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Creator and Creation: Artistic Development in Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts of the City College of the City University of New York

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Introduction

“Between the two – artist and art – there stands Life, now dividing, now uniting, now checking, now promoting.”

- Otto Rank, *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development* (1932)

To truly understand art-forms, besides studying them on several different levels, we must also understand the creative force in the artist. In this respect, Herman Melville’s *Pierre; or, the Ambiguities* (1852) and James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) are instructive as they outline the development of the artist-hero (to some extent based on their authors), who in a process of striving to realize their artistic potential, reject the social, cultural, and domestic demands of their environment to pursue an individual and transcendent artistic ideal. Both books reveal the difficulties and strange highs of the artist’s journey. However, while Joyce’s book traces a kind of artistic apotheosis, Melville’s shows an almost opposite journey of self-destruction and abject humiliation.

For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the primary protagonists of the novels, Pierre Glendinning and Stephen Dedalus, as well as Isabel Banford, a supporting character in Melville’s novel, to illustrate how the tensions of contemporary society have a direct influence on the artist-hero’s representations and perspectives on self-realization. The study can be divided into two parts. The introductory part will draw on the major concepts of the artist and artist fiction as put forth in Otto Rank’s *Art and Artist* (1916), Herbert Marcuse’s “Der Deutsche Künstlerroman” (“The German Artist Novel”, 1922), and Maurice Beebe’s *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (1964). This

section, consisting of the first two chapters, details the main features of the Künstlerroman and gives a brief survey of the critical trends concerning the genre. The purpose is to provide a working definition of the artist-novel and classifications of the artist-hero.

The second part consists of three chapters, each dedicated to each character, and studies the specificities of the artistic nature development. The importance of environment and experience for the artistic realization and the essential relations between artistic creation and the growth of personality are addressed. Pierre's section addresses the social and religious influences that affect his ability to write, as well as the character deficiencies that lead to his failure; for Stephen, it is the national and religious demands that impinge on his creativity and individuality. In both Pierre and Stephen's section, their domestic relationships, more specifically their relationship with women, are shown to also have a strong effect on their person and on their artwork. Isabel's section addresses a process of becoming an artist that is altogether different from Pierre and Stephen. For one, when the audience is introduced to her, Isabel's development as an artist is in a late stage. Secondly, she was able to develop independently because there are no exterior demands or stresses that hinder her ability to write. Indeed, of the three artist-heroes, Isabel seems to be the most "successful".

The final section is a summation and evaluation of the analyses addressed in the thesis.

Chapter 1: The Künstlerroman

When discussing the Künstlerroman, it is necessary to first consider the close connection it shares with the literary tradition of the Bildungsroman. In the German language, bildung translates as “education” or “formation” and refers to the philosophy of self-cultivation. This philosophy implies “introspectiveness; an individualistic cultural conscience; consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, the deepening and perfecting of one’s own personality...; subjectivism in the things of the mind”¹. The Bildungsroman, or the “novel of formation”, in which “an intelligent and open-minded young man in a complex, modern society, without generally accepted values...comes to decide, through the influence of [social and personal relationships and adventures] ...what is best in life for him and how he intends to pursue it”, was born from this philosophy on man’s adaptation to his society²³.

The Bildungsroman reached its paradigmatic form during the German Enlightenment at the end of the 18th century, and achieved its maximum expression with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, 1795-6) considered a prototype of the Bildungsroman. It was German philologist Johann Karl Simon Morgenstern who, precisely to classify Goethe’s novel,

¹ Bruford, W. H. *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: ‘Bildung’ From Humboldt to Thomas Mann*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). pp. vii.

² Ibid. pp. 30.

³ The genre of the Bildungsroman, and thus the Künstlerroman, has been dominated by male authors and protagonists. The Künstlerinroman (the “female artist novel”) has not been as explored and developed in literary criticism, though the Brontë’s (*Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*), Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*, *Orlando*), and more recently Margaret Atwood’s (*Cat’s Eye*) have greatly contributed to the genre.

introduced the term Bildungsroman into the literary lexicon. In his 1819 lecture called “Über das Wesen des Bildungsroman” (“On the Nature of the Bildungsroman”), Morgenstern offered a comprehensive definition of what he regarded as a new genre. He defined the Bildungsroman – which he considered “the most noble form of the category of the novel” – as a novel that represents the intellectual, moral, or aesthetic development of the hero from its beginning to a certain stage of completion; and the task of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* was “to depict a human being who develops toward his true nature by means of a collaboration of his inner dispositions with outer circumstances”⁴. Though Morgenstern receives credit for creating the term Bildungsroman, it was German philosopher and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey who legitimized and popularized its usage in literary criticism. Deriving his analysis from Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Apprenticeship* and Friedrich Hölderlin’s *Hyperion* (1797) Dilthey argues in *Der Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (*Poetry and Experience*, 1922) that the Bildungsroman represents “a regulated development in which the life of the individual is observed, each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony”⁵.

Künstlerroman, or “artist novel”, is a term given to the type of novel which represents the growth of an artist into the stage of maturity in which he recognizes his artistic vocation. The first samples of the Künstlerroman arose as a reaction to *Wilhelm*

⁴ Morgenstern, Karl. Tr. Boes, Tobias. “On the Nature of the Bildungsroman”. *PLMA*. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2009). pp. 656.

⁵ Swales, Martin. *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). p. 3

Meisters Lehrjahre, and not only for the conception of the artist-hero archetype but for an entire aesthetic front contrary to Goethe. Particularly representative in the genealogy of the Künstlerroman is Ludwig Tieck's *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (*Franz Sternbald's Wanderings*, 1798). Goethe deserves major credit for initiating the trend of the artist as hero, not merely because he pioneered the use of artists as central characters, but more importantly because the dominant theme of his work, particularly *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, attracted interest in the conflict between the individual with artistic tendencies and contemporary society. However, the Künstlerroman almost immediately established an oppositional relationship to the Bildungsroman. From the very beginning, a comparison was drawn between Tieck's and Goethe's novels. German poet and literary critic Friedrich Schlegel declared *Wilhelm Meister* no longer a supreme example of "progressive Universalpoesie" (progressive universal poetry). *Meister* had been transcended by Tieck's *Sternbald* as "der erste Roman seit Cervantes, der romantisch ist, und darüber weit über Meister" ("the first novel since Cervantes that is Romantic, and in that, is far above Meister")⁶. The final break that established the Künstlerroman as its own genre came with Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802). This novel was written as an "Anti-Meister" response to Goethe's Bildungsroman. Goethe's novel traces the inner development and changing fortunes of Wilhelm Meister in his quest for success in theatre and reconciliation with the demands of society. Goethe's hero, however, ultimately chooses the stability and practicality of a medical career. Novalis' novel narrates the spiritual and romantic journey of a young

⁶ Mahoney, Dennis F. *The Literature of German Romanticism*. (Rochester: Camden House, 2003). pp. 90.

poet. Whereas Wilhelm renounced art for social service, Novalis' unfinished novel made the artistic vocation seem the most noble and supreme calling for man. Novalis avowed that the aim of his "Anti-Meister" was as "an apotheosis of poesy. In the first part *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* matures into a poet, and in the second is transfigured as a poet"⁷. Ofterdingen differs from Meister in its concentration on the predicament of the creative artist.

The theoretical category of the *Künstlerroman* emerged, then, to examine the development of the figure of the artist. German philosopher Herbert Marcuse made the first and foundational study of this narrative modality in his doctoral dissertation "Der Deutsche *Künstlerroman*" ("The German Artist Novel", 1922). He explicitly cites Dilthey and Lukács as providing his analytical foundations and, like Dilthey and Lukács, Marcuse's work centers on an analysis of the novel form. As Marcuse sees it, the artist novel capture the special form of life represented by the artist.

