

*Romantic irony: the bridge between the romantic and the modernist artist in Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*¹

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ABSTRACT

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man may be interpreted as a Künstlerroman, a novel of an artist's development, in which the literary trajectory of Stephen Dedalus is depicted. We will trace the artist's evolution from young Stephen's ideas about art, strongly influenced by romantic principles, to Stephen's final assertion as an artist in the elaboration of his modernist autobiography.

The distance between the young and the mature Stephen, evolving from a romantic position to a modernist one, provokes the main irony in the novel, the opposition between the young Stephen's open defence of romantic principles and the mature Stephen's modernist style. Thus, the elusion of the author, hidden in an indirect interior monologue, is not authentic. The narrator is brought to light by the use of this same narrative technique discovering him as a modernist artist, contrary to his ideas of youth. This irony may be classified as romantic irony.

We also suggest that a similar evolution to the one described in the novel took place also in Joyce's literary career, and finally we will consider the linking role of romantic irony in both Stephen's and Joyce's evolution towards a modernist position, as well as in the 19th and 20th century history of literature.

0. INTRODUCTION

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is usually described as a fictional autobiography, whose protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, narrates his development as an artist, from youth to adulthood. According to this view, we can distinguish in the novel between old Stephen, who writes from the

perspective of a mature artist analysing his first steps in his career, and young Stephen, who is being portrayed.

The mature Stephen describes his early years at Clongowes Wood and at Dublin University and focuses especially on the particular literary theory he elaborates at that time. The ideas that build up this early literary theory seem to be close to a romantic position. In Stephen's conversation with both the dean of studies and Lynch, and also in Stephen's moments of literary inspiration, we can recognise some ideas that appeared as central in the romantic period, especially in Shelley. These common ideas include, for instance, the great importance of imagination, the essence as the only suitable material for art or the timeless moment of inspiration (radiance).

Everything is described through a third-person narrative that centres almost exclusively on the young artist's subjectivity. Besides, most of the narrative is devoted to depicting, by means of the interior monologue technique, young Stephen's psyche. His deepest thoughts and feelings are thus shown by through the so-called "stream of consciousness".

It is due to the emphasis on the description through subjectivity, represented in the narrative techniques used to picture young Stephen's stream of consciousness, that we can define this novel and also its fictional writer (mature Stephen) as fully modernist.

Therefore, the distance between Stephen-narrator and Stephen-character is not only temporal but also ideological and stylistic, and reflects the protagonist's trajectory in the rejection of his young literary ideas in favour of the modernist style he chooses to write his autobiography.

Although we assume that Stephen is a fictional character and we decline to interpret the novel as Joyce's autobiography, we can trace some significant parallels between Stephen's and Joyce's artistic trajectories.

The temporal and ideological distance between Stephen-character and Stephen-narrator produces the greatest irony in the novel: the opposition between the concept of art as explained by young Stephen and the concept of art that is implied in the mature Stephen's narrative style.

The kind of irony in Stephen's narration cannot be defined according to the traditional terms of "verbal" or "dramatic" irony. Irony is, in this novel, displaying one of the main problems in modernism: How does one represent reality objectively? Modernists tried to solve this problem by means of the total disappearance of the author in the novel and its replacement by the subjectivity of a character. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to silence the personality of the author in his work. In *A Portrait*, we have a fictional author who tries to portray objectively his young aesthetic ideas. However, he cannot leave aside his more developed theory at the moment of writing the novel. That is easily recognised in the modernist narrative technique chosen by Stephen-narrator, a narrative technique almost opposite to the style the romantic Stephen-character would

have chosen. Thus, the continuous presence of the author is made explicit in the form of the novel. This problem of self-mediation of the author is the main paradox in romantic irony, and therefore, we may define the irony in *A Portrait* as romantic irony².

In Stephen's, and also Joyce's development from romantic ideas to modernist ones, there is something that remains constant, and thus bridges the temporal and ideological gap between romanticism and modernism. This common feature is romantic irony. And this is due to the crisis of the representation of reality and the problem of the author-mediation that both the romantic and the modernist artist felt.

Our intention here is to analyse both the romantic features of Stephen-character and the modernist features in the narrative technique used by Stephen-narrator so that we can trace Stephen's trajectory as an artist. This initial analysis will be essential for the further discussion on the meaning and nature of irony in *A Portrait* which will lead us to consider romantic irony as the missing link between two not so different literary movements: romanticism and modernism, or at least James Joyce's romanticism and modernism.

