

The Adolescent Crisis of Identity in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man**

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In the last volume of the *James Joyce Journal*, I published a paper about how children in Joyce's writing experience a childhood crisis, the crisis of control. However, there is also a connective crisis that these children undergo once they become adolescents: the crisis of identity. The major difference between these two crises is that the crisis of identity is even more psychologically intense than the childhood crisis of control, and the decisions made by the characters experiencing the identity crisis will determine the course of the rest of their lives. This paper will continue the discussion of crises in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, focusing on the adolescent characters in those works.

While the word "adolescent" suggests a male or female between the ages of

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twelve and twenty-five,¹⁾ Joyce meant the word “adolescence” to reflect the immaturity of a person starting at the age of seventeen.²⁾ Some of Joyce’s characters who experience the identity crises are older, such as Bob Doran in “A Boarding House,” Jimmy Doyle in “After the Race,” and Lenehan in “Two Gallants.”³⁾ The crisis itself is best defined as the internal struggle which an adolescent character experiences as a result of having to choose between doing what he/she wants to do, and doing what society wants him/her to do. The characters experience the crisis at a pivotal point in their lives and the decision that they make will impact their lives forever. The numerous examples of characters experiencing the adolescent crisis of identity in Joyce’s writing highlight the enormous coercive power exercised by the panoptic society in Dublin at the turn of the century.

The first adolescent character struggling with the crisis of identity in Joyce’s writing is Eveline Hill. Eveline is “over nineteen” (*D* 26) and about to run away to “Buenos Ayres” (*D* 27) to start a new life with a “kind, manly, open-hearted” (*D* 27) seaman named Frank. On the eve of her departure, however, Eveline begins to vacillate between staying in the potentially violent, albeit familiar, environment of home with her father and running away from her native Ireland to “explor[e] another life” (*D* 26) with her paramour. When the story opens, Eveline seems to be optimistic about leaving home. Gazing out the window she seems happy to be following in the footsteps of her brothers and sisters and to be finally leaving home.

1) In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “adolescence” is defined as: “. . . extending from 14 to 25 in males, and from 12 to 21 in females.”

2) On February 1, 1905 Joyce wrote to Stanislaus that he marked “the precise point between boyhood (*pueritia*) and adolescence (*adulescentia*)—17 years” (Joyce, *Letters II* 79). Italics are mine. While writing *Dubliners*, Joyce wrote to Stanislaus around September 24, 1905 concerning the order of the stories: “The Sisters, An Encounter, and another story which are stories of my childhood: The Boarding-House, After the Race and Eveline, which are stories of adolescence . . .” (*Letters II* 111).

3) Bob Doran is “thirty-four or thirty-five” (*D* 48), Jimmy Doyle is twenty-six (*D* 30), and Lenehan is thirty (*D* 42).

As she looks around the room, however, she sees “the yellowing photograph” (*D* 25) of a priest and “the coloured print of promises made to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque” (*D* 25) and she begins to question the wisdom of her decision. The religious images make her feel guilty about leaving and she begins to think of reasons why she should stay.

One of the reasons that she considers staying is the fear of people gossiping. Eveline considers “[w]hat they would say about her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow” (*D* 26) and she imagines that they would probably think she was foolish (*D* 26). Another reason why she considers staying with her father is that he is growing old and she thinks he will miss her (*D* 27). Even though Eveline “sometimes felt herself in danger of her father’s violence” (*D* 26) and her fear of him causes her heart to palpitate (*D* 26), on the eve of her departure she becomes nostalgic and remembers that “sometimes he could be very nice” (*D* 27). Having read of her father’s abusive nature when hunting the children out of the field with his blackthorn stick (*D* 25), squandering Eveline’s hard earned wages on Saturday nights (*D* 26), and forbidding her to see Frank (*D* 27), it seems out of character for him to be “very nice.” Still looking out the window, Eveline hears a street organ playing a familiar tune that reminds her of the third reason why she should stay: the deathbed promise she had made to her mother, “her promise to keep the home together as long as she could” (*D* 27-8). Eveline’s reasons for considering staying in Dublin are related to issues of control which were discussed in my previous paper. We can see from Eveline’s thought process how effective the patriarchal institutions of church and family are at causing her to consider their perspective on what it is she should do. Even though Eveline feels that she “must” escape (*D* 28) a subtle, almost imperceptible force is coercing her to stay. She wants to be free and live with Frank and she knows that she “ha[s] a right to happiness” (*D* 28), however, there is something preventing herself from wholly committing to her plan.

