

“Pulcra Sunt Quae Visa Placent”:
Colonial Ambivalence, Third Space, and
Altering Perception in
Stephen Dedalus’s Aesthetic Theory

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The eye altering alters all.

—William Blake

I. Introduction: Aesthetic Theory and Colonial Reality

When Lynch “surlily” complains of Stephen Dedalus’s long explication of his aesthetic theory based on Thomism in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (hereafter *A Portrait*), he seems to regard the aesthetic theory as inapplicable to the realities of Ireland: “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” (215). Stephen does not (know how to) answer, yet Lynch’s remark inadvertently offers a crucial framework for situating Stephen’s theory within the context of colonial

Ireland as it echoes Simon Dedalus's sardonic condemnation of Catholic Ireland that "We are an unfortunate priest-ridden race . . . A priest-ridden Godforsaken race!" (37). Put together, the remarks of Simon and Lynch sound highly ironic: the expressions such as "miserable" or "Godforsaken" are unexpected since, from the Catholic standpoint, the Irish status of being "priest-ridden" should be good for its "sheep."

By having Stephen stay interestingly silent on Lynch's question, Joyce seems to want readers to consider some questions: Could a colonized subject be apolitical by doing away with the colonial reality besetting him? Is Stephen's theory really an attempt to escape the "miserable" reality of Ireland? If not, what would a colonial artist look like in such political chaos that Ireland suffers, as is violently embodied through the debate at the Christmas dinner table in the first chapter of *A Portrait*?

If *A Portrait*, from the beginning to the end, is meant to be full of the discourses of politics and ideologies, as we find it, Stephen's aesthetics, though seemingly apolitical, are inseparable from Irish colonial reality where Stephen is situated. As he affirms the traumatic influence of colonial experience on his art: "This race and this country and this life produced me . . . I shall express myself as I am" (*P* 203), Stephen's aesthetic theory is not fin-de-siècle art for art's sake. Nor is Stephen's radical Blakean recalcitrance toward contemporary ideologies and Orthodox Catholicism—evident in his famous "*Non serviam*"—an apolitical or ahistorical gesture. Rather, the bold announcement is very political as resistance against any authoritarian domination of oppressive religion or such ideology that is attributed to the Empire. Stephen in *Stephen Hero* clarifies the link between art and reality: "Art is not an escape from life. . . . Art, on the contrary, is the very central expression of life" (86). If "Joyce's politics and aesthetics were one," as Richard Ellmann asserts (90), Stephen's aesthetic theory appears to be arising from the engagement in the contemporary colonial reality of Ireland.

Based on this perspective, I argue that Stephen's aesthetic theory works toward suggesting an alternative way of seeing or perceiving reality that creates a third

space free from colonial ideologies in Ireland.¹⁾ In so doing, I examine how Stephen’s aesthetic theory develops and draws from a double-bind colonial experience deeply rooted in his concerns over Irish Catholicism and British imperialism. I particularly engage the three phases of perception, *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* to show how the theory works to produce mimicry of and ambivalence toward the dominant ideologies, especially in terms of the concepts of *claritas* (or *quidditas*) and *visa*, “postcolonial” strategies that negotiate between Catholic tradition and British modernity. Then, I specifically analyze how a famous epiphany, the “bird girl” scene, as an application of the theory, exemplifies a third space where many important aspects of the theory appear.

II. “That thing which it is and no other”: Searching for *Claritas* as a Third Space between Tradition and Modernity

Regarding Stephen’s aesthetic theory, it is crucial to discuss how Joyce’s early fictions demonstrate a certain tension between tradition and modernity in Dublin. Indeed, the urban landscape of Dublin at the turn of the century is suggestive of many symptoms of the already-existing tension. While, as a metropolis enjoying highly modernized apparatuses and commercial systems compared to its rural counterparts in Ireland, the city was full of “the musty rote of anachronistic classrooms”; education in Dublin’s schools primarily consisted of the medieval “trivium,” grammar, logic, and rhetoric, which was based on the principles of St. Ignatius, Aristotle, and St. Thomas Aquinas, and was “solid as they had been when

1) For Homi K. Bhabha, the third space is a mode of representation which engenders new possibility through the production of new “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” forms of cultural meaning and production that blur the limitations of existing boundaries and call into question established categories of culture and identity (208). Thus, this space is an ambivalent site where cultural meanings and representations are not fixed, which enables subversion of colonial authority and ideologies.

they informed the mind of Europe” (Kenner 3). Dublin appears as a colonial city with its divided space, like what Fanon illustrates in *The Wretched of the Earth* (38-39), and with coexistence, if not peaceful, of tradition and modernity.

