

## The Conscience of the Race

### The Nation as Church of the Modern Age

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Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and by extension Joyce himself have gained a reputation among some literary critics as apolitical "individualists" because Stephen rejects overtly nationalistic art (Cheng, 74). Yet, even as he refuses to learn Irish or to endorse the program of the Gaelic League, Stephen affirms the importance of his nationality to his art: "This race and this country and this life produced me. . . . I shall express myself as I am" (*P*, 203). This budding artist proposes to use the fact that he himself is a product of a particular race and country as a means of achieving a new sort of freedom. This freedom will consist in using his experience and his self-expression to embody the fate of the race that has created him. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, although Stephen does not endorse the nationalist political program, he does set himself the typically nationalistic goal of reviving his nation-race. He hopes to do so, however, not through traditionally political activity but by searching within his own soul and, through his writing, affording his race an opportunity for rebirth. Joyce's narrative technique emphasizes the close relationship between Stephen and the Irish race. In revising the traditional plot structure of the novel of disillusionment, Joyce attempts to overcome the radical distinction between the God's-eye-view of the omniscient narrator and the limited perspective of the individual character. It is through the fusion of these two perspectives at the end of the novel, with Stephen's ascension to the role of narrator, that Joyce inaugurates a radical revision of the novelistic tradition. At the same moment, Stephen attempts to overcome his own subjectivity by merging it in the larger fate of his nation. Thus, I will argue, the

aim of rebuilding the nation plays an important role in the formal structure of the novel and is not merely a secondary thematic concern.

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* tells the story of Stephen's emergence into consciousness as an entrance into Irish history. Political events that play a crucial role in Stephen's conception of his place in history, such as the fall of Parnell, precede Stephen's conscious understanding of Irish politics, and Stephen's attempts to understand such events are part of the novel's drama. From the first page of the novel, references to the Irish historical and political situation fill Stephen's growing mind. Dante's two brushes—a maroon one for the radical Michael Davitt and a green one for the moderate Parnell—color his childhood perceptions before he even knows what the colors may signify. As a child, Stephen cannot solve the problems that theology and politics raise for him: “It pained him that he did not know well what politics meant and that he did not know where the universe ended. He felt small and weak” (*P*, 17). Stephen is conscious of growing up in a world in which politics and history weigh upon the brains of the living. He is surrounded by discussions of Irish politics and particularly of Parnell's campaign for Home Rule. Already Stephen's awakening consists in his becoming conscious of his entrapment in the nightmare of Irish history (*U*, 2.337). Without being able to articulate the reasons for his fate, the young hero feels himself to be growing up as part of what his father calls a “Godforsaken priestridden race” (*P*, 37). When he goes to the rector to complain of having been beaten by Father Dolan, he sees himself as a historical personage: “A thing like that had been done before by somebody in history, by some great person whose head was in the books of history. . . . History was all about those men and what they did” (*P*, 53). To find his own place in history, Stephen places Irish history in the context of a mythical religious pattern that culminates in his own person.

Stephen's entrapment in the nightmare of Irish history and his living out of its logic make him the potential author of an Irish national epic. Stephen proposes to do rather more, however, than simply justify the ways of God to Irishmen. In this potential epic, the artist himself will play the role of the redeeming hero who, by his mystical union with the conscience of the race, helps to transform the Irish people. Stephen ends his diary entry for 26 April with the famous declaration that could stand as a motto for many of the novelists of his day: “Welcome, O life! 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” (*P*, 252–53). The conjunction “and” in this little manifesto suggests the close but oblique relationship between the two goals the aspiring novelist has set for himself. The encounter with

experience seems deeply personal, while the forging of the conscience of the race has important political implications. Yet Stephen links the personal and political goals by claiming that the forging will take place in the smithy of his soul. The problem that has faced many literary critics in interpreting Stephen's project has been that the quest for an authentic form of a pure, inner experience seems at variance with the desire to transform the "race." If Stephen really wants to serve his race, then why does he leave Ireland and bury himself in books? Why does he not join the nationalist movement and fight for political independence? Or why not, at least, write a work that will rouse other Irishmen to political action?

Answers to these questions depend on a rather odd form of theology in which the idea of the racial conscience takes the place preserved in the Catholic tradition for the idea of God, the only "uncreated" being in Christian theology, while the actual living members of the Irish nation become the Church of this new religion. Stephen himself plays the role of Christ in this nationalist theology, redeeming by reshaping the conscience of his race. This theology, I shall argue, places an emphasis on the role of the race in shaping the individual's experience that has often been ignored in Joyce criticism.

Stephen's use of the expression "uncreated" has often been taken to imply that Stephen plans to create a brand new racial conscience from nothing (to "forge" in the sense of "inventing"). Most critics assume that Stephen wishes to break free from Irish tradition and to invent something entirely new, in a Godlike *creatio ex nihilo*. Seamus Deane writes of the passage: "Endlessly repeated experience is going to be made into something that has so far remained 'uncreated', . . . [as Stephen produces] a writing that is not embedded in or reducible to the categories of previous Irish experience" (*Portrait*, xli). It is true that in 1912, Joyce spoke of himself as "one of the writers of this generation who are perhaps creating at last a conscience in the soul of this wretched race" (*JJ II*, 344). By the time he finished *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1914 or 1915, however, Joyce came to a more significant theological formulation of the relationship between the artist and the people that seems to imply a rather different conception of the role of the artist. For Joyce, I shall argue, the artist's work involved not a *creatio ex nihilo* but a reconfiguration of the eternal forces that had formed the racial conscience. The artist's role was not to invent a new consciousness for the race but to epitomize the age-old racial conscience that created both the artist and his people.