Eveline’s identity crisis is a result of her being forced to make a complex decision that will change her life forever. She must choose to either do what she

wants to do and go with Frank to South America or do what society expects her to do and stay in Dublin with her abusive father. As the crisis intensifies, Eveline is affected physically; her cheek is “pale and cold” (*D* 28) and she feels as if she is in a “maze of distress” (*D* 28). She is so distressed that she feels “a nausea in her body” (*D* 28). Conflicted and anxious, she “prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty . . . moving her lips in silent fervent prayer” (*D* 28). Eveline chooses to look to God for advice rather than family or friends. When Eveline finally makes the decision to stay in Dublin, she feels “like a helpless animal” (*D* 29), deciding to stay caged rather than following her heart. By giving into the pressures around her, Eveline contributes to her own subjugation, and “proves equal to the expectations of her society” (San Juan Jr. 71). “Eveline” shows how effective the Catholic Church and the institution of family are at coercing people to police their own behavior and do what is expected of them.

Bob Doran in “A Boarding House” is another one of Joyce’s adolescent characters who is pressured by society into making a decision that is contrary to his wishes. While a resident at Mrs. Mooney’s boarding house, Bob Doran gets too close to Mrs. Mooney’s daughter Polly and finds himself in a position where he is forced to either pay reparation for his “sin” by agreeing to marry Polly, or lose his room at the boarding house, his reputation in the community, and maybe even his job. The result of his getting caught having an affair with Polly throws Bob Doran’s world in a tailspin. Bob must make a life altering decision and the gravity of his predicament causes him to experience an identity crisis.

While Bob is definitely guilty of having an affair with Polly, it is important to consider Mrs. Mooney’s role in encouraging the affair. Mrs. Mooney, referred to by the young men residing at her boarding house as “*The Madam*”⁴) (*D* 46), had the intention of giving Polly “the run of the young men” (*D* 47) in hopes that Polly’s seductive songs (*D* 47) would lure one of the boarders into courting and

4) In the notes to my edition, Mrs. Mooney is “referred to by *Cyclops*’s misanthropic nameless narrator as having ‘kept a kip in Hardwicke street’ . . . ‘kip’: slang: ‘a brothel: thus *kip-keeper*, a brothel keeper, a madam” (223).

eventually marrying her.⁵⁾ When Mrs. Mooney notices the burgeoning affair between Bob Doran and Polly, rather than stopping the affair in its infancy, Mrs. Mooney “watched the pair and kept her own counsel” (*D* 47). Even when the other lodgers in the house begin to talk about the affair, Mrs. Mooney does not intervene (*D* 47). Polly is nineteen years old and her mother has a plan. She will allow Polly to ensnare Bob and when the time is right, she will demand reparation in terms of marriage.

Mrs. Mooney sees Bob Doran as a good candidate to marry her daughter. If another lodger had had the affair with Polly, for example, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Meade, or Bantam Lyons, “her task would have been much harder” (*D* 49). Mrs. Mooney is happy that it is Bob Doran because she “did not think he would face publicity” (*D* 49). Bob had been “employed for thirteen years in a great Catholic wine merchant’s office” (*D* 49) and Mrs. Mooney knows that if news got out that Bob had acted inappropriately with Polly, there was a distinct possibility that he would be fired. Mrs. Mooney, unlike “some mothers she knew that could not get their daughters off their hands,” (*D* 49) has carefully considered the situation from every angle and has prepared to play the role of “an outraged mother” (*D* 48) during her meeting with Bob and she is ready to do whatever is necessary to make Bob agree to marry Polly. She is sure that in the end she will win because “she had all the weight of social opinion on her side” (*D* 48).

