instead remain discrete entities, as though to indicate that the work had been carried out twice. A more suitable ending to a novel that similarly frustrates the conventions of the well-made plot by its constant vacillation between disjunctive and conjunctive tendencies could hardly be imagined. *A Portrait* refuses to develop smoothly: at times it moves forward by leaps and bounds, skipping from one phase in Stephen's life to another; at others it seems to merely spin around in circles, as each new episode takes on a disturbing resemblance to those that preceded it.

The tension between these narrative vectors can also be felt on the level of style. The epiphany and the leitmotif, the two devices that more than any others define Joyce's prose, are essentially opposites of one another.<sup>2</sup> The epiphany is fundamentally disjunctive: by "transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (*P*, 240), it necessarily destroys the flow of mundane reality and therefore also the continuity of sensation. As *A Portrait* demonstrates time and time again, the only way to follow up on an epiphany is with a chapter or section break. The leitmotif, on the other hand, is entirely conjunctive: it points out the prosaic underpinnings of lofty emotions and ties each stage in the development of both plot and protagonist back to the ones that preceded it. The endearingly frustrating nature of Joyce's text stems from the fact that epiphany and leitmotif can hardly be separated from one another. Stephen's famous encounter with the bird-girl on Sandymount Beach is at once radically disjunctive, pushing him "on and on and on and on" (*P*, 186), and symbolically overdetermined, invoking a network of well-established motifs that includes birds, Mariolatry, eyesight, falling water, and several others. Stephen's paradoxical resolution at the end of the novel says it all: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to

forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (*P*, 275–76). His aspiration is for a conscience that is as yet “uncreated,” but in order to achieve it he has to tread down a path that has been walked a million times before.

The ambiguous status that the concept of “development” thus occupies in Joyce’s novel is perhaps best demonstrated by the inevitable contradictions one encounters in the canonical attempts to classify *A Portrait* as a *Bildungsroman*, or “novel of development.”<sup>3</sup> In order to reconcile Joyce’s work to the tradition, Jerome Hamilton Buckley, for example, is forced to dismiss great chunks of it as “unnecessarily long-winded” and to assert, somewhat counterintuitively, that “indecision and inconclusiveness” have always characterized the endings of classical *Bildungsromane*.<sup>4</sup> Breon Mitchell has to similarly downplay the paradox of the novel’s title, which in Hugh Kenner’s words “impose[s] a pictorial and spatial analogy, an expectation of static repose, on a book in which nothing except the spiritual life of Dublin stands still.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Franco Moretti, who sees the *Bildungsroman* merely as an obstacle delaying the rise of the modernist novel, celebrates precisely the indecision of the final chapter as Joyce’s ultimate vindication. By asserting prosaic reality over poetic meaning, leitmotif over epiphany, and (in Moretti’s own terms) Gustave Flaubert over Arthur Rimbaud, Joyce has earned for himself the status as a modernist writer: “the merit of *Portrait* lies in its being an unmistakable failure” as a novel of development.<sup>6</sup>

In short, any approach to Joyce’s work that conceives of *Bildung* as a teleological process, a smooth and gradual journey towards individual and collective destiny, is bound to be frustrated by the contradictory dynamics of his novel. A very different methodology, however, is provided by Mikhail Bakhtin’s fragmentary study of the spatiotemporal form (or of what he in other contexts called the “chronotope”) of the classical *Bildungsroman*. Bakhtin’s essay can for present purposes be reduced to two main propositions. First, that “man’s individual emergence” in the novel of development “is inseparably linked to historical emergence,” and second, that this emergence takes the form of a dialogue between linear and cyclical temporalities.<sup>7</sup> In his analysis of *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprentice Years*, the novel with which Johann Wolfgang von Goethe inaugurated the *Bildungsroman* tradition in 1796, Bakhtin notes of Goethe’s writing that in it the “background of the world’s buttresses *begins to pulsate* . . . and this pulsation determines the more superficial movement and alteration of human destinies and human outlooks.”<sup>8</sup> For Bakhtin, Goethe’s genius lies in his ability to mediate between the

cyclical experience of time characteristic of the pre-modern agrarian society into which he was born and the essentially linear, progressive “historical time” that comes to dominate during the last thirty years of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