There are a number of reasons to suspect that Stephen's project involves not so much the creation of something new as the reshaping of what is old.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that, in Christian dogma, *uncreated* is originally and most commonly used to refer to the Creator, who is “of a self-existent or eternal nature,” who precedes creation, and who is the source of the entire created world. By calling the racial conscience “uncreated,” Stephen suggests not that this collective soul remains to be invented, but rather that it is itself the source of all experience, something permanent like God and unlike all mortal creatures. Ibsen’s Brand, to whom Stephen alludes in this diary entry, says, for example: “I do not aim at anything that’s new, / I stand to champion the eternal law . . . / There is an end to all created things . . . / But there is one thing indestructible. / *That* is the uncreated soul of man . . .” (Ibsen, 49).<sup>1</sup> Both Brand and Stephen are proposing heretical views, since the soul of man and the conscience of the race are properly, in Catholic theology, created things, while God alone is uncreated.

Stephen himself is highly conscious of the theological implications of his language and particularly of the theology of creation. Earlier in the novel, he has listened to a sermon that dwelt on the problem of creation. The preacher tells him that God is “the supremely good and loving Creator Who has called [the] soul into existence from nothingness” and refers to the torment into which “the created soul” falls upon separation from God (*P*, 128). When Stephen later proposes to forge in the smithy of his soul the *uncreated* conscience of his race, he is placing the conscience of the race on a level with God, the uncreated, in opposition to his own soul, which is merely created. In “forging” the “uncreated” conscience of his race, then, Stephen will not be inventing something entirely new, but reenacting and thus reshaping an eternal substance that precedes and conditions all his personal experiences. Stephen’s experience, like the flames of the smithy, will give a new form to this substance, which he has inherited and which inhabits his soul.

Stephen’s obsessive concern with the debate between free will and determinism shows the importance of interpreting Stephen’s final gesture as I have suggested. Stephen’s ruminations on the idea of a first cause for the entire created world militate against the idea that he can create something new. Throughout the novel, Stephen is moved by the idea that his actions are at once free and determined, both the actions of his own will and the products of an endless chain of circumstances. The theological resonances of Stephen’s plan to “forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” fit in well with Stephen’s search for a solution to the problem of free will. In coming to a vision of himself as a Christlike redeemer figure at the end of the novel, Stephen believes he has resolved this

problem. Rather than claiming that his creative activity can invent something new, Stephen sees his action in terms of metaphors of shaping and remodeling the inert matter that has been granted to him by his Creator. He conceives of himself as “a priest of eternal imagination, transmuted the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life” (P, 221). What makes this transubstantiation possible is the mystical unity of the priestlike artist with the “conscience of [his] race.” Yet Stephen’s ambition passes beyond that of the imaginative priesthood. In the novel’s final chapter, he hopes to become a more powerful mediating figure between the eternal world of ever-living life and the daily bread of experience. In Christianity, the only “uncreated” being is God. In Stephen’s theology, it is “the conscience of [his] race” that is uncreated, and Stephen himself is its prophet, or perhaps its redeemer.

The religious crises that play such a central role in the novel lead Stephen toward his conception of himself as a priest or redeemer of the secular world and the race. At the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen rejects his mother, noting that Jesus did the same: “Jesus, too, seems to have treated his mother with scant courtesy in public” (P, 242). In a debate with his mother, he holds up “relations between Jesus and Papa against those between Mary and her son” (P, 271). He thinks of his relationship to his own family as comparable to the “mystical kinship of fosterage,” akin presumably to Jesus’ relationship to Joseph and Mary (P, 98). Read in this light, even the final sentence of the novel seems to recall the relations between Christ and God the Father as much as those between Icarus and Daedalus: “Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead” (P, 253). Even as Jesus stands in the place of humanity on the cross, He fears that His Father has forsaken Him. Just as Christ stands for all humanity in His death on the cross, Stephen plans to become a Christ-figure, redeeming his “Godforsaken” race by symbolically standing for the Irish nation. Like Christ, he is at once a creature (one who has been created) and one with the power to reshape the raw material with which the racial conscience has provided him. The racial conscience conditions Stephen’s experience, but, as a great soul, he in turn transforms the racial conscience. The encounter with reality that Stephen plans for Paris has not only a personal but a racial and national significance.

If Stephen sees himself as a Christ-figure, then the “uncreated conscience of [his] race” appears to be God, and the “race” approximates the church, the body of faithful in need of redemption. Conceptions of the Christ-figure as embodying the genius of the race may owe something to Joyce’s reading (in 1905) of Ernest Renan’s *Life of Jesus* and possibly also

David Friedrich Strauss's work of the same name (*JJ II*, 200; Gillespie, *Inverted Volumes*, 20). Strauss elaborated a Hegelian interpretation of the Incarnation, emphasizing the dialectical nature of the Christ-figure who shares the infinite capacities of God and the finitude of humans. Renan conceived of Jesus as embodying the characteristics of his race at the moment when it was being decisively transformed by its contact with Greco-Roman civilization. Stephen's conception of the "race" mixes notions of historical fate, biological inheritance or blood, and spiritual unity.