1. STEPHEN'S TRAJECTORY FROM ROMANTICISM TO MODERNISM

A Portrait is a novel of character development and, as such, it is an example of *Bildungsroman*. It describes the different stages in Stephen's trajectory both as a person and as an artist.

Most critics limit the protagonist's development to the story narrated in the novel, thus being Stephen's decision to leave Dublin in its final stage. However, considering that the novel is also an autobiography, we would rather go beyond this point and consider the process of writing the novel by a more mature Stephen part of the trajectory depicted in *A Portrait*. Thus, the plot of the novel may be redefined as the development of young Stephen towards artistry and his final assertion as an artist in the elaboration of his autobiography.

The initial stage in the protagonist's literary career, going from his childhood to the moment he leaves Dublin, is clearly marked by some romantic principles. We recognise this influence through Stephen's thoughts, his open defences of his aesthetic theory and the description of Stephen's moments of inspiration and creation.

Although it is from chapter V onwards that Stephen consciously elaborates and explicitly describes his literary ideas, earlier in the novel Stephen already expresses the romantic nature of his artistic goals: "He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld"(p. 67)³.

Later on, he will mention several times the romantic poets Byron and Shelley. Stephen's admiration for them is clearly shown in the novel. Both poets appear twice, Byron being Stephen's favourite writer:

-And who do you think is the greatest poet? asked Boland, nudging his neighbour.
-Byron, of course, answered Stephen. (p. 85)

He is the one chosen as a model to be imitated:

On the first line of the page appeared the title of the verses he was trying to write: To E- C-. He knew it was right to begin for he had seen similar titles in the collected poems of Lord Byron. (p. 73)

Stephen has also read Shelley's poems, and they seem to have impressed him as he twice recalls "the words of Shelley's fragment upon the moon wandering companionless, pale for weariness" (p. 110).

These influences will later on become consolidated in his personal theory. Thus, the scholastic ideas he has acquired, immersed in the Jesuit discipline at Clongowes School, are but the foundations on which he will elaborate his own theory that is basically romantic. I do not intend here but to give a general outline of the main romantic ideas that can be traced in his theory⁴.

The main change that Stephen makes in the Thomist aesthetics is the introduction of the imagination. This concept of imagination is indissolubly linked to romanticism. Like the 19th century romantics, Stephen believes in imagination as a creating power that elevates him from the visible world to the *unsubstantial image*, in other words, the essence:

Beauty, the splendour of truth, is a gracious presence when the imagination contemplates intensely the truth of its own being or the visible world and the spirit which proceeds out of truth and beauty is the holy spirit of joy. (p. 225)

For Stephen, and also the romantics, the material world is not longer suitable to literature:

But we are just now in a mental world. [...] The desire and loathing excited by improper aesthetic means are really unaesthetic emotions not only because they are kinetic but also because they are not more than physical. (p. 223)

We may trace some parallels between Stephen's aesthetic theory and Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry". First we should realise both Stephen and Shelley make a distinction between reason (intellect for Stephen) and imagination as two different mental actions. In Shelley's words, reason may be considered as "mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to

another, while imagination is “mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light” (p. 480)⁵.

The objects of intellect/reasoning and imagination are different for Stephen and also for Shelley. The former states this distinction in this way:

Truth is beheld by the intellect which is appeased by the most satisfying relations of the intelligible: beauty is beheld by the imagination which is appeased by the most satisfying relations of the sensible. The first step in the direction of truth is to understand the frame and scope of the intellect itself, to comprehend the act itself of intellection. The first step in the direction of beauty is to understand the frame and scope of the imagination, to comprehend the act itself of aesthetic apprehension. (pp. 243-4)

The latter claims that:

... equality, diversity, unity contrast, mutual dependence [...] constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning. (Shelley 1977: 481)

Stephen does not define imagination directly, but through the explanation of the different phases of artistic apprehension. It is meaningful to us that Stephen translates the Thomist terms: “integritas”, “consonantia” and “claritas” into “wholeness”, “harmony” and “radiance”. “Radiance” is the most interesting in this context since this same term was used by Shelley to denote a similar concept. It is defined by Stephen as

The artistic discovery and representation of the divine purpose in anything or a force of generalization which would make the aesthetic image a universal one, make it outshine its proper conditions. (p. 231)

Something similar is asserted by Shelley:

It (*Poetry*) transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit. (p. 505)

We must bear in mind that, for Shelley, poetry is “the expression of the imagination” and so the radiance of poetry is the radiance of imagination. Both Stephen’s “universal image” and Shelley’s “incarnation of the spirit” or “the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth” (485) may refer to the same thing: the essence, the platonic Idea that can only be reached through the imagination.