Marcuse describes the *Künstlerroman* as a novel in which "an artist is treated in his milieu and as possessing a characteristic type of life"⁸. This type of novel is only possible if the very being of the artist is not harmonious with that of the community; that is, it presupposes that the artist possesses a unique lifestyle and that the other forms of social existence generally available are not suitable to the being of the artist⁹. For Marcuse, only if the artist does become a distinct personality, representative of his own

⁷Lutz, Bernd. Hoffacker, Helmut. Ehlert, Klaus. *A History of German Literature: From the Beginning to the Present Day*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994). pp. 182.

⁸ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 4*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006). pp. 72.

⁹ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation*. pp. 74.

type of life that fundamentally does not correspond with humanity, may he become the hero of the novel. The artist hero “has stepped outside of the preconscious unity with the world, he has taken up the painful, lonely struggle for his subjectivity,’ through to the recognition that he can only possess the world ‘insofar as he renounces it. Insofar as he abandons all personal desires, insofar as he does not want to be one, he can be all. Thus, he sacrifices himself for the world...And now the duality is effaced, the epic objectivity is possible”¹⁰. This is where the artist novel exists; here the artist seeks somehow to reconcile the divided self, the man *and* the artist, which pits his essential being as an artist (*sein Künstlertum*) against the surrounding world¹¹. The fundamental problem of the artist novel is the attempt of the artist to reconcile the contradictions between art and life, his values and those of his community. Marcuse presents that the rupture of the unitary vision of life, that is, the life-art conflict, is primary theme of the *Künstlerroman*.

Marcuse classifies the artist novel in terms of a distinction between two major types of the artist novel: “realistic-objective” and the “romantic”, which in turn are related to the two main cultural tendencies of the time: a rationalistic Enlightenment and a subjectivist Romanticism¹². The romantic tradition tends toward aesthetic ideals that generally cannot be realized, and thus often leads to a rejection of everyday life for art. The subjective-romantic orientation “flees into an otherworldly idealist dreamland, and constructs there his poeticized world of fulfillment”¹³. In the realistic-objective artist

¹⁰ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation*. pp. 74.

¹¹ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation*. pp. 78.

¹² Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation*. pp. 79.

¹³ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation*. pp. 79.

novel, the artist acknowledged that the world's surroundings are the basis of his craft, yet "he seeks to transform, transfigure, and renew them"¹⁴. In these ways, the *Künstlerroman* remains thus defined. Marcuse goes beyond a mere retrospective inquiry of the genre and inscribes this complex literary phenomenon with a general conception of the artist novel and a philosophy of the artist hero.

¹⁴ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation*. pp. 79.

Chapter 2: The Artist-Hero

The artist-hero is an individual who is easily recognized by his behaviors and temperament; he is “always sensitive, usually introverted and self-centered, often passive, and sometimes so capable of abstracting himself mentally from the world around him that he appears absent-minded or possessed”¹⁵. The narrative development of the Künstlerroman prototype leads the hero to test and reject the demands “of love and life, of God, home, and country, until nothing is left but his true self and his consecration as artist”¹⁶. The search for the self is the foundation on which the artist-novel is built, and since the self lives almost in constant conflict with society, this causes the emergence of the struggle between life and art. To study the genre by tracing its general pattern common to all works, allows an understanding of the different individual representations of the artist. Said patterns, per Beebe’s theory, can be found in three interrelated premises: “the divided self”, “the ivory tower”, and “the sacred fount.”

The Künstlerroman often highlights the divided nature of the creator: the human being and the artist; that is transformed into a marginal being, separate from the world around him and yet, prey to social conventions, while his whole being has artistic creation as his only and exclusive objective¹⁷. Maurice Beebe proposes a “divided self”

¹⁵ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce*. (New York: New York University Press, 1964). pp. 5.

¹⁶ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 6.

¹⁷ Establishing once again the parallelism between the artist novel and the novel of formation, it may be recalled that the Bildungsroman represents “a world from which one could expect the formation not of an artist, a statesman, or a scholar but of a *human being*”, in reference to Karl Morgenstern, “On the Nature of the Bildungsroman”. *PMLA*. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2009). pp. 656.

as one of the recurring patterns that form the standard of artistic character. We can assume the divided nature of the artist is the basic premise to understand the figure, understanding what forces pull him in contrary directions. Beebe posits that if the human side of the artist pursues personal success through experience, his creative self desires freedom beyond the demands of life¹⁸ (Beebe 13). Theoretical support for the concept of the “divided self” is found in C.G. Jung’s comments on art and artists, which casts the creative person as a duality, consisting of an individual with a personal life and an impersonal creative process:

Every creative person is a duality or a synthesis of contradictory attitudes. On the one side, he is an individual with a personal life, while on the other side he is an impersonal creative process...The artist is not a person endowed with a free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purpose through him. As a human being, he may have moods and a will and personal aims, but as an artist, he is “man” in a higher sense – he is “collective man” – one who carries and shapes the unconscious psychic life of mankind¹⁹ (Beebe 10).

The concept of the divided nature seems to be the interest of the *Künstlerromane*: the search for a reconciliation of the artistic self and person, or the artistic enterprise with the personal life. This conflict resulted in two contrary aesthetic traditions: the “Sacred Fount” and the “Ivory Tower”.

¹⁸ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, with reference to C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Tr. Stanley Dell and Cary F. Barnes. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1945), pp. 194-5). pp. 13

¹⁹ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 10.

What Beebe calls the “Sacred Fount” is “art as experience”; that is, this tradition is inclined to equate art and life experience, if “the true artist is one who lives not less, but more fully and intensely than others”²⁰. To presupposed that the artist is by nature an individual of feeling is to presupposed a close relationship between art and experience. According to Beebe, one implication of the Sacred Fount myth is that life and art are interchangeable; that is, life can be directly converted to art. Beebe assumes that this conversion would destroy life, or, similarly, destroy art and the artist²¹. The inference of the tradition is that life and art are so closely linked that one can expend or annihilate the other: “because there is so much life to be lived, that which is turned into art is made unavailable for living...hence the continual struggle between art and life”²².

The Sacred Fount tradition had its beginning in the art novels of the Romantic period. The *idée fixe* of the Sacred Fount tradition is the artist’s compulsion to consider himself “as one unknown, as an uncannily remote stranger”²³. Beebe distinguishes two main ideal types of the romantic artist-hero:

one is the Chatterton image, the sensitive plant too delicate to feel at ease in a material world; the other is Byronic, the guilt-cursed rebel whose intensity of purpose and appetite for passionate experiences alienate him from a society that prefers mildness to intensity and the usual to the unique²⁴.

²⁰ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 13.

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 16.

²² *Ibid.* pp. 17.

²³ *Ibid.* pp. 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 66.

The latter is the first type which this study will focus on. Because he feels more intensely than others, he is tempted toward the extremes of experience, and “if it is a sense of guilt that forces him into exile, it is also a sense of guilt that gives him the right to offer lessons to those who have not gone as far as he”²⁵ (Beebe 67). For a later Romantic like Melville, the artist-hero may even set himself as equal to the God of creation. “Exiled for aye from God and man,” Pierre declares, “I shall declare myself an equal power with both”²⁶ (Melville 107) The exalted ideals of the Byronic artist-hero in the “Sacred Fount” tradition unfit them for reality and produce a “disillusioned idealist whose unusual capacity for affection and experience [make] him bitter at the failure of life to meet his personal standards of intensity”²⁷ (Beebe 70). If the hero subscribes to the Romantic notion that an artist must depend on his experiences, that art is his sacred calling, then the romantic artist-hero must also accept the disconnection between the artist and the man. This type of artist-hero manifests itself in Pierre Glendenning in Herman Melville’s *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, which will be discussed later.

