

Apollonian and Dionysian Traits in James Joyce's a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2020

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Rijeci, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:186:493288>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-09**



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**Apollonian and Dionysian Traits in James Joyce's *A
Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and
Literature and Philosophy at the University of Rijeka**

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Rijeka, September 2020

Abstract: James Joyce's Bildungsroman *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is an ode to growing up in a frustratingly restrictive world where one's church, family, and country dictate the flow of one's life. Stephen Dedalus' poetic soul rebels against the norms suffocating him and frustrating his search for his true vocation. By pursuing his inner Apollonian and Dionysian drives—a Nietzschean concept—Stephen attempts to redefine himself in his own terms. Struggling with both his identity and artistic expression, the protagonist of the novel discovers meaning in actions resulting from his Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. The question of whether he will suffer failure in this pursuit, or if he will fly through life's difficulties, remains up in the air.

Key words: Joyce, church, family, country, Stephen, Daedalus, Apollonian, Dionysian, philosophy of art, Nietzsche, impulses

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1. Introduction

The artist ... standing in the position of mediator between the world of his experience and the world of his dreams--'a mediator, consequently gifted with twin faculties, a selective faculty and a reproductive faculty.' To equate these faculties was the secret of artistic success.¹

The quote from *Stephen Hero*—James Joyce's first draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—perfectly fits with Nietzsche's philosophy of art in *The Birth of Tragedy*. What Joyce means by this is that the heart of artistic achievement lies in the artist's ability to “disentangle the subtle soul of the image from its mesh of defining circumstances” and “re-embody it in artistic circumstances”.² Stephen, by the agency of dreams and experience, elevates himself to the position of the artist. This process of implementing dualistic features brings his artistic craftsmanship into existence. In Nietzschean words, this artistic accomplishment is embodied in Apollonian and Dionysian chemistry.

The thesis is divided into two sections. The first concerns Nietzsche, while the second is divided into five subsections that offer analyses of the five chapters of Joyce's novel. These readings utilize Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, and the chapters display the unraveling of the protagonist Stephen Dedalus in his formative years, his reformation, and the subsequent alteration we can observe in his Dionysian and Apollonian counterparts. Furthermore, I briefly mention Nietzsche's approach to religion, more specifically to Christianity and the interplay between it

¹ Joyce 1944, p.77-78

² Ibid.

and the Apollonian and Dionysian drives, and how these are reflected in Joyce's hero. In the end, I offer a conclusion based upon the assessment of both, Stephen Dedalus' inner growth and Nietzsche's theory translated on to the main character.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*

Friedrich Nietzsche, an acclaimed German philosopher of the 19th century majorly influenced the world of art, literature, philosophy, and theology of the 20th century. His unorthodox ideas facilitated a more progressive approach towards life in general. Noted for his monumental maxim *God is Dead* and his life-affirming philosophy, Nietzsche also advocated inner cultural development, while critiquing society at the same time.

In his book *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche introduces the artistic notions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian drives, which continued to pervade his later writings. The main hypothesis concerning the two impulses progresses substantially in his later works such as *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche even goes as far as to criticize *The Birth of Tragedy*, calling it “an impossible book [...] badly written, clumsy, embarrassing, furious and frenzied in its imagery, emotional, [...] an arrogant and infatuated book”.³ Nevertheless, in *Ecce Homo*, he concludes that despite its deficiencies, especially in terms of him not finding his voice but instead using that of Kant and Schopenhauer, *The Birth of*

³ Nietzsche, 2000, p.5

Tragedy still articulates fundamental well-founded qualities, one of them being the question concerning the Dionysian monster.⁴

2.1. Apollonian

Nietzsche states that the Apollonian spirit, named after the god Apollo, represents plastic arts, strives towards rationality, reason, self-control, and peace. Furthermore, Apollonian traits are moderation, clarity, analysis, and limitation, putting an emphasis on individualization, while simultaneously negating unity.⁵ According to Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, “The Apollonian principle conceived the individual as sufficiently separate from the rest of reality to be able to contemplate it dispassionately. The Dionysian principle, however, presents reality as a tumultuous flux in which individuality is overwhelmed by the dynamics of a living whole.”⁶

In addition, the Apollonian world is concerned with the visual arts and therefore with dreams. Nietzsche states that dreams are doorways to our own Shangri-La, a fantasy of our very own individual creation, stimulating us to choose the picture-perfect fiction instead of the gloomy alternative of pain and suffering. In it, we find consolation amidst the horror of daily existence. Even though one understands dreams as nothing more than a product of one’s own mind, Nietzsche advocates their significance more than the sad reality we live in, admonishing that the world is far more realistic than the reality we live in. Furthermore, Nietzsche advocates that our own reality is

⁴ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 5-11

⁵ Doc. dr. sc. Ana Gavran Miloš (lecture)

⁶ Higgins and Magnus, 2007, p. 22

nothing more than a semblance of another reality, even though we consider our reality to be an empirical reality, and that dreams are therefore semblances of a semblance or appearances of an appearance which makes them that more paramount to us:⁷