A further parallel between their theories is manifested in the opposition Stephen establishes between kinetic and static emotions that is also described

by Shelley (1977:500): “There are two kind of pleasures, one durable, universal and permanent; the other transitory and particular”.

Finally, we may also take into consideration the connection between the Joycean epiphany explained by Stephen in *A Portrait* and the romantic notion of “intensity”. Intensity, a concept that first appeared in Longinus⁶, is defined by Abrams (1953:134) as “the supreme moments of unsustainable feeling and imaginative impetus”. This flash of intensity that, for some romantics, takes place in the effect the poem provokes in the reader, takes place also, for some others, in the artist’s conception of the poem. According to Abrams, this is the case of Hazlitt whose criterion “gusto” (another term to refer to intensity) involves intensity in the effect of the poem but also in the creation of the poem by the artist⁷. In the same line Stephen defines his famous “epiphany”:

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the aesthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminously silent stasis of aesthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to the cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley’s, called the enchantment of heart. (p. 231)

The “beautiful” phrase Stephen mentions in the quotation above appears in Shelley’s “A Defence of Poetry”:

The mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within. (Shelley 1977:504)⁸

All these romantic topics are summarised in the moment of inspiration and creation of a villanelle by Stephen.

A spirit filled him, pure as the purest water, sweet as dew, moving as music. But how faintly it was inbreathed, how passionlessly, as if the seraphin themselves were breathing upon him! [...] An enchantment of the heart! The night had been enchanted. In a dream or vision he had known the ecstasy of seraphic life. Was it an instant of enchantment only or long hours and days and years and ages? The instant of inspiration seemed now to be reflected from all sides at once from a multitude of cloudy circumstances of what had happened or of what might have happened. [...] O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh. An afterglow deepened within his spirit, whence the white flame has passed, deepening to a rose and ardent light. [...] The verses passed from his mind to his lips and, murmuring them over, he felt the rhythmic movement of a villanelle pass through them (pp.235-6).

The artist’s mind is seized by inspiration, here represented by a seraph, and in the moment of inspiration, he feels the “enchantment of the heart”, an expression used previously by Stephen to define “the stasis of aesthetic

pleasure” that does not endure. It is, in other words, romantic intensity. Later, through “the virgin womb of the imagination”, he would translate into words the timeless dream or vision provided by the inspiration.

At the end of the novel, Stephen is apparently the typical heroic isolated romantic artist. Stephen lived in a moment of important political crisis in Ireland. The country was immersed in its struggle for national freedom. Moreover, he felt an ideological disillusion produced by a religion that had filled his childhood and youth with unconscious hope. To the above we must add the decadence of his family both in moral and economic terms. As a result, with a decisive gesture, Stephen breaks his links with his family, Ireland and Catholicism.

You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. [...] I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my Church. (p. 268)

In order to follow Stephen’s literary trajectory, we should analyse Stephen’s style in the narration of his autobiography. From the moment he leaves Dublin until the moment he fictionally writes this novel, there has been a development in his ideas, and the result of this development is clearly represented in the narrative technique the mature Stephen uses.

In general, “the narration consists of anonymous representations of scene, action, and dialogue in the third person together with the report of Stephen’s thoughts, also in the third person” (Riquelme 1983: 53). However, since focalization is centred on young Stephen, it is not an omniscient narrator structure. The narrator rarely abandons the protagonist’s point of view:

A few moments after he found himself on the stage amid the garish gas and the dim scenery, acting before the innumerable faces of the void. It surprised him to see that the play which he had known at rehearsals for a disjointed lifeless thing had suddenly assumed a life of its own. It seemed now to play itself, he and his fellow actors aiding it with their parts. When the curtain fell on the last scene he heard the void filled with applause and, through a rift in the side scene, saw the simple body before which he had acted magically deformed, the void of faces breaking at all points and falling asunder into busy groups. (p. 90)

In this example we have the description of a play, but we are not located among the audience but on the stage within Stephen’s mind. We do not know anything about what the play is about, we only can feel Stephen’s perception, we hear and see the audience through his senses. The narrator can not tell us about the audience’s applause but through Stephen.

The technique used by Stephen-narrator is, according to the classification made by Robert Humphrey (1954)⁹, interior monologue¹⁰. He defines interior monologue as:

the technique used in fiction for representing the psychic content and processes of character, partly or entirely unuttered, just as these processes exist at various levels of conscious control before they are formulated for deliberate speech. (p. 24)

Later on, Humphrey distinguishes, within the concept of interior monologue, between direct and indirect interior monologue. In direct interior monologue we have a first-person narration whereas in the indirect interior monologue the author intervenes between the character's psyche and the reader by means of a third-person narration. Indirect interior monologue allows the author to maintain the fluidity and sense of realism in the depiction of the states of consciousness and at the same time provokes in the reader a sense of the author's continuous presence.