The advantage of such a Bakhtinian approach to the *Bildungsroman* is that it allows one to understand the tension between conjunctive and disjunctive, cyclical and emergent elements of Joyce’s novel not as deviations from a norm but as the forceful assertion of a dynamic that has defined the genre from the very beginning. And indeed, the spatiotemporal form of *A Portrait*, like that of *Wilhelm Meister*, originates in and directly responds to a specific historical constellation. Like Stephen Dedalus, Ireland during the early years of the twentieth century was tossed back and forth between two different ways of representing temporal experience, and two different conceptions of historical development: on the one hand, that of the Irish Renaissance, for which real improvements in Ireland could be achieved only through the revival of the cultural values of a bygone era; and, on the other hand, that of progressivism, according to which the hope of the nation lay in a break with the past and a corresponding leap into modernity.<sup>10</sup> The problem of the Irish diaspora, which also becomes the central problem of *A Portrait*, provides merely one manifestation of this conflict.<sup>11</sup> As the famous debate between the citizen and Leopold Bloom in the “Cyclops” chapter of *Ulysses* illustrates, the cultural reactionaries of 1904 saw the post-famine exodus as a means by which Ireland would ultimately replenish itself—a systolic expansion of the nation’s lifeblood that would ultimately lead to a diastolic contraction: “But those that came to the land of the free remember the land of bondage. And they will come again and with a vengeance, no cravens, the sons of Granuaile, the champions of Kathleen ni Houlihan.”<sup>12</sup> For the progressivist Bloom, on the other hand, the diaspora simply helps fulfill the definition of a modern nation as the same people living in different places. The final lines of *A Portrait*, in which Stephen expresses his desire to renew the Irish nation precisely by leaving it behind him, congeal these warring conceptions of historical development into a dialectical image.

The historical situation that generates the tension between cyclical and emergent temporalities in *A Portrait* is as much a product of the early twentieth century as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* was a product of the outgoing age of Enlightenment. Joyce’s novel resists Moretti’s hypothesis of the destruction of the *Bildungsroman* genre at the hands of modernist style, but this does not imply that *A Portrait* represents

merely an updated version of Goethe's accomplishment, a relay station by which a literary form is exported from the European metropole towards the underdeveloped imperial periphery. Instead, it responds to the challenges of its own culture and its own time with stylistic grace and subtlety.

Joyce's 1904 essay "A Portrait of the Artist," which contains the first seeds of the novel he would complete a decade later, serves as a useful guidepost to the young artist's attempts to adapt the novel of development to his concrete historical situation. At the beginning of this essay, Joyce declares his dissatisfaction with all representations of personal growth premised upon the "characters of beards and inches," and thus implicitly also with traditional conceptions of the *Bildungsroman*, which valorize growth that occurs organically and in gradual increments.<sup>13</sup> He casts his lot instead with those who "seek through some art, by some process of the mind as yet untabulated, to liberate from the personalized lumps of matter that which is their individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of their parts."<sup>14</sup> This metaphor of an "individuating rhythm" once again points to a structural compromise between cyclical and progressive elements, between a temporal sequence that moves relentlessly forward and one in which individual stresses are repeated and thereby create compositional units (musical bars, or, in Joyce's case, sections and chapters).

The study of "individuating rhythms" as they manifest themselves in concrete historical situations and in the everyday experiences of ordinary people was also the focus of the late work of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre.<sup>15</sup> His conclusions not only prove extraordinarily fruitful for the study of *A Portrait* but also provide an interesting complement to Bakhtin's narratological approach, with its altogether different intellectual foundation. Like his Russian contemporary, Lefebvre regarded time and space as inextricable from one another; he was well aware, for example, that the temporal rhythms pulsing through the boulevards of a colonial city can be very different from those that hover in its back alleys. In his most extensive project of "rhythmanalysis," a study of the patterns of everyday life in Mediterranean cities, Lefebvre concluded that, "the large Mediterranean towns appear to have always lived and still to live in a regime of compromise between all the political powers. Such a 'metastable' state is the fact of the polyrhythmic."<sup>16</sup> "Polyrhythmicity" in this context should be understood as the simultaneous existence in close spatial proximity of life-worlds that place differing emphases on the linear and cyclical elements that constitute historical experience. The forum, for example,

in which each successive ruler reconfigures public life through a series of legal and even architectural adjustments coexists with older parts of town in which traditions pass on unchanged from one generation to the next.

Joyce, of course, always conceived of Dublin—to which in *Ulysses* he famously refers as the “Hibernian Metropolis”—as an essentially Mediterranean city.<sup>17</sup> *A Portrait* was largely executed in Pola and Trieste, and as in *Ulysses*, the imaginary reconstruction of Joyce’s hometown owes as much to the wine-dark as it does to the snot-green seas. Stephen’s call to spread his wings and arise from the Daedalian labyrinth—“Bous Sephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!” (*P*, 182)—is voiced in Greek and comes to him through a group of young boys who look as though they had just stepped onto Cythera out of the foamy breakers of the Aegean.

This analogy suggests that *A Portrait* might offer more than merely a *rhythmic* approach to the development of its protagonist. The novel in fact moves beyond Joyce’s initial resolution and towards a radical *polyrhythmicity* that achieves for narrative a similar breakthrough as Igor Stravinsky’s contemporaneous *Le sacre du printemps* did for music. *A Portrait*, divided as it is into numerous discontinuous sections, constantly displaces its protagonist from one environment (and thus also one rhythm) into another: Clongowes, Belvedere, and University College, but also the Dedalus’ living room, the brothels of Night Town, and the downtown thoroughfares. Stephen oscillates back and forth between those influences that urge him to move forward in life and those which encourage him to linger and thus to see his identity as essentially predetermined by the past. Jesuit priests, university instructors, and Unionist schoolfellows studying for the entrance exams to colonial careers form one extreme of a range of possible responses to the Irish historical situation; his father’s drinking companions and the whores of Night Town form another. The network of allusions between these influences is complex and reciprocal. The peasant woman who invites Davin to spend the night in her arms, for example, provides an inverted double of Stephen’s muse on the seashore: a kind of nocturnal bat-woman to his diurnal bird-girl. As a consequence, Stephen is constantly struggling to synchronize his internal beat with an ever-changing environment. Traces of the rhythms he has experienced continue to resonate in his unconscious, in much the same way in which the earliest lessons in theology that he received as a school boy find their way into his “mature” statement of aesthetic rebellion. He vacillates between being a priggish assimilationist and a “lazy idle loafer” (*P*, 51).