The second type of aesthetic tradition is the “Ivory Tower”; or, “art as religion.” This tradition places art over life, stipulating that the artist can make use of life experiences only if he remains detached – “the artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 67.

²⁶ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 1996). pp. 107.

²⁷ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 70.

existence, indifferent”²⁸²⁹. Contrary to the “Sacred Fount” tradition, the “Ivory Tower” tradition equated art with religion rather than experience. The artist of this tradition cares little for humanity: “far from wanting to live more fully, he resents his carnal appetites and natural instincts, and yearns to be free from human bondage...life is replaced by art, and art becomes a sacred ritual”³⁰.

This new emphasis on internal consciousness has its roots in what Beebe considers a “second romanticism.” In the “Ivory Tower” tradition the artist-hero becomes either a dandy or an aesthete. The dandy is “an artist of life who makes himself an artistic creation” and what distinguishes him from other men is a need to attain individuality³¹. The second type of artist-hero, and the second type on whom this study will focus, is the aesthete. The aesthete finds its roots in the Aesthetic movement of the fin de siècle. The Aesthetic movement championed the artistic vocation and the aesthete of the Ivory Tower tradition acted as a poet-prophet capable of comprehending and transcribing a deeper reality, “thus bringing a new vision to society and a desire for a world that is better than the apparent world because it is not only more beautiful, but closer to God’s creation”³². This type of modern artist inherits the curse of the Romantic poet and his sense of social exclusion forces him to live within himself and without the world. The tradition of the aesthete and the Ivory Tower serve to inform the second

²⁸ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. (London: Penguin, 2003). pp. 233

²⁹ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 13.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 114.

³¹ Ibid. pp. 133.

³² Ibid. pp. 148.

novel that will also be discussed later: James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Chapter 3: Pierre Glendinning as an Artist

Herman Melville's novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852) establishes itself as a Künstlerroman by tracing the artistic development of its hero, Pierre Glendinning, whose aspirations and ambitions are unhinged by the dogmatic social environment in which he resides and his eroticized relationship with a domineering mother and an illegitimate half-sister. Hence, Melville's artist novel becomes a study in failure: Pierre Glendinning fails as an artist because he is incapable of reconciling his realities.

I. Young American In Literature

Pierre Glendenning's disillusionment stems from an antiquated system of aristocratic feudalism and the romantic myth of American *noblesse oblige* ("privilege entails responsibility"). The heir apparent to the great, historic Glendinning line of Sadow Meadows, descended from heroes who fought in the Indian and Revolutionary Wars, Pierre stands primed to inherit a leadership role in the nation. However, Melville's novel serves to reflect the failure of the prevailing social systems of antebellum generation³³ through the lens of literary nationalism.

When Melville first describes Pierre Glendenning's existence at Saddle Meadows, he offers what Henry A. Murray describes as "an overcompensatory Eden, a poetical feudal paradise," and what Eric Sundquist judges an "insanely pastoralized

³³ I define "antebellum" as the years after the War of 1812 and before the American Civil War (1812-1861).

opening”³⁴. There is no doubt that Melville stresses the extreme aristocratic feudalism – and very American heritage – of the Glendinning rural seat at Saddle Meadows and of Pierre’s “great genealogical and real-estate dignity”³⁵. Further, Melville indicates that Pierre is product the archaic systems of the American aristocracy:

If this seem but too fond and foolish in Pierre, and if you tell me that [Pierre’s excessive pride in his ancestry] showed him no sterling Democrat, and that a truly noble man should never brag of any army but his own; then I beg you to consider again that this Pierre was but a youngster as yet³⁶.

and the narrator assures Pierre’s eventual maturation: “you will pronounce Pierre a thorough-going Democrat in time; perhaps a little too Radical altogether to your fancy”³⁷. The dissolution of antiquated aristocratic programs and patrilineal privilege and Pierre’s ideological emergence (or divergence) into a new democratic sphere are anticipated from the onset of the novel. The trigger for Pierre’s emergence from an idyllic youth and future as the lord of Saddle Meadows is the disruptive appearance of Isabel Banford, his alleged illegitimate half-sister.

On a certain level, Isabel serves as the archetypical mysterious dark heroine of the romance novel, who, through her distress and sexuality, entices Pierre away from his fiancé. But her presence also functions to galvanize Pierre’s maturation by forcing him not only to reconsider his social responsibilities but also his identity. His decision to

³⁴ Nixon, Nicola. “Compromising Politics and Herman Melville’s Pierre”. *American Literature*. Vol. 69. No. 4. (Durham: Duke University Press, Dec., 1997). pp. 722.

³⁵ Meville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 13.

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 12.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 13.

preserve his father's public memory and recuse Isabel from her isolation and obscurity destroys the structures that guaranteed his aristocratic position and patriarchal distinction. By rejecting his birthright and separating himself from his family's distinguished position, Pierre "crosses the rubicon":

Henceforth, cast-out Pierre hath no paternity, and no past; and since the Future is blank to all; therefore, twice-disinherited Pierre stands untrammelledly his ever-present self! – free to do his own self-will and present fancy to whatever end³⁸.

Pierre faces the consequences of declaring liberation from his predetermined identity, a decision that generates his resolve to be a "mature" author.

Having discussed the irreversible loss and disintegration of Pierre's Edenic world, Melville links Pierre's social nonconformity to the issue of authorial creativity and aesthetic nonconformity. As the young aristocrat at Saddle Meadows, Pierre was an author of sentimental poetry and prose, praised by his peers and critics who

spoke in high terms of his surprising command of language, they begged to express their wonder at his euphonious construction of sentences, they regarded with reverence the pervading symmetry of his general style...and confessed their complete inability to restrain their unqualified admiration for the highly judicious smoothness and genteelness of the sentiments and fancies expressed"³⁹.

The tone of the narrator is half-mocking; he later goes on to lambast "agreeable parlor society"; for there, "you lose your own sharp individuality" and become part of "that soft

³⁸ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 199.

³⁹ Ibid. pp. 245.

social Pantheism, as it were, that rose melting of all into one, ever prevailing in those drawing rooms, which pacifically and deliciously belie their own name; in as much as there no one draws the sword to his own individuality, but all such ugly weapons are left...with your hat and can in the hall"⁴⁰. Such an indictment of the inauthentic and narcissistic sentimentalism of those patrons who celebrated the mediocre and the conventional signals Pierre's break from the homogenous conventions of antebellum genteel culture. While the novel contains a lacerating condemnation of the "dynasty of taste" in America, Melville imagines Pierre's attempts to write a "mature work" as representative of a (failed) effort to deliver the "Truth."

Pierre's proclamation of independence from "parlor society" finds expression in his vow "to gospelize the world anew" and transcribe "deeper secrets than the Apocalypse"⁴¹. Disowning all his previous work as "care-free fancy" and renouncing his relinquished identity, Pierre engages himself in composing a "mature" work to deliver "what he thought to be a new, or at least miserably neglected Truth to the world"⁴². It may be recalled that once the artist has "'stepped outside the preconscious unity with the world, he has taken up the painful, lonely struggle for his subjectivity,' through to the recognition that he can only possess the world 'insofar as he renounces it...thus he sacrifices himself for the world'"⁴³. Authorship for Pierre represents a step outside of the "preconscious unity" to a more individual and interior development. He intends his

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp. 250.

⁴¹ Ibid. 273

⁴² Ibid. pp. 282-3.