In this novel, the indirect interior monologue is the one widely used by Stephen-narrator, although, sometimes the boundary between direct and indirect interior monologue becomes blurred:

There was still time. O Mary, refuge of sinners, intercede for him! O Virgin Undeified, save him from the gulf of death! (p. 135)

No escape, he had to confess, to speak out in words what he had done and thought, sin after sin. How? How? (p. 136, my emphasis)

He feared intensely in spirit and in flesh but, raising his head bravely, he strode into the room firmly. A doorway, a room, the same room, same window. (p.147, my emphasis)

We may question the source of the words underlined, it is not the third-person narrator but Stephen's own mental words. These are just some examples, many more can be found in the novel.

The depiction of Stephen's thoughts is made more reliable as the language develops along with Stephen. The first pages of the novel are representative. There, the narrator describes the thoughts of very young Stephen with a limited vocabulary and very simple grammatical structures:

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face. He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt. [...] When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell. His mother had a nicer smell than his father. [...] Uncle Charles and Dante clapped. They were older than his father and mother but uncle Charles was older than Dante. (p. 3)

The language gets more complex and the narrative distance between character and narrator is shortened as the novel advances till the end. There, we can read the personal diary of young Stephen that is written in direct interior monologue:

22 March: In company with Lynch followed a sizable hospital nurse. Lynch's idea. Dislike it. Two lean hungry greyhounds walking after a heifer. (p. 270)

It is at the end of the novel where we can best realise the distance between character and narrator. The displacements in *A Portrait* are not only temporal but also stylistic. It is clear that this text is not a diary written by young Stephen, it is not his style. His style is the lyricism in the villanelle, not the modernist stream-of-consciousness. Thus, the representation of young Stephen's stream-of-consciousness through indirect monologue by the mature Stephen implies a change in his previous romantic conception of literature. And this change leads him to modernism.

There is in modernism a new general concept of literature that would give way to a considerable complexity in literary works. This complexity is based, mainly, on their formal aspects, since the narrative techniques used move away from the realist ones in the previous period. This results from a new conception of reality that takes as its basis the emerging science of psychology and the philosophy of Nietzsche. Now, reality itself is seen as something elusive and the only thing that we can grasp is our view of experiences. Therefore, there is in modernism, according to Peck and Coyle (1993:150), a new awareness of the human mind. And, this new awareness of inner feeling leads to the eclipse of the intrusive omniscient narrator, for if one acknowledges the unique character of every mind, then it becomes impossible for anyone to provide an authoritative view of experience.

The use of these narrative techniques, especially the indirect interior monologue, provokes in the reader the awareness of the continuous presence of a narrator who mediates between himself and young Stephen's thoughts. Moreover, it allows irony to take place since it represents the move from romanticism to modernism that takes place in Stephen's ideas about art. The modernist narrative style of mature Stephen in writing his autobiography is almost opposite to the lyricism of young Stephen's villanelle.

2. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NATURE OF IRONY IN *A PORTRAIT*

We assume that proving the existence of irony in a text is a hard task because of two main reasons: firstly because irony is above all a semantic and pragmatic phenomenon with a very limited textual support, and secondly because there is not a definition of irony generally accepted as valid for all cases. Nevertheless, if we analyse the different definitions of irony through history it is possible to outline one feature of irony that appears, at least, in all forms of modern irony, that is paradox. Therefore, we would provisionally consider paradox as irony to start our discussion on safe ground.

We find in this novel two main sources of irony, two different paradoxes that result from Stephen's evolution. The first one is based on the myth of Dedalus, the paradox of the protagonist who although is called after Dedalus, is really the fallen Icarus. And the second one, of great importance for our study, is the paradox that results from the opposition between the romantic ideas defended by the young Stephen and the modernist techniques used by the same Stephen some years later. This paradox is, to us, the main ingredient in *A Portrait's* irony.

It is essential for the understanding of the novel's irony to realise the importance of Daedalus, since the meaning of *A Portrait* is based upon that myth. Daedalus, in his fabulous flight, took with him his son, Icarus, who in his youthful pride flew so near to the sun that the wax, which held together his wings, melted and fell into the sea where he was drowned.

