

## *A Portrait of the Artist*

### Some things to pay attention to

xxx

#### **Chapter 1: memories of childhood, elementary school**

Stephen's growing fascination with words and sounds, and with the correspondence between words, sounds, and objects; his interest in books; the light and dark; his initiation into the adult world of politics; Stephen's sense of injustice--why does Chapter I end with the story of his triumphant talk with the rector?

#### **Chapter 2: adolescence--family moves to escape creditors**

Stephen's growing sense of a)alienation, loneliness, and detachment, and b)the power of silence; his attitudes toward his father; also toward his mother; the search of his romantic imagination for the ideal, transfiguring woman (Eileen, Mercedes from *The Count of Monte Cristo*, B.V.M. = Blessed Virgin Mary, Emma Cleary, etc.). How does this chapter end?

#### **Chapter 3: wallowing in lust**

Stephen's attitudes toward women and sex: sex vs. the idealized woman, lust vs. beauty, shame and guilt vs. repentance; his interest in technical religious questions; the nature of hell in the sermons; Lucifer's Fall as an act of self-exile and defiance: *non serviam*, I will not serve. The chapter ends with repentance and spiritual renewal.

#### **Chapter 4: tries to choose a vocation--chooses art rather than priesthood**

The power and secret knowledge of priesthood; Stephen's sundering from both father (and the "misrule of his father's house"-- Ireland?) and mother; his discovery of his priestly "vocation" as an artist (via the myth of Daedalus, Icarus, and the "fall"); the inspirational revelation of the bird-like girl on the beach. Chapter IV ends with a discovery of vocation and purpose.

#### **Chapter 5: at University--conversations about aesthetics-- decides to leave Ireland**

- a) Stephen's aesthetic theory and definitions (from Aristotle and his "applied Aquinas"): art and beauty; pity and terror; rhythm; wholeness, harmony and radiance, and the moment of apprehension of beauty, of inspiration--light, *claritas*, epiphany; lyric, epic and dramatic forms; the artist's indifferent and invisible personality, "refined out of existence" from the work.
- b) Stephen's combat against the "three nets of language, nationality, and religion through "silence, exile and cunning"; his sense of isolation, his self-imposed silence; his growing sense of women (mother, Emma, etc.) as treacherous, as symbols of Ireland, the Church, and Irish treachery: "the old sow that eats her farrow."
- c) Stephen's exile: his rejection of home, parents, Ireland and Church for art and the "priesthood of eternal imagination": he is the winged exile (in both senses of "flight"), the "hawklike man:" and "symbol of the artist" (Daedalus), the apprentice artificer (Icarus), both Icarus and Lucifer ("Brightness falls from the air" in both meanings of "fall"), the winged and defiant angel in Lucifer's *non serviam*.

## Portrait -- General notes

Pay special attention, as you read, to the rich and intricate development of the following themes and motifs:

### I. [Light and vision]

- a) **Blindness**, eyes, weak vision, darkness, blinding and pain, brightness falling, the blinding pain of hell vs. the blinding light of forgiveness and repentance.
- b) **Brightness** and light as creative, epiphany, radiance and *claritas*, moments of imagination and inspiration, artistic creation, brightness of angels, brightness falling from the air, etc.

### II. The pervasive imagery of **birds**, winged creatures, and of **flight**:

- a) as applied to young Stephen, to the mythic Daedalus ("hawk-like man," "fabulous artificer," "symbol of the artist"), to the artist, to flight and exile, to winged seraphs, to bright angels, to Lucifer and his Fall, to Icarus' flight, to Stephen as Icarus--the apprentice artificer learning how to fly.
- b) as applied to Eileen Vance, to Emma Cleary, to angels, to the bird-like girl on the beach as an artistic muse and inspiration, to women and Ireland as "a race of bats."

III. The **Daedalus-Icarus mythic motif** of escape from the Labyrinth (the "maze of Dublin") by the **father** teaching the **son** how to fly; the inadequacy of Stephen's father; other father-figures: the Dean of the college (priest as "Father") and his warning about falling "into the depths," religion and the Church, Cranly (in his role of confessor to Stephen, and as defender of Ireland and his mother); the search for a father, Icarus seeking a Daedalus to guide him through the maze.

### IV. Stephen's attitude toward **women**:

- a) As something pure, to be worshipped, in the midst of ugliness: Eileen and the Blessed Virgin Mary ("tower of ivory"), Mercedes and the search for the ideal woman, the girl at the beach, the villanelle to Emma, Dante's Beatrice and the "spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus"; the ideal woman as a muse for creativity.
- b) As symbols of sin and destructiveness: Women as sex, sin, lust, shame and guilt (for Stephen); the shame of kissing, and of his mother's kisses; women as traitresses (Emma's flirtations and "disloyalty," Dante and Parnell); women as a race of Oats; women = mother = Church = Ireland = treachery = old sow that eats her farrow.

## Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist...*

One class meeting for each chapter of the novel.  
Students read at least one chapter ahead of each class session.  
(can draw comparisons with *Great Expectations*)

### *Portrait*

5 chapters, each a different stage in development of Stephen -- each written in a different style, reflecting the (style ?)

1. memories of childhood, elementary school
2. adolescence - family moves to escape creditors
3. wallowing in lust
4. tries to choose a vocation -- chooses art rather than priesthood
5. at University -- conversations about aesthetics - decides to leave Ireland

Author's attitude toward subject  
(in last chap. Stephen isn't particularly likable)

*Portrait* is stripped of all superfluities -- poetic compression  
no dramatic plot to follow  
symbolic themes: young person learning to fly and be free  
Daedalus (father of Icarus) inventor of labyrinth and imprisoned there -- teaches himself to fly and flies out of prison - and teaches his son to fly

Dante is Mrs. Riordan (?)

Parnell and Irish politics

Parnell was for reasonable approach to Home Rule  
was defeated by the scandal aroused after he was found having an affair with another woman -- then divorce

Christmas dinner scene: brings up conflicts: church, home, state

- conflict between what he has been taught and

what adult authorities are doing

- conflict between his father and Mrs. Riordan, Dante, his governess
- Stephen, embryo of an artist -- is thrilled by the power of the spoken work
- learning of loyalty, treachery

Hellfire sermon in chapter 3: vividness

pp. 158-159: the temptation of power which he would have as a priest

p. 161 -- sin of pride (see p. 117) -- Stephen is closest to Lucifer here

Mercedes in *The Count of Monte Cristo*

Stephen's priesthood is of the imagination  
He preferred the warmth and disorder of real life to the ordered chill of the church priesthood

p. 169 -- very self-conscious, dramatic choosing of his vocation

p. 171 - first time a female is described as a whole beautiful woman -- of both madonna and whore qualities