⁴³ Marcuse, Herbert. *Art and Liberation*. pp. 74.

writing to transcribe “Truth” through reflection and then to project these truths into the culture against which the self is set.

If Pierre’s principled search for truth makes him seem the ideal artist-hero, the narrator suggests that at this point he still represents the world he renounced; he is the “American Enceladus, wrought by the vigorous hand of Nature’s self”⁴⁴. Even in Pierre’s dedication to genius and transcendental individuality, and despite his descent from the privileged and illustrious position he held at the beginning of the novel, his character still, in some respects, remains fixed in tradition. The literary marketplace and the American public may be flawed, but Pierre’s “plagiariz[ing] from his own experiences,” his expression of that which is “hard and bitter in his lot”, is likewise so. Ultimately Pierre’s failure as an author comes from his belief in the uniqueness of his own experiences and from his inability to recognize the fault in his romantic self-perception. His apparent ideological transformation becomes self-deception. Pierre may “cross the rubicon”, but he reverts: he “may live in New York, but he imports Saddle Meadows; he may become a wage slave, but he tries to earn money by aggrandizing himself; he may be a democrat, but he believes himself to be a chivalric hero”⁴⁵. These inconsistencies will be explored further in a later discussion of Pierre’s character.

⁴⁴ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 346.

⁴⁵ Nixon, Nicola. “Compromising Politics and Herman Melville’s *Pierre*”. pp. 736-7.

II. Mothers and Muses

Pierre Glendenning's Oedipal attachment to his mother in childhood and the ambiguous relationship with his half-sister interfere with Pierre's psychological development and prove themselves ultimately destructive to his artistic production. Crimes of nature and crimes of writing are inseparable in *Pierre*. Melville's chaotic state of authorship is, then, another effect of his preoccupation with themes of subversiveness.

Following the death of his father, Pierre becomes unusually attached to his mother and her passionate return of his Oedipal affection create a confusion of sexual desire with the desire for maternal love⁴⁶. The relationship between Pierre and his dominant mother is intensely eroticized; the narrator writes that a "reverential and devoted son seemed lover enough for this widow...[the] romantic filial love of Pierre seemed fully returned"⁴⁷. Pierre's "romantic filial love" suggests a lack of distinction between romantic love and maternal affection. Melville adds another layer to Pierre's Oedipal crisis:

⁴⁶ Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank believes that from the standpoint of the psychology of artistic production, "[the artist's] wrestling with the Oedipus experience seems to mean something essentially different...the artist reacts more strongly than, and certainly in a different way from, the normal person to this unavoidable average experience of the parental relation...because of his peculiar reactivity, which in the case of artistic expression we call "creative". Rank, Otto. Trans. Atkinson, Charles Francis. *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development*. (New York: Agathon Press, 1968).

⁴⁷ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 5.

[in] the playfulness of their unclouded lover, and with that strange license...long bred between them, they were wont to call each other brother and sister. Both in public and in private⁴⁸.

The “playfulness” of their “unclouded love” does little to veil the romantic nature of their relationship, and the “strange license[s] warn of the dangers of Pierre’s Oedipal attachment. Pierre’s conversion from mother to sister/lover facilitates his conversion of sister to wife. In speaking of a sister, Pierre again conflates romantic love with fraternal affections; “For surely,” he says, “a gentle sister is the second best gift to a man, and it is first in point of occurrence, for the wife comes after...for much that goes to make up the deliciousness of a wife, already lies in the sister”⁴⁹. The sibling relationship, in all its “deliciousness”, and the “romantic filial” relationship, reveal the eroticism of the sentimental family. One reviewer took umbrage to this, writing:

Mrs. Glendinning and Pierre, mother and son, call each other brother and sister, and are described with all the coquetry of a lover and mistress. And again, in what we have termed the supersensuousness relation between Pierre and Isabel seem to be vaguely hinted at⁵⁰.

Indeed, such transgressive equivalencies creates anxiety for Pierre, whose relationship with his half-sister Isabel becomes just as confused and ambiguous.

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 7.

⁵⁰ Ed. Higgins, Brian. Parker, Herschel. *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). pp. 431.

Pierre's "labyrinth of untethered kinships" is closely linked to his authorship⁵¹ and his need to create a new narrative. After Pierre escapes Saddle Meadows with Isabel, they establish a false identification as husband and wife. By the "nominal conversion of a sister into a wife", Pierre "had habituated his voice and manner to a certain fictitiousness"⁵². As Silverman suggests, Pierre's renaming of Isabel suggests a rewriting of conventional familial relationships; that is the transgression of domestic rule is what Barthes called a "transgression of semantic rule"⁵³. Speaking of the conflicting modes of writing, Pierre notes,

[by] the one mode, all contemporaneous circumstances, facts, and events must be set down contemporaneously; by the other, they are only to be set down as the general stream of the narrative shall dictate, for matters which are kindred in time, may be very irrelative in themselves. I elect neither of these; I am careless of either; both are well enough in their own way; I write precisely as I please⁵⁴.

This suggests that Pierre's attempt to revise the dominant narrative is tantamount to an attempt to semantically rewrite social structures to conform to his own version of reality.

Here the sister is both muse and mistress at once; which, according to Otto Rank, means that "she must justify equally the artistic ego, with its creativeness, and the real self, with its life...the artist of this type working off on the woman his inward struggle between life and production or, psychologically speaking, between impulse and will"⁵⁵.

⁵¹ I borrow this phrase from William Spengemann's introduction to *Pierre*. pp. xii.

⁵² Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 177.

⁵³ Silverman, Gillian. *Bodies and Books: Reading and the Fantasy of Communion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2012). pp. 90.

⁵⁴ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 244.

⁵⁵ Rank, Otto. *Art and Artist*. pp. 52.

Rank holds that the woman rarely, and only then temporarily, succeeds in resolving the two conflicts – and such is the case with Pierre. Isabel as a Muse spurs on and aids Pierre; taken by “the divine beauty and imploring sufferings of [her] face, Pierre feels his sense of “the solid land of veritable reality...audaciously encroached upon by bannered armies of hooded phantoms, disembarking in his soul”⁵⁶. For Pierre, who had never known suffering or been deeply “initiated into that darker, though truer aspect of things”, Isabel reveals profundities in his soul and “one infinite, dumb, beseeching countenance of mystery, underlying all surfaces of visible time and space”⁵⁷. In a passage that emphasizes Isabel’s impact on Pierre’s imagination, Melville writes, “Of late to Pierre, much more vividly than ever before, the whole story of Isabel had seemed an enigma, a mystery, an imaginary delirium, especially since he had got so deep into the inventional mysteries of his book”⁵⁸. Isabel holds over Pierre the power to shape his narrative; he tells her so when he declares “any, – all words are thine, Isabel, word and worlds with all their containings, shall be slaves to thee, Isabel”⁵⁹. Once Pierre discovers the deeper founts of his creativity, he is initiated through Isabel into an awareness of the “strange stuff”, the “devouring profundities” which would be the basis of his new, more mature, and more interior work⁶⁰.

However, once Pierre has settled in the city and begins work on his book, Isabel becomes associated with the struggles of writing. The narrator writes that often “when

⁵⁶ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 69, 51-2.

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp.353-4.

⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 313.

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 304-5.

