

Stephen, Emma and Irish Women:
A Feminist Reading of *A Portrait of the Artist
as a Young Man* and *Stephen Hero*

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I.

Is James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus a misogynist? This essay aims at finding a clue to answer this uneasy question. Stephen's position toward Irish women is discussable against two premises. First, he surely falls into the pitfall of the binary opposition of virgin and harlot deduced from Catholicism, even though he consciously challenges it. Secondly, the tawdriness of his circumstantial reality in contrast with the idealized romantic view of women has a poignant significance to Joyce's whole scheme. Stephen's problematic thoughts on the woman question render his ambitious project of being a national writer questionable due to his self-centered male ego. The narrator's distance from the would-be young artist's questionable position toward Irish women thus deserves our attention. A scene highlights the drawbacks of Stephen's romantic idealism: "The cattle which had

seemed so beautiful in the country on sunny days revolted him and he could not even look at the milk they yielded” (*Portrait* 63; hereafter abbreviated as *P*). The sharp contrast of fantasy and reality is obvious. While the aspiring young artist is preoccupied with the desire or fantasy of installing himself as an artist from a distance, it appears “so beautiful in the country on sunny days.” But all the fantasy has its sordid reality, “the bases of life” from which he intends to divert himself (*Stephen Hero* 35, hereafter abbreviated as *SH*). Stephen’s romantic perception of women and love is in the same vein as his containment within ideal dream that is detached, or at least not sufficiently integrated with a keen awareness of the bases of life. He feels the significance of the Irish sordid reality in his own way. It is the starting point for a writer’s literary vision, but Stephen establishes an insurmountable barrier between the bases of life and the heroic dream. He decides to follow his dream. But the bases of life are not easily passable. They interfere with the pursuit of his dream. Life does not easily comprise the fantasy of the cattle which seems “so beautiful in the country on sunny days.” More importantly, “clots of liquid dung and steaming brantroughs” are symbolic of the bases of life. They sicken Stephen’s mind. The impassable question of how to integrate his dream with the bases of life is crucial in his growth as an artist. This is an unmistakable admonition from Joyce to a young colonial artist.

The binary logic of the romantic ideal and sordid reality, plus Stephen’s tilt toward his dream typically, appear particularly in his perception of Irish women. The female characters are fairly two dimensional in Stephen’s thoughts. They are either perceived as threatening or enchanting, seductive or aloof. Their fictional portraits are largely contingent on Stephen’s narcissistic projections and misogynist frame of mind (Henke, *James Joyce* 4-5). It is presumptuous to conclude that the female characters are merely Stephen’s narcissistic projections and misogynist frame of mind. Nevertheless, it is at least arguable that the female characters are usually socially stereotyped and simplified to the extent that they lose their own individuality in Stephen’s thoughts. The image of pure and white virginity is typically projected onto Mercedes, the heroine from *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Stephen's romantic reverence of Mercedes demonstrates how the logic of narcissistic projections and misogynist frame of mind functions:

The vastness and strangeness of the life suggested to him by the bales of merchandise stocked along the walls or swung aloft out of the holds of steamers wakened again in him the unrest which had sent him wandering in the evening from garden to garden in search of Mercedes. And amid this new bustling life he might have fancied himself in another Marseille but that he missed the bright sky and the sunwarmed trellises of the wineshops. A vague dissatisfaction grew up within him as he looked on the quays and on the river and on the lowering skies and yet he continued to wander up and down day after day as if he really sought someone that eluded him. (*P* 66)

The first sentence suggests Stephen's aloofness from the vastness and strangeness of life. The details of sordid reality trouble his mind. "The bales of merchandise" conjures up an image of life from which Stephen does not just turn his eyes and run away. Stephen's wandering in the evening from garden to garden is expressive of his desire of extrication from the vastness and the strangeness of life. He dreams of a different world that provides him with a kind of romantic consolation. It is the fictional world of Mercedes, the world of "the bright sky and the sunwarmed trellises of the wineshops." Stephen here obviously identifies himself with the Count of Monte Cristo, a romantic hero.

