

The Artist Body: A study on A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman by James Joyce

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ABSTRACT

The evolutionary process in an individual to become an artist apparently celebrates and explores the mind of an individual for being the source for strewing such qualities within. With the growth of the artistic mind, the body as well grows and it is realized and experienced through the mind in the case of Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman*. It is a *Künstlerroman* text tracing the growth of Stephen from childhood to an artist. Why Stephen has to push his body and its needs and desires to a hidden zone and he stoically approaches his mind as a medium to express and experience his body has been delved into with particular references from the text chosen. Foucault's thoughts on the disciplining of the body and Butler's critique on the regulatory discourses determining one's body provide the theoretical gloss for the study.

The *Künstlerroman* text capturing the evolution of artistic qualities in an individual and its culmination into an artist in the life of an individual also provides a subtext stating the artist's relation to his body. The impediments cropping and mounting in between the artist and his body and the artistic techniques implemented to conduct the artist's body in a hidden zone are of major concern of the study. In *Künstlerroman* texts as confirming to the term the growth of an artist would be traced. As such texts are referred semi- autobiographical the artist's life from childhood till the artist stage would be captured. The source of the artistic creation is believed to be the mind and it becomes the privileged term over body and silences body. James Joyce has used the mind as a tool in experiencing and expressing the body while producing the discourse on the life of Stephen Dedalus. Stephen Dedalus and his inhibitions towards his body and the elements framing his superego will be discussed in detail with the help of textual references from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman*. Here the mind performs the alter ego of body representing the world's acceptance of mind over body. Bodily communication is purposefully muted and subsided into a hidden zone. Why it should be pushed to the private zone whereas the mind could echo everywhere without any mediation and hindrance form the essence of discussion in the rest of the work.

The body subjected to and restricted by norms has been theorized by certain post structuralist thinkers like Mitchel Foucault and Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter* elaborates on the 'regulatory discourses' determining the biological facts. Butler's theory of materiality finds the body as the material fabricated by external pressure. The post-structuralists believe that body, sex and sexuality are part of discourse and history. The influence of such discourses has its effect on one's activities. Due to such external influences, Foucault has argued that Sexual identification need not stand for oneself as sexual practices are under the surveillance of power and authority.

According to him, power is not with one head, it is diffused through a 'network of social relation'. Through body power exhibits itself via minute and local practices. This identifies the social construction of gender and sexuality. The power in everyday practices perpetuates and reproduces power relations. Individuals are produced through disciplinary powers like religion, prison, military, factories, schools and workplaces. The constant monitoring of the individuals has control over their conduct.

Traditionally, power was what was seen, what was shown, and what was manifested...Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility...It is this fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. (Foucault 1920, 187)

The sexual drive categorized as normal (healthy manner) and pathological (warped and perverted) represses one's sexual behavior and makes one always self-scrutinizing and self-disciplining. Butler also has talked about the regulatory regime as gender is performative insofar as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraint... There is no subject who precedes or enacts this repetition of norms (Moi 56).

During the mid-1980s the female critical practices to voice for the female gender also influenced male to critique the representation of men by men. Male taken as the subject of discussion exposes the objectified state of male. *The masculine mode* by Peter Schwenger expresses male treated as pure object in pushing and forcing man towards attaining and performing masculinity. Male identity is stated as

My Life as a Man, though, is not only about how difficult it is to render in words the truth about a past experience; it is also about how words and the expectations they set up may affect an experience before and while it happens. And at the centre of all this is a question of male identity: the desire to "get to be what is described in literature as a man (Schwenger 106).

Judith Butler's statement on identity in *Gender Trouble* is that,

If one "is" a Woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result it becomes impossible to separate our "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (Butler 1999, 6).