Martin Swales has brilliantly summarized the operative logic of the classical *Bildungsroman* as that of a transformation of contiguity into continuity—of a synchronic “beside-one-another” (*Nebeneinander*) of potential selves into the diachronic “after-one-another” (*Nacheinander*) of realized actuality.<sup>18</sup> *A Portrait* breaks with this operative logic by refusing to cast its lot with a single “after-one-another,” a single rhythm. Multiple versions of the self and multiple interpretations of success and personal growth compete for attention, in much the same way that differing historical rhythms pulse and flow through the back alleys, institutions, and public places of Dublin. Stephen himself intensely experiences the tensions that condition his personal development. On the night of one of his greatest successes, for instance, right after his triumphant performance in the Whitsuntide play at Belvedere, the young man abandons his admiring family in a state of nervous tension and finds reprieve only once he has inundated himself in the intense physicality of the poorer areas of town near Marlborough Street: “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).

Unlike in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, in which the progress of the hero eventually takes on a harmonious rhythmic structure that illustrates the shape of a larger underlying historical current, Stephen’s development in *A Portrait* remains internally contradictory. A product of the polyrhythmic texture of his colonial surroundings, Joyce’s hero might thus be described as having a “syncopated” identity. Jumping back and forth between the individual strands that constitute Irish historical experience, he is often internally at odds with his immediate surroundings. But as anyone who has ever spent time contemplating Stephen’s monologues on Irish identity will recognize, this tension is as productive as it can be painful. Kenner once observed that:

in the mind of Joyce there hung a radiant field of multiple possibilities, ways in which a man may go, and corresponding selves may become, bounding him by one outward form or another while he remains the same person in the eye of God. The events of history, Stephen considers in *Ulysses*, are branded by time and hung fettered “in the room of infinite possibilities they have ousted.” Pathos, the subdominant Joycean emotion, inheres in the inspection of such limits: men longing to become what they can never be, though it lies in them to be it, simply because they have become something else.<sup>19</sup>

Kenner's basic approach is correct, but his conclusions are altogether too pessimistic. *A Portrait* is neither a eulogy to lost possibility, nor does it quietly resign itself to the triumphal march of history. Instead, it offers a celebration of life in a colonial society caught between tradition and modernity in all its confusing, contradictory, and sometimes also disheartening complexity, filtered through the mind of an individual desperately trying to compose his "individuating rhythm" amidst a polyrhythmic tapestry. Only in the mind of *Ulysses*' obsequious Mr. Deasy could history be conceived of as a singular train of events moving "towards one great goal, the manifestation of God."<sup>20</sup> Stephen believes, on the other hand, that God manifests himself locally, as a mere "shout in the street"—a creed that binds historical revelation to spatiotemporal contingencies.<sup>21</sup> The traditional *Bildungsroman*, of course, is structured as a poetic correlate of Deasy's historical hypothesis, leading up to that cathartic moment when error is transformed into insight and development brought to a convenient closure. *A Portrait*, on the other hand, refuses such a teleological structure on a variety of levels.

Fredric Jameson, whose work continues to be inspired by Lefebvre's, summarizes some of the central insights also reached by the rhythm-analytical project when he explains that "the subjects or citizens of the high-modern period are mostly people who have lived in multiple worlds and multiple times—a medieval *pays* to which they return on family vacations and an urban agglomeration whose elites are, at least in most advanced countries, trying to 'live with their century' and be as 'absolutely modern' as they know how."<sup>22</sup> *A Portrait*, of course, contains its own highly unpleasant version of such a "return to a medieval *pays* on family vacation," in the form of the trip to Cork in the third chapter of the novel. This episode aptly illustrates how *A Portrait* manages to transmute the deep historical rifts that run through Irish society at the *fin-de-siècle* into a "rhythmic" experience. The excursion begins with a detailed description of Stephen's impressions during the journey on the Dublin-Cork night train. As the train leaves the station, the boy is overcome by a curious feeling of detachment that enforces a definite rupture between his present self and his personal recollections:

As the train steamed out of the station he recalled his childish wonder of years before and every event of his first day at Clongowes. But he felt no wonder now. He saw the darkening lands slipping past him, the silent telegraphpoles passing his window swiftly every four seconds, the little glimmering stations, manned by a few silent sentries, flung by the mail behind her and twinkling for a moment in the darkness like fiery grains flung backwards by a runner. (*P*, 92)

A consummate modernist subject, Stephen is no longer capable of feeling any wonder, for wonder presupposes rootedness in familiar circumstances.<sup>23</sup> Yet as he continues on towards an uncertain destination, Stephen leaves all prior allegiances behind him. He appears as a monadic subject, an entity cutting a solitary path through historical time and into the promise of modernity. As the landscape that he has known for all his life fades into darkness, his primary markers of experience become the passing “telegraphpoles,” which no longer frame recognizable vistas, but instead measure out the relentless advance of empty time at the rate of one bar every four seconds.