“An Encounter” in *Dubliners* makes a good example of how such a Joycean Dublin reveals a clash between the traditional and the modern, especially with its representations of incipient urban landscape along with the rise of mass production by British capitalism. The short story builds on a parallel between some mischievous Catholic students playing “Indians,” that is, Native Americans, and Father Butler among the Christianizing missionaries to the “New World,” a pattern that ironically refers to the colonizer-colonized relationship. The students imagine “adventure” to be like that of “the Wild West,” which involves the mass production and consumption of such highly popular “chronicles of disorder” and “doors of escape” as *The Union Jack*, *Pluck*, and *The Halfpenny Marvel* (*D* 17). Father Butler’s condemnation of the story series “The Apache Chief” in *The Halfpenny Marvel*, is particularly disturbing: “The man who wrote it, I suppose, was some wretched fellow who writes these things for a drink. I’m surprised at boys like you, educated, reading such stuff” (*D* 18). For Irish Catholicism, elements of the modern world are somewhat unwelcome attractions to be ignored or reproached as the Church trades in the fate of timeless “souls.” As for the students, their consumption of popular culture combines with their enjoyment of the urban landscape in Dublin: “We pleased ourselves with the spectacle of Dublin’s commerce—the barges signalled from far away by their curls of woolly smoke . . . the big white sailing-vessel which was being discharged on the opposite quay” (*D* 20). The boys’ mischievous trip for modernity, however, is countered by a weird old man, whose authoritative “gaze,” which terrifies the narrator of the story, replicates the traditional Catholic authority of Father Butler (*D* 25). Here, this encounter seems to indicate the peculiar Joycean tension between tradition and modernity as “a form of mutual determination whereby the traditional reveals its susceptibility to the intervention of modern[ity],” while “the modern unveils its hidden desire to express its longing for totality and unity in traditional terms” (Castle 177-78).

Joyce makes this tension in *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero* contested through Stephen Dedalus, who constantly feels ambivalent toward Irish Catholicism.²⁾ The comparison of the Church to other institutions of colonial domination in his early works informs the Irish writer’s serious awareness of the problematic “priest-ridden” history of Ireland. In *Stephen Hero*, for instance, “The Roman, not the Sassenach, was for [Stephen] the tyrant of the islanders” (*SH* 53). And *Ulysses*’s Stephen is more provocative in continuing this basic framework as he despairingly explains a double-bind situation to the Englishman, Haines: “I am a servant of two masters . . . an English [‘the imperial British state’] and an Italian [‘the Roman Catholic’]” (*U* 1.638). Here, Haines’s response, “It seems that history is to blame” (*U* 1.647-9), may tactfully blur the traumatic sufferings arising from the complicity between the British Empire and Irish Catholicism by means of universalism. Within the complicity, a “nightmare” is not history in general, but *Irish* history, from which Stephen tries to “awake” (*U* 2.377), as he recollects later a Blakean aphorism, tapping his brow: “[I]n here it is I must kill the priest and the king” (*U* 15.4436-7).

In this sense, Stephen’s aesthetic theory in *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero* is an early condensed theoretical landscape whereby Joyce illustrates the discussed (post)colonial ambivalence and tension between Stephen and Catholicism and between him and the Empire.³⁾ On Stephen’s subjectivity entering into that space, his aesthetic theory does not retrogress into Catholic tradition, for the Catholic tradition that has shaped Stephen’s subjectivity is destabilized by modernity. Also,

2) Of course, whether Joyce eventually abandoned Catholic faith is debatable. See Boyle, 36-79.

3) Mulrooney considers *A Portrait* an important postcolonial text: “[p]ostcolonialists concerned with evaluating the politics of Joyce’s modernism have chosen *Ulysses* and to a lesser extent *Finnegans Wake* as their preferred texts. *A Portrait* . . . has been largely ignored. . . . *A Portrait* publicly rejects Catholic nationalism’s claims to speak for all Ireland, even as it resists the solution of transnationalism by manifesting a sustained engagement with the Irish-Catholic discourses of Joyce’s youth” (471). I would add one more text, *Stephen Hero*, to his argument.

since that modernity is caused by colonial intervention, Stephen's aesthetic theory does not follow the trajectory that typifies the European Bildungsroman, in which a subjective figure in a relatively stable situation finally achieves "self-fashioning."

The "Catholic" Joyce or Stephen, then, faces a difficult, multifaceted task: establishing his modernist aesthetics and indicating a new "Irishness" *through* Catholic tradition, while simultaneously moving beyond that tradition's inherent Eurocentric universalism; moreover, he must resist being totally subsumed into modernity. In any case, Stephen is doomed to depart from the safe, stable space of "grace" that Catholicism as Irish native tradition could continue to offer. In Stephen, however, the dominant discourse of the Church involves a "self-disruptive" mode of representation so that a (post)colonial ambivalence "enables a form of subversion" (Bhabha 160).⁴⁾

For this complicated aspect, Joyce represents Stephen as preoccupied with expounding his aesthetic theory in the fifth chapter of *A Portrait*, while walking with Lynch the various streets of modernized Dublin. Two different things interact during that walk: first, Stephen's theory based on traditional Thomism, which is far too delicate to apply to the second, which is the modern urban landscape of Dublin, as represented in, for example, the noisy "dray" (or lorry) that distracts Stephen (*P* 209). As in the Baudelairean "flânerie" of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, modernity is overshadowed by colonial exploitation and interpellation of various ideologies in Dublin, where the results of colonization intervene in his aesthetic theory, in the course of Stephen's "flânerie" throughout Dublin.⁵⁾

This conflict is dramatized as early as *A Portrait* through adolescent Stephen, who becomes vulnerable to the modernity of Dublin: "A vague dissatisfaction grew up within him as he looked on the quays and on the river and on the lowering skies

4) In relation to this subversion, Bhabha indicates the colonial ambivalence as "split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference," which makes colonial discourse become contradictory and inevitably self-disruptive (153).