A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman captures a few sequences of Stephen Dedalus's life, right from his early childhood to adulthood. In this journey, all his trials and errors, his perception of the world without any colouring during the early childhood and his armor-less exposure to the outside reality provide space for external teachings to influence him. The more he is pushed to maturity he is torn between his need and the built conscience. In the course of time, he reaches the moment of revelation to the artist in him and he relies on the artist in him to lead the rest of his life. The work is divided into five chapters. The first concentrates on him as a school student at Conglowses, the second chapter is on the early young man, the third chapter prepares him to be a perfect man through his exposure to retreats and confessions, the fourth chapter is self-mentoring and the final chapter is about limiting him to the poetic world to comprehend and

experience the unlimited space around.

Throughout the novel, there is deliberate usage of the word brain. Stephen interacts with and experiences within his mind. His desires, his experiential stimulus, his bodily reactions and needs everything altogether get accumulated in his mind. As a result, words like brain and mind are often used. This can be read as a tool to distract the readers in camouflaging his bodily needs.

The evolution of the artist in him is traced and it forms the main motto of the novel. But the undeniable fact is that with the evolution of the artist in him, his physical body as well evolves. Its growth and its needs and his interaction with it and its expression are as well equally captured but in a partially hidden manner. This attitude requires the mind to represent the body.

As it is an artist novel Joyce has highlighted the mind and its function so well and its creation right from the start of the novel which covers the childhood experience. For instance, the boy wetting the bed is described by him as he is experiencing it at the moment of narration. The moisture feels warmth in the beginning, then cold and the oil sheet spread over the bed, its smell and from here his thought moves to the question of who spread it and his mind focuses on that person (his mother) which leads to his father. The sensory perceptions like tactile, olfactory, auditory and visual are processed in his mind.

When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oil sheet. That had the queer smell. His mother had a nicer smell than his father. She played on the piano the sailor's hornpipe for him to dance (PAYM 2012,3).

A similar incident happened when Stephen's classmates were on the ground. Stephen stays away by highlighting the weakness of his body to face the players as well as the weather. But from a distance, he starts his mind game. Though he refuses to occupy the ground physically, his mind fills the ground. His mind is personified, and it gives the exact details like the chillness of the weather, the heaviness of the orb, and the flight of the leather orb between the players, which is compared to the flight of a bird. As he could sense the weakness of his body, his mind was also experiencing the weight of his companions.

The evening air was pale and chilly and after every charge and thud of the footballers the greasy orb flew like a heavy bird through the grey light... feigning to run now and then. He felt his body small and weak amid the throng of players and his eyes were weak and watery. (PAYM 2012, 4)

Once he thought he was sick and he was urged to cry out of sadness but then his mind calmed on and controlled his urge to cry; His mood to cry is distracted towards a game of imagination where a train sound is imagined as in and out of tunnel. This is felt by flapping his ears. An uncontrollable, impulsive action like crying is also procrastinated. He experiences his attraction towards the opposite sex. But he never missed to repress his desires. He has read the translation of the work *The Count of Monte Christo* and gets the images of Marseille and Mercedes. And about which he states that the figures stuck in his mind and often engaged with the figures in his mind. His desire to meet Mercedes gets existence only in his mind though not in the external reality. But he shows and feels satisfaction with his mental activity.

His perception changes with his maturity. The idea of cowyard, its dung and milk are filthy once. He perceived milk to be dirty due to the sameness of the place of production. But the filthy milk of childhood though despicable to him now still had an attachment. So the disgust towards it changed to healthy milk in his adulthood. Its impact on his body gave him a pleasant feel replacing the past disgusting memory. His body as well imbibed and is obedient to his mental conceptions. When he believed milk as equivalent to urine his body nauseated and later when his mind accepted it to be pleasant his body adhered. This is followed by the milk delivery

episode where his eagerness to glimpse a woman waiting to receive the milk and the way she closes the door. He dares not grace any mental celebration for his attention but it just remained an expressive quest.