[Pierre's] day's work was done, [Isabel] sat by him in the twilight, and played her mystic guitar till [he] felt chapter after chapter born of its wondrous suggestiveness; but alas! eternally incapable of being translated into words; for where the deepest words end, there music begins with its supersensuous and all-founding intimations"⁶¹. Where Isabel as a Muse initiated Pierre, as Pierre's book becomes increasingly disappointing, Isabel as a mistress is felt to be an obstacle to Pierre's artistic productions. By committing himself to Isabel, Pierre believes he is not committing himself to Truth, but to a further (if different) level of disillusion:

With the soul of an Atheist, he wrote down the godliest things; with the feeling of misery and death in him, he created forms of gladness and life... the more and the more he wrote, and the deeper and the deeper that he dived, Pierre saw the *everlasting elusiveness* [emphasis added] of Truth; the universal *lurking insincerity* [emphasis added] of even the greatest and purest written thoughts⁶².

Isabel's own elusiveness and ambiguity is one of the deepest sources of his conflict, and she leads Pierre (or in any case joins him) to his annihilation. Arrested for murder and alone in a dungeon of the city prison awaiting judgment, Pierre laments:

Here, then, is the untimely end; – Life's last chapter well stitched into the middle!
Nor book, nor author of the book, hath any sequel, though each hath its last lettering! – It is ambiguous still. Had I been heartless now, disowned, and

⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 282.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 339.

spurning the girl at Saddle Meadows, then had I been happy through a long life on earth, and perchance a long eternity in heaven⁶³ (Melville 360).

Whether Isabel did beguile Pierre, or whether Pierre is displacing his failures onto her, is ambiguous. Isabel's strong influence on Pierre implies a tacit submission on Pierre's and of course, the reality of her "spell" reflects in his own nature and impulses rather than in her. Yet to say so does not lessen Isabel's force on Pierre's development as an author.

III. The Sacred Fount and the Romantic Artist-Hero

Returning to the earlier discussion of the artist hero, recall that the "Sacred Fount" tradition can be defined as "art as experience". In this tradition, life can be converted into art, and thus being so closely related, one can consume or destroy the other. The "romantic artist-hero" is the "Byronic, guilt-ridden rebel" in the Sacred Fount tradition. Herman Melville's *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* and his titular artist-hero, Pierre Glendinning, are representative of Beebe's classifications.

Following the tradition of the Sacred Fount, Pierre the author "seems to have directly plagiarized from his own experiences, to fill out the mood of his apparent author-hero, Vivia"⁶⁴. The narrator's expression "plagiarized from his own experiences" denotes the artistic appropriation of life. The (mis)adventures of Pierre develop in a text that at once enacts and records them. Assuming this close relation of life experience and art, the narrator theorizes:

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 302.

though the naked soul of man doth assuredly contain one latent element of intellectual productiveness; yet never was there a child born solely from one parent; the visible world of experience being that procreative thing which impregnates the muses [emphasis added] ...it is impossible to talk or to write without apparently throwing oneself helplessly open⁶⁵.

Pierre uses the materials afforded him by experience; indeed, Pierre's work becomes autobiographical fiction. Though Pierre's work is a product of his imagination, it is a mimetic representation of his reality. What Pierre desired was to create in novelistic form a world that would more accurately convey the essence of experience, that would "gospelize the world anew"⁶⁶. Like many artists of the Sacred Fount tradition, Pierre was absorbed with questions of the artist's relationship to the world, and the degree to which his work "will stand the final test of a real impassioned onset of Life and Passion"⁶⁷.

Pierre's unusually strong fixation on his art's relationship to life accounts for his collapse. Maurice Beebe insists that such is the close link of art and life, that one must necessarily surpass the other. In Pierre's case, life destroys his art; his art could not withstand the demands of living. The peculiar destructive relationship between art and life – the "two leeches" – is best explained by the narrator's metaphor of the two books:

Two book are being writ; of which the world shall only see one, and that the bungled one. The larger book, and the infinitely better, is for Pierre's own private shelf. That it is, whose unfathomable cravings drink his blood; the other only

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 259.

⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 272.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 289.

demands his ink. But circumstances have so decreed, that the one cannot be composed on the paper, but only as the other is writ down in his soul... Thus Pierre is fastened on by two leeches; – how then can the life of Pierre last?⁶⁸

Whereas life liberated his art, Pierre becomes increasingly at odds with his book, surrounded by the ambiguities of life.

Pierre is the romantic artist-hero archetype of the Sacred Fount tradition, or the “Byronic, guilt-cursed rebel”. He exhibits the general artistic temperament: “always sensitive, usually introverted and self-centered, often passive, and sometimes so capable of abstracting himself mentally from the world around him that he appears absentminded or ‘possessed’”⁶⁹. The romantic artist-hero is the guilt-cursed artist who seeks redemption by “passing onto others his vision of the absolute”⁷⁰. Recurrent hope and disillusion characterize both of his art and his life – filled alternately with self-pity and self-exultation, excitement and despair – and his work is a product of a disillusioned idealist whose peculiar capacity for feeling make him bitter at the failure of his life to meet his personal standards⁷¹. Melville’s Pierre Glendinning is particularly representative of this style of artist-hero.

Pierre is the guilt-ridden “aristocratic rebel” linked with the romantic artist-hero. Deprived of his father, rejected by his mother, and disillusioned with the shallow hypocrisies of his aristocratic class, Pierre becomes the figure of the disinherited, misanthropic youth seeking truth. Duty-bound, guilt-ridden, and driven by a Byronic

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 304.

⁶⁹ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid. pp. 68.

⁷¹ Ibid. pp. 70.

hero's rash impulses, Pierre is compelled to recognize his sibling and rescue her, even though doing so will destroy his family and himself. Pierre's heroic defiance of his past represents a will to annihilation, a sort of death drive⁷². He rebels against the world and the society which has shaped him; charged with "the fire of all divineness", Pierre declares, and "exiled for aye from God and man, I shall declare myself an equal power with both"⁷³.

Pierre exhibits the mental instability of the romantic artist-hero; he is unbalanced in the direction of narcissism and manic depression. Passive melancholy and aggressive grandiosity causes Pierre to wildly waver between self-deprecation and conceit:

there was nothing more he spurned than his own aspirations; nothing he more abhorred than the loftiest part of himself⁷⁴.

His feelings of grandiosity are accompanied by an appalling delusional reconstitution of himself as an omnipotent object; he was "this vulnerable god...this avenger of the avenging dream"⁷⁵. It is this pathological belief that makes Pierre tragically ill-equipped to cope the "everlasting elusiveness of Truth" and that leads to his intense melancholia.

Trapped in his extreme romantic subjectivism and complete inwardness, Pierre could

⁷² I agree with Robert Howland Smith's assertion that the death-drive works as "the silent motor of artwork": "As it were the 'spirit' of the artwork, the death-drive carries the artwork away from all that is, from all that is 'there', and in so doing protects it as an artwork". Smith, Robert Howland. *Death-Drive: Freudian Haunting in Literature and Art*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). pp. 24.

⁷³ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 107.

⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 339.

⁷⁵ Ibid. pp. 181.

not transcend the split between the ideal and reality, self and society. His final act of suicide is the result of his realization that the world will not fulfill his narcissistic fantasy.

Chapter 4: Isabel Banford as an Artist

“Bring me the guitar!” exclaims Isabel, the heroine of *Pierre*. “Now listen to the guitar; and the guitar shall sing to thee the sequel of my story; *for not in words can it be spoken* [my emphasis]”⁷⁶.

Isabel is almost always presented in relation to Pierre. Yet there is a brief moment in which Melville gives Isabel her own story, independent of Pierre’s. What she recounts to Pierre of her own process of becoming an individual is also a recounting of her process of becoming an artist.