Young Stephen projects his feeling of vague dissatisfaction onto someone that eluded him. Mercedes plays a comforter to Stephen's romantic fantasy of pursuing something beyond tawdry reality:

Only at times, in the pauses of his desire, when the luxury that was wasting him gave room to a softer languor, the image of Mercedes traversed the background of his memory. He saw again the small white house and the garden of rose-bushes on the road that led to the mountains and he remembered the sadly proud gesture of refusal which he was to make there, standing with her in the moonlit garden after years of estrangement and adventure. (*P* 99)

Mercedes is a fairy-tale princess residing in the small white house and the garden of rose-bushes. All the images around Mercedes projected by Stephen indicate that the young romantic hero patterns his behavior on the tragic romantic ineptitude of Hamlet than on the effective romantic talent of Leopold Bloom (Norris 148). Stephen becomes the victim of her refusal. But Mercedes is not simply reduced to a platonic lover of a fairy tale. She ignites a sexual desire which Stephen intentionally forfeits. His willed negation of sexual desire is effected by Catholicism's doctrine on marriage and sex. Catholicism stigmatizes the sexual desire out of wedlock as a sin. As Cranly sharply points out, Stephen is still a son of Christianity. But the desire of flesh is not a scarecrow to trod down effortlessly: "He returned to Mercedes and, as he brooded upon her image, a strange unrest crept into his blood. Sometimes a fever gathered within him and led him to rove alone in the evening along the quiet avenue" (*P* 65). The virgin image of Mercedes is later imposed onto Emma Clery. He cannot yet easily violate Virgin Mary, as he is still steeped in Catholicism: "At present I have a reluctance to commit a sacrilege. I am a product of Catholicism; I was sold to Rome before my birth. Now I have broken my slavery but I cannot in a moment destroy every feeling in my nature. That takes time" (*SH* 139). It takes some time for Stephen to escape Catholicism. Stephen's vigorous wrestling with sexual desire is thus understandable and even sympathetic. His sorely guilty conscience about the imaginary violation of Emma arises from his projection of the image of the Virgin Mary onto her. A kind of religious image association functions in his mind between the Virgin Mary, Mercedes, and Emma. The desire of flesh naturally brings about a feeling of shame:

Shame rose from his smitten heart and flooded his whole being. The image of Emma appeared before him, and under her eyes the flood of shame rushed forth anew from his heart. If she knew to what his mind had subjected her or how his brute-like lust had torn and trampled upon her innocence! Was that boyish love? Was that chivalry? Was that poetry? The sordid details of his orgies stank under his very nostrils. (*P* 115)

Stephen again contrasts the romantic love of innocence and the sordid details of his orgies. He strains to deny the other aspect of love. The widely discussed issue of Stephen's misogynist propensities seem explainable in terms of his romantic attitude toward women, oscillating between virgins and whores (Tindall 92-93).¹⁾ Stephen's feeling of guilt about Emma chiefly comes from a religious projection of the Virgin Mary onto her. The narrator does not, however, neglect to indicate that the aspiring young artist's sinful feeling is a result of his biased view of Emma. Stephen blames Emma hastily and carelessly when she does not prove to fit Virgin Mary's image projected by him:

In his heart he deplored the change in her for he would have liked nothing so well as an adventure with her now but he felt that even that warm ample body could hardly compensate him for her distressing pertness and middle-class affectations. In the centre of her attitude towards him he thought he discerned a point of defiant ill will and he thought he understood the cause of it. (*SH* 67)

Stephen "thought he understood" Emma's life, but he did not. The narrator keeps a delicate distance from the young lover.

1) The traditional Christian dichotomy between virgin and whore, Madonna and temptress in Joyce's writings is frequently discussed and used as the evidence for the limit of Joyce's position toward the woman question (Nolan 169). But the negative critics of Joyce on the issue of the woman question do not fully pay attention to the contradictory evolvement, even though it is far from a linear one, in Joyce's elaboration on the woman question. Even *Dubliners* demonstrates the complexities and contradictions in Joyce's attitude toward the (Irish) woman question. Joyce questions and disrupts the rigid borderline between harlot and the Virgin Mary. For example, Polly in the story "The Boarding House" is dubbed perverse Madonna (*Dubliners* 57). Joyce renders Polly a mixture of harlot and Madonna, demonstrating his sensitiveness to such social issues as high percentage of spinsterhood and celibacy at the turn of the century in Ireland.

II.