I feel myself compelled to make the metaphysical assumption that that which truly exists and the original Unity, with its eternal suffering and contradiction, needs at the same time the delightful vision, the pleasurable appearance, for its continual redemption: the very appearance which we, completely enmeshed in it and consisting of it, are forced to experience as that which does not truly exist, to experience then as a continual becoming in time, space and causality, to experience in other words as empirical reality.⁸

He puts his trust in the individual to save her/himself from the world of torment by means of illusions:

But Apollo appears to us again as the apotheosis of the *principium individuationis*, in which the eternally achieved goal of the original Unity, its redemption through appearance, is alone completed: he shows us with sublime gestures how the whole world of torment is necessary in order to force the individual to produce the redeeming vision and then to sit in calm contemplation of it as his small boat is tossed by the surrounding sea. This apotheosis of individuation, if we think of it as at all imperative and prescriptive, knows only *one* law, the individual.⁹

Dreams shelter us from the raw reality of life and provide us with the escape we seek so desperately. This chrysalid state we find ourselves in yields inspiration crucial for the artist to create. Through this process of individual creation, Nietzsche states¹⁰ that the individual gains hope and agency to act on her/his own, choosing illusions to fight off the external influence of the world that surrounds her/him:

⁷ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 30-31

⁸ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 30

⁹ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 31

¹⁰ Ibid.

If we could imagine dissonance in human form—and what is a man but that? – then this dissonance, in order to be able to live, would need a magnificent illusion to cast a veil of beauty over its own essence. This is the true artistic intention of Apollo: whose name summarizes all those countless illusions of beautiful appearance, which in each moment make existence worth living and compel us to live on to experience the next moment.¹¹

The Apollonian drive also emphasizes rationality, restraint, and discipline, intellect, and logic.¹²

2.2. Dionysian

On the other hand, the Dionysian spirit, named after the god Dionysus, strongly opposes the Apollonian orderly nature. Dionysian traits are hidden deep in one's core, stemming from the innermost human essence, from one's own nature. The Dionysian impulse strives towards unity, linking faction with some form of organic, ecstatic oneness, renounces individualism and personal identity, and celebrates life in the purest sense. It is a picture of enormous strength, creativity, rampant passion, disorderly behavior, and mystical intoxication. The prevalent features that go hand in hand with the Dionysian drive and dominate its essence are: emotions, destruction, chaos, madness, bestial hunger for sexual experiences, bliss, and excess.¹³

Whereas Nietzsche sees the Apollonian drive as a dream/illusion, the Dionysian is depicted as drunkenness/intoxication.¹⁴ As previously mentioned, the two entities work only in discord, completely disputing with each other, while their fusion bestows redemption and endows one to

¹¹ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 130

¹² Doc. dr. sc. Ana Gavran Miloš (lecture)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Nietzsche, 2000, p.23

live with the painful and exhilarating knowledge of the world, with all its faults and beauty, the pain and pleasure it offers.

Dionysian intoxication signals the cessation and annihilation of the Apollonian principle of individuation, in order to further man's drive towards becoming one with another and with nature. This fervent festival of oneness celebrates life in the most phenomenal sense, welcoming both pain and suffering and joy and jubilation as equally needed instances of life. The veil of Maya (Nietzsche borrowed this Hindu and Buddhist term from the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer who adopted it to describe the illusory belief in the world we perceive)¹⁵ is thus lifted, putting into motion a greater, Dionysian, power. According to Nietzsche, under the Apollonian aspect the veil of Maya is only fractured, not completely cracked, and bits of it remain, while the Dionysian spirit takes control in form of unification and self-abandonment. Through this process, man acts as a part of a community, intoxicated with life, and all it has to offer. He is drunk with hysterical excitement, bewitched by music and dance, and is completely enthralled with the unearthly world of Dionysus:¹⁶

Now, with the gospel of world-harmony, each man feels himself not only reunified, reconciled, reincorporated, and merged with his neighbor, but genuinely one, as if the veil of Maya had been rent and only its shreds still fluttered in front of the mysterious Unity ... Just as now the animals speak and the earth gives forth milk and honey, so something supernatural sounds forth from him: he feels himself as god, now he himself strides forth as an enraptured and uplifted as he saw gods stride in dreams. Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.¹⁷

Nature plays a big part in the Dionysian world: the wilderness and primal instincts emerge, combining both the eternal beauty nature embodies and the feral savageness that springs forth from

¹⁵ Gemes and Richardson, 2016, p. 173 (footnote)

¹⁶ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 22-23

¹⁷ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 23

that euphoric sense of being at one with nature. According to Christoph Cox, art and nature are intimately joined and thus Nietzsche's jubilation in the face of art corresponds to the jubilation prompted by nature.¹⁸ Music emerges as an equally vital Dionysian occurrence, as it manages to draw one nearer to the essence of the Dionysian world. With its "shattering force of sound, the unified flow of melody and the utterly incomparable world of harmony"¹⁹, Dionysian music succeeds in completely engulfing a person, whilst stimulating her/him to celebrate life in their entirety. The domain of Dionysian music cries out for transcendence while making every aspect of life more prominent and meaningful.