In a move that is typical of *A Portrait*, however, a psychosexual component is immediately added to Stephen’s exhilarating experience of modernist vertigo. His self-assured demeanor on the train corresponds to a simultaneous debasement of his father, who now appears to him stuck in the past, futilely clinging to experiences that history has long since condemned to irrelevancy: “Stephen heard but could feel no pity. The images of the dead were all strange to him save that of uncle Charles, an image which had lately been fading out of memory” (*P*, 92). Stephen tosses his personal recollections into the darkness behind him in roughly the same way in which the night train flings backwards the “fiery grains” of the provincial postal stations. His father, who still held a position of supreme respect in his life during the Christmas dinner scene, now seems to him ludicrous—a weak old man who nurses the fires of past passions with occasional sips from his pocket flask. In Sigmund Freud’s terms, Stephen might be said to have successfully resolved an Oedipus complex, and the endless succession of telegraph poles flanks a trail not only into historical modernity, but also one that leads towards an unencumbered personal development.

But as night yields to day, Stephen’s initial exhilaration also has to make room for a very different, and much more depressing, experience:

The cold light of the dawn lay over the country, over the unpeopled fields and the closed cottages. The terror of sleep fascinated his mind as he watched the silent country or heard from time to time his father’s deep breath or sudden sleepy movement. The neighborhood of unseen sleepers filled him with strange dread as though they could harm him: and he prayed that the day might come quickly. (*P*, 92)

For the first time since his evening departure, the Irish landscape becomes visible as something more than a mere abstraction, something more than a dark mass of shades broken up every four seconds by a pole. And what Stephen views through his window isn’t just any



landscape—and certainly not the urban agglomeration of Dublin in which he has lived for most of his life—but rather a *paysage* of cottages and “unpeopled fields,” an almost mystical vision of rural Eire. Suddenly, the previous feeling of detachment and disjunction gives way to a definite sense of place: the experience of a locality that is steeped in custom, organic social experience, and intransigent historical continuity.

Stephen’s sense of his own position in the world changes in accordance with the landscape that he glimpses outside of his window. Suddenly, his father’s presence—so easily dismissed just a few hours ago—takes on an almost claustrophobic heaviness, and the dim outlines of the fellow passengers in his compartment inspires in him a strange dread. His experience of time changes as well. His attention is no longer held by the passing telegraph poles, which measure out the advance of historical time in a relentlessly repetitive mechanical continuity, but by his father’s heavy breathing and occasional sleepy movement. The mechanical thus yields to the biological, and mere repetition is replaced by the organic cycle of pulmonary activity. Time no longer progresses, but appears almost at a standstill.

Psychologically, this change corresponds to a relapse into a pre-Oedipal state for Stephen, in which the physical proximity of his father becomes a source of almost unmanageable anxiety. To contain his fears, he has recourse to what Freud in *Totem and Taboo* calls the “power of magical thinking” and defines as the belief that wishes, thoughts and prayers can effect direct changes in the world.<sup>24</sup> Stephen’s prayer, “addressed neither to God nor saint, began with a shiver, as the chilly morning breeze crept through the chink of the carriage door to his feet, and ended in a trail of foolish words which he made to fit the insistent rhythm of the train; and silently, at intervals of four seconds, the telegraphpoles held the galloping notes of the music between punctual bars” (*P*, 92–93).

An important change occurs over the course of these four lines. The telegraph poles that fly by outside of the window are no longer merely described as markers of a spatiotemporal contiguity, but as the “punctual bars” that create an underlying “rhythm” for the “galloping notes” of Stephen’s prayer. Stephen’s prayer is the direct result of his Oedipal anxiety and his apprehension of a spatiotemporal situatedness that negates his earlier feelings of modernist vertigo. Clock time and circadian time, the linear and unbroken expanse of the railroad tracks and the cyclical movement of pulmonary activity have blended into the apprehension of a rhythmical structure.

This episode not only illustrates how Stephen creates an “individuating rhythm” out of the overlap between progressive and regressive influences, but also demonstrates the essential parallelism to which Joyce subjects the themes of historical and psychosexual development in his novel. The nativist, cyclical elements of *A Portrait* are consistently gendered as female and associated with maternal and gestational imagery: Stephen’s mother, whose death sometime in the interstice between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses* will force the young poet to return to Ireland; Emma Clery, whom Stephen sexually desires yet at the same time loathes for her obsequious attempts to learn Gaelic; the peasant woman who attempts to lure Davin into her bed; and most forcefully, perhaps, the “old sow eating its farrow” (*P*, 220) to which Stephen impatiently compares his native country. Throughout the book, the young poet will struggle to liberate himself from the heavy burden of a nationalist movement that self-consciously aims not for revolutionary rupture but for a renaissance—a “rebirth” of lost cultural values and thus the continuation of a matriarchal lineage.

