

James Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is unique as a novel in that it blends biography, history, and fiction together to create a powerful exploration of a young artist's development, as well as the foundations of his guiding philosophies. Among the concepts explored by this text:

1. **The development of a young genius:**

Joyce is interested in the formative experiences of his own life and uses Stephen to explore their development. Joyce attempts to trace the decisive points of Stephen's sexual, artistic, political, and religious growth.

2. **The role of an artist in society:** Joyce depicts Stephen at once as being a part and product of his society, and yet separate from it as well. Through Stephen's development, Joyce explores the relationship between an artist and the society in which he functions, questioning the distance between the two and whether this distance is involuntary or chosen by the artist himself.

3. **The role of religion in an individual's life:**

Joyce depicts Stephen intermittently as a religious extremist, sometimes rebelling against Catholic strictures and sometimes dogmatically obeying them. The role of guilt, shame, repression, and rebellion during these periods helps shape Stephen's eventual maturation and leads to an ultimate declaration of independence.

4. **The autonomy of an individual and a state:** Throughout the novel, Joyce juxtaposes the Irish struggle for independence with Stephen's quest for autonomy. Stephen's gradual political awakening and sensitivity to the colonization of Ireland helps him (and the reader) consider his own sovereignty.

5. **The relationship between father and son:** Closely related to Stephen's consideration of Irish autonomy is his relationship with his father. The name Dadelus is a significant allusion to a Greek father and son who both sought freedom through flight. Throughout the novel, this allusion is touched upon to help describe Stephen's relationship with his father.

6. **The role of women in developing one's identity:** A significant trigger for much of Stephen's development as an individual is his views towards women. At various points in the novel, Stephen views women as remote, fantastical, sexual objects, and sources of transcendent self-knowledge. Much of his own development is triggered by these shifting views and accompanying experiences.

Stream of Consciousness: It's all in your head

One of the definitive features of *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is Joyce's unique use of **stream of consciousness**, a style in which the author directly transcribes the thoughts and sensations that go through a character's mind, rather than simply describing those sensations from the external standpoint of an observer..

Stream of consciousness is extremely challenging to read and understand because it mimics the cryptic, non-linear, myopic patterns of real thought. As you adapt to this style, you may want to consider the following:

- ✓ Stephen's stage of development: Each chapter finds Stephen older and more mature. Thus, Joyce adapts his stream of consciousness to reflect Stephen's gradual development.
- ✓ The repetition: Stephen fixates on certain details and motifs throughout the novel. These are important to developing the novel's themes.
- ✓ The artist's scope of awareness: As Stephen ages, he becomes more aware of his surroundings and his place within them. Thus, his thoughts become increasingly complex and thematically pronounced.

This novel is exceedingly complex and challenging. As you read, you'll want to keep these themes in mind, annotating for how Joyce establishes and develops them through characterization, imagery, dialogue, symbolism, and especially stream of consciousness.