Prior to his meeting with Mrs. Mooney, Bob is “very anxious” (*D* 49). He had “made two attempts to shave but his hand had been so unsteady that he had been obliged to desist” (*D* 49). He had visited a priest the night before and the “recollection of his confession . . . was a cause of acute pain to him; the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair and in the end had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation” (*D* 49). After Bob’s consultation with the priest, he realizes that he has only two

5) Suzette Henke writes that “Mrs. Mooney, the madam, cannot see that she is condemning her daughter to repeat the cycle of her own disastrous marriage” (“Feminist Perspectives” 16).

options; he can either marry Polly or run away (D 49). At the forefront of his mind is the fear that the affair would be “talked of and his employer would be certain to hear of it” (D 49). He laments, “Dublin is such a small city: everybody knows everyone else’s business” (D 49). Bob is most terrified of his employer finding out about his affair with Polly and “[h]e felt his heart leap warmly in his throat as he heard in his excited imagination old Mr Leonard calling out in his rasping voice: *Send Mr Doran here, please*” (D 49). Mrs. Mooney’s calculations were correct; Bob Doran is not prepared to face publicity.

Compounding Bob’s difficulty in making a decision is the feeling that Polly was “a little vulgar” (D 50) and that his “family would look down on her” (D 50) because of her “disreputable father” (D 50) and the fact that her mother’s boarding house was “beginning to get a certain fame” (D 50). In the back of his mind, Bob “had a notion that he was being had” (D 50) and his “instinct urged him to remain free, not to marry. Once you are married you are done for, it said” (D 50). Under enormous pressure, Bob asks himself, “*What am I to do?*” (D 51) and he seems to be being pulled in two opposite directions. The narrator states, “[t]he instinct of the celibate warned him to hold back. But the sin was there; even his sense of honour told him that reparation must be made for such a sin.” Despite desperately wanting to hold back and remain free, Bob is heavily influenced by societal pressures to atone for his sin and make reparation.

Going down the stairs to finally discuss the affair with Mrs. Mooney, Bob suffers an anxiety attack; his “glasses became so dimmed with moisture that he had to take them off and polish them” (D 51). The scene is reminiscent of a prisoner being led to his execution. Rather than obeying the dictates of society, Bob “longed to ascend through the roof and fly away to another country where he would never hear again of his trouble” (D 51). As the moment arrives when Bob Doran must commit to a decision, his behavior is very similar to Eveline’s. Like Eveline, Bob feels that he must escape, but ultimately he finds that he cannot. Just as societal pressures force Eveline to stay behind with her aging father, “a force pushed [Bob] downstairs step by step” (D 51) to agree to a marriage which he would rather not

go through with. In the Dublin society that Joyce's characters inhabit, the concept of free will seems to be illusory. The characters seem to be bound by the invisible external forces that demand their conformity.

Even though Eveline Hill and Bob Doran acknowledge their right to happiness and admit that their happiness depends on remaining free of the forces that are pushing them in the opposite direction of attaining that happiness, when the time comes to determine their destinies, they choose to sacrifice their freedom and bow to social pressure. By conforming to societal expectations, Eveline and Bob are complicit in their own subjugation. While an overwhelming majority of Joyce's adolescent characters conform to the expectations of the patriarchal authority, one character, Stephen Dedalus, chooses not to conform. Whereas Eveline and Bob are willing to spend the rest of their lives unhappy but accepted by society, Stephen refuses to disobey his inner voice and he is willing to be a social outcast rather than compromise his freedom. Whereas Bob Doran concedes to the wishes of his priest and marries Polly, Stephen weighs his priest's words carefully but chooses to abandon his faith rather than conform. Whereas Eveline Hill does not have the courage to leave her family in Dublin, Stephen welcomes a solitary life abroad. Stephen's choices differ from those Joyce's other adolescent characters' because he sees himself outside of, and not wanting to be a part of, society.

For over fifty years critics have offered a wide range of theories from various critical stances to help explain Stephen's unorthodox behavior. The most common analytical approach critics have used to explain Stephen's unconventional behavior has been to attribute it to him experiencing an "identity crisis." Scholars conducting this type of critical inquiry have primarily focused on Stephen's confusion regarding his Irish identity, his insecurity about his identity as an artist, and his nascent sexual awareness.⁶⁾ While my critical investigation will also explore the

6) For a more in-depth look at the criticism acknowledging Stephen's "identity crisis" please see the following works: John King, "Trapping the Fox" (1999); Marly Hill, "Amor Matris" (1993); Michael Gillespie, ed., *James Joyce and the Fabrication of Irish Identity* (2001); Gerald Doherty, *Pathologies of Desire* (2008); and Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (1934). Full citations in bibliography.