5) See Duffy, 47.

and yet he continued to wander up and down day after day as if he really sought someone that eluded him” (P 66). The word “dissatisfaction” suggests how materialism and commodities in the city disturbingly operate in the consciousness of “Catholic” Stephen. Accordingly, after sleeping with a prostitute on a street in Dublin and confessing that “sin” to a priest, Stephen devotes to “mortifying” his senses as thoroughly as he can, especially his eyes to “shunning” visual realities in the city (P 150). Here, Garry Leonard’s discussion offers an insight into how Stephen’s aesthetic theory is a “symptom” of the urban landscape of Dublin:

In dramatizing Stephen’s formulation of an aesthetic theory, Joyce reveals that theory is a means of monitoring subjectivity, criminalizing “perversion” and, in the guise of a neutral exploration of “the beautiful,” providing the entry point for the policing of desire. Aesthetic theory must be designated as asexual in order that it might also pose as ahistorical. By showing Stephen Dedalus in the throes of inventing a modernist aesthetics, Joyce also shows him compulsively vacuuming out the dirt of eroticism from such a theory, thereby creating a sanctioned space free of the seductions and importunities one encounters in an urban landscape. (92)

Situating Stephen’s explanation of “the beautiful” within an urban landscape, Leonard regards Stephen’s aesthetic theory as a space where Stephen protects himself from interpellations of both modernity and Catholicism.

The three phases of perception, *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* (or *quidditas*), in Stephen’s aesthetic theory in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait* work to ground Stephen’s position as an Irish colonial subject searching for such space, a third space in between the traditional and the modern. In the first and second phases of the Thomistic apprehensions—*integritas*, *consonantia*—the aesthetic theory in *A Portrait* initially reveals Catholic ideologies that Stephen internalized. Regarding *integritas*, which he translates into *wholeness*, Stephen takes a material thing, a “basket,” in a street of Dublin, as an example to suggest that the subject can observe a single unified object: “You apprehend it as *one* thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness. That is *integritas*” (P 212). Stephen in

Stephen Hero asserts that “Your mind to apprehend that object divides the entire universe into two parts, the object, and the void which is not the object. To apprehend it you must lift it away from everything else: and then you perceive that it is one integral thing, that is *a* thing. You recognize its integrity” (*SH* 212). This assertion is identical to essentialists’ binary opposition between the self and the other.

With *consonantia*, Stephen seems to indicate the heterogeneity of the basket: “You apprehend it as complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts” (*P* 212). Nonetheless, rather than perceiving that there are objects of “the Other” around it, Stephen finally excludes them, “the rest of the visible universe which is not basket” (212). This example of *integritas* and *consonantia* shows how Stephen’s attempt to establish a dominant gaze of a subject toward an aesthetic object signifies and reinscribes European essentialism in which the subject locates something as unified and balanced.

Unlike the phases of *integritas* and *consonantia*, Stephen’s aesthetic theory yields a very different interpretation at the last phase of apprehension, *claritas* (or *quidditas*), as *claritas*, understood as clarity or wisdom in standard Latin-English translation, which is for the idiosyncratic Stephen, the “whatness of the thing” (213). We know by “whatness” that Stephen means beauty. But questions should be asked: Should “whatness” be understood as something that a thing emits, attached to the thing, but at the same time, floating from it? Or is it a kind of essence that is existent inside the thing? Whatever the case, it is clear that that “whatness” is linked with the theory of epiphany that Stephen claims in *Stephen Hero*, which finds the thing “as it is,” namely, beauty: “It is just in this epiphany that I find the third, the supreme quality of beauty” (*SH* 211).

Significantly, though the expression “the supreme quality of beauty” sounds compatible with the Thomistic divine that points to Heaven, Stephen’s “whatness” indicates the ground. By saying “that thing which it is and no other” (*P* 213), Stephen’s concept of “whatness” locates a material quality of an object in reality as combined with certain spiritual aspects, a notion that moves away from the

Platonic concept of an object that Aquinas was concerned about, “‘symbolism or idealism’ (the notion that the object is merely the shadow or symbol of some other reality)” (Peake 64). For Stephen, “radiance” at the stage of *claritas* should be discovered in the reality of everyday life, as the epiphany is “reduced simply to revelations of whatness rather than of soul” and does not “imply the existence of an all-encompassing Unity” (Beebe 288). Stephen’s comparison of “a spiritual state” to modern medical terms, such as “cardiac condition” (*P* 213), which echoes a claim that “the modern spirit is ‘vivisectiv’” (*SH* 186), confirms this phase of “whatness” as a profoundly secular epiphany.