The story of Isabel’s past stands in stark contrast with Pierre’s own early history. Pierre is the beloved only child, nurtured in the comfort and grandeur of the Glendinning estate. Isabel’s early history is one of poverty, neglect, and abuse. Motherless, fatherless, and with no companion, she feels “all visible sights and all audible sounds growing stranger and stranger, and fearful and more fearful” to her⁷⁷. Unlike Pierre, who feels joy to be his “right as a man”, Isabel, because of her bleak childhood, is still unable to “identify that thing which is called happiness” and does not long for it, having no “conscious memory” of ever experiencing it⁷⁸. After her account of her “first dim life-thoughts”, she tells Pierre that she never “wholly recovered” from the effects of her childhood⁷⁹. Otto Rank suggests,

⁷⁶ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 126.

⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 116.

⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 41, 119.

⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 114, 117.

in no case...will the individual become an artist through one experience, least of all through the experiences of childhood...the becoming of the artist has a *particular genesis* [my emphasis] one of the manifestations of which may be some special experience⁸⁰.

The icon for the “dreaminess” and “bewilderingness” of Isabel’s history and the genesis of her becoming is her guitar⁸¹.

As a child, Isabel purchased a guitar from a peddler who had bought it from a servant at the (unknown to her at the time) Glendinning estate. For some reason she could not yet fathom, Isabel immediately identified with the guitar; though she had never seen a guitar before nor ever heard of one, Isabel “knew there was melodiousness lurking in [the instrument] ...[and] there was a strange humming in [her] heart that seemed to prophesy of the hummings of the guitar”⁸². Isabel explains to Pierre that from the moment she first plucked its strings, she realized that “the guitar was speaking to [her], the dear guitar was singing to [her]; murmuring and singing”⁸³. Through this conversation with the guitar, Isabel came to believe the instrument translates “all the wonders that are unimaginable and unspeakable” and speaks of “legendary delights eternally unexpected and unknown”⁸⁴.

Isabel relies on the guitar to speak for her, to tell her story, “for not in words can it be spoken,” she asserts. This declaration is very Melvillean; that is, it is very reminiscent

⁸⁰ Rank, Otto. *Art and Artist*. pp. 50.

⁸¹ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 121.

⁸² Ibid. pp. 125.

⁸³ Ibid. pp. 125.

⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 125.

of views expressed in Melville's work of the inadequacies of language. In his essay "Hawthorne and His Mosses" (1850), Melville writes that he is no longer certain that writing could express the "occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth"⁸⁵. In the section "Extracts" of *Moby Dick* (1851), Melville quotes from James Montgomery's poem "The Pelican Island" (1828) that refers to "Fishes of every color, form, and kind; / Which language cannot paint"⁸⁶. The struggle to escape literary conventions and dominant discourses, as well as and the failure of language to sufficiently express experience was discussed in the earlier section on Pierre Glendinning. With Isabel, Melville presents music as an alternative, and more successful, medium through which to convey "intuitive Truth".

In her study of the language in *Pierre*, Elizabeth Duquette writes that Isabel's song is "phonic in its emphasis" and as such "rejects interpretation"⁸⁷. The sounds from the guitar become a sort of non-verbal language and Isabel uses the guitar to express otherwise inexpressible truths. That Isabel accompanies words with her guitar's "murmurings" demonstrates the impossibility of translating the guitar's truth into a verbal medium:

⁸⁵ Melville, Herman. "Hawthorne and his Mosses". <https://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/SAYLOR-ENGL405-3.2-MOSES.pdf>. pp. 6.

⁸⁶ Lee, Maurice S. "The Language of *Moby-Dick*". *A Companion to Herman Melville*. (New Jersey: Wiley, 2008). pp. 402.

⁸⁷ Duquette, Elizabeth. "*Pierre's* Nominal Conversions". *Melville and Aesthetics*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). pp. 134.

And still the girl played on the guitar; and her long dark shower of curls fell over it, and veiled it; and still, out from the veil came the swarming sweetness, and the utter unintelligibility, but the infinite significances of the sounds of the guitar⁸⁸.

The guitar is associated with a deeper consciousness, the “inmost tones of [the] heart”, therefore placing Isabel in a natural state. This is evidenced by Pierre’s insistence that Isabel is “the mistress of the natural sweetness of the guitar”⁸⁹. Christopher Sten states that Melville argued for a theory of art according to which “the artist who is closest to Nature is the one whose work is most likely to be true” and that he insisted “on a sense of immediacy and honesty in the creation of any work of art – a feeling of liveliness, or of something beyond what the eye can see”⁹⁰.

What Duquette calls this phenomenon “cognitive failure”, Melville terms “bewilderment”⁹¹. Drawing on Paul de Man’s reading of Kant, Duquette shows that Melville aligns “bewilderment” with creativity and aesthetic ideology:

What “poets do” is see the materiality of the world, unfiltered by the faculties Kant details through the many pages of his critical philosophy, for the sublime registers “the disruption of the aesthetic as a return to the materiality of inscription”. When we do what poets do, when we “take” the world “just as it strikes the eye,” we unsettle our expectations, the assumptions cognition teaches us to make, and see the *form* [her emphasis] of the world anew⁹².

⁸⁸ Melville, Herman. *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. pp. 126.

⁸⁹ Ibid. pp. 334.

⁹⁰ Sten, Christopher. “Introduction”. *Savage Eye: Melville and the Visual Arts*. (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1991). pp. 11.

⁹¹ Duquette, Elizabeth. “*Pierre’s* Nominal Conversions”. pp. 129.

⁹² Ibid. pp. 130.

This model of “what ‘poets do’” allows Isabel to be taken seriously as an artist. She succeeds where Pierre fails because she is “unfiltered”; because she has no domestic or social obligations or responsibilities, she could develop her art purely and independently of all those demands. Her history has made her particularly well-suited to “see the materiality of the world” and to “see the *form* of the world anew”⁹³.

⁹³ Recall that Pierre announced to Isabel his intention to “gospelize the world anew” through his novel; he fails to do this.

Chapter 5: Stephen Dedalus as an Artist

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) establishes itself as a Künstlerroman almost simply by its title. Joyce's novel plots the path to the artistic maturation and independence of its hero, Stephen Dedalus, through his repudiation of the Irish nation state and the systems of nationalism and religion. Stephen's journey culminates in his triumphant self-exile from God, home, and country so that he may actualize himself as a true artist.

I. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Irish Man

Written and set in a time of emergent Irish nationalism, the relationship between the artist and his country is prevalent in *A Portrait*, beginning with the young Stephen memorizing the colors used by his aunt to represent the Irish politicians Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell, and ending with an older Stephen leaving Ireland "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race"⁹⁴. This section will be concentrated on the dialogues Stephen has regarding the relationship between politics, religion, and art.

The conversation that initiates and informs Stephen's discussion of politics and aesthetics is the dialogue he has with his English dean of studies, wherein Joyce dramatizes the loss of the Irish language as a loss of the national character and the national artist. Speaking before class, Stephen discovers that he and the dean use different words to refer to the same tool. The dean, who is English, assumes his word to

⁹⁴ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 276.

be Irish, and Stephen notes his own relationship to the English language and is troubled by it:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language⁹⁵.

Language is problematic for Stephen because, as indicated above, he is fully aware that his language is not his own. He recognizes English as the language of the colonizer and one in which his Irish thought might not be accurately communicated. Because Stephen does not speak his own language – that is, his “native” language – he suggests here that his art will always be, in a manner, foreign to him⁹⁶. The problem of being an Irish writer was not just a linguistic problem; it was also a political problem⁹⁷.

Later in the chapter, Stephen then meets his friends, one of whom is Davin, a young Irish nationalist. The conversation begins with Davin scolding Stephen for criticizing the Irish informers, and questioning Stephen’s loyalty to his country and his

⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 205.