... (autumn)- the first sight of the filthy cowyard at Stradbrook with its foul green puddles and clots of liquid dung and steaming brantroughs sickened Stephen's heart. He could not even look at the milk they yielded. (September)- these chilly drives blew away his memory of the filth of the cowyard...whenever the car drew up before a house he waited to catch a glimpse of a wellscrubbed kitchen... to see how the servant would hold the jug and how she would close the door. (PAYM 2012, 56)

So far Joyce has set the background where the socially accepted mind is foregrounded for all his thoughts, actions and bodily reactions. There is no intention of highlighting the mind-body conflict. The analysis has no question about their functions. It is the observation that Joyce is more convenient in openly stating the functions of the mind than the body. So body gets shaped and conveyed through the mind. His urge to be in the accompaniment of a female partner finds expression in his imagination. He is in search of the character Mercedes which gushes restlessness throughout his body, so excitement mounts and the body responds. He feels a premonition that he will meet her shortly. He wishes to be transfigured to experience that awaiting magical moment and affirms that at that moment he would be a different person erasing his timid and weak feel. He is engrossed in the thought.

He returned to Mercedes and as he brooded upon her image, a strange unrest crept into his blood... he wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld... they would be alone, surrounded by darkness and silence: and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured... weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in that magic moment...he was angry with himself for being young and the prey of restless foolish impulses (PAYM 2012, 57 59)

His gloomy mood evaporated with the memory of his encounter with a girl on the last tram. He describes the scene as, he occupied the upper step, and she on the lower step. She is said to climb up and advance towards him and his heart desires and dances to her movements. He finds her to be interested in him and voices for her that she wants him to hold her. But he regrets missing the chance and is unaware of the reason which prevented his body from acting on its own. Yet a voice within him spoke above the noise of his dancing heart, asking him would he take her gift to which he had only to stretch out his hand... I could easily catch hold of her when she comes up to my step: nobody is looking. I could hold her and kiss her. (PAYM 2012, 62)

He gives physical existence to his virtual recollections and claims that he could see visually his wistful recollections, the happenings of that moment and clamors that he could be sexual. The thought of the girl occupied his mind and took a poetic form. But his outlet in the poetic world does not seem to quench his thirst, so impatience and restlessness sustained. During the fight between his friends, he experienced a shaft of anger in his mind while he was bet. And when he remembers her again, he describes it as,

... her dark eyes had invited and unnerved him. But the pressure of her fingers had been lighter and steadier: and suddenly the memory of their touch traversed his brain and body like an invisible warm and wave (PAYM 2012, 74).

The external pressures and expectations on him are listed once. He had continual pressure on him such as the controlling and instructing voice of his father and his master wanted him to be a gentleman and a catholic; other voices wanted him to be healthy, strong, manly and patriotic, the worldly voice expected him to be risen from the fallen state and his friends wanted him to be a

descent fellow. But Stephen finds tranquility and his existence to be friction-free when he distances himself from the voices.

As a result of stimuli from numerous directions, a superego is well-built. This leads to a lot of restrictions imposed on his body. He finds his body to be heavy. He could hear only the inner cries of the body. He fought with his body because the dynamic instincts and the alternation stimulus made him restless without peace. The tumult in his heart and the dilemmatic situation sustained. It is described as “the inarticulate cries and the unspoken brutal words rushed forth from his brain to force a passage. His blood was in revolt” (PAYM 2012, 90). The second reality and a futile play of shadows from external reality is dominated by savage desires. At night he suffers from an orgiastic riot and feels shameful and self-accusing for the mortal sin. He wishes to project his desire on some other person to taste his instinct in suspense and to escape from blame. This is perfectly described in Freudian term ‘Projection’, one of his Defense Mechanisms, "a fragmented self"

He burned to appease the fierce longings of his heart...He cared little that he was in mortal sin...Beside the savage desire within him to realize the enormities which he brooded on nothing was sacred...He bore cynically with the shameful details of his secret riots... Only the morning pained him with its dim memory of dark orgiastic riot, its keep and humiliating sense of transgression (PAYM 2012, 89)

He shares his encounter with a woman. He says that she approached him and he finds relief from his repressed desires. He being held by her gives him strength and withers fear and guilt. Though he seems to ignore He feels her clinging and switches fear. Though he seems to ignore the reverberating inner voices against his act, he restricts his body from leaning to kiss her until she makes him bow his head.