“identity crisis” theme with regard to Stephen, it differs from all the previous scholarship in that my focus will be on locating the precise point in Stephen’s life where the identity crisis occurs and highlighting the major influences that cause the identity crisis. Another popular approach to analyzing Stephen’s behavior has been to focus on Stephen’s anxiety. Several critics following this type of approach have attributed Stephen’s anxiety to his sexual inefficiency, his inability as a child to resolve the Oedipal complex, and his resentment over the Irish-British colonial tension.⁷⁾ Last, in response to feminist criticism of Joyce’s male characters, numerous critics have focused on masculine, or gender-based, issues as being responsible for Stephen’s identity crisis.⁸⁾ While all of these critics have added plausible explanations for Stephen’s unorthodox behavior, the proliferation of scholarship which continues to offer new reasons for Stephen’s identity crisis suggests that no one has sufficiently satisfied the scholarly curiosity related to this subject. By focusing on the role of the Catholic Church in Stephen’s internal struggle and showing how the Catholic ideology Stephen has inculcated exacerbates his identity crisis, I hope to add another layer to this long-standing and contentious debate.

Stephen’s adolescent crisis of identity begins in chapter two of *A Portrait*. Two important changes have occurred since we last saw Stephen at Clongowes feeling

7) For more criticism focusing on Stephen’s “anxiety” please see: Calvin Thomas, “Stephen in Process” (1990); Francis Restuccia, *Joyce and the Law of the Father* (1989); Bonnie Kime Scott, *New Alliances in Joyce Studies* (1988); Susan Friedman, *Joyce and the Return of the Repressed* (1993); and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, *Writing Against the Family* (1994). Full citations in bibliography.

8) For masculine or gender-based criticism discussing Stephen’s confusion over his identity, please see: Sheldon Brivic, “Gender Dissonance” (2002); Suzette Henke, *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire* (1990) and “Feminist Perspectives” (1980); James Fairhall, *James Joyce and the Question of History* (1995); Christine van Boheemen-Saaf and Colleen Lamos, eds., *Masculinities in Joyce* (2001); Katherine Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality, and Social Purity* (2003); Neil Davison, “Joyce’s Homosocial Reckoning” (1994); and Joe Valente and Margot Backus, “An Iridescence Difficult to Account For” (2009). Full citations in bibliography.

“happy and free” (P 60) after his triumphant meeting with the rector over Father Dolan’s pandying him. The first change in Stephen’s life is that his father has experienced a dramatic change in fortune and the family is struggling financially.⁹⁾ Stephen’s father cannot afford to pay for his son’s tuition at Clongowes and the “changes in what [Stephen] had deemed unchangeable were so many slight shocks to his boyish conception of the world” (P 66-7). The second major change which has occurred in the space between the end of the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter is that Stephen is going through puberty and, as a result, he finds himself “the prey of restless and foolish impulses” (P 69). The foolish impulses that Stephen grapples with in chapters two and three are largely responsible for the crisis of identity that he experiences in chapter four.

In chapter two, Stephen’s sexual impulses find an outlet in the spacious realm of his active imagination. We see him pouring “over a ragged translation of *The Count of Monte Cristo*” (P 64) and imagining himself as a sort of Edmond Dantes. He amuses himself by reenacting scenes from the book and he even imagines that a Mercedes of his own stands in the garden outside of “a small whitewashed house” (P 65) on the road to the mountains just outside of Blackrock (P 65). His imaginary love affair with Mercedes ends abruptly when he meets Emma Clery at a children’s party at Harold’s Cross (P 71). The encounter itself is rather innocent. They exchange fleeting glances with each other at the party and they briefly share the same tram on their respective ways home (P 72). Aside from that, there is no textual evidence to suggest that Emma is interested in Stephen in the same way that Stephen is interested in her. Stephen, however, desperate to make the transition from an imaginary romance with Mercedes to a real romance with Emma, idealizes the encounter. Again, Stephen turns to art as outlet for his pubescent frustration and hastily composes a poem, “To E— C—”, in the style of his favorite poet, Lord

9) In his essay “Consciousness and Society in *A Portrait*,” James Naremore writes that “[n]evertheless, the financial disasters of the older Dedalus can be shown to have a crucial effect on Stephen’s consciousness, just as the identical family crisis must have affected the consciousness of James Joyce” (Staley and Benstock 115).