The ambivalence in the identification of Stephen with Daedalus or Icarus depends on our irony awareness. Thus, Stephen, in his position of artist and so creator, seems at first sight the *fabulous artificer* Daedalus, but through irony he turns out to be his son, the one that is bound to fall down. The greatest strength of this irony is focused in Stephen's last words in *A Portrait*: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" (p. 276).

These are not the words of Daedalus but of a damned Icarus asking his father for help. It is necessary to be familiar with the myth to grasp this final irony, maybe Joyce relied too much on the reader's knowledge of it. We must wait for *Ulysses* to find an explicit identification of Stephen with Icarus:

Fabulous artificer, the hawlike man. You flew. Where to? Newhaven-Dieppe, steerage passenger. Paris and back. Lapwing. Icarus. Pater, ait. Seabedabbled, fallen, weltering. Lapwing you are. Lapwing he. (Joyce 1992b:270)

Therefore, at the end, Stephen, as a romantic hero, is going to be freed from religion, family and country, but he is doomed to fall down, as Icarus, because of the limitations that result from his immature adhesion to the romantic-scholastic theory of art, as it can be seen in *Ulysses*.

Nevertheless, we must point out that irony in *A Portrait* does not limit its existence, in linguistic terms, to the signified but expands to the signifier, to the formal aspects of the novel.

The use of a narrative technique based on the representation, in different forms, of Stephen's stream of consciousness in contrast to the lyricism of young Stephen, is ironic. As Peter Faulkner (1990:15) claims, "not only did the modernist artist see himself confronted by the infinite complexity of reality, he also saw that his medium itself might be part of the problem". The "medium" is, in *A Portrait*, the source of its complexity.

Paul de Man¹¹ conceived irony in terms of discrepancy between sign and literal meaning, distance, and absence of coherence among the parts of a work.

This definition can be applied to *A Portrait* since it presents a lack of coherence between form and content, that is, between the narrative techniques used in the practice by the old artist to recall his first approach to literature and the theory young Stephen defends. We may understand this paradox in terms of irony.

Besides, Paul de Man (1983: 213-4), adopting Baudelaire's ideas, considered the division of the subject into several consciousnesses and the final falling, the main ingredients in irony:

More important still, in Baudelaire's description the division of the subject into a multiple consciousness takes place in immediate connection with a fall. The element of falling introduces the specifically comical and ultimately ironical ingredient. At the moment that the artistic or philosophical, that is, the language-determined, man laughs at himself falling, he is laughing at a mistaken, mystified assumption he was making about himself.

These ingredients can be found in *A Portrait*: the division of Stephen into Stephen-writer, "the language-determined man", and Stephen-character; Also, the final falling of Stephen-character, the fallen Icarus, who is a mystified version of the writer's young ideas.

Therefore, according to what we have already seen, we can describe *A Portrait*, among other things, as an ironical novel. In fact, irony turns out to be an appropriate tool for modernists to express their worries about the representation of the world since it allows the writer to provide the reader with endless interpretations. That is due to the fact that, as Muecke (1986: 31) asserts, "Irony is saying something in a way that activates not one but an endless series of subversive interpretations".

We could make a further comment on the nature of irony in *A Portrait*, as there may be a connection between it and romantic irony. Muecke describes romantic irony as a creative surpassing where the author is like God or Nature immanent in every finite created element, but the reader is also aware of his transcendent presence as an ironic attitude towards his own creation. The transcendent presence of the author, postulated by the most optimistic romanticism, also forms part of young Stephen's theory of art as he emphasises the ironic distance that the author should maintain from his creation:

The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond, or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails. (p. 233)

However, the mature Stephen is closer to the pessimistic romantics that postulated the author's awareness in the process of creation and in the reader's awareness of the author's presence in the novel. In *A Portrait*, as we have tried to prove, the reader is aware of the author's presence thanks to the narrative

techniques used. The author is not “indifferent, paring his fingernails “, in fact the narrator himself is giving us clues to interpret his irony. Joyce is showing us in this novel the difficulties modernist writers found in trying to give the reader a faithful representation of reality through the subjectivity of the characters. That difficulty is due to the inevitable presence of the author, especially in a novel where the fictional author, the narrator and the character through whose subjectivity we see, is the same individual. Therefore, the objectivity in the representation of Stephen’s reality should be complete. We can feel the author’s presence both in his narrative style and in the use of the third person narrator. In that sense, Riquelme (1983:59) claims that “the narration of *A Portrait* supports Genette’s conclusion that all narrative is essentially diegetic and that pure mimesis is not possible. The speaking voice of the discourse is always evident”. Therefore, the objectivity intended by Stephen-narrator in the depiction of his young ideas through the stream of consciousness is hindered by the use of this narrative technique that discovers the pretended eluded narrator and gives way to romantic irony.