Martha C. Nussbaum states that the "tragic-Dionysian state" is, in fact, a form of accepting and believing in oneself and one's own action, instead of seeking the meaning from external sources, such as, say, religion.²⁰ Thus, the Dionysian persona can be placed in juxtaposition with God as the substitute for that religious authority. Given that Nietzsche's regarded Christianity, in particular, as a negation of life—"the disgust and aversion felt by life towards itself, merely disguised, concealed, and masquerading under the belief in an 'other' or 'better' life"²¹—we can conclude that the existence and embracing of it negates the Dionysian impulse. Moreover, since the Dionysian core is paradoxical by nature and displays its duality, we can also simultaneously link it with the Antichrist. Nietzsche himself stated so in the *Attempt at Self-Criticism* asserting: "for who knows the true name of the Antichrist?—with the name of a Greek god: I called it the

¹⁸ Cox, 2006, p. 5

¹⁹ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 26

²⁰ Nussbaum, 1991, p. 26

²¹ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 9

Dionysian.”²² According to Walter Otto, the Dionysian world is characterized as equally “the fullness of life and the violence of death”.²³

2.3. The Birth of Art

According to Nietzsche,²⁴ the two diametrical divergences—the Apollonian and the Dionysian—are in such a stark contrast that it seems they would cancel each other out completely but are instead, in all their extremity, a necessity for the birth of art as the ultimate calling and metaphysical agency of life:

To both of their artistic deities, Apollo and Dionysus, is linked our knowledge that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition, in terms of origin and goals, between the Apollonian art of the sculptor and the imageless Dionysian art of music: these two very different drives run in parallel with one another and continually stimulating each other to ever new and powerful births, in order to perpetuate in themselves the struggle of that opposition only apparently bridged by the shared name of ‘art’; until finally, through a metaphysical miracle of Hellenic ‘will’, they appear coupled with one another and through this coupling at last give birth to a work of art which is as Dionysian as it is Apollonian.²⁵

At the very moment of collision between the two properties, this dichotomy ceases to exist, and art emerges as the horn of salvation, the necessary organ by dint of which we inevitably exist and which soothes us against the cruel reality of life:²⁶ “Here, at this point of extreme danger for the will, *art* draws near as the enchantress who comes to rescue and heal; only she can reshape that

²² Nietzsche, 2000, p. 10

²³ Otto, 1995, p. 89

²⁴ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 19

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 46-47

disgust at the thought of the horrific or absurd aspects of life into notions with which it is possible to live.”²⁷

According to Nietzsche, the Dionysian aspect matures into artistic form only when it collides with the Apollonian,²⁸ where the collision itself opens a portal enabling both these drives to assume a higher meaning. Their formerly black-and-white contrast is blurred and together they become one, merging into a perfect harmony that results in the creation of art, which would not have been possible without their union: “And look! Apollo was unable to live without Dionysus! The ‘Titanic’ and the ‘barbaric’ were ultimately as much a necessity as the Apollonian!”²⁹ As Smith notes, “Without the other to hold it in check, each drive would tend to the extreme.”³⁰ If not for their synthesis, the Dionysian aspect would be nothing but a mere rampage driven by destructive energy, a worthless ecstatic storm, while the Apollonian would be translated into excessive rationalism. Thus the Apollonian aspect manages to subdue the uncontrolled energy with which the Dionysian is filled, steering it in the right direction, while, at the same time, not diminishing the absolute power it retains: “Dionysus is the explosive ungoverned force of creation; Apollo is the power that governs him”.³¹

Robert Luyster paints the Apollonian man as the hero who swimmingly overcomes “Dionysian suffering”.³² Utilizing dreams and illusions, the Apollonian manages to bring beauty, delight, and creation into the calamity propagated by the Dionysian world.³³ Furthermore,

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Nietzsche, 2000

²⁹ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 32

³⁰ Smith, Introduction, p. xix

³¹ Hollingdale, 2001, p. 84

³² Luyster, 2001, p. 4

³³ Luyster, 2001, p. 5

Nietzsche himself renders the Apollonian as a warlike figure, a monster-slayer of everything that jeopardizes all that is Apollonian.³⁴ On the other hand, the Dionysian man is labelled as ecstasy incarnate, according to Luyster. He acknowledges a different approach to Nietzsche's metaphysics, one in complete contradiction with the stark picture of suffering reality. Quoting an excerpt from *The Birth of Tragedy*, he illustrates a euphoric world which can be found exclusively behind phenomena.³⁵ Even though Nietzsche affirms at one point that the core of the Dionysian is its suffering which ensues due to the Apollonian principle of individuation and therefore, the end of it displays the resurrection of Dionysus, at the other, he puts emphasis on the ecstasy which originates in the Dionysian art (through rituals, music, and being one with nature)³⁶:

the blissful rapture which rises up from the innermost depths of man, even of nature, as a result of the very same collapse of the *principium of individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the essence of the *Dionysian*, with which we will become best acquainted through the analogy of *intoxication*. Either under the influence of the narcotic drink of which all original men and peoples sing in hymns, or in the approach of spring which forcefully and pleasurably courses through the whole of nature, those Dionysian impulses awaken, which in their heightened forms cause the subjective to dwindle to complete self- oblivion.³⁷