This concept of a secular epiphany, associated with the appropriation of Thomistic “*visa*,” assures how “all-seeing” and “all-knowing” divine eyes are combined with aesthetic eyes gazing at everyday things, a formation that refers to “whatness.” The secularized aesthetic eyes on worldly objects are *en rapport* as manifest in *Stephen Hero*, where Stephen’s interpretation of Thomistic *visa* baffles a college president:

- Pulcra sunt quae visa placent. He seems to regard the beautiful as that which satisfies the aesthetic appetite and nothing more—that the mere apprehension of which pleases. . . .
- His remark would apply to a Dutch painter’s representation of a plate of onions.
- No, no; that which pleases the soul in a state of sanctification, the soul seeking its spiritual good.
- Aquinas’s definition of the good is an unsafe basis of operations: it is very wide. He seems to me almost ironical in his treatment of the “appetites” (*SH* 95)

Stephen modernizes Thomistic *visa* in order not to confine “the beautiful” within “spiritual good” that refers to religiosity. Just as the “whatness of the thing” in *A Portrait* ultimately excludes something divine associated with essentialism, Stephen contends that beauty found in the material world should “please” an artist’s *visa*, not God’s, in terms of his definition of beauty, “that is beautiful the apprehension

of which pleases” (P 207). Indeed, this interpretation decisively differs from the dominant Catholic notion that Father Arnall ferociously advocates in his “hellfire” sermon in the third chapter of *A Portrait*: “the worst damnation consists in this, that the understanding of man is totally deprived of divine light and . . . turned away from the goodness of God” (P 127). For Father Arnall, a “soul” must never be “shut off from the presence of God . . . the beatific vision” (132), and only “in the state of grace when God looked upon it with love!” can a soul be “beautiful” (140).

At this point, some questions should be asked: What kind of whatness would come up if the aesthetic eyes Stephen advocates are focused on a material object? Can we say that whatness is where the divine and the worldly negotiate as one’s eyes try to project something divine (in a secularized way) onto the material in modern society? How would Stephen’s aesthetic eyes be able to help Stephen create his own way of representing Ireland or Irish identity between the forces of Irish Catholicism and British imperialism?

Central to answering these questions is the concept of morality, as Stephen radically departs from Aquinas, “a *moral* theologian,” who “wished that poetic ‘representations’ would ‘induce to truth’” with respect to *claritas/quidditas* (Noon 41). Removing Catholic morality from Thomistic *visa* means the disruption of the good-evil binary, as Stephen hints: “This word [*visa*], though it is vague, is clear enough to keep away good and evil which excite desire and loathing” (P 207-8). More importantly, the dominant Catholic concept of beauty combined with morality informs the colonial intervention of the British Empire driven by a Christianizing mission, for it involves “the salvation of one’s soul,” as Father Arnall claims (110). This notion holds that the souls of indigenous peoples must be saved from their “evil” sins and that they must be turned to God’s eyes for the process of civilization in which Catholicism and Protestantism see things no differently.

As it registers such a colonizing mission, morality hampers the development of his concept of autonomous (or postcolonial) Irish art and artists. In “Oscar Wilde: The Poet of ‘Salome,’” Joyce blames the “English authorities” for Wilde’s

downfall: he refutes the English view on Wilde as “a monster of perversion” who emerged inexplicably from “the modern civilization of England,” describing him as “the logical and inevitable product of the Anglo-Saxon college and university system” (*CW* 150). For Joyce, Catholic morality associated with imperialism led Wilde, who otherwise would have exemplified Irish art, to an early end.

In all, Stephen’s credo of *claritas*, *consonantia*, and *integritas*, is the strategic product of a colonial subject’s activity of redefinition and reapplication expressed in his ambivalent position in Irish history. Given that Aquinas is believed to be “the greatest doctor of the Church, the angelic doctor” (*P* 127), as Father Arnall contends, Stephen’s “Applied Aquinas” represents a mimicry, that is, “almost the same but not quite,” working toward a third space (Bhabha 127). That mimicry proposes a strategy to destabilize the dominant narrative of Thomistic ideology that pervaded Western Europe. And the opposition “between essentialist logocentrism and subversive plurability” that persists in Stephen’s mind makes this mimicry possible (Cheng 254).

III. “She was . . . gazing out to sea”:

Encountering an Epiphany and Altering *Visa*

The secularization and demoralization of Thomistic *visa* informs the discursive relationship between a subject and an object since aesthetic eyes, which seek “whatness” of things in reality, are not as stable and dominant as God’s divine eyes. Stephen in *Stephen Hero* initially suggests that a subject is active: Aquinas believed that “it is for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care” (211). On the one hand, it is true that the subject apprehends or appropriates the object as his/her aesthetic object through the facility of vision: “[t]he moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised” (*SH* 211). Regarding this interaction within the epiphany, Kenner asserts the importance of active envisioning: “The epiphany is the reward of intense contemplation; not a tranced stare, but precisely the active

groping of a spiritual eye seeking to adjust its focus to what is there” (147).

On the other hand, it is dubious that such activeness of a subject is always the case, especially when a “secular” epiphany is expected to occur: is an object always passive just because it is observed by a subject? It should be noted that Stephen underscores the agency of an object in *Stephen Hero*: “The thing achieves its epiphany” as “a sudden spiritual manifestation” (211 & 213). The moment an object is epiphanyed, that object functions as the real agent of the action, while the subject becomes relatively passive, merely following the action of the object. The “whatness of the thing” as secular beauty in “the soul of the commonest object” in everyday life spontaneously “leaps up from the vestment of its appearance” to the subject regardless of the subject’s will to observe it (*SH* 213). This is the very epiphany that Joyce famously dramatizes throughout *Dubliners* that features ordinary people in the modernizing city of Dublin. As the agency of an object is more recognized than the agency of the perceiving subject, *per se*, in an epiphany, the notion that a subject always appropriates objects through its subjective eyes becomes contentious.