Byron (*P* 73). The next time Stephen sees her is on the night of the Whitsuntide play. Two years have passed since they met and the anticipation of seeing her at the play causes a “restless moodiness” (*P* 81) to fill “his breast” (*P* 81). Stephen is anxious to finally see Emma again and when he notices her “serious and alluring eyes watching him from among the audience” (*P* 90) his “moody mistrustfulness” (*P* 90) is transformed into “mirth” (*P* 90). After the play, however, his elation abruptly turns to dejection when he discovers that Emma is not among the group waiting for him under “the first lamp” (*P* 91) outside of the theater. Stephen’s first experience with “love” devastates him. As he walks at “breakneck speed down the hill,” (*P* 91) presumably chasing after Emma, he is clearly distraught. Joyce writes, “[p]ride and hope and desire like crushed herbs in [Stephen’s] heart sent up vapours of maddening incense before the eyes of his mind” (*P* 91).

Stephen’s identity crisis intensifies as a result of his unrequited love for Emma. He becomes progressively more detached and introverted; “[n]othing moved him or spoke to him from the real world unless he heard in it an echo of the infuriated cries within him” (*P* 98). He laments the passing of his youth (*P* 102) and Joyce writes that “[n]othing stirred within [Stephen’s] soul but a cold and cruel and loveless lust” (*P* 102). Stephen is overcome by a “savage desire” (*P* 105) and he “exult[s] to defile with patience whatever image had attracted his eyes” (*P* 105). He is visited in his dreams by a woman whose face has been “transfigured by a lecherous cunning” (*P* 105) and in the morning he feels humiliated by the “dim memory of [their] dark orgiastic riot” (*P* 105). The “wasting fires of lust” (*P* 106) consume Stephen. His “blood [is] in revolt” (*P* 106). He wanders the “dark slimy street” (*P* 106) moaning to himself “like some baffled prowling beast” (*P* 106). He is desperate to sin with “another of his kind, to force another being to sin with him and to exult with her in sin” (*P* 106). Stephen has moved away from his initial desire to experience the kind of romantic love promoted in adventure stories and poetry and now he desires only to experience the dark, sinful kind of “love” which could be purchased in “the squalid quarter of the brothels” (*P* 109). When he finds that he can no longer resist “the wasting fires of lust” (*P* 106) burning inside him,

Stephen finally has sex with a prostitute, as Joyce had done when he was fourteen (Ellmann 48). Joyce's own experience of going to the brothels "helped to fix his image of the sexual act as shameful" (Ellmann 48). Sex was a pulling force even for Joyce, who in *A Portrait* wanted Stephen to feel that "sex was reproachable, irresistible" (Ellmann 37). Joyce transferred this experience and the feelings that he felt as a result of it to Stephen because he wanted *Portrait* to represent the "fall" from innocence (Ellmann 48). This "fall" does, in fact, make him fall hard.

Stephen's intention in frequenting prostitutes was to satisfy his carnal desires and to gain experience. His impatience to end his sexual innocence, however, results in him falling out of fellowship with God. His only gain seems to be a "cold indifferent knowledge of himself" (*P* 110). The "frenzy of his body's lust" (*P* 112) has "covered him from the sight of God" (*P* 112) and in chapter three Stephen's "sin-loving soul" (*P* 109) begins "to grope in the darkness of his own state" (*P* 113). Stephen is aided in his self reflection by the occasion of a religious retreat held at his college. He knows that the retreat will force him to confront his sins and the knowledge of what he has done causes his heart "slowly to fold and fade with fear like a withering flower" (*P* 115).