The progressivist influences of *A Portrait*, on the other hand, are largely associated with imperial institutions that assume a super-egoic function in the nascent mind of Stephen Dedalus. The Jesuit school system, for instance, exerts a castrating power over the young man, forcing him to either throw his lot with the colonizer or else to risk symbolic impotence alongside the rest of an underdeveloped Irish nation. Father Arnall’s sermon, which forms both the literal and the symbolic centerpiece of Joyce’s novel, illustrates this dynamic especially well. The priest begins his descriptions of hell with a proem reminding his students of the future that awaits them in colonial service—a future imagined as the very negation of present circumstances: “Many of the boys who sat in these front benches a few years ago are perhaps now in distant lands, in the burning tropics or immersed in professional duties or in seminaries or voyaging over the vast expanse of the deep or, it may be, already called by the great God to another life and to the rendering up of their stewardship” (*P*, 117). From this proem, the sermon gathers force over the span of almost forty pages before it culminates in an elaborate metaphor intended to dramatize the quite literally inconceivable duration of an eternity of suffering:

You have often seen the sand on the seashore. How fine are its tiny grains! And how many of those tiny little grains go to make up the small handful which a child grasps in its play. Now imagine a mountain of that sand, a million miles high, reaching from the earth to the farthest heavens, and a million miles broad, extending to remotest space, and

a million miles in thickness: and imagine such an enormous mass of countless particles of sand multiplied as often as there are leaves in the forest, drops of water in the mighty ocean, feathers on birds, scales on fish, hairs on animals, atoms in the vast expanse of the air: and imagine that at the end of every million years a little bird came to that mountain and carried away in its beak a tiny grain of that sand. How many millions upon millions of centuries would pass before that bird had carried away even a square foot of that mountain, how many eons upon eons of ages before it had carried away all. Yet at the end of that immense stretch of time not even one instant of eternity could be said to have ended. (*P*, 142)

The image of sand that needs to be cleared away from a beach has become a familiar symbol of the progressive urge ever since Goethe finished the second part of his *Faust* in 1832.<sup>25</sup> But in Father Arnall's hellscape, this struggle for improvement has been converted into a futile and repetitive activity: hell quite literally is development at a standstill, a denial of the teleological promise modernity holds out to its faithful disciples.

Another instance of rhythmic composition occurs early in the fifth chapter of *A Portrait*, as Stephen, afflicted with a guilty conscience because he is late for a lecture, makes his way through downtown Dublin. Although he marches through many of the same streets later memorialized in the "Lestrygonians" chapter of *Ulysses*, his response to the surrounding cityscape is very different from that of Bloom ten years later. In *Modern Epic*, Moretti describes Bloom's stream-of-consciousness as "an edgy, discontinuous syntax . . . where the subject withdraws to make room for the invasion of things." Stephen, by contrast "is not really in tune with the big city: he prefers peripheral or enclosed places."<sup>26</sup> Moretti may be right about Stephen's predilection for sheltered spaces, but he misses that Stephen, if anything, is far too much "in tune" with the surrounding city. For him, there exists a psychic continuity between the world of exterior sensations and the world of interior rumination:

Through [the memory of his friend Cranly] he had a glimpse of a strange cavern of speculation but at once turned away from it, feeling that it was not yet the hour to enter it. But the nightshade of his friend's listlessness seemed to be diffusing in the air around him in a tenuous and deadly exhalation and he found himself glancing from one casual word to another on his right or left in stolid wonder that they had been so silently emptied of instantaneous sense until every mean shop legend bound his mind like the words of a spell and his soul shriveled

up, sighing with age as he walked on in a lane among heaps of dead language. His own consciousness of language was ebbing from his brain and trickling into the very words themselves which set to band and disband themselves in wayward rhythms. (*P*, 193)

In this passage, Stephen's memories of Cranly diffuse into the atmosphere around him, where they seem to poison the signs and shop legends, leaving only "heaps of dead language." In response to this figurative murder, Stephen's own "consciousness of language" (a purely subjective mental operation, just like his earlier recollection) appears to drain out of him in an attempt to restore life to the goings-about in the street. Exterior observation and interior psychic process mingle in the production of a "wayward rhythm."