Stephen's frequentation to the dark slimy streets of Nighttown and his sexual affairs with prostitutes lead him to a troubled initiation into the question of sexuality. His submission to sexual desire brings about a sinful feeling in him. His religious education is instrumental in enforcing this sinful feeling. He is the prefect of the sodality of the Blessed Virgin. His public religious position is ironically effective in making his visits to Nighttown despicable to himself. His romantic fascination with Mercedes and Emma expresses the faultiness in his preoccupation with a platonic love. Stephen transforms virgins into whores in his imagination: "A figure that had seemed to him by day demure and innocent came towards him by night through the winding darkness of sleep, her face transfigured by a lecherous cunning, her eyes bright with its dim brutish joy" (*P* 99). As rendered later in Joyce's extended elaboration on Nighttown in "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, Nighttown reveals the dark side of bourgeois social order. The Irish phallogocentric culture establishes an unbridgeable gap between ladyship as the symbol of virginity and harlotry as evil. The dividing line is not rigidly fixed. Stephen pinpoints that an Irish woman's position in her conjugal relationship is not in nature much different from 'the public women':

A woman's body is a corporal asset of the State: if she traffics with it she must sell it either as a harlot or as a married woman or as a working celibate or as a mistress. But a woman is (incidentally) a human being and a human being's love and freedom is not a spiritual asset of the State. . . . The woman in the black straw hat gave something before she sold her body to the State; Emma will sell herself to the State but give nothing. (*SH* 202-03)

Stephen's harsh critique comes after his disillusionment with Emma's entrapment in the Christian ideology of chastity, although this is only his adjudication on his part. His trenchant critique is relevant to a large extent in disclosing the fact that the existence of harlots is concomitant to bourgeois marriage (Wills 86).² Incisive

and powerful as Stephen's fulmination against bourgeois marriage is, he cannot easily find an outlet from the Christian binary logic of virginity and harlotry. As he confesses remorsefully, he is still a son of Catholicism. Taken by itself, Stephen's unfavorable image of the harlot may indeed amount to nothing more than his notorious misogyny steeped in Christian ideology regarding femininity. Against the risk and danger in the desire of flesh after his sexual affair with a young harlot, Stephen finds naturally a loophole from the sin of adultery through a prayer to the Virgin Mary: "There was still time. O Mary, refuge of sinners, intercede for him! O Virgin Undeiled, save him from the gulf of death!" (P 125). Ironically enough, the place where Stephen finds a feeling of comfort is in the harlot's arms:

In her arms he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself. But his lips would not bend to kiss her. . . . He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind, conscious of nothing in the world but the dark pressure of her softly parting lips. They pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech; and between them he felt an unknown and timid pressure, darker than the swoon of sin, softer than sound or odour. (P 101)

The harlot functions as the maternal image against which Stephen stabilizes his identity. The anonymous whore's strange seductiveness for young Stephen is juxtaposed with the uneradicable maternity. The whore is an ambivalent figure of masculine aggression and feminine protection. She demands erotic surrender, yet shelters his adolescent charge in a tender, maternal embrace (Henke, "Stephen Dedalus" 91). Stephen's visits to Nighttown result from his ongoing search for the

2) Joyce's dislike of formality in bourgeois marriage is relevant here: "I cannot tell you how strange I feel sometimes in my attempt to live a more civilised life than my contemporaries. But why should I have brought Nora to a priest or a lawyer to make her swear away her life to me?" (*Selected Letters* 61). His deep-down discomfort with bourgeois conjugality leads Joyce to a sincere thinking on the likelihood of a more desirable relationship between two sexes in the deep understanding of the opposite sex elaborated in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

symbolic substitute for his dead mother for whom he feels guilty. In the prostitute's maternal embrace, Stephen surrenders to her, body and mind.