In his new theology, Stephen finds a place for a number of doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The *creatio ex nihilo*, God's creation of the universe out of nothing, concerns him first in the class of elements at Clongowes Wood when he ponders his own place in the universe, having written in his geography book, on successive lines, his location:

Stephen Dedalus  
Class of Elements  
Clongowes Wood College  
Sallins  
County Kildare  
Ireland  
Europe  
The World  
The Universe (*P*, 15)

Stephen wonders what belongs before the universe: "It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that" (*P*, 16). Here, Stephen understands God as a first cause of the universe, in a version of the ontological proof of Saint Anselm, who wrote: "What art thou, then, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be conceived? But what art thou, except that which, as the highest of all beings, alone exists through itself, and creates all other things from nothing? For, whatever is not this is less than a thing which can be conceived of. But this cannot be conceived of thee" (Stumpf, 99).<sup>2</sup>

What troubles Stephen next is that God has different names in different languages, a problem he eventually abandons after thinking, "though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same and God's real name was God" (*P*, 16). Stephen accepts that there must be some ultimate cause at the root of the way in which the world is ordered. The problem for

Stephen seems to be that each person can imagine God only in language, and that each language gives God a different name.

Stephen's very specific location has of course shaped his conception of God. A number of other aspects of the passage call attention to the shaping of Stephen's conception of the world by his nationality and particularly by Irish politics. Across from his "address" in the geography book, Stephen's classmate Fleming has written:

Stephen Dedalus is my name,  
Ireland is my nation.  
Clongowes is my dwellingplace  
And heaven my expectation. (*P*, 16)

Fleming has also colored in the picture of the earth in the geography book in maroon and green, which reminds Stephen of Dante's maroon brush for Davitt and green brush for Parnell. Stephen contemplates the coincidence: "But he had not told Fleming to colour them those colours. Fleming had done it himself" (*P*, 15). The lesson is that Fleming and Stephen get their values, including aesthetic ones, from their nation. When he comes to embrace the "conscience of [his] race" as that which is "uncreated," he will see in the values he has learned from his nation, rather than in a universal God, the first cause that has called his soul into existence from nothingness.

In college, Stephen's teacher Mr. Tate accuses him of heresy for his statement in a paper "about the Creator and the soul" that the soul should strive to imitate the perfection of the creator "without a possibility of ever approaching nearer" (*P*, 79; cf. Deane, *Portrait*, 293, and Gifford, 167). Stephen quickly corrects himself: "I meant without a possibility of ever reaching." In the final chapter of the novel, Stephen finally devotes himself to an imitation of Christ that implies the opposite heretical position: that he can actually reach divine perfection, and become God the Son.

Stephen, then, proposes not an absolutely original creation but a transformation of the ideal racial conscience he embodies through yet another encounter with the reality of experience. On the one hand, he wants to believe himself free to make his own moral choices. On the other hand, he sees that his very being, his moral agency, is the product of a personal and national history that he did not choose. Viewed subjectively from an ethical, "first-person" standpoint, Stephen is a free agent. Viewed objectively, from a sociological, "third-person" perspective, Stephen is the product of the laws of history, psychology, and biology. It is the intense conflict be-

tween his deterministic conception of the laws of the mind and his desire for autonomy that leads Stephen to seek in a dialectical conception of "experience" an escape from this central dilemma of human freedom.

Stephen's relation to his society shows an extreme form of a tension between determinism and free will, and his mystical unity with the race will allow him to resolve this tension. Stephen continually asserts that he can overcome his shaping by society: "You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (*P*, 203). He tells his friend Cranly that he aims "[t]o discover the mode of life or of art whereby [his] spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom" (*P*, 246). He sets himself the goal of complete autonomy, serving no end but his own. These statements have contributed to the conception of Stephen as an "individualist," or an adherent of "art for art's sake." Yet Stephen just as often expresses a conviction that his actions are part of a teleological plan that he himself can only vaguely sense. As a child, he is conscious of having been born to serve an unknown end: "in secret he began to make ready for the great part which he felt awaited him, the nature of which he only dimly apprehended" (*P*, 62). He frequently senses throughout the novel that his life is headed toward a predestined goal, "the end he had been born to serve yet did not see" (*P*, 165). Near the end of the novel, he tells Cranly that he was "someone else" in his childhood: "I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become" (*P*, 240).

He couples this sense of destiny with a skepticism of the capacity of the human mind to act in ways that are new. Toward the end of the novel, Stephen tells the dean of his college that he is "sure there is no such thing as free thinking inasmuch as all thinking must be bound by its own laws" (*P*, 187). If the mind does obey "its own laws," it meets the formal definition of "autonomy" (self-rule), but this autonomy does not constitute a Kantian freedom, since it involves no active will on the part of the thinker; thought is an automatic process, like breathing or the circulation of the blood. Stephen seems trapped in a determinism that suggests that his own thoughts can only develop in accordance with his instincts, his previous experience, and the nets in which that experience has captured him: "this race and this country and this life produced me. . . . I shall express myself as I am" (*P*, 203).

Joyce expressed himself in words similar to Stephen's when discussing Irish independence with Frank Budgen: "Ireland is what she is and therefore I am what I am because of the relations that have existed between England and Ireland. Tell me why you think I ought to wish to change the conditions that gave Ireland and me a shape and a destiny" (Budgen,



*Making of Ulysses*, 155). Today, we might refer to this shaping of the individual by the nation as an effect of "culture," but people in the first decades of this century tended to talk of nationality in terms of "race." Like Stephen, they tended to use the word "race" to refer to the complex amalgam of biological and cultural factors that made up their conception of the nation.

To overcome this persistent tension between determinism and free will, Stephen comes to understand the development of his personality as a dialectic; as his consciousness encounters reality, it actively transforms the world it perceives according to the categories it has derived from experience. While this reality conditions how Stephen's consciousness will perceive the outside world, each new encounter adds to Stephen's store of experience and thus transforms his consciousness. All experience is new in as much as it does transform Stephen's mind, but it is also old in that Stephen can interpret it only in accordance with the hundreds of thousands of encounters that have already created him. For this dialectical notion to allow Stephen a sense of meaningful freedom, Stephen must believe that the encounter between his consciousness and experience can create something essentially new, a synthesis of his mind with external reality that can allow him to do something more than enact the inevitable logic of history.