This state of blissfulness, Luyster highlights, unveils our own nucleus, a hidden side that awakens at the first sound of the Dionysian carnal call.³⁸

³⁴ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 29

³⁵ Luyster, 2001, p. 6-7

³⁶ Nietzsche, 2000

³⁷ Nietzsche, 2000, p. 22

³⁸ Luyster, 2001, p. 7-8

3. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: Apollonian and Dionysian Traits in the Character of Stephen Dedalus

James Joyce, a prominent Irish writer of the last century was born in Dublin into a Catholic family. The autobiographical nature of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can be easily seen as it follows closely Joyce's own personal growth. The dilemmas concerning the questions of family, country, and religion recurring themes in his novels. The young Joyce perceived aspects of the Irish Literary Revival, as well as the Gaelic Revival, as constrictive and in the commission of a provincial nationalism. Disappointed in his country and Ireland's stagnation, Joyce decided to flee the country, in favor of continental Europe.³⁹ His immense influence on modern literature echoes even now.

If we take a look at the title of the novel itself, we can deduce that *A Portrait of the Artist* signifies a work of art done by Joyce himself vis-à-vis a protagonist struggling to become an artist. The subsequent part of the title, *as a Young Man*, indicates that it is a work in progress, that is concerns the ontogenesis of the main character. In this light, it is possible to read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and the semi-autobiographical character of Stephen Dedalus in light of Nietzsche's approach to art in *The Birth of Tragedy*, or more precisely, by exploring how the gravity of Apollonian and Dionysian drives on the emergence of art might be articulated in James Joyce's novel.

³⁹ Joyce, 2000, Introduction, p. VI

3.1. Chapter One: Apollonian Beginnings

The opening chapter of the novel affords an insight into Stephen's mind as a youngster. Predominately Apollonian, young Stephen performs in an unsuspecting matter, using structure and form to cope with life and the unknown, foreign, situations he often finds himself in. His running thoughts illuminate how he perceives time in a linear, simplistic order, often disrupted with pondering daydreams:

First came the vacation and then the next term and then vacation again and then again another term and then again the vacation. It was like a train going in and out of tunnels and that was like the noise of the boys eating in the refectory when you opened and closed the flaps of the ears. Term, vacation; tunnel, out; noise, stop.⁴⁰

Distinctively and categorically an Apollonian domain, dreams populate *A Portrait* considerably, in thirty-four cases to be exact, and are often quite lengthy.⁴¹ One of the most central and pertinent dream-visions is, certainly, the one in the first chapter involving Stephen's troubling dream of Parnell's death. The feverish vision mimics an epiphany, albeit a subconscious one. The underlying problematic of the religious and nationalist impacts of Ireland on Stephen's persona can be seen subliminally in this epiphanic dream-vision.⁴² According to Joyce, an epiphany is characterized as, "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind".⁴³ Young Stephen is quite unaware of the meaning of the dream but is nevertheless antagonized by it, with its somber atmosphere and his governess's role

⁴⁰ Joyce, 1992, p. 11

⁴¹ Egri, 1968., p. 1

⁴² O' Grady, 1990, p.4

⁴³ Joyce, 1944, p. 234

in it, as well as Dante's irresolute demeanor against Parnell. As the reverberation of this dream stayed with him, both consciously and subconsciously, throughout the book, we can argue that the aforementioned dream paved the way for Stephen's own forthcoming metamorphosis.

In addition to dreams and daydreams belonging to an Apollonian sphere, we can also observe the Nietzschean principle of individuality, or *principium individuationis*, which is distinctively Apollonian. Stephen feels isolated from everyone from as early as he can comprehend the world around him. In the opening pages of the first chapter, Joyce's alter ego, Stephen, avoids playing with his friends, stubbornly insisting on the utter banality and stupidity of the act, and putting more value on the spellings of the words he was looking into than to frolicking. Apart from that moment of separation from the collective, Stephen partakes in an additional quintessential withdrawal from the group in the concluding pages of the first chapter, one where he feels content with himself after gaining a moral victory: "The cheers died away in the soft grey air. He was alone. He was happy and free".⁴⁴ Following the unjust beating by a prefect, young Stephen opts for standing up for himself and calls for justice. Choosing between religious authority and flying by those nets taking hold of him, Stephen's decision indicates a leap forward towards self-discovery. Ultimately, he is praised for his dauntlessness and is designated as a hero by his peers. Nonetheless, Stephen stands alone amidst the cries of triumph, once again apart from everyone. What we can gather from this injustice is an affiliation with both St. Stephen, the first martyr, and Parnell as well, as both were ostracized. In the latter chapters, this martyrdom can be translated as his attempt to arise as an artist.

⁴⁴ Joyce, 1992, p.44

The correlation between dreams/daydreams and the principle of individuality seen in Stephen as a young boy paints him Apollonian inside and out, as both provide an escape from the reality Stephen enforces.