Stephen's release from Catholicism in the tryst with a harlot does not last. The scenes of Father Arnall's retreat speech on hell, penance, punishment plus Stephen's confession of adultery demonstrate the iron discipline the Irish Church performs. After the sexual affair, the Christian mental consciousness again takes hold of him. Stephen takes pains to negate and despise sexual desire as the swamp of spiritual and bodily sloth in which his whole being had sunk. Father Arnall's speech drives Stephen to penitence and confession of adultery: "No escape. He had to confess, to speak out in words what he had done and thought, sin after sin" (*P* 126). Since Roman Catholicism teaches that salvation outside the church is impossible, a mortal sin can be absolved only through a ritualistic contrition, confession to a priest, and the performance of penance. Only a priest is entitled to hear confession and forgive the sinner. Responsibility for the truth is passed off to a priest in the process of confession. Stephen's reflection on the doctrine of confession captured in free indirect style grapples humorously with the validity of the religious judgment on morality and immorality. The final judgment is transferred to the higher-ranking priest in the religious order. The final truth is not yet confirmed. It is continuously deferred. Religious control over sexuality is functional in the ritual of confession. Sexual repression includes celibacy until marriage, considering masturbation a form of perversion and the body a source of sin (Pearce 143). Confession is ritualized by the reconstruction of sexual discourse modeled on a rigorous and detailed confessional investigation. To be forgiven, one should confess all his secrets of sexuality and admit his sins. The ritual of confession is an expression of the church's power extended into an individual's personal spheres of behavior and sexual desires. To sum up, confession is a kind of examination of conscience, as Foucault puts it succinctly: "at the heart of Christian penitence, there is the confessional, and so the admission of guilt, the examination of conscience and arising from that the production of a whole body of knowledge and a discourse on sex" (Foucault 186). The sinful feeling drives

Stephen to confession: "Confess! Confess! It was not enough to lull the conscience with a tear and a prayer. He had to kneel before the minister of the Holy Ghost and tell over his hidden sins truly and repentantly" (*P* 139). The second sentence illustrates the significance of confession as a religious ritual. It is not enough just to repent in one's mind. A confessor "had to kneel" and "tell over his hidden sins." It is a process of brainwashing. With a decisive disapproval of brainwashing, Stephen in *Ulysses* argues that he should kill two enemies in his brain, the imperial British State and the holy Roman catholic church (*U* 1.643-44).

Catholicism requires celibacy until marriage and stigmatizes any sexual relationship out of wedlock as immoral. Sexual relationship out of the tenets of Catholicism is not limited to aberration. It is an unforgivable sin. Only priests have the authorial power to forgive, as the priest forgives Stephen: "You are very young, my child, he said, and let me implore of you to give up that sin. It is a terrible sin. It kills the body and it kills the soul. It is the cause of many crimes and misfortunes. Give it up, my child, for God's sake. It is dishonourable and unmanly" (*P* 145). The priest does not dare to name Stephen's sexual affair literally. He calls it just "a terrible sin." The priest's stigmatization is rendered in Catholicism's unquestioned discourse on sexuality. More importantly, the priest is respected as the protector of social morality. Who decides and measures whether a behavior is moral or not? Joyce's treatment of sexuality poses this issue. The priest's indictment of sexual sin functions in the constituted discourse of sexuality, which is produced and promulgated by the religious apparatus of sexuality. Confession leads Stephen to the rigid discipline of soul and body. The narrator describes the unnaturalness and futility in the young sinner's endeavor to discipline his body and sexual desire. Stephen regards this discipline as the due course of intricate piety and self-restraint. But the evoked desire of flesh is not easily quenched: "he felt his soul beset once again by the insistent voices of the flesh which began to murmur to him again during his prayers and meditations" (*P* 152). Stephen's relationship with Emma Clery could be discussed in terms of his oscillation between religious prayers and meditations and the insistent inner voices of flesh.

III.

Emma seems oddly muted in Joyce's recasting of *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait*. She loses her name. Only her initials remain. The deletion of her name bespeaks the loss of her subjectivity. She is reduced to a symbol of Irish women against which the aspiring young male artist's desire of establishing himself as a national writer is measured. The woman question is not a big issue in *Stephen Hero*. But a certain weight, if nothing else, is at least given to Irish women's voices in the characterization of Stephen's mother, sisters, and Emma. The female characters have their own individualities and voices in *Stephen Hero*. This marks a crucial difference between *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*. In *A Portrait* the female characters appear only as the social types who are deprived of their own individualities, which reflects Irish men's general attitude toward the opposite sex. As Joyce's brother Stanislaus Joyce puts it in reminiscence, women do not interest Irishmen except as streetwalkers or housekeepers (S. Joyce 164). Stephen's relationship with Emma is no exception. The heavy-weighted narrative in *A Portrait* focuses only on Stephen's thought of Emma, not *vice versa*. It is to some extent inevitable, for the narrative scheme is winnowed around the young protagonist. An advantage of this narrative spotlight is to invite the reader to understand Stephen more directly. This highly focused narrative on Stephen's consciousness pays the price, keeping certain truths about Emma's existence out of the reader's attention, and preventing the reader from sizing up her situation with a balanced point of view. Some reasons for this narrative scheme are explainable. *A Portrait* may be comparatively categorized as, in Bakhtinian terms, a monophonic novel where a dominant voice, i.e. Stephen's voice, is prevailed, which sets *A Portrait* apart not only from *Dubliners*, or *Stephen Hero*, but also from such later works as *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

