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THE CONSTRUCTION OF JOYCE'S IRELAND IN  
*A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*

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ABSTRACT

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the first novel of Irish writer James Joyce. It marks the political and cultural as well as literary awakening of Joyce who later goes on to utilize and further develop his own notions of Irish identity as well as Irish nationalism in his later works. In *A Portrait*, Joyce presents his opinions on Ireland as a newly emerging nation and his vision for his country. He does so through the voice of his fictional alter ego Stephen Daedalus and his interaction with the people around him. Joyce presents Stephen's life from his childhood to his college days when he decides to leave Ireland behind. What he in fact seeks to do is leave behind the idea of Ireland shackled by the manacles of Church or a political leadership which only replaces British imperialism in its essence. This paper analyses Joyce's stance on Irish nationalism through the interactions of Stephen Daedalus with the people around him who offer varying perspectives and therefore help shape his idea of Irish nationalism.

**Keywords:** James Joyce, Ireland, Irish identity, Irish nationalism

Joyce treats Ireland in the process of construction. This construction is not in terms of geography but in terms of identity. In fact, Stephen's, i.e., the artist's trajectory of growth is mirrored by Ireland's growth such that Stephen's potential to become a critical and independent artist represents Ireland's potential to become an independent and successful nation. Ireland is in transition from being a colony to becoming an independent nation. Stephen (and by extension Joyce) realizes the challenge at this stage is to create a separate Irish identity because as a country, Ireland has only started coming into existence to the feeling of an independent nationhood separate from the British forces. According to Stephen, this feeling can only be translated into independence of Ireland when the people thwart the authority of the British Empire as colonial masters as well as reject their own version of Ireland as a pre-colonial rural utopia. *A Portrait* is a portrayal of Ireland free from the weight of these two Irelands which do not correspond with Joyce's Ireland.

Stephen's perception of an independent Ireland includes complete rejection of the existing cultural value systems and social power relations. It is imperative to perceive Ireland outside the limits of institutions like religion and politics. This is evident in the views of Dante which mandate that Church should be muddled by politics and it is the duty of the priest to dictate what is right and what is wrong. For the morals of her church, she is prepared to let go of the future of her country by condemning Parnell. On the other hand, Mr. Casey weeps for the dead Parnell and calls him, "dead King" (45). Both of them in fact choose to replace British

imperialistic forces with their version of tyranny, either the priest or the political leader. Both Dante & Casey represent how excessive emotional attachment towards institutions like religion or politics impeaches on the rational approach needed towards the establishment of an independent Irish nation. The future of Ireland is compromised because of Dante's belief that the Church is supreme and because of Casey's hero worshipping.

During Stephen's visit to Cork with his father, Joyce elaborates the two different attitudes towards the construction of independent Ireland. One is Simon's nostalgia for a utopian dream and the other is Stephen's break from this nostalgia. He does not relate Ireland with his father's memories and is instead bored by Simon's rumination. This disconnection from the previous generation marks Stephen's place in the new generation of Irishmen who will construct a true national identity for the independent Ireland. It is evident that this new Irishman, like Simon will not be able to experience the joys his father experienced in the pub but will trade them for a critical construction of Ireland. Joyce problematizes the idea of the flaneur as Stephen's visit is not an aimless urban wandering but affects him powerfully by transfiguring the image of Dublin.

Language is the cultural capital of the nation. Partha Chatterjee distinguishes nationalism as either political or cultural where cultural identity needs to be preserved from the colonial conquerors.

"That? said Stephen. – is that called a funnel? is it not a tundish?"

What is a tundish?

That. The...funnel.

Is that called a tundish in Ireland? –asked the dean. – I never heard the word in my life" (233)

The struggle between 'tundish' and 'funnel' represents the diminishment that Irish culture goes through at the hands of its colonizer such that language, an intimate reservoir of cultural heritage adopts foreignness. Stephen says, "His language, so familiar and so foreigner, will always be for me an acquired speech"(234). This notion of 'acquired speech' holds true for English because ultimately it is the language of the colonizer imposed upon the colonized at the cost of his own language. Hence, it too is a weapon of subjugation. Joyce however decides to use the coloniser's tongue as a weapon. He chooses to make English Irish by talking about Ireland and 'Irishness' in English.

Joyce's Ireland needs to be free from both British colonialism and fake nationalism that hinges on the past glories of the time bygone. Thus, Joyce's Ireland is a break from Dante's surrender to religious institutions such that it leaves no space for either rationalism or multiplicity, or Simon's glorification of the ideal past and the idea of a pre-colonial utopia or even Casey's brand of patriotism that just replaces one form of tyrannical rule for the other.

Joyce therefore seeks to reconstruct Ireland such that it is not a revival of the past but a new beginning which is a break from the existing socio-political and cultural scenario. In the quest for this new Ireland, Stephen abandons all the old and decaying institutions like religion, education etc. *A Portrait* is as much about decay as it is about growth and the new order. It marks a desire for escape from all that is a political or social construct. The Daedalus myth is about escape from the geographically defined boundaries of nationalism and creation of the labyrinthine reality of multicultural and pluralistic Ireland which neither belongs to the glorious past nor is embroiled within the colonial present. Franz writes, "His dream nation is not simply a collective social construct, but an individual cultural collectivity"

Anderson in *Imagined Communities* states that nation is not a product of determined sociological conditions like language, race, or religion but is actually a collectively imagined political community (23). Joyce tries to question the arbitrariness of the nation-state. In opposition to the homogenizing agenda of nation and nationalism, Joyce presents the possibility of imagining a nation beyond the mundane conceptualizations of Irishman as a devout Catholic toeing the line of stereotypes. Instead, Joyce's Ireland presents you with its multiplicity. Joyce's Ireland is not mere geography but a culture. That is why Stephen needs to leave this Ireland to create a new nation of which he is the author. His Ireland is not simply constituted by an Irish race.

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“Stephen’s decision to leave Ireland is not just an escape of the colonized from the colonial confinement. But it is also an escape from the labyrinthine ways of a manipulated nationalism and the modern construct of the nation.” (p.68 Franz)

During Stephen and Davin’s conversation, Davin states that, “a man’s country comes first. Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or a mystic after” (171). He is the stereotype of the “manipulated nationalism” that Joyce wants to do away with in his Ireland.

Both Stephen and Joyce escape but they do not “escape from [their] Ireland, they escape with it” (p.87 Deane). It is in the hopes of reconstructing an Ireland which is truly independent from its previous conceptions that Joyce leaves behind the Dantes, Davins, Caseys, and Simon Daedaluses.

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