Stephen's capacity to live and create art in "unfettered freedom" depends on the transformation of "experience" into "everliving life." In order to accomplish this synthesis, he must find freedom in the knowledge that he has been shaped by forces beyond his control. The narrator-protagonist becomes, in Stephen's vision, the focus for a reawakening of national consciousness centered on the awareness that individuals are both subjects and objects of historical processes. He must find in the fact that his soul derives from an "uncreated" racial conscience the condition for a new type of freedom. He must think of himself as a type of world-soul, who in his individual actions also lives out the fate of the entire nation-race. He must awake from the nightmare of Irish history, not by escaping from that history but by allowing it to speak through him. Like the Christ described by Renan, Stephen must embody the genius of his entire race in order to be able to redeem it.

The idea of the novelist as national redeemer contributed to Joyce's reworking of a literary archetype of nineteenth-century realism, the novel of disillusionment. The disillusionment plot, of which Balzac's *Lost Illusions* is the prime example, brings the protagonist into conflict with a world of contingent reality where, in Lukács's phrase, the soul turns out to be "wider and larger than the destinies which life has to offer it" (*Theory*,

112). The protagonist goes out into the world expecting to conquer it, but instead finds that it conquers him. In *Lost Illusions*, the hero is Lucien de Rubempré, from whom Stephen borrows his motto “silence, exile, cunning” (*JJ II*, 385). Lucien is a young, naive, provincial genius who hopes to become a great author in Paris. Full of pride, and certain of his ability to impose his will on the capital, Lucien goes to Paris, rises to the top of the journalistic world, but then falls from grace. In the end, having lost all his illusions about his own significance, Lucien contemplates suicide, but ultimately survives, after selling his soul to the arch-criminal Vautrin.

Joyce’s reworking of the disillusionment plot typified the modernists’ rethinking of the logic of realist narrative forms. Novelists like Balzac developed a set of techniques for describing the complex interplay of personal identity and social role within a newly liberalized, industrial society. These techniques included the radical separation between the third- and first-person perspectives on the actions of individuals. This bifurcation corresponded to a liberal model of the nation-state. Individuals pursued their own private interests in the context of a shared public reality; these were the characters of the traditional realist novel, with their limited, first-person perspectives. On the other hand, the omniscient narrator acted as a neutral arbiter of the shared reality within which the characters interacted. The third-person narrator played a role similar to that of the state in liberal political thought, standing above and outside the various individuals who make up society. Modernists radically reconsidered the role of the omniscient narrator, guarantor of public reality. They scrutinized the distinction between an objective narrator and subjective characters with limited perspectives, giving life to a whole generation of narrator-heroes who, like Stephen, forged social realities in their own images. Their various attempts to unify the first- and third-person perspectives demonstrated the power of national myths to shape even apparently “objective” perceptions of reality.

Hugh Kenner, Wayne Booth, and others have noted the mingling of the character’s and the narrator’s voices in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, what Kenner has called Joyce’s “doubleness of vision” (Kenner, *Joyce’s Voices*, 82; Booth, 323–36). This formal technique, the mingling of third- and first-person perspectives on Stephen’s actions, serves to undermine the social and political assumptions of the realist novel. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* the intertwining of narrator’s and character’s perspectives makes the existence of the mature, socially sanctioned perspective problematic. The distinction between the outer world and the

mind of the protagonist is vague, and it is not always possible to separate perception from reality.

The most remarkable formal innovation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the disappearance of the narrator's "objective" social knowledge. For Balzac, an objective external reality exists, albeit one ruled by social conventions. Through encounters with these conventions, the hero learns to interpret "reality" (in the same way as everybody else). For Joyce, the shaping effects of consciousness are so important that the hero, by virtue of his perceptions, effectively transforms the outside world. This becomes clear in Joyce's use of a heightened form of novelistic irony, in which it is very difficult to separate the perceptions of the narrator from those of the protagonist. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* mingles objective third-person accounts with the subjective impressions of the growing artist. Not only does Joyce do away with quotation marks when relating the character's impressions, but he also severely limits his use of verbal markers, such as "Stephen thought." This narrative voice, then, represents an "objectivity" itself shaped by the same forces that shape the hero.

This collapsing of the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity allows Joyce to convert the disillusionment plot from a single, momentous event in the life of the protagonist into an indefinite process, coextensive with life itself. Stephen proclaims his desire to go to Paris and "encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience" at the end, not the beginning, of the novel, after he can already claim to have encountered experience 999,999 times. Whereas Balzac presents the reader with fully formed young adult characters who are ready to leave home for Paris, Joyce starts with an infant. Joyce thus presents the formation of character itself as a product of social forces, rather than (as in Balzac) the unique function of the intimate household.

The role of language itself in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* emphasizes the lack of a dividing line between the household and society at large. The novel begins with the protagonist's first attempts to make sense, in language, of the reality of experience, and it is through his many encounters with reality, always mediated by language, that his consciousness develops. As Stephen learns language, he also learns his place in history and in geography. Thus even his nursery song about a "wild rose" blossoming on a "little green place" leads him a little later in life to muse half-consciously on the possibility of Irish nationhood: "you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could" (P, 12).

As Stephen remarks to his friend Davin, “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight” (*P*, 203). One of these nets is language, which captures the soul in a particular way of encountering reality. Yet Stephen transforms this consciousness of the individual’s shaping by society into the material for a transfiguration of society through the individual. Through his manipulation of language in writing, Stephen hopes to overcome the dynamic of disillusionment and to convert the hostile, contingent “reality of experience” into the material of his own meaning-making process.