3. JOYCE’S LITERARY CAREER AND ROMANTIC IRONY

Joyce’s personal ideas about art and the artist cannot be separated from the aesthetic meditations contained in his works, maybe as a consequence of the aesthetic self-consciousness that characterizes modern times. Joyce’s theory of art develops along with the ones presented in his novels. Umberto Eco claimed in *Las poéticas de Joyce* that

para comprender el desarrollo de su poética, es necesario remitirse constantemente a su desarrollo espiritual o, mejor dicho, al desarrollo de ese personaje que vuelve una y otra vez en el curso del inmenso fresco autobiográfico de las varias obras, [...] La poética de Joyce no sirve como punto de referencia externo a la obra para comprenderla, sino que forma parte de la obra, íntimamente, y la obra misma la aclara y explica en sus varias fases de desarrollo. (1993:8)

Therefore, a comparative study of both Joyce’s and Stephen’s theories of art is justified. However, when we turn to analyse Stephen’s aesthetics we may question ourselves whether it is a faithful image of Joyce’s or, on the contrary, it is a fictional portrait. From our point of view, Stephen is just a fictional construct for which Joyce took his own experiences as raw material. In him, Joyce emphasises the aspects of his youth he would reject later on in his maturity. Young Joyce was not a pure romantic artist, he was influenced also, among others, by Ibsen’s naturalism, by symbolism and by the “Celtic renaissance”¹².

Stephen Hero gives the most accurate account of what young Joyce's attitudes really were: the moral intransigence, the stress on "truth"-telling in art, "classicism", the "epiphany". The ideas he gives Stephen in *A Portrait* include none of young Joyce's own ideas about the moral and social significance of art, and they contain nothing of his belief that the stable humane "joy" of comedy is ultimately the perfect manner in art. Instead, Stephen sees art only in terms of Beauty, and the more closely we inspect his attitudes, the more clearly he appears limited by his aestheticism (Goldberg 1962: 16). Thus, we cannot utterly identify Stephen with the young Joyce, but we can say that Stephen is a character created by means of hyperbole, by means of the exaggeration of the romantic features of the earliest Joyce with the final purpose of being ironized. Stephen is, in Goldberg's words, a "hard-won imaginative creation" (Ibid. 16). If we intend to describe this novel as an autobiography, it seems reasonable to interpret it as Stephen's autobiography instead of Joyce's although it clearly symbolises part of Joyce's biography, his rejection of some of his romantic ideas of youth.

Thanks to Richard Ellman's *James Joyce* (1991) we can follow closely the development of Joyce's literary ideas during the period he attended the Dublin University College. During the first years Joyce got to know Aquinas's theory of aesthetics¹³ and was fostered by one of his teachers, Mr Ghezzi, to study and formulate his own aesthetic theories. Nevertheless, Joyce's earliest philosophy of art is not rooted in the Thomist principles¹⁴. In fact the real source of his earliest literary thinking is the Romantic poets, specially Shelley, Blake and Byron¹⁵.

In 1898, his first year at the university, he wrote a composition vindicating the romantic "imagination" and its power to discover to men the "sublime" that is hidden from everyman's sight. And, later on, Joyce would reject Yeats' poetry. According to Joyce, Yeats was loosing his imagination. These two terms, Imagination along with Beauty, Truth and the kinetic and static emotions, are the most relevant terms in young Stephen's aesthetics.

Truth and Beauty would also be present in his young literary ideas. In 1900, Joyce volunteered to present a work on the theme "Drama and Life" for the Literary and Historical Society and in it he described the role of drama as the expression of the truth. This essay was censured by Mr Delany, president of the society. He considered that the essay minimised the ethic content of drama to what Joyce alleged in line with Aquinas's "dictum" in his *Summa Theologica*: "Pulchra enim dicuntur ea qua visa placent". This event would inspire a passage in *A Portrait*.

When Joyce left the University, he started to write *Stephen Hero*, a kind of autobiography in which Stephen Dedalus explains almost the same aesthetic ideas that, later on, would appear in *A Portrait*. We may question then the reason why Joyce "translated" *Stephen Hero* into the language of *A Portrait*.

Stevenson (1992) claims that the main difference between *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait* is that, in the latter, Joyce omits some of the realistic detail of the earlier draft, *Stephen Hero*, and practises a Jamesian exclusiveness of focus on -sometimes within- a single mind trying to place the centre of action as much as possible within the consciousness of the hero. To us, this formal change accompanies an intellectual evolution towards modernism similar to Stephen's.