Tears of joy and relief shone in his delighted eyes and his lips parted though they would not speak. He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind, conscious of nothing in the world but the dark pressure of her softly parting lips. They pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech (PAYM 2012, 91).

The entire episode is described from a distance and he refers mind more often than his performing body.

The aftermath of his encounter with the girl is also filled with threatening inner voices against the sin performed by his soul’s lust. He happens to listen to a lecture on St. James and he is reminded of the commandments and the deadly sins. But his attitude to critique the religious messages sent across further makes him intimidated. He attended a retreat in his institution and was informed about the last four things death, judgment, heaven and hell. He feels that his soul would burst and his body would be dishonored and helpless. As a result, his heart breaks, his ‘brain burst’, his ‘limbs powerless’ and his speech thickened. Religious instructions influenced him and obstructed his consciousness over bodily instincts. Stephen's religious Puzzles and the way his mind's beauty is treated, in contrast to his bodily instincts.

He felt the deathchill touch the extremities and creep onward towards the heart, the film of death veiling the eyes, the bright centres of the brain extinguished one by one like lamps, the last sweat oozing upon his skin, the powerlessness of the dying limbs, the speech thickening and wandering and failing, the heart (PAYM 2012,101).

He is made to believe that what he has done so far is against God’s will. He firmly believes that he has sinned with his body and would be ravished. His past is filled with sins and the main motto of his life is to undo his past. It was said once that, “beautiful to die if God so willed. It was beautiful to live if God so willed” (PAYM 133). The control over the body is stated openly like he

has to walk with downcast eyes, his sense of sight, smell, taste and even touch are under control and he practiced static lying position on the bed, tolerated itch and pain, and he was on his knees throughout the prayer. His body is punished by him through all possible means.

This is the melancholic state he faces due to the loss of his body (bodily pleasure). Freud describes this state in his *Mourning and Melancholia* thus,

The accumulation of cathexis which at first bound and then, after the work of melancholia is finished, becomes free and makes mania possible must be linked with regression of the libido to narcissism. The conflict within the ego, which melancholia substitutes for the struggle over the object, must act like a painful wound which calls for an extra ordinarily high anti- cathexis.- But here once again, it will be well to call a halt and to postpone any further explanation of mania until we have gained some insight into the economic nature, first, of physical pain, and then of the mental pain which is analogous to it. (Freud 258).

Though he tries to evade his inner voice and turn towards the external world he cannot dissolve himself in his prayers. He finds himself away from what he is involved in. so too many repressions result in a burst of the volcano. His loud cry of a triumphant hawk symbolizes his need to get freed from the clutches of his daily duties. Such a cry withheld by his lips is cleft by his 'brain'. To perform his needs he has used his brain and at times the word 'mind' is used to perform his body.

The artist," says Freud, "is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts, he moulds his phantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favorite he desired to be, without the circuitous path of creating real alterations in the outer world." (Freud 1953, 224)The poet, that is, is a daydreamer who is socially validated. Instead of altering his character, he perpetuates and publishes his phantasies (Wellek 1942, 76).

Stephen's encounter with the growth of his body; Stephen getting introduced to the socio-cultural expectations, religious restrictions and instances where he is caught between the two – all these are approached and experienced by his mind more than his body. Most of the descriptions are given through his mind's eye and his mental calculations are captured. This reinstates the socially sanctioned status of the mind as privileged over the body. As Freud puts it the bodily instincts repressed in the 'unconscious' get shape in the fantasy world created by the mind of the creative writers.

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