Emma's loss of full name in *A Portrait* has a different ring for the reader, if seen positively, indicating Joyce's sensitive reference to Irish women's sterile situation. While Stephen frequently makes a harsh rejoinder to Irish Catholicism, he

does not, ironically enough, fully escape from Catholicism's dogmas about women: "women are seducers and betrayers. Stephen hastily attributes the troublesome Irish history of betrayal to Irish women: Stephen wished to avenge himself on Irish women who, he says, are the cause of all the moral suicide in the island" (*SH* 200). He runs the risk of stigmatizing Irish women as Ireland itself in her fallen state. But his blame is far from balanced. Davin's tale of a pregnant peasant woman who gave him milk and beckoned to him from a half-opened door confirms Stephen's harsh critique of Irish women. His contempt of Irish women's utmost servility hits an aspect of their barren situation, as many female characters in Joyce's fictions testify. But it is a strike on the surface, falling short of hitting the core of the issue. Stephen fails to delve into the cause of their servility, even if he denounces the Irish history of betrayal. Stephen hastily depicts the anonymous farmer's wife as a type of her race:

The last words of Davin's story sang in his memory and the figure of the woman in the story stood forth reflected in other figures of the peasant women whom he had seen standing in the doorways at Clane as the college cars drove by, as a type of her race and of his own, a bat-like soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness and, through the eyes and voice and gesture of a woman without guile, calling the stranger to her bed. (*P* 183)

For Stephen, woman is a weaker and more engaging vessel (*SH* 112). Stephen concludes that Irish women are easily committed to the game of betrayal, calling the stranger to her bed. The stranger is associated with British colonialism in Stephen's thought. Stephen repeats the British conception of Ireland as the feminine. He plays the game by the ruler's rule. His thought is in a similar vein with the gendering dynamic by depicting the Irish as spiritually or psychologically feminine and so attuned to the private sphere of Great Britain's colonial life (Valente 39). Ireland is usually dubbed as feminine Erin while Britain is called masculine John Bull. Stephen's harsh fulmination against Irish women's passive

submission to British imperial power brings him ironically to his dislike of Ireland, even though his attitude toward Ireland, on a careful reading, proves to be more complex and ambiguous. Stephen is trapped in the imperialist gender allegory, hastily claiming that Irish women have “a batlike soul” (*P* 221). The term bat is a slang for prostitute (McCarthy 97).

Stephen’s misogyny is coupled with a sweeping criticism of all existing social institutions of colonial Ireland, particularly with a total condemnation of the Irish Church and British imperialism. The scene of a debate over the Irish Revival remarks his disenchantment with the rigid logic of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Stephen’s analysis of the drawbacks of the Irish Revival is in itself pointed: “No, no, it is Irish peasant wisdom: he balances the priest against the policeman and a very nice balance it is for they are both of a good girth. A compensative system!” (*SH* 64). The young dissenter pinpoints the interrelatedness of Irish Catholicism and British colonialism. Irish nationalism and the Irish Revival share the anachronistic assumption of the aboriginal image of Irish peasant. Neither is free from the compensative system. Stephen’s critique undoubtedly reflects Joyce’s double-edged attack on what goes by the name of Irish nationalism and any unrealistic cosmopolitanism, leading Joyce to his singular isolation in the civic world of the Irish culture. Stephen, like his creator, refuses to be put in the group of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Stephen’s sweeping criticism of the existing social system is, however, deadlocked at the point of the Irish woman question. His male-centered egoism finds its aggravated form in a distorted misogyny: “He acknowledged to himself in honest egoism that he could not take to heart the distress of a nation, the soul of which was antipathetic to his own” (*SH* 146). The distress of Ireland illustrates itself in Irish women’s sterile life, which Stephen does not fully acknowledge. His relationship with Emma Clery sheds light on what is lacking in his intentional distance from the distress of Ireland.