⁹⁶ Joyce’s own career was plagued by the same linguistic anxieties: “He could write the spiritual history of his own country, but only when he found that mode of English appropriate to Irish experience, through which the Irish could repossess their experience in an English which was unmistakably an Irish English” (34). Deane, Seamus. “Joyce the Irishman”. *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). pp-31-53.

⁹⁷ At the time Joyce was writing his novel, Ireland was still a part of the United Kingdom. It was not until 1921, with the Anglo-Irish Treaty, that the Republic of Ireland was established.

identity as an Irishman. When Davin pleads for Stephen to “be one of us”, Stephen replies:

My ancestors threw off their language and took another...They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person the debt they made? What for?⁹⁸ (Joyce 220)

Though Stephen does indeed acknowledge that he was formed by Ireland, he ridicules the lack of freedom in his country and declares his own artistic independence:

When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by both of those nets⁹⁹.

The problem of being an author in Ireland was in a very specific sense a political issue. While nationalists such as Davin believed that all individuals must subordinate themselves to their country (“Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or mystic after”), Stephen repudiates all those factors (“nationality, language, religion”) which he claims restricts the free development of the individual¹⁰⁰. Stephen’s “esthetic objectives encompass a complex desire for liberation...that must be based on a coherent and independent identity”¹⁰¹.

Toward the end of Chapter V, Stephen returns to a discussion on aesthetic principles, this time in relation to the Irish Catholic faith. Born into the Church and

⁹⁸ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

⁹⁹ Ibid. pp. 220.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 220.

¹⁰¹ Eide, Marian. “James Joyce and the Politics of Creativity”. *Twentieth Century Literature*. Vol. 44. No. 4. (Durham: Duke University Press, Winter 1998). pp. 380.

trained by Jesuits at Clongowes Wood College, Belvedere College, and later at the National University, Stephen is infused with religion; he is, as Cranly remarks later in the novel, “supersaturated” by it¹⁰². Stephen keenly feels the threat of institutionalized religion, which seeks to coerce and co-opt him into the vocation of priesthood. Stephen realizes that “his destiny was to be elusive of social and religious orders” and that his true vocation is that of a “priest of the eternal imagination”, “an artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being”¹⁰³. In his closing conversation with his friend Cranly – a staunch Catholic – Stephen declares his intent to free himself from religion to discover an aesthetic consciousness in which his spirit can “express itself in unfettered freedom”:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can¹⁰⁴.

Stephen knows that he must shed imposed loyalties so that he might develop his own way – and in this way, his act of writing is an act of liberation.

Only by being uncompromisingly individualistic can Stephen produce “unfettered” art; only by shedding social and religious orders can Stephen learn “what the heart is and what it feels”¹⁰⁵. By bidding farewell to Ireland, Stephen sets out on a journey to

¹⁰² Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 261.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* pp. 175, 183, 240.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 268-9.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 275.

reimagine his country and his culture; to “forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race”¹⁰⁶.

II. Dedalus as Pygmalion

Female characters abound throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. They are figures of representation, sexualization, and inspiration. Three women in particular – Mercedes Mondego, Emma Clery, and the bird-girl – pervade the development of Stephen Dedalus’ consciousness and provide a foil against which he defines himself as a man and as an artist.

In his boyhood Stephen searches for the romantic figure of a woman who will provoke his artistic transformation. Identifying with Edmond Dantes, the hero of Alexander Dumas’ novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1845), he indulges in fantasies of Mercedes Mondego (née Herrera), Dantes’ paramour. The image of Mercedes offers Stephen a respite from the growing “strange unrest” of his soul; her “tender influence into his restless heart” consoles him, for he had begun to feel even more keenly his difference and alienation from the other children¹⁰⁷. Rather than play with the other children, he yearns “to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld...They would meet quietly as if they had known each other and had made their tryst...and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured. He would fade into something impalpable under her eyes and then in a moment, he would be transfigured. Weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in

¹⁰⁶ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 276.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 67.

that magic moment”¹⁰⁸. This romantic figure he desires would empower her lover with spiritual wisdom of an artist while also giving him with self-determination of a man.

Art offers a refuge for the frustrated sexual desires of a pubescent Stephen. Emma Clery, a young girl with whom Stephen becomes infatuated as a boy, is Stephen’s beloved object and feminine ideal. His desire for Emma is never physically consummated: “I could easily catch hold of her...I could hold her and kiss her”; but, the audience is told, Stephen did neither¹⁰⁹. Stephen has failed to possess Emma physically, so he is determined to possess her artistically. Frustrated, Stephen figures himself and Emma in his art, creating a moment of serenity to give expression to the pain of unfulfilled desire. In poetic verses written to E----- C-----, Stephen creates an experience in which his desire is sublimated through art:

The verses told only of the night and the balmy breeze and the maiden lustre of the moon. Some undefined sorrow was hidden in the hearts of the protagonists as they stood in silence beneath the leafless trees and when the moment of farewell had come the kiss, which had been withheld by one, was given by both¹¹⁰.

In his imagination, Stephen is fulfilled.

Stephen’s self-realization and consecration as an artist occurs when he encounters the young woman who will be called “the bird-girl”. Shortly after his interview with the director, Stephen has fallen into an existential crisis – he did not know whether

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. pp. 67.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. pp. 73.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 74.

he was destined for the priesthood or whether he was not “destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world”¹¹¹. Walking along the seashore, Stephen experiences a series of epiphanies, culminating in the encounter with the young girl standing midstream. Stephen’s choice of the artistic vocation is confirmed by his encounter with her. This young girl, who seemed to Stephen “like one of whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird”, serves an initiatory purpose. In her, Stephen encounters the “unsubstantial image which is soul so constantly beheld” in his boyhood in its corporeal form:

Her image passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life. A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory¹¹².

His thoughts transform the bird-girl into an aesthetic object, from actual young girl to the herald of his artistic calling.

Besides her function as the aesthetic Muse, the bird-girl symbolizes Stephen’s “aesthetic love affair with his own soul”¹¹³. In his study *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development*, Otto Rank discusses the relationship between the

¹¹¹ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 175.

¹¹² *Ibid.* pp. 67, 186.

¹¹³ Henke, Suzette. *James Joyce and The Politics of Desire*. (New York: Routledge, 1990). pp. 72.

(presumably male) artist and women. Rank theorizes that the “love-conflict” is in many cases a conflict with the ego; that is “a problem with which the individual can only deal by personifying a portion of his own ego in another individual...the poet values his Muse the more highly in proportion as it can be identified with his artistic personality and its ideology”¹¹⁴. Suzette Henke makes a similar claim in her book *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire* by calling the bird-girl Stephen’s “projected self-image clothed in female garb”¹¹⁵. The bird-girl is Stephen’s double; indeed, Stephen personifies his soul in feminine terms, speaking of “her destiny” and “her wounds”¹¹⁶ (Joyce 185). She is the soul he so often speaks of who breaks free from the nets flung around him, “soaring impalpable [and] imperishable”¹¹⁷..

The dedication that Stephen gives to describing the physical form of the girl is another representation of the relationship between sexual desire and art creation. The bird-girl physically excites Stephen: “his cheeks were aflame; his body was aglow; his limbs were trembling”¹¹⁸. By framing the scene in terms of aesthetic euphoria and sexual desire, Stephen once again undergoes an exercise in lyrical – rather than physical – consummation. As with Emma Clery, Stephen becomes the “tranquil watcher of the scene before him” and claims the bird-girl as a “fetishistic trophy to grace the scene of writing”^{119 120}. Stephen’s declaration to “recreate life” is the privilege of both

¹¹⁴ Rank, Otto. *Art and Artist*. pp. 53.