The three day retreat, designed to cause students to "give all [their] attention to the state of [their] souls" (*P* 118), covers four important subjects found in the catechism: death, judgment, hell and heaven (*P* 117).¹⁰ The Church uses the retreat as a tool to control the boys, to bring their potentially wayward souls back on track. Stephen is, of course, one of those wayward souls. The preacher's skillfulness at imparting bible doctrine is made apparent by the profound affect his sermons have on Stephen. After the first sermon on death, Stephen felt that "his diseased conscience" (*P* 123) had been "deeply probed" (*P* 123) with a knife and "he felt

10) Joyce's inspiration for the religious retreat scene in *Portrait* stems from his experience at a retreat which began on November 30, 1896. Father James A. Cullen was the retreat director, and his sermons delivered "a more than customary number of twinges from hell-fire" (Ellmann, *Joyce* 49). Joyce, because of his own recent experiments with sex, was immediately affected. He saw himself as "a beast, eating like a beast, lusting like a beast, dying like a beast" (Ellmann, *Joyce* 49).

now that his soul was festering in sin" (*P* 123). Reflecting on his sordid past causes Stephen to feel "the agony of shame" for the first time (*P* 124). As Stephen considers the enormity of his sins, "[a] cold sweat broke out upon his forehead as the foul memories condensed within his brain" (*P* 124). The preacher's sermon affects Stephen both mentally and physically.¹¹⁾ Stephen's shame, however, gives way to sheer terror after hearing the preacher's sermon on hell.

Whereas the first sermon makes Stephen introspective, the second sermon on judgment and hell terrifies him. At the end of the preacher's description of hell Stephen is so frightened that when he walked down the aisle of the chapel his legs shook and the scalp of his head trembled "as though it had been touched by ghostly fingers" (*P* 134). Vincent Heron admits to Mr. Tate that the preacher's hell sermon put all the boys "into a blue funk"¹²⁾ (*P* 135). Imagining himself in hell, Stephen feels his "flesh shr[i]nk together, as if it felt the approach of the ravenous tongues of flames" (*P* 134) and he feels his brain "glow[ing] . . . simmering and bubbling within the cracked tenement of the skull" (*P* 134). The preacher's sermon on hell causes Stephen to "[fear] intensely in spirit and in flesh" (*P* 147) and later in bed that evening he is given a glimpse of "the hell reserved for his sins: stinking, bestial, malignant, a hell of lecherous goatish fiends" (*P* 149). The vision of his own personal hell causes Stephen to "[vomit] profusely in agony" (*P* 149) and he "[makes] a covenant with his heart" (*P* 150) to confess "his hidden sins truly and repentantly" (*P* 150) "before a minister of the Holy Ghost" (*P* 150). The preacher's prayer has been answered; Stephen will confess and be forgiven (*P* 118-9).

According to Michel Foucault, the act of confessing has become "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truths" (Mullin 59). Foucault argues that in Western society, confession "plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations" (Mullin 59). Foucault writes that when confession "is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the

11) In *Joyce Annotated*, Gifford notes: "Stephen would have been taught that mortal sin deforms the sinner both mentally and physically" (179).

12) The endnote defines "a blue funk" as "a total state of fear" (*P* 300).

confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body" (Mullin 59).¹³ Although the preacher does not use violence or overtly threaten the boys during the retreat at Belvedere College, his sermon is designed to scare them into making a full confession of their sins. In giving the boys a glimpse of the afterlife they will inherit if they do not confess, the preacher intends to scare them into compliance. According to Foucault, "[c]onfession frees" the confessor (Mullin 61); "it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation" (Mullin 62). The effectiveness in the Catholic Church's implementation of the ceremony of confession is evident in Joyce's portrayal of Stephen's confession.