Two biographical notes support that view. First, there was a distance of 10 years from the moment Joyce reviewed *A Portrait* for the last time before its publication, and the moment he leaves the University, which corresponds to the events in the last chapter of the novel. His ideas were developed greatly during this intermediate period. And, second, Joyce was writing the first chapters of *Ulysses* at the same time as he was finishing *A Portrait*. This implies that the modernist ideas that we find in *Ulysses* were in his mind when writing the last chapters of the novel we are analysing and it justifies the use of the modernist narrative techniques in *A Portrait* by the mature modernist Stephen. Therefore, by the time he was writing *A Portrait* his posture towards romantic ideas had changed, they had given way to the modernist ones I have mentioned.

Some years after finishing *A Portrait*, Joyce explained to A. Power (1974:98) that "Romantic flair should not be mistaken for true inspiration, and that Romanticism was closely associated with a kind of false and evasive idealism which is the ruin of man".

This rejection of some romantic tenets was a commonplace in many Modernist writers. D.H.Lawrence, for instance, in his essay "The spirit of place" claims that "Art-speech is the only truth. [...] Away with eternal truth. Truth lives from day to day, and the marvellous Plato of yesterday is chiefly bosh today" (Lodge, ed. 1996:123).

However, Joyce was never fully against romantic ideas because, in fact, these played a very important role in his career as writer, but what is true is that in *A Portrait*, like in *Ulysses*, he confronts two different traditions, and obviously, in his maturity he abandoned romanticism and created the stereotype of modernist novel, *Ulysses*.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is the middle stage between *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, between a position close to the nineteenth-century realism and the most developed modernism. As D.Lodge (1988: 130) claims, it is in *A Portrait* where Joyce "declared his secession from the fully readerly mode of narrative, and began his career as a fully fledged modernist writer". The stream of consciousness and different narrative techniques to reflect it appear in Joyce's writings for the first time.

The representation of Stephen's stream-of-consciousness reflects one of the main features of modernism, the modernist novel tends to express objectively

the subjectivity of the untruthful reality. The quest for objectivity that modernists in general follow is reflected in Joyce's narrative techniques, especially the representation of the stream-of consciousness. Virginia Woolf, in her essay "Modern Fiction" (1919)¹⁶ referring to the *Portrait* and the first instalments of *Ulysses*, says that "Mister Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see".

Joyce, like many of the writers at that time, was clearly influenced by Freud's theory that the mind helps create its reality by selection and evaluation. Moreover, there are striking analogies between Freud's use of free association and the literary stream of consciousness which attempts to present the mind in unmediated flux, capturing the rhythms of the process of thought itself (Bell 1980: 210). Also, Joyce may have been influenced by Nietzsche who claimed that there are not facts, only interpretations. The influence of these theories finds its actualisation in Joyce's choice of the narrative techniques, more or less developed, to be used in his works.

Joyce did not limit the representation of the stream of consciousness to this novel's boundaries but used it widely throughout the rest of his literary production as many more modernist writers did: D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf or William Faulkner.

Thus, *A Portrait* is a decisive step in Joyce's career towards modernist modes of writing, it represents this breaking from tradition and the search for modernity, and this gap between traditions is reflected, as we have previously said, in Stephen's literary trajectory.

Hence, considering these similarities in both Stephen's and Joyce's careers, we should agree with Margaret Norris' assertion that "A Portrait is both the author's autobiographical fiction and the autobiography of the fictional character. It provides the portrait of both artists"(1992:51).

In Stephen and Joyce's movement from romantic ideas to modernist ones, although in Joyce romantic ideas are accompanied by some ideas belonging to different traditions, there is something from romanticism that remains constant and that is, as we have seen, romantic irony.

Thus, we may go a step further and consider this novel not only a reflection of Joyce's literary career but also a depiction of the more general evolution of the literary movements during the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century¹⁷.

Some critics claim that modernism has its roots in some romantic ideas. Among them, Matei Calinescu suggests the existence of romantic principles in

the modernist aesthetic ideas in his work *Cinco caras de la modernidad*. And the same does Kernan in *The Death of Literature*¹⁸.

One of these romantic elements adopted by the modernists seems to be romantic irony. The main paradox of romantic irony is, according to Finlay Marike (1988), how the knowing subject can affirm its existence as discursive subjectivity and simultaneously lay claim to any authoritative objective representation of knowledge of the world without compromising that very objectivity with the intrusion of its speaking subjectivity. But this is not only a romantic concern, in fact we find it closely related to modernist worries about the capacity of art to represent reality through the subjectivity of a character. Both the romantic and the modernist artist feel the crisis of self-representation and of self-mediation that provokes the appearance of romantic irony.