Around the time that he was completing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce read Vico (Bishop, 180–81), who argued that “the world of civilization has certainly been made by men . . . and its principles are to be found in the modifications of our own human mind” (Vico, para. 232). Stephen attempts something similar in finding in his own mind the ultimate product of the laws immanent in the world of civilization. Joyce also read Marx, who argues that while humans make their own history, they do not do so under circumstances of their own choosing. By recognizing that the ethical self he is now is a product of the historical forces at work in human society, that his mind is a product of human history, and human history is a product of the human mind, Stephen hopes to overcome the dynamic of disillusionment. His coming to consciousness is a gradual process that culminates in the epiphanic moments of the novel’s final chapter, a fulfillment of historical laws that will also lead to their transfiguration.<sup>3</sup> It will allow him to achieve the unity with the Irish race that raises his experience above the level of mere necessity and contingency.

Parnell’s adultery, fall from power, and death will play something like the role of original sin in Stephen’s Irish eschatology. Stephen hears of Parnell on the first page of the novel. He learns of Parnell’s death as he lies in the school infirmary where he has been imagining his own death (*P*, 24, 27). Later, he recalls that moment: “But he had not died then. Parnell had died. There had been no mass for the dead in the chapel and no procession” (*P*, 93). At the Christmas dinner, Stephen struggles to understand the argument between Dante, a family friend who condemns Parnell, and John Casey, who glorifies Parnell as “my dead king,” while Simon Dedalus bemoans the fate of his “Godforsaken priestridden race” (*P*, 39, 37). The next morning, Stephen attempts to write his first poem, a commemoration of Parnell (*P*, 70). Parnell, for Stephen, is both an Adam whose fall has terrible consequences for his entire (Irish) race and a failed Christ, who might have redeemed Ireland. Stephen imagines Parnell, like Christ, dying in his place. Parnell inspires Stephen, and Stephen imagines himself as

capable, through his writing, of redeeming Parnell's fall and repaying Parnell for having died in his place. Through his writing, then, Stephen will offer the sacrifice of his own soul to Ireland. Just as this act of martyrdom will save the Irish, however, it will also allow Stephen to achieve unfettered freedom because, in embracing his moral unity with the Irish race, he will reconcile his ethical self with his socially constructed identity. He will become both the first-person character who pursues his own ends and the third-person narrator who sees that all apparently free acts are in fact products of historical circumstance.

Stephen's choice of the word *race* to describe the source of the identity of his ethically free and sociologically determined selves points to his concern with achieving a moral unity of the nation as the basis for the new form of freedom he hopes to achieve through his writing. Stephen has promised to fly by the "nets" of "nationality, language, religion" before dedicating himself to the "conscience of [his] race," leading to much critical confusion. (One good reason for the confusion is the virtual impossibility of clearly distinguishing Joyce's own voice from that of Stephen on any internal textual evidence; cf. Booth, 323–36. I have written throughout of Stephen's project, except where referring to specific technical devices employed by Joyce.) His choice of vocabulary seems rather shocking since to affirm "racial" ties seems to involve accepting the idea of a biological essence of the nation, as opposed to the purely legal or political notions of membership in the community implied, for example, by the term "citizenship."

The biological content of Stephen's ideal does not sit well either with the older critical conception of Joyce as an apolitical individualist or with more recent attempts to find in Joyce a progressive, antiracist critic of capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism. In his groundbreaking *Joyce's Politics*, Dominic Manganiello summarizes and attacks the traditional view of Joyce as an apolitical artist. From Manganiello's discussion of Joyce's interest in anarchism emerges the conception of Joyce as a sort of ultraindividualist, a point of view very much in line with the earlier idea of Joyce as an apolitical defender of "art for art's sake": "For Joyce, the freeing of the individual was the main issue, indeed the only one" (232). Similarly, Manganiello asserts that "Stephen's mission of ennobling his country holds a new promise of freedom, since the artist asserts that the individual is more important than institutions such as Church and State" (41).

Two more recent attempts to find a different sort of politics in Joyce are Vincent Cheng's *Joyce, Race, and Empire* and Emer Nolan's *James Joyce*

*and Nationalism*. These two works share a salutary emphasis on Joyce's criticisms of liberal individualism, but whereas Cheng focuses on Joyce's opposition to imperialism throughout the world, Nolan is concerned primarily with Joyce's links to Irish nationalist cultural movements. Neither offers a satisfactory account of Stephen Dedalus's devotion to the "conscience of [the] race." Nolan notices the kinship with the Irish nationalist project but still sees Stephen as involved in a "resolutely individualistic self-fashioning" and, in line with most previous criticism, considers Stephen simply an aesthete (38, 44). Cheng tends to consider race primarily in terms of biological racial theory rather than in its full range of application, which could include cultural as well as biological phenomena. He therefore expects Joyce to oppose any notion of race, and in particular sees in Stephen's conception of race an overturning of an "English/Irish dialectic" (64). Cheng concludes that Stephen "certainly runs the risk of an apolitical aestheticism (such as Joyce has been accused of) in his concerns with an Aristotelian/Thomistic aesthetic theory" (74).

Manganiello, Nolan, and Cheng all seem bent on reclaiming Joyce for progressive politics, but Michael Tratner has suggested that Joyce seems to feel at least some sympathy for the efforts of Stephen Hero to create an art modeled on Gabriele d'Annunzio's ideal of the artist as a dictatorial hero who shapes the masses to his will (116–32). The Stephen of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* seems at any rate to have much in common with the younger Joyce, who wrote of the artist's role as a sort of midwife for the "nation that is to come." In "A Portrait of the Artist," the first sketch of what later would be the novel, Joyce uses the word *nation* in a sense akin to Stephen's use of the word *race*: "Man and woman, out of you comes the nation that is to come, the lightening of your masses in travail. The competitive order is employed against itself, the aristocracies are supplanted; and amid the general paralysis of an insane society, the confederate will issues in action" (*P*, 265–66). Several of Joyce's youthful critical statements seem similarly to participate in Stephen's "racial" conception of the Irish, notably his reference to the Irish, in "The Day of the Rabblement," as "the most belated race in Europe" (*CW*, 70). What, then, does Stephen mean by "race" and how can serving the race be linked to the project of individual freedom?