This notion of a "city of signs" that can instantaneously lose meaning when their beholder is overcome by melancholia is certainly nothing new in Joyce. He first experimented with this motif in "Araby," although strictly speaking, the compositional prehistory of this passage reaches back even further. Stephen's swoon represents a fairly transparent rewriting of the seventh book of William Wordsworth's *Prelude*, in which the rural poet, newly arrived in cosmopolitan London, attempts to domesticate the dazzling multiplicity of signifiers through an act of poetic creation.<sup>27</sup> By the time that he started in earnest on *Ulysses*, Joyce had all but abandoned this heavily subjectivized attitude towards language. Bloom's Dublin teems with signifiers, but they are fragmentary, open to recombination, and tossed about by rhythms that are entirely the city's own. Hely's sandwichmen perfectly exemplify this principle as they roam through the streets in a Dadaist procession of letters, constantly struggling to keep up with one another amidst the pulse of the crowd. In *A Portrait*, however, meaning is still immanent to the subject, rather than a product of outside circumstance. Stephen succeeds in synthesizing his confused surroundings in an act of linguistic creation, a "band of wayward rhythms" that can be wrapped around them to artificially enforce stability. All of which is to say that the rhythmic shape of history in this novel emerges from and through the protagonist, rather than independently of him, as it will in the later and more radical *Ulysses*.<sup>28</sup>

This conversion of a historical experience into poetic language also explains the peculiar texture of Joyce's novel: its oscillation between disjunctive and conjunctive elements and its reliance on the antagonistic techniques of epiphany and leitmotif. For after all, both style and structure of *A Portrait* reflect the growing consciousness of its hero, from the infantile babblings on the opening page to the transition into

the diary form in the closing chapter. And if the form of this novel is explicitly shaped by the polyrhythmic historical experience that serves as its content, then it only makes sense that it would attempt to move in multiple directions at once. Michael Levenson recognized as much twenty years ago, when he attempted an intervention to save Joyce critics from their paralyzing obsession with “irony,” defined long ago by Wayne Booth as a refusal to take sides. According to Levenson, “Joyce is less concerned to submit sentiment to the astringencies of irony than to conjoin all pertinent implications and to disclose the copresence of incongruous designs. Stronger than the attraction of irony is the allure of the pun, which depends not only upon a collision but a union of meanings and which functions at every level of Joyce’s work.”<sup>29</sup>

Epiphany and leitmotif are, in other words, nothing less than a stylistic precipitate of the conflicting vectors that defined Irish intellectual life in the early years of the twentieth century. The epiphany, for example, is unmistakably aligned with the modernist aesthetics of rupture, and with the Nietzschean blink of an eye (*Augenblick*). In the *Stephen Hero* manuscript, Stephen himself defines it as “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.”<sup>30</sup> This emphasis on the epiphany’s sudden and unexpected appearance stresses its family resemblance to the shock, that other quintessential symptom of modernist experience. Like the shock, the epiphany renders the everyday strange by disrupting the comfortable distance that ordinarily exists between the objective world and an apprehending subject. But while the shock reduces the objective world to a jumble of meaningless signifiers that encroach upon and threaten to overwhelm the subject, the epiphany increases the distance between the two until the objective world is quite literally consumed in a moment of radiant and pure signification.<sup>31</sup> Here, again, is Stephen Dedalus on his morning walk to University College:

His thinking was a dusk of doubt and selfmistrust lit up at moments by the lightnings of intuition, but lightnings of so clear a splendor that in those moments the world perished about his feet *as if it had been fireconsumed*: and thereafter his tongue grew heavy and he met the eyes of others with unanswering eyes for he felt that the spirit of beauty had folded round him like a mantle and that in reverie at least he had been acquainted with nobility. But when this brief pride of silence upheld him no longer, he was glad to find himself still in the midst of common lives, passing on his way amid the squalor and noise and sloth of the city fearlessly and with a light heart. (*P*, 191; my emphasis)

For Friedrich Nietzsche, the “blink of an eye” was the fragile contact zone between the unrealities of the past and the future in which the new enters into our world. He dreamt of a reformed humanity that might break the shackles of historicism and live entirely for the present. Joyce, who went through a brief Nietzschean phase in early life, but essentially left the philosopher-prophet behind him once he moved out of the Martello Tower, is considerably less grandiose in his fictions. Nevertheless, a similar confidence in the restorative powers of the new informs the structure of the epiphanies in *A Portrait*.<sup>32</sup> In the very best of them, Stephen Dedalus finds himself yanked out of his habitual surroundings and born aloft on a current of pure historical time that drives him forwards with relentless momentum. This is the case, for example, with the famous “bird-girl” epiphany:

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 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 for ever 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 had appeared to him, the 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. On and on and on and on! (*P*, 186)

The key phrase in this passage clearly is the twice-repeated “on and on and on and on,” an expression of the vertiginous experience of modernity. It is true that not all epiphanies are quite as optimistic as this one. In some, the sudden interruption of the familiar perception of reality causes only paralysis. But even in *Dubliners*, Joyce’s darkest treatment of his native city, this paralysis is often accompanied by a new perspective on Irish life, a sudden apprehension of the vulnerable place traditional cultural formations occupy in the modern world system. At the conclusion of “Eveline,” for example, three short sentences are enough to sever the eponymous heroine from her local surroundings, cast her back upon herself, and at the same time connect her with the world at large as it is experienced in diaspora: “All the seas of the world tumbled about in her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.”<sup>33</sup> Eveline experiences her epiphany as a moment of radical solitude wrapped up

in the sudden comprehension of a world that is larger than anything she has previously experienced. In a parallel case, Emer Nolan has shown how Gabriel Conroy's concluding epiphany in "The Dead" articulates a vision of the Irish national community that is resolutely modern in tone, in that it dispenses with the need for ideological roots in a shared historicity and stakes its claims instead on a conception of nationhood based entirely in a performatively experienced now.<sup>34</sup>