Stephen is aware that in order to be pardoned for his transgression, he must make a complete confession. Joyce writes:

"Confess! He had to confess every sin. How could he utter in words to a priest what he had done? Must, must. Or how could he explain without dying of shame? A madman, a loathsome madman! Confess! O he would indeed to be free and sinless again!" (P 151)

Despite the shame of having to give a detailed account of his sins, Stephen is prepared to suffer the shame in order to repair his relationship with God and avoid the punishment of hell. Aching to "be free and sinless again" (P 151), Stephen promises that "[b]efore he heard again the footboard of the housedoor trail over the threshold as it opened to let him in, before he saw again the table in the kitchen set for supper he would have knelt and confessed" (P 150). Stephen seems to purposely eschew the college chapel, perhaps for fear that his teachers and friends might learn of his lecherous past, and he goes out in search of a nearby chapel to atone and confess.¹⁴ In Church Street chapel, the shame of putting his past into

13) Stephen thinks that "[p]erhaps that first hasty confession wrung from him by the fear of hell has not been good" (P 166). It is interesting that both Joyce and Foucault use "wrung" when describing confession, for it seems both writers understand that information is drawn out, rather than freely given, from the confessor.

words almost causes him to reconsider going through with the confession. When it becomes his turn, however, he “stood up in terror and walked blindly into the box” (*P* 155). The experience of confessing has, as Foucault suggests, a liberating effect on Stephen. Walking home after his confession, Stephen felt as though “[h]is soul was made fair and holy once more, holy and happy” (*P* 157). He seems liberated and celebrates the new life he is embarking on, “[a] life of grace and virtue and happiness” (*P* 158).

After being absolved of his sins, Stephen enters into a phase of “resolute piety” (*P* 159). He feels he achieving “spiritual triumph” (*P* 159) because of his new approach to life. He dedicates every day to a “holy image or mystery” (*P* 159) and he constantly says rosaries by keeping the “beads loose in his trouser pockets” (*P* 160). Stephen believes that his actions will grant him enlightenment and purity, yet he acts “with trepidation” (*P* 161). He is frightened into holiness because of the threat of spending eternity in hell. Even though Stephen is trying to do everything in his power to follow the rules of his religion, he sometimes feels “a subtle, dark and murmurous presence penetrate his being and fire him with a brief iniquitous lust” (*P* 161). His body is still struggling with the desire to do things that his religion tells him are inappropriate. He constantly struggles with guilt and feels that it will “always be present with him” (*P* 166).

Stephen’s identity crisis reaches its climax after a meeting with the director of Belvedere College. Stephen had been summoned to the director’s office to ascertain whether or not Stephen had ever felt within his soul “a desire to join the order” (*P* 170). The director informs Stephen that to receive the call to become a priest “is the greatest honour that the Almighty God can bestow upon a man. No king or emperor on this earth has the power of the priest of God” (*P* 171). Stephen had seen himself “as a priest wielding calmly and humbly the awful power of which angels and saints stood in reverence” (*P* 171) many times before but when the

14) Like Stephen, Joyce was too embarrassed to confess in the college chapel, so he went to the Church Street chapel and poured his heart out to a Capuchin, who listened to Joyce’s sins “with sympathy rather than indignation” (Ellmann, *Joyce* 50).

chance to become a priest actually presents itself to him, he begins to have serious misgivings. He sees the priesthood as “a grave and ordered and passionless life” (*P* 174) and when he thinks about what it would mean to answer the calling, “from every part of his being unrest began to irradiate” (*P* 174). He experiences a “feverish quickening of his pulses” (*P* 174) and “[h]is lungs dilated and sank” (*P* 174). He does not see himself as one of the “men who washed their bodies briskly with cold water and wore clean cold linen” (*P* 168). Despite having imagined himself someday becoming a priest “[s]ome instinct. . . stronger than education or piety, quickened within him at every near approach of that life, an instinct subtle and hostile, and armed him against acquiescence. The chill and order of the life repelled him” (*P* 174).

Although Stephen is aware shortly after his meeting with the director that the priesthood is not his calling, he seems uncomfortable at his inability to explain to himself the reason for his decision.¹⁵ He sees himself as having “passed beyond the challenge of the sentries who had stood as guardians of his boyhood and had sought to keep him among them that he might be subject to them and serve their ends” (*P* 178) but he cannot understand why he would turn away from his religious upbringing so unexpectedly. All through Stephen’s boyhood “he had mused upon that which he had so often thought to be his destiny and when the moment had come for him to obey the call he had turned aside, obeying a wayward instinct” (*P* 179). He is confused and struggling to find the answers within himself.