3.2. Chapter Two: The Awakening of the Dionysian Counterpart

The first pages of chapter two exhibit to what degree Stephen's fascination with words progresses, at first a shimmering captivation, seen in the lines in the first chapter: "They were like poetry but they were only sentences to learn the spelling from. It would be nice to lie on the hearthrug before the fire, leaning his head upon his hands, and think on those sentences."⁴⁵ Furthermore, this fascination increases alongside his own development, and the Dionysian intoxication that takes place in the opening pages of the second chapter extends throughout the novel. It is important to mention the interaction between the daydreams and his bewitchment with words, or literature, as the two overlap, that is, the antecedent (reading) implies the consequent (daydreaming):

His evenings were his own; and he pored over a ragged translation of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. [...] Outside of Blackrock, on the road that led to the mountains, stood a small whitewashed house in the garden of which grew many rosebushes: and in this house, he told himself, another Mercedes lived. Both on the outward and on the homeward journey he measured distance by this landmark: and in his imagination he lived through a long train of adventures, marvellous as those in the book itself, towards the close of which there appeared an image of himself, grown older and sadder, standing in a moonlit garden with Mercedes who had so many years before slighted his love.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Joyce, 1992, p. 5-6

⁴⁶ Joyce, 1992, p.47

All throughout the second chapter, Stephen is feeling increasingly agitated and flustered, overwrought with the incessant thoughts that cloud his mind. Literature comes across as both the savior, offering a greatly desired escape from reality, as well as the oracle, installing in him emotions of restlessness and foretelling of a yet-unknown change to come:

He returned to Mercedes and, as he brooded upon her image, a strange unrest crept into his blood. Sometimes a fever gathered within him and led him to rove alone in the evening along the quiet avenue. [...] He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld. He did not know where to seek it or how, but a premonition which led him on told him that this image would, without any overt act of his, encounter him.⁴⁷

His Dionysian side begins to stir with the arrival of these feelings, a feral beast hungry for his own awakening. Up until now, the only instance where Dionysian energy emerged in Stephen was in the form of his enthrallment with words and in the case of the unwarranted punishment administered by Father Dolan in the first chapter, which may be seen as one form of Dionysian suffering. The inner turmoil he feels so deeply is interconnected with his family's financial decline as well. Stephen is beginning to exhibit the raw, unfiltered, and intense emotions akin to the ones belonging to the Dionysian realm. The confusing state he finds himself in proves to be fuelled more by his family's relocation to a shabbier part of Dublin. The intense craving inside him screams to be satiated: "A vague dissatisfaction grew up within him as he looked on the quays and on the river and on the lowering skies and yet he continued to wander up and down day after day as if he really sought someone that eluded him".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Joyce, 1992, p.48

⁴⁸ Joyce, 1992, p. 50

Once again, Apollonian individuality bursts forth at the birthday party Stephen was present at, but, this time, he completely embraces it, finding comfort in the solitary confinement he sought to overcome moments before, while also awakening to a girl's interest in him:

though he tried to share their merriment, he felt himself a gloomy figure amid his song and withdrawn into a snug corner of the room he began to taste the joy of his loneliness. The mirth, which in the beginning of the evening had seemed to him false and trivial, was like a soothing air to him, [...] amid the music and laughter her glance travelled to his corner, flattering, taunting, searching, exciting his heart.⁴⁹

Despite the fact that his Dionysian half has started to gradually rouse in this moment of adolescence, the Apollonian aspect still succeeds in exerting more control over its barbaric other half, which results in the obstruction of one's own primal instincts. Stephen decides to deny himself the girl's touch, and with that closes the well of emotions threatening to unsettle his world. By doing this, he finds an easy way out, listening only to the Apollonian force in him. In addition to that, this Apollonian impulse is also accountable for him getting the role in the play he participated in: "He had been cast for it on the account of his stature and grave manners"⁵⁰ The play is disturbed by a moment of reverie, which signals a step away from his otherwise collected behavior, where Stephen defies his colleagues and speaks his mind, in spite of criticism: "At this Stephen forgot the silent vows he had been making and burst out"⁵¹ These brief moments of revelation of Dedalus's self can be observed all through the novel, where Dionysian anima explodes with no forewarning. After experiencing the thrill of being in a play, Stephen's entire figure vibrates with the need for another venture.