Leitmotifs, on the other hand, function in a manner that is diametrically opposed to that of epiphanies in *A Portrait*. Instead of emphasizing historical ruptures, they reiterate continuities, and instead of focusing on the contingency of the subject, they restrict personal options and underscore necessity. In the closing paragraphs of the first chapter of the novel, for example, Joyce offers a detailed and psychologically realistic description of Stephen's exuberant feelings after he elicits an apology of sorts from the rector of Clongowes Wood College over the unjust beating administered by Father Dolan: "The cheers died away in the soft grey air. He was alone. He was happy and free: but he would not be anyway proud with Father Dolan. Hew would be very quiet and obedient: and he wished that he could do something kind for him to show him that he was not proud" (*P*, 60–61). The text then continues with a paragraph that enumerates Stephen's surroundings in sensual detail—the color of the air, the smell of the fields. But when the description shifts into an auditory register, it takes on symbolical overtones: "The fellows were practicing long shies and bowling lobs and slow twisters. In the soft grey silence he could hear the bump of the balls: and from here and from there through the quiet air the sound of the cricket bats: pick, pack, pock, puck: like drops of water in a fountain falling softly in the brimming bowl" (*P*, 61).

The onomatopoeic sequence "pick, pack, pock, puck" is introduced in an attempt to realistically render the noise that a cricket ball makes when it strikes a wooden bat, but the concluding simile draws attention to an additional symbolic meaning generated by the textual interplay of Joyce's novel. For the sound of water striking a bowl recalls Stephen's earlier memories of the time that his father took him to the lavatory of the Wicklow Hotel and of the time when his classmate Wells shouldered him into the same sewage ditch into which "a fellow had once seen a big rat jump plop into the scum" (*P*, 11). Stephen's moment of victory is thus implicitly connected with two previous episodes in which he showed weakness, and his triumphant rupture with past experience is ironically diminished. If the epiphany results in a consumption of everyday reality in a flame of pure signification, then the leitmotif

asserts the continued material presence of just this ordinary reality. The Joycean leitmotif never consists of exact repetitions of previous symbolic material, however, and therefore points not towards stasis, but towards a cyclical emergence in time. The dozens of different motifs that circulate in *A Portrait* gain in complexity with each and every occurrence. In a word, they develop. Their structuring logic isn't that of the closed circle, but rather that of William Butler Yeats's "widening gyre."<sup>35</sup>

Previous attempts to relate *A Portrait* to the *Bildungsroman* tradition have failed because they were unable to fully account for these two aberrant kinds of development using the terms laid out by canonical theories of *Bildung*. Neither the transformative, disjunctive pull of the epiphany, nor the conservative, conjunctive recurrence of the leitmotif submit to what Joyce attacked in 1904 as the "character of beads and inches." They do, however, combine to form an "individuating rhythm" not just of Stephen's tortured mind, but also of the Irish historical situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Caught in what Lefebvre would designate as a "metastable" state at the fringes of the British imperial world, Ireland vacillates between a full immersion in the cultural and economic exchanges of modernity and the revival of more ancient identity formations. *A Portrait* illustrates this contradictory dynamic by narrating Stephen's gradual move towards a diasporic vocation that is imagined both as a radical break with the homeland and as its symbolic renewal. Epiphany and leitmotif represent the antagonistic—yet closely intertwined—extremes of this development. By switching back and forth between them, Joyce creates not only a "polyrhythmic" texture previously unknown to Anglophone fiction, but also moves the time-honored novel of development firmly into the age of empire and towards an engagement with many of the historical traumata that would come to define the twentieth century.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1993), 276. Hereafter abbreviated *P* and cited parenthetically by page number.

<sup>2</sup> The scholarly literature on either of these devices is far too vast to comprehensively summarize here. Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959) and Hugh Kenner's *Joyce's Voices* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978) remain valuable starting points. For an overview of recent research on the literary epiphany, see the essays collected in Wim Tigges, ed., *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). Franco Moretti's *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez* (London: Verso, 1996) presents a



highly influential comparison of epiphany and leitmotif in Joyce's fiction and ultimately argues for the primacy of the latter.

<sup>3</sup>I intentionally translate the German word *Bildungsroman* as "novel of development" rather than as "novel of formation," because the English use of this term much more closely resembles that of the German word *Entwicklungsroman*, which quite literally means "novel of development." The characteristic features of *Bildung*—a pedagogical ideology associated with German classicism and romanticism, and with such figures as J. G. Herder, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, and Alexander von Humboldt, to name just some examples—are almost entirely absent in the Anglophone context. This slippage in usage is regrettable and has caused many a headache in comparative literary studies, but it is by now unavoidable. For a standard treatment of the concept and history of *Bildung*, see W. H. Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: "Bildung" from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975). Its relationship to British culture is discussed in the introductory chapter of Gregory Castle's *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2006), 1–29.