The Dublin beach scene at the end of fourth chapter in *A Portrait*, where Stephen encounters the epiphanic bird girl, exemplifies that ambivalent interaction between a subject and an object with regard to how secularized *visa* works. Though Stephen’s vision is still rough, abstract, and uninformed by the theory that Stephen will advance in the subsequent chapter, some aspects of Thomistic phases of apprehension, *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*, along with *visa*, occur spontaneously here. The highly detailed manner of the description of the beach reflects what goes on in Stephen’s mind, whose workings provide a crucial metaphor for the ambivalent colonial situation: the immixture of an essentialist point of view in unifying all things as one and the perception of the heterogeneity of things. While wading on this beach, Stephen witnesses how two contrary objects, an unrealistic heaven and a realistic mundane sea, are commingled when the waters of the rivulet “mirrored the high-drifting clouds” (*P* 170), an interaction that initiates a movement toward a third space where, as Edward Soja suggests, “the real

and the imagined” come together and collapse (57). The beach is where all becomes one, for Stephen feels “that all ages were as one to him” (168). With *integritas*, “one” emerges as the key word. At the same time, Stephen perceives that the things around him consist of various movements and colors: “He wondered at the endless drift of seaweed. Emerald and black and russet and olive, it moved beneath the current, swaying and turning” (170). He recognizes the heterogeneity of an object, the beach, concurrently trying to unite and appropriate it as harmonized in *consonantia*.

Stephen’s symbolic hybridity extends into recognizing the geopolitical location between the two nations of Ireland and of England, moving toward the realization of a third space. “Third space” means an “*entre*” where one finds words with which [he or she] can speak of Ourselves and Others and where one “may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (Bhabha 56). And the beach is that *entre* that opens up a new possibility for Stephen to move beyond the established categorizations (politics, religion, and language in *A Portrait*) of culture and identity and envision his future as an Irish artist who would speak for himself and Others: in this third place, Stephen, a native Irishman with both heritages, Catholicism and the English language, emerges as a complex colonial negotiator between two cultures. The beach near Howth, lying to the north of Dublin Bay, stands at the far edge of Dublin’s prosperous suburbs, among the places where the Irish, on a very clear day, can see the land of England across the sea (Gifford 221). Figuratively, the beach embodies the cultural, geographical border of the city, Dublin, which allows Stephen to view the city of Dublin as representing the Christian community, “the image of the seventh city of Christendom” (167). While referencing a name given to Dublin during the Middle Ages, the designation also identifies the city as “the second city” of the British Empire. Stephen’s musings on the beach recognize Dublin as a colonized and colonizing city, overlapped with subjection and domination as the *polis* that would seem to replicate God’s order on earth, mirroring and reinscribing colonialism combined with a Christianizing mission. On the beach, the historical and cultural image of Dublin becomes “visible

to him across the timeless air, no older nor more weary, nor less patient of subjection than in the days of the thingmote” (167).

Musing on the English language combined with a visualized colonial literature provides a crucial implication for the colonial status of Ireland and Stephen’s colonial subjectivity:

He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to himself:

—A day-dappled seaborne clouds.

The phrases and the day and the scene harmonized in a chord. Words. . . .

Disheartened, he raised his eyes toward the slow-drifting clouds, dappled and seaborne. They were voyaging across the deserts of the sky, a host of nomads on the march, voyaging high over Ireland, westward bound. The Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshaled races. . . . (166-67)

Stephen’s awareness of how the English language is linked to imperialism becomes part of how his symbolic hybridity is extended to the real and cultural one, to the “in between” of the two nations. That Stephen is ironically “disheartened” by the phrase he quotes for himself is significant because it is derived from the work of a Scottish scholar who wrote about the inferior status of Ireland and the Irish to the British Empire (Gifford 219).⁶ The “clouds” in the literary phrase, coupled with the literal clouds voyaging westward on the beach, extend his perception to the contemporary Western European countries that were similarly expanding imperialism through military invasion. When pondering on “Europe of strange tongues,” the country that Stephen has in his mind is England, whose language is, for him, a product of imperialism that destabilizes his identity and subjectivity: the

6) According to Gifford, Miller cites the persecuted Irish as a case in point, as “having been exposed to the worst effects of hunger and ignorance, the two great brutalities of the human race . . . these specters of a people that were once well-grown, able-bodied, and comely, stalk abroad into the daylight of civilization, the animal apparition of Irish ugliness and Irish want” (272-73).

English language came from where the actual clouds are marching from, the Empire. The English language, Boheemen-Saaf notes, “does not provide him [Stephen] with a stable point of authority, a unified mirror image, an unshakable concept of origin which can ground his identity in language” (49).

It is significant that the encounter with the bird girl is after the realization of the heterogeneity of various objects on the beach, a space that keeps its own harmony, by which Stephen’s “mind is arrested,” (*P* 205), a phrase Stephen uses later to illustrate an epiphanic moment in his aesthetic theory. Also, his mind goes toward the last phase of the apprehension, *claritas*, that is, the bird girl. The suggested ambivalent and discursive space of the beach of Dublin shows that within the world of objects, it is the object that positions the subject, the central thrust of Wildean principle in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that “every portrait . . . is a portrait of the artist” (9), an influence on the title of Joyce’s novel, *A Portrait*.