⁴⁹ Joyce, 1992, p.51

⁵⁰ Joyce, 1992, p.55

⁵¹ Joyce, 1992, p.61

The concluding pages of the second chapter are charged with Dionysian descriptivist wording, including: “a brutish and individual malady of his own mind”, “monstrous reveries”, a “den of monstrous images”⁵². Stephen is, to all intents and purposes, frantic with Dionysian madness slowly taking hold of him. It is extremely arduous for him to stay in the real world when his insides howl for something else entirely. After he spent all the money he won as a literary prize, Stephen’s life plummets once again:

How foolish his aim had been! He had tried to build a breakwater of order and elegance against the sordid tide of life without him and to dam up, [...] Useless. From without as from within the waters had flowed over his barriers: their tides began once more to jostle fiercely above the crumbled mole. He saw clearly too his own futile isolation. He had not gone one step nearer the lives he had sought to approach nor bridged the restless shame and rancor.⁵³

Disappointed with the actuality of life, Stephen turns to his Dionysian side, realizing the futility of his disciplined acts. For the first time, Stephen decides to listen to his inner being, as opposed to those “hollow-sounding voices”,⁵⁴ waking up a whole palette of emotions he had repressed: “He felt some dark presence moving irresistibly upon him from the darkness, a presence subtle and murmurous as a flood filling him wholly with itself. [...] He was in another world: he had awakened from a slumber of centuries.”⁵⁵

Once again, Stephen chooses to escape the world he was brought into, only this time in the form of indulging himself and his inner desires. By choosing to explore his sexuality, instead of following religious dicta, Stephen makes more room for the Dionysian in him. Intoxicated with lust, his whole body trembles with the need to “sin with another of his kind, to force another being

⁵² Joyce, 1992, p. 68

⁵³ Joyce, 1992, p. 74-75

⁵⁴ Joyce, 1992, p. 63

⁵⁵ Joyce, 1992, p. 76

to sin with him and to exult with her in sin”.⁵⁶ Having sex with the prostitute signifies his own undoing, where he feels more self-assured and brave. The ‘relationships’ he starts to have with women, from this point on, are painted as important facilitators for his self-discovery.⁵⁷

3.3. Chapter Three: Dionysian and Apollonian Absence

After fulfilling his desires and opening up to his Dionysian side, Stephen starts to regret the actions that brought him to having sex with a prostitute, and undergoes one of the many hither and thither moments between his Apollonian and Dionysian side that he displays in the novel.

The initial page of the third chapter incorporates imagery connected with music and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem *To the Moon*, which was mentioned in the previous chapter. Completely engrossed in his thoughts and writing, Stephen starts hearing music in an almost delirious manner, while recalling Shelley’s lines, which are evocative of Stephen’s state as a wayward, insatiable soul roaming amongst the sea of people: “Art thou pale for weariness/ Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth, / Wandering companionless/ Among the stars that have a different birth, / And ever changing, like a joyless eye/ That finds no object worth its constancy?”⁵⁸ He seems confused by the presence of the music, and quite distant to its call. Religion takes precedence in this stage of his life.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Erkoç, 2018, p. 2

⁵⁸ Shelley, lines 1-6

For Nietzsche, “there is no greater contradiction of the purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world” than Christianity, “which is and wants to be exclusively moral, and with its absolute standards [...] exiles art, *each and every art*, to the realm of *lies*—that is, denies, damns, condemns it.”⁵⁹ Based on this, we can observe the extent to which this proves to be the case throughout the third chapter. If, for Nietzsche, Christianity goes against life and the entirety of what makes life worth living, while bringing morality to the fore,⁶⁰ art is described as: “the real *metaphysical* activity of man”,⁶¹ while the actuality of life is “only *justified* as an aesthetic phenomenon”.⁶² For example, Stephen becomes obsessed with the notion of sin, projecting and overanalyzing his every action, leading to a feverish mental war where the guilt of previous deeds engulfs his whole persona substantially. While listening to the priest’s homily, Stephen’s frantic thoughts emerge as a spiraling blizzard where the fear of divine retribution makes little place for anything outside of the religious framework: “What did it profit a man to gain the whole world if he lost his soul?”⁶³ All and any thoughts of artistic endeavors are long disregarded. His entire body is paralyzed with fear and he aches to save his soul from damnation. Ultimately, Stephen confesses his sins, in another church, far away from someone who may judge him, continually choosing to find some sort of escape from arduous situations, instead of facing them head-on.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, 2000, p.9

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, 2000, p.9

⁶¹ Nietzsche, 2000, p.8

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Joyce, 1992, p.96

3.4. Chapter Four: Reclaiming the Dionysian

The first part of Joyce's penultimate chapter maintains the religious atmosphere, although Stephen's zealous behavior is amplified, with the intensity of his inner turmoil wailing for heaven. His days go by in a systematic manner, following a rigorous regime in order to atone for his sins. He becomes a meek and compliant shell of a person, dedicating every second of his days to God's will, incorporating ludicrous means so as to earn his place with the almighty God. By putting himself and his senses through stringent discipline, Stephen loses touch with Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. He purposely subjects himself to burdensome and unpleasant ventures, denouncing the pleasures and contentment of daily life but to no avail. His demons and temptations follow him, still and all, taking a toll on him and weighing down his soul, making it clear he would fall quite soon.