Emma is a “dark full-figured girl” (*SH* 46). Her appearance is enriched with the dark power against male authority. She is an Irish Revivalist with the general scheme of her nationalising charm. She is also a feminist, demanding the equal

higher education for women. Stephen is distrustful of these movements that involve Emma. The implication of his discomfort is twofold. His disillusionment with Irish nationalism and feminism is excusable in that these movements have some unmistakable defects. Stephen suspects Emma for her fairly heavy reliance on Irish nationalism and feminism. Stephen's dislike of the narrow-minded nationalism and feminism is well captured in his detachment from a self-acclaimed male feminist McGann in *Stephen Hero*. McGann's negative characterization effectively reveals some couched problems of Irish feminism that is not integrated with Irish women's real sufferings. As McGann's case shows, Irish feminism remains a lip service. McGann's description is fraught with satiric tone: "McGann enjoyed the reputation of a fearless, free-spoken young man but Stephen found it difficult to bring him to any fixed terms on matters which were held to be dangerous ground" (*SH* 49). Stephen's cold response to Emma's defense of equal education is thus partly understandable: "She coquetted with knowledge, asking Stephen could he not persuade the President of his College to admit women to the college. Stephen told her to apply to McGann who was the champion of women" (*SH* 66-67). Stephen stops here. His harsh retort indicates that some problems are also couched in his misogyny. He considers Emma's suggestion as coquetry with knowledge, falling far short of true understanding of her situation. Both Emma's involvement with feminism and her demand of equal education sound rather innocent and insincere. But her efforts to become an independent woman, without herself being reduced to a man's mere sexual object, are no mean achievement. The reader should be left with a complex sense of both her strength and her deepening peril. Stephen is not fully balanced between his rare, but sincere acknowledgement of Emma's subjectivity and his infamous misogyny, as Stephen's conversation with his friends demonstrates:

- Might I ask you what you are talking about? Said Stephen urbanely.
- Indeed you might, answered Heron. We saw her[Emma], Wallis, didn't we? And deucedly pretty she is too. And so inquisitive! . . . She's ripping, isn't she, Wallis?

A shaft of momentary anger flew through Stephen's mind at these indelicate allusions in the hearing of a stranger. For him there was nothing amusing in a girl's interest and regard. All day he had thought of nothing but their leavetaking on the steps of the tram at Harold's Cross, the stream of moody emotions it had made to course through him, and the poem he had written about it. (*P* 77)

Stephen feels a movement of anger at his friends' indelicate allusions to Emma. His friends regard Emma as a sexual object. Stephen refuses his friends' stereotypical remarks on women. For this reason, Stephen's rather provocative argument in the following conversation should be read cautiously: "Tell me, for example, would you deflower a virgin? Excuse me, Stephen said politely, is that not the ambition of most young gentlemen?" (*P* 246). His response is ironic, for he does not pretend to become a "young gentleman." For gentlemen, deflowering of a virgin is not an issue. Male authority appropriates it.

Stephen's position is ambiguous here. On the one hand, he derides the ambitions of young gentlemen who wish to deflower a virgin. On the other hand, Stephen allows the male appropriation or representation of women, as his treatment of Emma showcases. Emma's life is filtered and interpreted in Stephen's thoughts as he dimly acknowledges: "And if he had judged her harshly? If her life were a simple rosary of hours, her life simple and strange as a bird's life, gay in the morning, restless all day, tired at sundown? Her heart simple and wilful as a bird's heart?" (*P* 216). Stephen's obvious jealousy of Emma's seeming flirtation with Father Moran reveals what is wrong with his misogyny:

Stephen watching this young priest and Emma together usually worked himself into a state of unsettled rage. It was not so much that he suffered personally as that the spectacle seemed to him typical of Irish ineffectualness. Often he felt his fingers itch. Father Moran's eyes were so clear and tender-looking, Emma stood to his gaze in such a poise of bold careless pride of the flesh that Stephen longed to precipitate the two into each other's arms and shock the room even though he knew the pain this impersonal generosity would cause

himself. (*SH* 66)