<sup>4</sup>Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974), 238, 246.

<sup>5</sup>Kenner, "The Cubist Portrait," in *Approaches to Joyce's Portrait: Ten Essays*, ed. Thomas F. Baley and Bernard Benstock (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), 171. See Breon Mitchell, "A Portrait and the Bildungsroman Tradition" in *Approaches to Joyce's Portrait*, 61–76.

<sup>6</sup>Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2000), 243.

<sup>7</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986), 23.

<sup>8</sup>Bakhtin, 30; my emphasis.

<sup>9</sup>Bakhtin, 26.

<sup>10</sup>Unionism belongs to this second category, because it sees British colonial rule as essentially setting the pace and direction for Ireland's march into modernity. Jed Esty has recently written with great erudition on the relationship between the *Bildungsroman* and what Esty, following the postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty, calls the "not yet" of imperial modernity ("Virginia Woolf's Colony and the Adolescence of Modernist Fiction," in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899–1939*, ed. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2007], 77).

<sup>11</sup>For a recent theory of the peculiar nature of Irish modernity, see Joe Cleary, "Toward a Materialist-Formalist History of Twentieth-Century Irish Literature," *boundary 2* 31.1 (2004): 207–41.

<sup>12</sup>Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), book 12, lines 1372–75.

<sup>13</sup>Joyce would, of course, have approached the *Bildungsroman* tradition (which at any rate lacked a name until Wilhelm Dilthey introduced this term to modern criticism in 1906) primarily through the impact it left on nineteenth century French and English novels of literary realism. It does not appear that he had read Goethe by 1904, though Mitchell has suggested that Stanislaus Joyce came up with the name *Stephen Hero* by analogy to *Wilhelm Meister* ("William Master"). See Mitchell, 63–65, esp. 65 n.5). Ellmann reports that as late as 1915, Joyce dismissed Goethe as "*un noioso funzionario*" (a boring civil servant) (406).

<sup>14</sup> Joyce, "A Portrait of the Artist," in *The Workshop of Daedalus. James Joyce and the Raw Materials for A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1965), 60.

<sup>15</sup> I am sincerely indebted to a seminar presentation given by Tom Sheehan of Florida Atlantic University at the Modernist Studies Association Conference (2005) for an introduction to Henri Lefebvre's theories and some preliminary theses regarding their applicability to the analysis of colonial societies.

<sup>16</sup> Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Continuum, 2004), 92.

<sup>17</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 7.1–2.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), 28–36. The terms *Nebeneinander* and *Nacheinander* are, of course, borrowed from G. E. Lessing's famous distinction between pictorial and verbal art in the *Laocoön*.

<sup>19</sup> Kenner, "The Cubist Portrait," 179. Kenner's reference is to Joyce, *Ulysses*, 2.50.

<sup>20</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 2.381.

<sup>21</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 2.386.

<sup>22</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1991), 366.

<sup>23</sup> As Sigmund Freud famously pointed out, the step-sibling of wonder, the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*), similarly results from a violation of the underpinnings of familiar reality (*das Heimliche*).

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Routledge, 1950), 94–124.

<sup>25</sup> Goethe's drama and its central motif find a powerful explication in Marshall Beraman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 37–86.

<sup>26</sup> Moretti, *Modern Epic*, 135, 132.

<sup>27</sup> William Wordsworth's *Prelude*, which can be seen as a grand attempt to synthesize rural and urban experiences into one poetic statement, is surely one of the earliest examples of a "polyrhythmic" artwork that the English canon has to offer. Unfortunately, the influence of Wordsworth on Joyce remains largely unexplored in the critical literature.

<sup>28</sup> As Robert Spoo puts it, "[i]n *Ulysses* an expansive format and epic scope eagerly accommodate history as a theme, going so far as to make it the organizing principle of the second episode. In *A Portrait*, however, history is important because it belongs to Stephen's emerging sense of self, and this personal imperative causes historical issues to be registered in psychological and poetic terms, in sudden flashes of image and metaphor, allusion and luminous detail, as Stephen's mind and story dictate" (*James Joyce and the Language of History* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994], 39).

<sup>29</sup> Michael Levenson, "Stephen's Diary in Joyce's *Portrait*: The Shape of Life," *ELH* 52 (1985): 1033–34.

<sup>30</sup> Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (Norfolk: New Directions, 1963), 211.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, the most important theorist of the shock, cites as one of its consequences the "demolition of the aura" (*Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn [London: Verso, 1983], 154; translation modified). The epiphany, by contrast, might be defined as an attempt to mend this aura and to return a sensation of organic wholeness to a fragmented age.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Joyce's flirtation with Nietzsche, see Ellmann, 142, 162, 172.

<sup>33</sup> Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin, 1993), 34.

<sup>34</sup> See Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 36.

<sup>35</sup> Among Yeats's many articulations of the historical gyre, the most famous is, of course, the one given in the poem "The Second Coming," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, rev. 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 187.