At the outset, the confrontation between Stephen and the bird girl seems to balance both between the religious and the mundane, the subject and the object, as Stephen views the girl as an aesthetic object, one of his representations. Benstock characterizes this configuration as showing “the balanced perspective of the artist, denying neither flesh nor spirit but not exclusively enslaved by either” (14). This corresponds to what aestheticism critics like Umberto Eco maintain; while discussing *integritas* as part of epiphany, Eco appreciates the bird girl as “the paramount example of epiphany” in *Portrait*, suggesting that “The Joycean *integritas* is the result of a psychological focusing; it is the imagination that selects the thing” (21). Moreover, Stephen’s response seems to confirm the concerns of feminist critics, a conventional male perspective that appropriates the girl as the Other, especially sexual one.⁷⁾ Indeed, Stephen’s eyes are in tandem with Thomistic

7) The bird girl has been pivotal to critical controversy whether she is passive and understood from the traditional Catholic perspective that Stephen internalized. For example, Henke notes in particular that as women often “appear as one-dimensional projections” of Stephen’s aesthetic imagination, the bird girl “assures psychological stability to the speaking/seeing subject, the authorial I/eye who frames and appropriates her figure” (370, 319). The feminist reading, though reasonable, reveals its limitation

visa through/by which a subject grasps an object, and his subjective consciousness appropriates the bird girl within the classic binary that the religious *visa* maintains – sinful “whores” versus beautiful “Madonnas.” Through the repetitive words “white” and “girlish” (171), the girl is described as an archetype of virgin femininity.

We come to understand, however, that such an aesthetic balance would be possible only if Stephen, as a stable subject, were able to project his arbitrary gaze on the bird girl. Is the girl passive just because she is represented by Stephen’s gaze or does Joyce describe her so? Is she or does she exist, to borrow Bhabha’s phrase, “within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision”? (66) When Joyce (not Stephen) narrates, “Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call” (*P* 150), does he represent this as only an imagination or fantasy in which Stephen, an immature aesthete, indulges?

The bird girl works *against* the questions. Whether Stephen intentionally selects the bird girl as an aesthetic object on the beach where he is depicted as *wandering* is as doubtful as whether the epiphanies Joyce embodies in *Dubliners* are the result of active focus or meditation; for instance, it is questionable whether Gabriel Conroy’s musing on “snow” at the end of “The Dead” is intentional. Rather, Joyce describes the epiphanies as the moments of an encounter, one that is not particularly intended or expected.

Since the bird girl, as a “sudden” and unexpected manifestation, achieves her

when it might dismiss the bird girl as something only submissive and negative, while finding Irish male subjectivity as something unified and complete that maintains the binary opposition between Self and Other, between male and female, and between the colonizer and the colonized. Such a configuration should be questioned in terms of the traditional image of Ireland as having been made colonially feminine by the British Empire. The allegory of Ireland as a “woman” appears as “the foundational myths of Irish identity are infused with the feminine; and so, historically, is the notion of the (“feminine”) Celts as a race different from the (“masculine”) English” (Boheenmen-Saaf 29). Irish patriarchal vision that is derived from late Victorian/Edwardian ideologies forms an ambivalent identity of Irish manhood, both feminine and masculine.

epiphany, she is not so much conventional as just passively receiving the male gaze. Just as the beach is understood as a metaphor for a third space, the “balance” made between male gazing and female gazing back should be thought of as an ambivalent moment: this exchange of gaze renders the underlying asymmetry of power generated by a male gaze at female objects discursive as opposed to a stable *visa*, which eventually enables the reversal of gaze between the two within the world of objects. Unlike the “basket” in Stephen’s theory, the girl is an interactive subject whose gaze both reflects and openly acknowledges Stephen’s own:

She was alone and still, gazing out to sea; and when she felt his presence and the worship of his eyes her eyes turned to him in quiet sufferance of his gaze, *without shame or wantonness*. Long, long she suffered his gaze and then quietly *withdrew her eyes* from his and bent them *toward the stream*, gently stirring the water with her foot hither and thither. (*P* 171, emphasis mine)

The girl seems to passively suffer Stephen’s gaze for a while, yet at the same time she boldly returns the gaze without hesitation or nervousness. This is understood as the moment a “static” emotion occurs, an “esthetic emotion” Stephen later refers to in his aesthetic theory (205). At this point, an aesthetic balance is made not by Stephen, but by the girl, as she actively returns “the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (Bhabha 160), the power which might otherwise portray her only within sexual terms.⁸⁾ The bird girl is an “almost the same but not quite” sexual object that neutralizes the eyes of the subject, Stephen. If Stephen’s mind, which is “arrested” or “fascinated,” should be “raised above desire and loathing” in a “dramatic emotion” as explained in his aesthetic theory (205), the bird girl should be at such a moment an epiphany. More significantly, the bird girl takes action as she wishes, while Stephen’s eyes passively stay in that moment, just

8) Regarding the colonial “gaze,” Bhabha writes that “in the objectification of the scopical drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject,” and, for him, “the stereotype is in that sense an ‘impossible’ object” (116).

following her moves; she returns to her own work, “stirring the water,” in which she was previously engaged, by rather indifferently and autonomously withdrawing her gaze from Stephen’s to finally gaze “out to sea.”