This description is replete with ironies. Stephen's self-deception is obvious. He switches his personal jealousy to the clichéd opinion of Irish women whom he regards as a bat-like soul. The reason for his jealousy and anger at Emma's flirtation is that she seems, in Stephen's thought, unreservedly submissive to Catholicism. It is partly true, but Stephen again displaces his personal feeling of jealousy and frustration with a heroic rebuttal against the plague of Catholicism. A strategy of mental containment is at work here. Emma becomes a figure of a bat-like soul in the repression of his emotional disruption: "He had told himself bitterly as he walked through the streets that she[Emma] was a figure of the womanhood of her country, a bat-like soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness, tarrying awhile, loveless and sinless, with her mild lover and leaving him to whisper of innocent transgressions in the latticed ear of a priest" (*P* 221). It is understandable that the young lover laments the futility of Platonic love with his Mercedes. The narrative tone uniquely indicates that Stephen exaggerates his emotional frustration. The next step to overcome his bafflement is to degrade Emma consciously: "Her loud forced manners shocked him at first until his mind had thoroughly mastered the stupidity of hers" (*SH* 66). The narrator here clearly keeps distance from the frustrated lover's solipsistic male point of view. A crucial reason for his dislike of Catholicism arises from its contempt of human nature: "Contempt of [the body] human nature, weakness, nervous tremblings, fear of day and joy, distrust of man and life, hemiplegia of the will" (*SH* 194). His critique is pointed and insightful. With this insight, he carefully listens to the inner voice of his soul:

He submitted himself to the perfumes of her body and strove to locate a spiritual principle in it: but he could not. She seemed to conform to the Catholic belief, to obey the commandments and the precepts. By all outward signs he was compelled to esteem her holy. But he could not so stultify himself as to misread the gleam in her eyes as holy or to interpret the

[motions] rise and fall of her bosom as a movement of a sacred intention.

(*SH* 156)

Stephen contrives a sort of mental control over emotion. His mental consciousness takes pain to discern a spiritual principle, but it does not work properly. He surrenders himself to emotion. His candid response to emotion is yet flawed and precarious.

A difficulty in imagining such a sexual relationship of mutual respect is found in the young misogynist's neglect of his lover's own subjectivity. The projected virgin image of Emma is not far from a harlot's image. Stephen spies Emma from the window of Father Artifoni's study. He proposes a sexual bargain to her:

– Goodby, Emma ... I felt that I wanted to say that to you for my own sake but if I stand here in this stupid street beside you for much longer I shall begin to say more ... You say I am mad because I do not bargain with you or say I love you or swear to you. But I believe you hear my words and understand me, don't you?

– I don't understand you indeed, she answered with a touch of anger.

– I will give you a chance, said Stephen, pressing her hand close in his two hands. Tonight when you are going to bed remember me and go to your window: I will be in the garden. Open the window and call my name and ask me to come in. Then come down and let me in. We will live one night together one night, Emma, alone together and in the morning we will say goodbye.

– Let go my hand, please, she said pulling her hand away from him. If I had known [if] it was for this mad talk ... You must not speak to me any more, she said moving on a pace or two and plucking her waterproof out of his reach. Who do you think I am that you can speak to me like that?

– It is no insult, said Stephen colouring suddenly as the reverse of the image struck him, for a man to ask a woman what I have asked you. You are annoyed at something else not at that. (*SH* 198-99)

This rather long quotation about Stephen's experience with Emma is concrete enough to check any tendency toward a favourable oversimplification of his

position toward her. Stephen's ignorance of Emma's feelings and her vulnerability to humiliation is not mistaken. The narrator keeps a distance from Stephen, asking the reader to do the same thing. When Emma senses the problems couched in Stephen's seemingly progressive thoughts of free love, the young protagonist is no longer equal to such trustworthiness as her partner wants. The narrator keeps a critical gaze on Stephen. The scene jeers at his misogyny. The narrative tone tilts in Emma's favor. The troubled misogynist suggests that a woman give herself freely, naturally demanding a bargain of body from her. What Stephen fails to catch is the nature of this free giving of one's own will. He draws a naive conclusion that his suggestion is a fair bargaining in free will. Stephen is surely solipsistic.