Stephen looks at the race as a body with which he can identify more fundamentally than with any other social group. His references to "race" contain echoes not simply of modern racist tracts like Arthur de Gobineau's *The Inequality of Human Races*, but also of older, "pre-scientific" conceptions of "race" as a group sharing a common lineage and fate. It is

in this latter sense that Milton's fallen angels frequently refer to the competition between their race and the race of mankind: "Shall we then live thus vile, the race of Heaven / Thus trampled, thus expelled to suffer here these / Chains and these torments?"<sup>4</sup> Part of the difficulty for Joyce's critics lies too in a confusion about the contemporary meaning of the word *race*. George Stocking has demonstrated the tendency among post-Darwinist anthropologists and philosophers to treat "race" as an amalgam of cultural and biological factors. The resulting amalgam did carry elements of the rigid biological determinism that, according to Vincent Cheng, Joyce "rejects and reverses" in his later fiction (27). Yet the concept of "race" still had the flexibility, in the early twentieth century, to refer not just to a rigid biologism but also to the "moral" factors, such as customs and institutions, that later anthropologists would distinguish as "culture" (see Stocking, 137-43). In common parlance, the concept "race" blurred the boundaries between the terms that the later liberal tradition would confidently differentiate as "race" and "culture."

One of the disturbing implications of this blurring, for progressive analyses of racism, is that the "cultural" determinism embraced by modern anthropology and cultural studies has common roots with the "racial" determinism it is meant to contradict (see Gumbrecht, "Everyday-World"). Both see the individual as decisively shaped by inheritance, whether biological or cultural. Today, the "natural" or appropriate response to the history of racial stereotypes of the Irish might seem to be to reject racial stereotyping outright. For Stephen Dedalus, however, and apparently also for Joyce, there was another possible response: to affirm Irish "racial" difference and find in it a source of strength. In doing so, Stephen shares many of the crucial assumptions of Irish nationalists whose overt political and cultural agenda he opposes. In particular, he rejects political activism in favor of cultural renewal and associates this cultural renewal with expressing the essence of the Irish race (see Foster, 450, 459).

Apart from the fact that he has inherited the notion from his father, one of Stephen's reasons for conceiving of the Irish nation as a "race" apparently stems from his conception of the race as a community to which a person belongs even before learning a language. Part of the fallen condition of the Irish race is that it has abandoned its own language in favor of the language of the conquerors. Stephen, whose idea of the race owes more than he would like to think to contemporary Irish nationalism, still rejects the nationalist program of reclaiming the Irish language: "My ancestors threw off their language and took another. They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life

and person debts they made? What for?" (P, 203). Stephen does not, however, imagine that he can find in the English language a pure and unmediated relationship with his race. He feels alienated in his use of English. When speaking to the dean, an English convert to Catholicism, he says to himself: "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 his language" (P, 189).

"Language" is one of the nets in which the Irish soul is captured upon birth. Stephen hopes to return to something even more primary, although he recognizes that he can do so only through language. Thus, he accepts the Gaelic League's conception of the Irish as alienated from themselves by their use of English, but rejects the solution of a return to Irish. Working out the implications of this alienation rather than seeking a nostalgic return to a lost origin will bring Stephen's soul out of the shadows.

Similarly, Stephen rejects the term *nationality* and much of the rhetoric of national renewal. Here again, he seems to be searching for a conception of Irish identity prior to its identification with the formal politics of citizenship in a modern liberal state. In this respect, again, he models his concept of membership in the race on notions of community he has inherited from the church. As Cranly tells Stephen just before he rejects Christianity, "[t]he Church is not the stone building nor even the clergy and their dogmas. It is the whole mass of those born into it" (P, 245). In the race, Stephen finds an even more primary source of communal identity. He embraces the concept of the "race" because one belongs to the race by right of birth, before learning a language or being baptized. Whether it depends primarily on one's blood or on one's being born in a particular location is a problem that Stephen considers without resolving. It seems likely, from the evidence of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, that Joyce himself gradually broadened his definition of the race to which he belonged.

Most of the eleven uses of the word *race* in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which have been enumerated by Vincent Cheng, confirm this association of the racial conscience with an identification prior to all other forms of membership in social groups (Cheng, 17). Several point in particular to the link between race and maternity, suggesting one of the reasons for Stephen's refusal to serve his "fatherland"—namely, that fatherhood itself is ultimately a "legal fiction" and maternity is a more intimate source of identity (U, 9.844). Because he has rejected the intimate sphere,



Stephen's own contribution to the race will be strictly spiritual, but he nevertheless links it closely with reproduction. It is in women, and especially peasant women, that he expects to find the racial conscience embodied. He listens with fascination to Davin's story of a peasant woman who had asked him to spend the night with her. Stephen pictures this peasant woman as "a type of her race and of his own, a batlike soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness" (*P*, 183).