Following the dialogue with the priest about him joining the congregation, Stephen envisages the life within the Church he covertly imagined. After hearing the praise with which the priest spoke of him, Stephen feels elevated with pride and gratification. Once more, as soon as Stephen is on the verge of taking hold of what he initially craves, he has a change of heart. Ever-changing and fluctuating between his decisions, he considers the dullness and tediousness of the religious life, the actual absence of life in itself. Dionysian music rushes to his mind suddenly, clearing his head from the passionless life he had almost obediently accepted:

The music passed in an instant, as the first bars of the sudden music always did, over the fantastic fabrics of his mind, dissolving them painlessly and noiselessly [...] he raised his eyes to the priest's face and, seeing in it a mirthless rejection of the sunken day, detached his hand slowly which had acquiesced faintly in the companionship.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Joyce, 1992, p. 123

The second half of the fourth chapter addresses Stephen's alteration: "The chill and the order of the life [of service] repelled him."⁶⁵ It demands too much from him, draining his soul, and he realizes that "His destiny was to be elusive of social or religious orders. [...] was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world."⁶⁶ Yet again, Stephen chooses to escape from the path he once greatly desired, only this time in the name of freeing himself from the shackles he was born with--those connected to his family—and those that were imposed on him by his country and religion. Stephen's euphoric ecstasy that greets his victory in reclaiming his own soul, which had been at the disposal of everyone but himself, and the revivification of the Dionysian beast can be seen in the following lines:

he heard notes of fitful music leaping upwards a tone and downwards a diminished fourth, upwards a tone and downwards a major third, like triple-branching flames leaping fitfully, flame after flame, out of a midnight wood. It was an elfin prelude, endless and formless; and, as it grew wilder and faster, the flames leaping out of time, he seemed to hear from under the boughs and grasses wild creatures racing, their feet pattering like rain upon the leaves. Their feet passed in pattering tumult over his mind, the feet of hares and rabbits, the feet of harts and hinds and antelopes.⁶⁷

By rejecting the religious part of himself, while still being influenced by its theoretical approach that thwarted all and every thought of art, Stephen finally manages to find the voice he has been searching for, both consciously and subconsciously. He is intoxicated with words once more, reclaiming the Dionysian drive that was repelled by the Christian supremacy. He proceeds to hear the music inside him, which reverberates in the voices of his colleagues around him, and it

⁶⁵ Joyce, 1992, p.123

⁶⁶ Joyce, 1992, p.124

⁶⁷ Joyce, 1992, p. 127

is laced with images of Daedalus and Icarus. Standing apart from them and listening to their cries, Stephen begins to dwell on the name he shares with the well-known artificer, drunk on the life he has chosen, as opposed to the one that has been thrust upon him since his childhood. He feels elevated, petrified, invigorated by this new adventure his soul had yearned for, making an oath to himself to create and to transcend life through art:

This was the call of life to his soul not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar. [...] His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her grave-clothes. Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable.⁶⁸

After experiencing this moment of spiritual clarity, Stephen stumbles upon a girl who is depicted as “a beautiful and strange seabird”.⁶⁹ a rendering clearly connotative of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus. The fire within him ignites in an instant, evoking the dormant Dionysian parts of him completely, making him embrace the entirety of a life he once denied. Stephen experiences an epiphanic moment that consumes his soul *in toto*, after which he feels drained and dozes off with contentment.

⁶⁸ Joyce, 1992, p. 130

⁶⁹ Joyce, 1992, p. 131

3.5. Chapter Five: The Artist-in-Making

The concluding chapter of *A Portrait* sees Stephen's transmutation from an obedient boy who blindly followed authority to an artist who is in the process of unfolding. Stephen's family disapproves of him enrolling in university, thinking he is making a grave mistake, one he will soon live to repent. He, on the other hand, is born anew, a Dionysian person ascending. No longer subdued and muted to please the ones around him, Stephen takes comfort in nature, allowing it to soothe his soul from the nipping voices of his family, country, and religion:

His father's whistle, his mother's mutterings, the screech of an unseen maniac were to him now so many voices offending and threatening to humble the pride of his youth. He drove their echoes even out of his heart with an execration; but, as he walked down the avenue and felt the grey morning light falling about him through the dripping trees and smelt the strange wild smell of the wet leaves and bark, his soul was loosed of her miseries.⁷⁰

Having no energy anymore to follow the footpath and dreams of his father, mother, and everyone around him, Stephen "turns his mind to unknown arts."⁷¹

He starts to formulate his aesthetic theory whose premise rests on a religious groundwork, but which is loosened from religion's tight leash. In a conversation with the dean regarding aesthetics, Stephen and the dean experience a difficulty with the words "funnel" and "tundish".⁷² Stephen becomes disgusted by the dean's poor knowledge about his own language and ultimately loses all interest in a further discussion with him. He starts to perceive him in a different light, comprehending that, in the dean's English eyes, all he will ever be is a colonial other. This discussion also furthers the loss of veneration he feels for religious authority. The altercation stays

⁷⁰ Joyce, 1992, p. 135

⁷¹ An epigraph from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* viii, 188

⁷² Ibid.

with him and reemerges in the diary part of the novel, where he notes while the colonised Irish have more grasp of the English language than the English, the English still have primary possession of it. For Stephen, English both is and is not his language:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of the language.⁷³

The dean embodies the connection between the Roman and British empires—the two systems of control from which Stephen intends to flee; a severing of the ties with elements that hindered the connection to the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses.