The answer that Stephen has been searching for presents itself to him during a long walk. While thinking about his predicament, Stephen encounters a few of his classmates. The boys playfully make fun of Stephen’s name and their banter causes something within Stephen to recognize his name as being connected to his

15) Neil Davison suggests that Joyce wanted Stephen to have a “perception of the priesthood as a kind of castrating power structure” (86). He concludes that it is during, not after, the interview with the director that Stephen “discovers a new strategy to deal with his anxiety—that of a commitment to secular art” (86). On the other hand, David Daiches maintains that “Stephen the Artist begins to be born at the moment when he has successfully resisted the temptation to enter the Jesuit order” (699).

destiny. Whereas others had commented on his name in the past, now, “as never before, his strange name seemed to him a prophecy” (*P* 183), “a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being” (*P* 183). While Stephen had shown an interest in literature prior to this self-revelation, there is no indication that he had any aspirations of becoming an artist.¹⁶ Aside from using poetry and literature as an outlet for his frustrations and having a talent for writing essays, Stephen does not express an interest in dedicating his life to art. It is only at this moment that Stephen becomes aware of his destiny.

The realization that art, not religion, is his life’s calling has a liberating affect on Stephen.¹⁷ Stephen’s “heart trembled; his breath came faster and a wild spirit passed over his limbs as though he were soaring sunward” (*P* 183). His “throat ached with a desire to cry aloud, the cry of a hawk or eagle on high” (*P* 183). He realizes that art “was the call of life to his soul not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar” (*P* 184). Stephen realizes that he does not want to live in fear anymore. He makes the decision to “create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and

16) There is a camp of critics that believe Stephen does not become an artist at all during this work, and even extend that notion to *Ulysses*. For more information on this theory, see the works cited in my bibliography by Alan Warren Friedman (65), Thomas Grayson (315), and Eugene M. Waith (257).

17) David Daiches writes that “the birth of Stephen Dedalus (who is James Joyce) as an artist does not mean his recruitment into any specific profession; it does not mean that he has found his place in the social hierarchy and that henceforth his task is smooth. On the contrary, it means that he has discovered that he has no place, no recognized function” (701). In order for Stephen to become the artist he realizes he wants to be, he needs to leave the society that will label him a pariah. When Stephen returns to Dublin in *Ulysses*, his social status as a teacher gives a false impression that he is now accepted. He is more alienated and unhappy than the true outcast: the Jewish teetotaler, Leopold Bloom.

soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable" (P 184).

Stephen, Eveline, and Bob Doran all experience intense moments where they are faced with making decisions that will affect their lives forever. For Stephen, the crisis he faces is whether or not to follow the Church's plan for him and become a priest, or follow the plan he has for himself and become an artist. For Eveline, the crisis she faces is whether or not to stay with her father in Dublin, or go with Frank to Argentina. For Bob, the crisis he faces is whether or not to marry Polly, or to remain a man who is free from the restricting institution of marriage. All three characters feel the pressure to conform and realize their decisions have huge ramifications. Eveline, Bob, and Stephen all yearn to be free, but it is only Stephen who, at the end of *Portrait*, frees himself through a self-exile to Paris. While he is ironically not a "servant of two masters" in Europe, he will become one when he is lured back to Dublin in *Ulysses* as an adult (Joyce, *Ulysses* 20).

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Abstract

The Adolescent Crisis of Identity in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and
A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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This paper focuses on how British colonial institutions adversely affected the adolescent characters in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The adolescent crisis of identity found in Joyce's works starts to take shape when the characters reach a pivotal point in their lives. The characters are forced to make a choice: conform to societal expectations or follow their individual instincts and risk social alienation. In addition, the characters that are undergoing the crisis of identity in Joyce's writing are being influenced by society to make decisions that are diametrically opposed to what they truly want. In the first two examples from *Dubliners*, the protagonists give in to societal pressures and do what is expected of them. The third example, Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait*, despite enormous pressure from society to conform, chooses his own path of non-conformity. In all cases, the crisis of identity proves to be an extremely psychologically intense experience for the character regardless of whether he/she chooses to conform or not to conform. In exploring this important transition into adulthood, Joyce shows the adolescent characters as they face the most critical decisions of their young lives and tempers them for adulthood.

■ **Key words** : *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Foucault, identity, colonialism, crisis, adolescence, "Eveline," "The Boarding House"
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