In this epiphany in which the object resists the subject’s desire to fix the object as a homogenous entity, “whatness of the thing,” reality, is mirrored in the eyes of the subject. Viewed from the Lacanian concept of gaze, the bird girl could involve an “anamorphosis” that “reflects our own nothingness” as she deconstructs the subject-object dichotomy (Lacan 527). For Lacan, the balance is made by an aesthetic object within the world of objects as is described in his illustration of an unexpected skull gazing back at a viewer of a picture, an interaction that makes the viewer conscious of the reality in which he is situated.⁹⁾ The gaze in this context is indeed a “blind spot” in the subject’s perception of visible reality, “disturbing its transparent visibility” (Žižek 79), and the bird girl’s image is that spot where a traditional male gaze falls short. This newly found spot between the exchange of gazes creates a third space (like “sea”) as a discursive condition of enunciation that ensures “that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew” (Bhabha 55). In short, the bird girl’s action of gazing out to “sea,” a third space, is what leads the entire action in the epiphany to challenging the paradigm of gendered looking in colonial Dublin.

In this third space, the bird girl is interpreted “anew” as something more than

9) While Lacanian gaze is anything but the intrusive and dominant male gaze on the world, it also refers to the uncanny sense that the object of the subject’s look or glance is somehow looking back at him/her of its own will. In “Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*,” Lacan explains this interaction by using Hans Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* as an aesthetic object in which a skewed anamorphic skull is placed at the bottom center of the painting and seems to be staring back at the subject. Here, the subject is no longer in control of his/her eye’s view. In relation to this, Joyce shows how Stephen’s subjectivity is always under the threat of the world of objects by describing the atmosphere of rooms of priests, Father Conmee, the principal of Clongowes, and the director of Jesuits at the college, who invites him into the life of a Jesuit priest, with a grotesque Lacanian “skull” watching Stephen as he enters their rooms (*A Portrait* 57 and 154).

a traditionally projected image, a conventional Irish or Celtic muse or Virgin Mary, one problematic to feminist perspective. In interstitial Ireland and within the British Empire, she belongs to those larger entities just as Stephen does. But, at the same time, the girl “has no socioeconomic existence at all” and “does not even belong in Dublin” (Fairhall 157). She, then, mirrors the location of Stephen as a colonial subject between Ireland and the British Empire. And as the bird girl exists beyond the location of a fixed object, a typical Irish woman, her apparent namelessness underscores that she, in light of Althusserian interpellation, is free from being interpellated by various ideologies in Ireland. In that regard, the girl, who interpellates Stephen as the priest of art, reflects what Stephen wants to be, a Godlike Irish artist, thus anticipating the conclusion of Stephen’s aesthetic theory: “the artist, like the God of the creation, remains . . . invisible, refined out of existence” (P 215). The girl reflects how God, the Logos, is transformed into an appropriative metaphor for the mundane artist, and is mobilized to express what the secular *visa* sees: Catholic vision (or Thomistic *visa*) is ultimately reduced into an aesthetic one for an epiphany that makes Stephen apprehend the autonomy of an art and artist.

Such destabilization of subjectivity within the world of objects manifested by the concept of God informs a discursive connection between the signifier and the signified in terms of Catholic morality. That the bird girl (signified) is a “beautiful soul” (signifier) without Catholic registers of beauty suggests a new definition of what is beautiful. If the bird girl is signified as a sinful threat or temptation, the epiphany would be a lapse into Catholic tradition that condemns and oppresses sexuality. The bird girl scene does not seem to work within sinful thoughts as Stephen’s gaze at the girl betrays his gaze at other women on the streets of Dublin, a sinful one that is troubled with guilty feelings. Because of the bird girl, the “bird” that had been negative to Stephen throughout *A Portrait* is no longer associated with fear and guilt and punishment. Also, the intense expressions of the bird girl epiphany as an “outburst of profane joy” (171) and “to err, to fall” (172) characterize *sins* that Stephen must not commit within the Catholic world. If the

allegedly “profane” expressions “a wild angel” and “the angel of mortal youth and beauty” (172) are truly profane, it is because the bird girl symbolizes a transgressive move beyond the Catholic binary between the good (Virgin Mary) and the evil (temptress), an oppressive framework that would inevitably relapse into the concept of sinfulness and guilt. If Blake’s larger influence on Joyce is recalled, the expression “a wild angel” is an embodiment of a depolarized and unified vision of a space in which the material, physical world is equally part of the divine order, which Blake strove to visualize in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

This concept of beauty embodied in the bird girl offers an inspiration for a mode of representation that differs also from one of the nationalistic images, peasants, which Irish Celtic Revivalism most enthusiastically sought out. Though not completely dismissing the Irish nationalist and Revivalist propaganda in *A Portrait*, Stephen believes that the ideals—which regard recovering true or pure national culture or image in the pre-colonial state as a sole way to decolonize Irish people—would fall short. After meeting with the bird girl, Stephen considers a “peasant” woman who “wooded” Davin and invited him to her bed at night to be “a batlike soul” who needs to wake to “its consciousness” (*P* 184). Such a sinful image, a stereotype of his “race,” would only reproduce the frame of British colonialism and Catholic morality that would take Ireland back into chaos. For Stephen, colonial and postcolonial people should be “free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities” (Bhabha 55).