Similarly, thinking of a girl who had flirted with him, he feels that "perhaps the secret of her race lay behind those dark eyes upon which her long lashes flung a quick shadow. He had told himself bitterly as he walked through the streets that she was a figure of her country, a batlike soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness" (*P*, 221). He resents the fact that she will confess to a Catholic priest, "one who was but schooled in the discharging of a formal rite," rather than to himself, "a priest of eternal imagination" (*P*, 221). He also hopes to communicate this essence to the daughters of Irish patricians. As he contemplates leaving the Church, Stephen observes a party in the Maple Hotel, and wonders, "How could he hit their conscience or how cast his shadow over the imaginations of their daughters, before their squires begat upon them, that they might breed a race less ignoble than their own? And under the deepened dusk he felt the thoughts and desires of the race to which he belonged flitting like bats, across the dark country lanes" (*P*, 238). This passage ends with the observation: "him no woman's eyes had wooed." Stephen associates racial conscience with women and reproduction, or perhaps virgin birth, since he will merely cast his shadow over the imaginations of the young women.

Stephen's hostility to politics, whether democratic and progressive or organic-nationalist, confirms this association of race with the inheritance of a group membership prior to all cultural associations. The racial conscience is "natural," not in the sense that it belongs outside history or culture, but in the sense that it precedes the individual's formal incorporation into the cultural groups associated with the nets of "nationality, language, religion." Stephen recognizes the significance of formal politics, and particularly of Parnell, in having shaped the Irish race, but he seems to view politics as a lost opportunity and thus treats with skepticism any attempts at political renewal. While shaped by events in the public realm, Stephen's concept of the race can be of little use in the formulation of a pragmatic political agenda. It is as hostile to movements of cultural renewal aimed at securing the rights of the "nationality" or the "fatherland" as to progressivist theories of history aiming at the rights and worth of the

“human individual.” Stephen even seems to sense this irrelevance of his forging of the racial conscience to formal politics somewhat guiltily in his various exchanges with the democrat MacCann.

While Stephen’s own theory of the race does not serve any explicitly political agenda, it nonetheless participates in a number of contemporary political trends.<sup>5</sup> In particular, his conception of himself as a redeemer eerily prefigures the sacrificial language surrounding the uprising of Easter, 1916, the year of publication of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In seeking to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race, Stephen draws upon the organic nationalist conception of the intimate relationship between the individual and his ethnic group, which precedes all cultural ties and fundamentally conditions the individual’s experience. It is more primary than culture, but it necessarily implies a combination of historical, cultural, biological, and spiritual conditions.

In this ultimate existential unity between the individual and the race, Stephen, much like the Gaelic nationalists whose merely superficial nationalism he opposes, seeks to overcome the conflict between the individual’s moral autonomy and his status as a product of a given set of historical and social forces. Stephen rejects religion because it proposes a false standard of human conduct, language because it is a purely conventional social structure that for the Irish in particular always involves oppression, and nationality because it reflects the merely formal, institutional conception of community implicit in modern liberal politics. He seeks instead a moral unity not with all of humanity nor with the principle of individuality, not with the nation nor the fatherland, but with the conscience of his “Godforsaken priestridden race.”

Joyce’s narrative technique seems to offer some hope that Stephen will succeed in achieving this mystical union. At the end of the novel, the transcription of Stephen’s diary, written in the first person, offers an apparent resolution of the tension between first- and third-person modes of narration; the young man with his subjective impressions becomes the narrator and a purely subjective first-person account replaces the tainted objectivity that has constituted the narrative up to that point. The intensified conflict between the third- and first-person perspectives in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* leads to a collapsing of the two voices, and this collapsing corresponds to Stephen’s attempt to overcome the bifurcated perspective on life in this world implied by the realist literary tradition and by liberal politics. The emergence of Stephen’s apparently authentic voice in the diary relies of course on the Romantic trope of the attainment of objectivity through immersion in subjectivity. Like Wordsworth in the *Prelude*,

Stephen comes to realize the retrospective unity of his whole life. The fact that his entire experience has contributed to the formation of his present identity seems to lend his current subjective impressions an air of objective necessity. The diary represents the final step in Stephen's coming to consciousness of his own destiny and his overcoming of the bifurcation between his social and ethical selves.

Stephen's statement of his own aesthetic theory suggests that Joyce saw his experiments with narrative technique as aspects of an attempt to overcome the bifurcation I have described between sociology and ethics, between the third- and first-person perspectives on human action. Stephen suggests that the "epical form" emerges "out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal" (*P*, 215). He gives as an example the "old English ballad Turpin Hero which begins in the first person and ends in the third." Stephen compares this transformation to the creation: "The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, paring his fingernails" (215). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* proceeds in the opposite direction, from the third person to the first person. At the end of the novel, Stephen begins his diary and thus becomes the narrator. Joyce is not retreating from the "epical" to the "lyrical," so much as reuniting the lyrical "I" with the epical third person (or, in the terms I have been using, the ethical, subjective "I" with the sociological, objective third person).

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* the artist reenters his creation to overcome the distinction between lyric and epic. If the accomplishment of the epic resembles in Stephen's theory the mystery of creation, the achievement of Joyce's modernism resembles the mystery of God's incarnation, which permits redemption. After Stephen has explained his aesthetic theory, he and Lynch take shelter under the arcade of the national library. Lynch complains: "What do you mean by prating about beauty and the imagination in this miserable Godforsaken island? No wonder the artist retired within or behind his handiwork after having perpetrated this country" (*P*, 233). The echo of Stephen's father's complaint about the "Godforsaken priestridden race" is unmistakable. Stephen will resolve on a new type of art in which the artist enters into his creation and in doing so he will redeem the Godforsaken island. The debate with Lynch outside the National Library seems an essential step in Stephen's development of his

theory of a new type of art that will allow him to forge the racial conscience, and such an art must, like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, achieve a synthesis between purely lyrical subjectivity and epical objectivity, must reinsert the creator in his creation, must reunite the artist with his country.