After their meeting, Stephen tries to conjure up a logic of self-defense. Emma is quite right in detecting some problems couched in Stephen's intellectualism. She feels embarrassed by Stephen's rationalist conception of love. But if this is so, what does the apparent impossibility of his winning over Emma mean? Emma does not thereby offer any answer to the question of male authority and female passivity. Both the facts that she does not follow Stephen's suggestion, resulting in disappointment and hatred, and that Stephen does not understand why she rejects him, are expressive of the impossibility of their love in mutual respect. After Emma's refusal, Stephen again blames her for insincerity or stupidity:

The general attitude of women towards religion puzzled and often maddened Stephen. His nature was incapable of achieving such an attitude of insincerity or stupidity. By brooding constantly upon this he ended by anathemising (*sic*) Emma as the most deceptive and cowardly of marsupials. He discovered that it was a menial fear and no spirit of chastity which had prevented her from granting his request. Her eyes, he thought, must look strange when upraised to some holy image and her lips when poised for the reception of the host. He cursed her burgher cowardice and her beauty and he said to himself that though her eyes might cajole the half-witted God of the Roman Catholics they would not cajole him. . . . It did not strike him that the attitude of women towards holy things really implied a more genuine emancipation than his own and he condemned them out of a purely suppositious (*sic*) conscience. He exaggerated

their iniquities and evil influence and returned them their antipathy in full measure. (*SH* 210)

The narrative tone in the quoted passage turns away clearly from the limit of Stephen's free thoughts on love and his flamboyant stricture against women's submission to the half-witted God of the Roman Catholics. His insensitivity to Emma's subjectivity is not yet dramatically and painfully brought home to him. He is still self-defensive. The ironic tones in the above description successfully refute a common notion that the narrator is mostly in favor of the young protagonist, revealing that Emma must not, any more than the narrator, deny her own voice. Joyce's description of Stephen's distinctive neglect of Emma's subjectivity in *Stephen Hero* requires the reader to maintain a close and attentive reading of *A Portrait* where the narrator often favors Stephen at the expense of the female characters. Stephen's misogyny inscribes a fatal scar on the portrait of the artist as a young man, insofar as Stephen's fear of woman and contempt for sensuous life are among the many inhibitions that stifle his creativity (Henke, "Stephen Dedalus" 102). Stephen's self-imposed exile at the end of *A Portrait* is thus risky in falling short of a real freedom from the soul-stifling Irish reality if he does not pay due attention to his contemporary Irish people, especially Irish women.

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Abstract

Stephen, Emma and Irish Women: A Feminist Reading of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephen Hero*

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This essay aims at finding a clue to answer the following question: Is Stephen Dedalus a misogynist? Stephen's position toward Irish women is discussable against two premises. First, he surely falls into the pitfall of the binary opposition of virgin and harlot deduced from Catholicism, even though he consciously challenges it. Secondly, the tawdriness of his circumstantial reality in contrast with the idealized romantic view of women has a poignant significance to Joyce's whole scheme. Stephen's problematic thoughts on the woman question render his ambitious project of being a national writer questionable mainly due to Stephen's self-centered ego. The narrator's distance from the would-be young artist's questionable position toward Irish women thus deserves our attention.

The binary logic of the romantic ideal and sordid reality, plus Stephen's tilt toward his dream typically appear in his perception of Irish women. The female characters are fairly two dimensional in Stephen's thoughts. They are either perceived as threatening or enchanting, seductive or aloof. Their fictional portraits are largely contingent on Stephen's narcissistic projections and misogynist frame of mind. Stephen's resort to the dark slimy streets of Nighttown and his sexual affairs with prostitutes lead him to a troubled initiation into the question of sexuality. His submission to sexual desire brings about a sinful feeling in him. His religious education is instrumental in enforcing his sinful feeling.

The female characters have their own individualities and voices in *Stephen Hero*. This marks a crucial difference between *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*. In *A*

Portrait the female characters appear only as the social types who are deprived of their own individualities, which reflects Irish men's general attitude toward the opposite sex. Women do not interest Irishmen except as streetwalkers or housekeepers. Stephen's relationship with Emma is no exception. Stephen's self-imposed exile at the end of *A Portrait* is thus risky in falling short of a real freedom from the soul-stifling Irish reality if he does not pay due attention to his contemporary Irish people, especially Irish women.

■ **Key words** : Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Stephen Hero*, feminism, the woman question

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