In that regard, the epiphanic bird girl indicates new Irish “cultural identities” not confined within such an image of a “peasant” woman, as Stephen maintains, “[w]hen we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation, and artistic reproduction I require a new terminology and a new personal experience” (*P* 209). This manifesto relates to what Stephen, a colonized subject, would encounter in Irish colonial reality, revealing an artistic way to resist totalizing narratives and the dominant Logos that both Catholicism and imperialism have imposed. Stephen in the “Nestor” episode of *Ulysses* shows a heterogeneous understanding of history when he famously refers “God” to “a shout in the street”

in resisting the Jesuit motto, “A.M.D.G.,” and the Catholic doctrine that Mr. Deasy, the schoolmaster of Dalkey, maintains: “All history moves toward one great goal, the manifestation of God” (*U* 2.380-7). Mr. Deasy’s linear epistemology of history emulates the project of the colonizer that collectively reduces and subordinates other histories of the colonized, as is evident in the aforementioned case of the Englishman, Haines. For Stephen, the discursive gap between the signifier and the signified is where his heterogeneous, subaltern imagination arises, whereas the Irish Catholic perspective subordinating different perspectives to a mono-vision provides no specific representations of Ireland. Stephen’s argument in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode of *Ulysses* affirms this phase: “Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love” (*U* 9.1044-46). Indeed, *Ulysses* embodies such subaltern subjects like Leopold Bloom, whose mundane encounters with various people in modernized Dublin transform the quotidian into epiphanic moments and vice versa.

Ultimately, the attempt to objectify and secularize God’s manifestation by “a new personal experience” points to a third space, thereby subverting stereotypes. Stephen shows this aesthetic ambition to transcend the colonial “nets” at the end of *A Portrait*: “I desire to press in my arms the loveliness which has not yet come into the world” (251), as he goes to “forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race” (253). The expressions “not yet come” and “uncreated” indicates a new aesthetic experience that the very young Stephen imagines from the beginning of the novel: “[b]ut you could not have a green rose. But perhaps *somewhere* in the world you could” (12, emphasis mine). Though a “green rose” is literally impossible, it informs alternative perceptions or different ways of looking.

IV. Conclusion

An aesthetic, epistemological transposition via altering eyes enables Stephen to navigate an alternative way of representing Irish identity. He believes in the “responsibility” of the Irish artist to create “a way for the Irish to understand themselves as separate from the double colonizing forces of Roman Catholicism and British imperial rule” and that “[t]he artist must also imagine an independent morality that is not constrained by the dominant paradigms created by these two institutions” (Eide 380). For this aesthetic responsibility, culture and identity should be enunciated through a new type of art (which Joyce further develops later in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*), one that negotiates between the traditional and the modern and between the colonized and the colonizer, engaging the transformational process in a third space where an artist is able to freely float above a fixed identity or culture. The reference to a third space at the very ending of *A Portrait*, “Trieste 1914,” (253) where Stephen exiles himself, indicates this awakening.

Though not postcolonial yet, Joyce predictably represents a vision for a future postcolonial state of Irish art through Stephen’s encountering of the bird girl who gazes out to sea. Through this moment of epiphany, Joyce suggests that a new Irish artist like Stephen possibly can “create the consciousness” of his “race” by altering the eyes of Irish people. The Celtic revival attempts to “find” Ireland; the Catholic Church claims to already have it; and the British regret having exploited it (if Haines is to be believed). But Stephen sees all of these as dead-end paths: the Irish need to see differently, or it will make no difference where they look. Of course, as he is often compared to Icarus, whether the “old father,” Daedalus, whom Stephen evokes at the ending of *A Portrait*, would ultimately free him from the colonial fatherland is moot. However, what is meaningful is the visionary “portrait” of a new kind of Irish artist awakened to an alternative way of seeing and representing the colonial Ireland for the postcolonial future.

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Abstract**“Pulcra Sunt Quae Visa Placent”: Colonial Ambivalence, Third Space,
and Altering Perception in Stephen Dedalus’s Aesthetic Theory**

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James Joyce’s attitude toward Irish politics as developed in the character of Stephen Dedalus involves “postcolonial” ambivalence and third space, and is crucially represented in Stephen’s aesthetic theory and in the bird girl epiphany in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephen Hero*. Stephen’s theory is not an apolitical aestheticism but a realistic manifesto that engages Irish coloniality, culture, and politics, which indicates a postcolonial strategy that is not subsumed into colonizing mission but which works toward the creation of a new Irish art. Particularly, the three phases of perception, *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* (or *quidditas*), in Stephen’s aesthetic theory serve to ground Stephen’s ambivalent position as such an Irish colonial subject searching for a third space in between Catholic tradition and colonial modernity. The epiphanic scene of the “bird girl” is where many important aspects of the theory appear—mimicry and ambivalence, subversion of gaze, and alternative perception—as a process of undermining colonial power and authority.

■ **Key words** : Stephen, aesthetic theory, colonial ambivalence, third space,
epiphany, gaze
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