The artist-in-making has a handful of discourses akin to the one with the dean, albeit with his colleagues, where he proudly proclaims: “You are right to go your way. Leave me to go mine.”⁷⁴ This strong urge for individuality calls for the Apollonian in him, while the rebellious part that defies mundanity and tediousness of the lives lived by those he knows is a Dionysian characteristic.

In the ultimate chapter, we can notice a definite change in Stephen, in his voice and soul. The question that arises from this evolution of character is whether Stephen will cultivate his artistic spirit progressively more or will he fall into his old ways. Despite the fact that he is, all the same, work in progress, it seems as though his regression is bound to occur at some point in the future since the circular pattern of falling back has not been disrupted yet.

⁷³ Joyce, 1992, p. 146

⁷⁴ Joyce, 1992, p. 153

Awakening next morning, under the spell of the arousal of the Dionysian and the Apollonian drives, Stephen, in high spirits, intoxicated with the “faint sweet music”⁷⁵ and drowsy from sleep and dreams, starts composing his villanelle. Completely enamored with Emma, the words begin flowing from him, a rhapsody of rhymes and verses: “He spoke the verses aloud from the first lines till the music and rhythm suffused his mind, turning it to quiet indulgence; then copied them painfully to feel them the better by seeing them”.⁷⁶ The moment of revelation, under the guise of the Dionysian and Apollonian amalgamation, leads to Stephen’s first real artistic endeavor.

In the ensuing passage, Joyce recounts Stephen’s fixation with birds. The artist-to-be is enraptured with their cries and flight, which invoke in him a plethora of emotions. The feeling of a premonition is strongly present here: “Then he was to go away for they were birds ever going and coming, building ever an unlasting home under the eaves of men’s houses and ever leaving the homes they had built to wander”.⁷⁷ This is supplemented by allusions to the myth of Daedalus, using motifs such as “flight”⁷⁸, “hawk-like man”⁷⁹, “out of captivity”⁸⁰. There is a suggestion here, perhaps, that Stephen is meant to roam the world, doomed to perpetually seek ways to create but never quite managing to do it or be satisfied with the outcome.

Moreover, in the last conversation in the novel with his friend Cranly, Stephen proudly exclaims the maxim he embraced hitherto: “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe,

⁷⁵ Joyce, 1992, p. 167

⁷⁶ Joyce, 1992, p. 171

⁷⁷ Joyce, 1992, p. 174

⁷⁸ Joyce, 1992, p. 173

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid

whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use- silence, exile, and cunning.”⁸¹ By declaring this, Stephen can be linked with both Lucifer, who according to the priest’s homily in the third chapter uttered *a non serviam* declaration, as well as with the unruly Nietzschean Dionysian beast. Not being able to be the person everyone around him expects him to be, Stephen chooses to abandon all the falsehoods of his childhood in order to save his soul. The confessional part of the last chapter ends with Stephen seemingly accepting the loneliness, exile, and suffering that will ensue so as to satisfy the urge in him to create, which makes him the Dionysian incarnate, through and through.

The final point for consideration is the diary portion of the novel. Joyce chooses to incorporate the first-person narrative at this point. What may be implied here is that by including the first-person point of view, Joyce affirms the actualization of Stephen’s voice, even if it is hardly completely artistic. In his final cry, Stephen calls out an invocation to his pagan father to guide him in his artistic strivings.

⁸¹ Joyce, 1992, p. 191

4. Conclusion

This thesis reads James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the light of Friedrich Nietzsche's book *The Birth of Tragedy*, and focuses in particular on how the ideas of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses are reflected in the main character, Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's alter-ego. From the earliest days, Stephen was like no other child, substantially different from others. His peculiar nature was at first hidden and subdued by the autocratic powers surrounding him until he found the courage to react to these. His metamorphoses can be considered as a work of art, at least to some extent. Not yet a complete person, Stephen's attempt to become an artist is a work in progress. His mind, both a labyrinth of creation and a prison, an instrument of salvation and damnation, is a tool continuously molding him into a person according to his own devices. This process of formation is interspersed with alterations between his Dionysian and Apollonian natures, which mark Stephen's struggles to define himself. His oath "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"⁸² is a pledge of continual self-creation, made by Stephen, a godlike artificer in anticipation of a much-needed reformation.

On the other hand, if we take into consideration the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, and the impact Stephen's surname has on him, we can argue about the possibility of failure. Daedalus succeeded in escaping the confinement he was put in, but along the way lost his son. Similarly, we

⁸² Joyce, 1992, p. 196

can argue that if it is possible that although Stephen frees himself from the restrictive ropes of his country, family, and religion, he might ultimately fail in defining himself as an artist.

Be it as it may, Stephen's transformation over the years and his cultivation of his inner Dionysian and Apollonian impulses brought him to be the person he is at the end of the final chapter. His detachment from the smothering hands of his family, fatherland, and church offers hope for his art. To stay in the same place would mean for him a demise of his self because the dullness of it all would spit on his soul and nothing would be left except the emptiness of regret.

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