Thus, Ballart (1994) notices continuity in the use of irony from romanticism to the literature of the first decades of the 20th century. This author relates the use of irony to those ages when the exploitation of reality is seen as damned to failure. Alan Wilde, in *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination*, goes even further and defines irony as a modern way of thinking, “a mode of consciousness, a perceptual response to a world without unity or cohesion”¹⁹. As a result, in Muecke’s words (1986: 35), “irony and deception are close neighbours”, and romanticism and modernism share this feeling of deception with respect to the chaotic world around them.

Thus, when, in the romantic period, Hegel discusses the “general irony of the world” and Kierkegaard defines irony as an absolute and irreconcilable opposition between the subjective and the objective, or when Heine uses terms such as “God’s irony” and “irony of the world” to express the disappearance of reasonable order in the world²⁰, they are foretelling some of the worries that the modernists felt about the impossibility of art to represent reality and about the modern paradox of objectivity and subjectivity in art.

The mature Joyce that wrote *A Portrait* with the purpose of ironizing his young romantic ideas by means of Stephen, had already got rid of his romanticism with the exception of this kind of irony that is common to both literary movements, and that was firstly defined in romantic terms. Therefore, romantic irony in this novel is the bridge, the common characteristic, that unites two views of reality and its representation in literature not so separate as it may seem: the romantic and the modernist.

NOTES

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² For the concept of romantic irony, the following references may be useful: Ballart (1994), Marike (1988), Muecke (1986), and Wheeler (1984).

³ Joyce, James (1992a) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. London: Penguin. Further quotations are taken from this edition and are indicated parenthetically in the text.

⁴ Many critical works have been written of Stephen's aesthetic ideas. Booth, in his article written in 1961, mentions the existence of at least fifteen articles and one full book disputing Joyce's attitude to the aesthetics alone.

⁵ "A Defence of Poetry" from the edition Reiman, D. H. & Powers, S. B., eds. (1977). *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. London: Norton. Further quotations are indicated parenthetically in the text.

⁶ The romantic term "intensity" developed from one of the sources of "sublimity" as described by Longinus. The concept that would be called later on "intensity", was described in *On the Sublime* as the highest quality of style invested in only a short passage of verse and prose. This fragment burst suddenly upon the auditor, with an effect of intensity, shock and illumination. (Abrams (1953): 133)

This idea of the link between "intensity" and its presence only in short fragments of text became a commonplace in romanticism, and can be found, for example in E. A. Poe.

⁷ Wellek considers Hazlitt's "gusto" under a different perspective which does not stress its conceptual connection to "intensity" as much as Abrams does.

⁸ Stephen quotes this sentence by Shelley in *Ulysses*: "In the intense instant of imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal." (Joyce 1992b:249)

⁹ Humphrey's categories have been refined as the research of narrative techniques has evolved in recent years. For our purpose in this paper, however, it may constitute a convenient theoretical framework.

¹⁰ In *A Portrait* the use of the indirect interior monologue is predominant, that is the one Dujardin used in *Les Lauriers sont coupés*. Joyce bought this book in a train station on his way to Tours in 1903. Later on, in the year 1921, Joyce would acknowledge the great influence this book had in his writings in a conference on Larbaud. (Ellman 1991)

¹¹ Paul de Man explores the concepts of allegory and irony in his essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Blindness and Insight* (1983: 187-228).

¹² These influences are explained in full detail in Harry Levin (1973) and Richard Ellman (1991).

¹³ His admiration for Aquinas led him to attend the inaugural session of the Thomas Aquinas Society in 1901.

¹⁴ Goldberg (1962:5) notes that assuming that Joyce's artistic outlook sprang from St Thomas de Aquinas is "one popular fallacy to get rid of at the start.[...] Nothing could be further from the truth. If his ideas sprang from anywhere it was from the Romantics, and particularly from Shelley".

¹⁵ Timothy Webb, in his article "Planetary music: James Joyce and the Romantic example" in McCormack and Stead (1982) gives a complete description of these romantic poets' influence on James Joyce's work.

¹⁶ In Lodge (1996:89).

¹⁷ This thesis is further developed in Flores Moreno (1999).

¹⁸ Kernan, A. (1990). *The Death of Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Quoted in Norris (1992).

¹⁹ Quoted in Dane (1991: 9) from Wilde, Alan (1981). *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (page 2).

²⁰ Preminger & Brogan (1993). *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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