Stephen's other main statement of his aesthetic theory in the final chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* confirms the centrality of the problem of race to his literary experiments. In expounding aesthetics to Davin, he points out that different races have different ideals of beauty: "The Greek, the Turk, the Chinese, the Copt, the Hottentot . . . all admire a different type of female beauty" (*P*, 208). One explanation of this variety is that aesthetics originates in a purely physiological impulse, which differs according to the different biological makeup of the various races: "every physical quality admired by men in women is in direct connection with the manifold functions of women for the propagation of the species" (*P*, 208). Stephen rejects this explanation as leading to "eugenics rather than to esthetic." He denies the reasoning he associates with Darwin, which ultimately reduces the differences among races to purely physical terms.

Stephen does not, however, propose as an alternative that beauty itself inheres in aesthetic objects or in women or that beauty can be judged universally. Rather, he suggests that each beautiful object appeals to a certain common set of relations presumably present in human minds: "though the same object may not seem beautiful to all people, all people who admire a beautiful object find in it certain relations which satisfy and coincide with the stages themselves of all esthetic apprehension. These relations of the sensible, visible to you through one form and to me through another, must be therefore the necessary qualities of beauty" (*P*, 209). This solution allows Stephen to reconcile the fact that each race interprets the world differently with a notion of a universal human nature. For if the beautiful differs for each race, then paradoxically the way to reach the universal in human nature may be to submerge oneself in the particularities of one's own race. Only by embodying a racially specific perspective as perfectly as possible can one arrive at an embodiment of the shared human condition of belonging to a particular race. This suggestion bears a resemblance to some modern multiculturalist theories and in particular to the notion of a "politics of identity," but it bears an equally striking resemblance to the racist theories that Joyce's work is often seen as opposing.

Just as Balzac's disillusionment plot reproduces certain crucial assumptions of nineteenth-century liberalism, Stephen's proposal to overcome

disillusionment embodies early-twentieth-century theories of the nation-state. In particular, like many contemporary "organic" nationalists, Stephen conceives of the individual not as autonomous but as largely (perhaps entirely) determined in all his actions by the circumstances of his birth and by membership in a given national community. For Joyce, this determining force works primarily through historical conditioning but also perhaps through biological inheritance (Joyce never clearly makes the distinction). The liberal conception of a necessary bifurcation between an intimate sphere dominated by ethics and true moral freedom and a social sphere operating according to purely material laws of necessity has disappeared for Stephen. The nation represents the cultural and genetic inheritance that cannot be overcome or ignored, and the nation speaks through the writer. The individual is a product of racial or historical forces that he does not control, but by embracing this condition, he can achieve the mystical union with his race that will allow him to convert his determination into a source of freedom.

In the novel generally, as Lukács wrote, life is a going out onto an earth in which we are exiled from God, a world ruled by merely conventional morality, with no divine sanction for authority or divine guarantee of justice. A redemption on the earth is impossible in the realist novel; the world is only the world and cannot become paradise. In the modernist novel, the possibility of regaining paradise on earth becomes central again, and the nation becomes the means for this redemption. The national bond represents the possibility of transcending the apparent meaninglessness of life on earth, of "transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (*P*, 221). Through the novelist-hero's mystical union with the racial conscience, the experience of life in a world abandoned by God is redeemed and the word again made flesh.

### Notes

1. In calling the soul of man "uncreated," Brand also calls it "indestructible." He is asserting its permanence against the mutability of everyday life. See Gifford, 287.

2. Cf. St. Anselm, *Proslogium*, chap. 5; Thomas Aquinas's five proofs of the existence of God are essentially variations on the ontological argument and are somewhat closer to Stephen's own ways of thinking. The five proofs Aquinas mentions are: from motion (God as the first mover, or *primum mobile*); from the nature of efficient cause (God as the first efficient cause); from possibility and necessity (God as the being that has of itself its own necessity); from the gradation to be found in things (God as the cause of being, goodness, and every other perfec-

tion); from the governance of the world, or from teleology (God as the intelligent being by whom all natural things are directed to their end). The last, teleological, argument seems to weigh heavily with Stephen. See Stumpf, 93–104.

3. I borrow the terms *fulfillment* and *transfiguration* from Seyla Benhabib's discussion of the conception of history in neo-Marxist critical theory.

4. Belial's speech at the conclave of the fallen angels, *Paradise Lost*, II.194–96. Beelzebub proposes at the same conclave that the fallen angels seek out the legendary new world: "another world, the happy seat / Of some new race called Man, about this time / To be created like to us" (II.347–49). The poet writes that Beelzebub got the idea of corrupting mankind from Satan, "For whence, / But from the author of all ill could spring / So deep a malice, to confound the race / Of mankind in one root, and Earth with Hell / To mingle and involve, done all to spite / The great Creator?" (II.380–85). Satan congratulates Sin and Death on having proven themselves worthy to be his offspring: "High proof ye now have giv'n to be the Race / Of Satan" (X.385–86). "Race" has a wide range of cultural resonances, illustrated by the various definitions offered of it in the *OED*.

5. Stephen's conception of the race is indebted to the Irish nationalist movement's rhetoric of racial regeneration and thus indirectly to the systematic racial theories of Gobineau, Robert Knox, and John Beddoe. Cheng offers an interesting discussion of Knox and Beddoe (19–41). Michael Tratner has also suggested that the use of the term *race* in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is in part a residue of Joyce's obsession with racial purity and the possibility of a more explicitly political unifying of the race in *Stephen Hero* (see Tratner, 130–32). On the sacrificial language surrounding the Easter, 1916, uprising, see Foster, 477–84.