¹¹⁵ Henke, Suzette. *James Joyce and The Politics of Desire*. pp. 73.

¹¹⁶ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 185.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 183.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 186.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 72.

¹²⁰ Henke, Suzette. *James Joyce and The Politics of Desire*. pp. 75.

the lover and the artist; the physical intercourse of the man and woman and the spiritual intercourse of the artist and the Muse in which “the word [is] made flesh”, are complimentary manifestations of the urge toward completion.

Stephen returns to Emma in his young adulthood, once again sublimating his unconsummated desire for her in poetry. Ten years after his boyhood infatuation, Stephen still desires the unattainable Emma. The poet’s boyhood enchantment with Emma returns, only this time she is re-imagined in the form of the temptress. Rejected by Emma, he recreates her as a seductress and muse, using her as the object of his sexual fantasies and then transmuting her in his villanelle:

a glow of desire kindled again his soul and fired and fulfilled all his body.

Conscious of his desire she was waking from odorous sleep, the temptress of his villanelle. Her nakedness yielded to him, radiant, warm, odorous and lavishlimbed...like a cloud of vapour of like waters circumfluent in space the liquid letters of speech, symbols of the element of mystery, flowed forth over his brain¹²¹.

Stephen-the-man never does physically possess Emma, but Stephen-the-poet conquers her form¹²². Real women who exist autonomously in the world pose a problem to Stephen, but subordinated and controlled by his “eternal imagination”, Stephen can moderate his frustrated desires.

¹²¹ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 242.

¹²² Rank frequently links what he calls the “biological sex-impulse” with the artistic “creator-impulse.”

III. The Ivory Tower and the Aesthete

Recall that in a discussion of the *Künstlerroman*, Maurice Beebe discussed the tradition he called the “Ivory Tower”, which can be define as “art as religion”. This tradition places art above life and insists that the artist can make use of life experiences only if he remains aloof. The artist-hero type in the Ivory Tower tradition is, Beebe labels, “the aesthete”; and the aesthete champions the artistic vocation as the highest and most divine vocation open to man. Stephen Dedalus, the artist-hero of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, represents the poet-priest of the Ivory Tower tradition.

To the aesthete artist-hero of the Ivory Tower tradition, art is required to be as independent and free as possible from all social orders and religious doctrines. The artist must reject the demands of “God, home, and country”, until “nothing is left but his true self and his consecration as an artist”¹²³. Reinforcing Beebe’s classification, Stephen denounces “[his] home, [his] fatherland [and his] church” and claims “silence, exile, and cunning” as his “mode of life”¹²⁴.

Exile and freedom become in this formulation almost synonymous. Exile is the most ideal form of artistic resistance that, along with silence and cunning, allows for individuality. The exile Stephen refers to is not only spacial, it is spiritual; to prevent the erosion of art by the proliferation of institutionalized orders, Stephen must detach himself from all exteriority. The possibility of maintaining artistic integrity while being

¹²³ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 6.

¹²⁴ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 269.

involved with the establish became impossible. Stephen's decision to leave Ireland and fly free from the nets of nationality, language and religion is a

revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition

[emphasis added], in this endeavor to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul,

of whatever exists and can be realized by consciousness, in this dutiful waiting

upon every symbol by which the soul of things can be made visible; *literature,*

bowed down by so many burdens, may at last attain liberty, and its authentic

speech [emphasis added]. In attaining this liberty, it accepts a heavier burden; for

in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion has hitherto spoken

to us, it becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of

the sacred ritual¹²⁵.

The quest for salvation through exile – and consequently through art – results in a transformation of art into religion, or “art as religion”.

The artist in the “art as religion” tradition “tries to become a saint...strong enough to withstand all worldly temptations”¹²⁶. The artist must withdraw from life, using it in his art but isolating himself from its interests. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus insists on the necessary alienation, and then detachment, of the artist. To make art, to “recreate life”, Stephen must first see the world plainly and disinterestedly, he must stand beyond participation; he must withdraw to his Ivory Tower. It is upon this foundation that

¹²⁵ Dettmar, Kevin J. H. *The Illicit Joyce of Postmodernism: Reading Against the Grain*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). pp. 121-2.

¹²⁶ Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*. pp. 114.

Stephen formulates his theory of esthetics, insisting all true art is static and dissociated from kinetic desires:

The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic...esthetic emotion is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above [kinetic emotions] ... [that which is expressed by] the artist cannot awaken in [the artist] an emotion which is kinetic or a sensation which is purely physical. It awakens, or ought to awaken, or induces, or ought to induce, an esthetic stasis, an ideal...a stasis called forth, prolonged, and at last dissolved¹²⁷.

Far from wanting to live more fully, Stephen rejects his natural desires and instincts. Life should not dictate art; rather art should represent the complete transformation and revising of the life.

Despite rejecting organized religion, Stephen's consecration as an artist and the elevation of his artistic craft take on religious dimensions. Not only does Stephen give art divine properties, he also postulates himself as the poet-priest, a godlike Creator. Describing the process of authorial creation, Stephen invokes images of transubstantiation; he, "a priest of eternal imagination", transmutes "the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life"¹²⁸. Though Stephen rejects the priesthood, he is fascinated by "the power, the authority, to make the great God of Heaven come down upon the altar and take the form of bread and wine... [Stephen had] seen himself as a priest wielding calmly and humbly the awful power of which

¹²⁷ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 222-3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 240.

angels and saints stood in reverence”¹²⁹. This religious ideology is transferred to the creative personality and the sacred ritual of the Eucharist becomes the sacred ritual of art. Stephen aspires to a form of godhood; the true artist, he says, is godlike in his role as creator and in his sublime indifference:

The personality of the artist...refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself...the mystery esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished [and] the artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent¹³⁰.

The principal aesthetic theme here is detachment, the impersonal manner which allows life to be “purified in and reprojected from the human imagination”¹³¹. Stephen is an artist, and he believes that the artist, like God, is beyond subjectivity or objectivity. The artist, liberated from God, himself becomes a god. A parallel is established between artistic creation and the divine begetting of the Son of God; through the divine creative power of artist “in the virgin womb of the imagination the word [is] made flesh”¹³².

¹²⁹ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. pp. 171.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 233.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 233.

¹³² *Ibid.* pp. 236.

Postscript

Of all the individuals discussed, Isabel Banford emerges as more of an artist-hero than her counterpart Pierre Glendinning or Stephen Dedalus. Because she developed in alienation and isolation from the world and because her life experience was so limited, Isabel could create an art that is more natural, purer. The exterior stresses placed such a forceful demand on Pierre and Stephen that they were unable to create without removing themselves from those stresses – Pierre, through suicide, and Stephen, through exile¹³³. She lacks life experience and so never must reconcile a divided self, the man *and* the artist, which pits Pierre's and Stephen's essential being as an artist (*sein Künstlertum*)¹³⁴ against the surrounding world.

Our artist-heroes are also shown to differ in their creative personality. Though Pierre, Isabel, and Stephen are all characterized by a consciousness of their creative work and of their artist mission, not all are conscious of their own personality. Pierre and Stephen are highly narcissistic and their self-appointment as artist is a result of creative impulse rather than any real productiveness. This self-labelling and will to art does not suffice to make an artist. In stark contrast, Isabel's status as an artist is not just a

¹³³ Stephen Dedalus also appears as a central character in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, set two years after *A Portrait*. Despite the promising conclusion to *A Portrait*, Stephen is still struggling with his ties to Ireland and has yet to fulfill his artistic talent. Stephen's character is somewhat unsympathetic; the emotional detachment and superior indifference he regarded as necessary alienate him from the other characters. However, by *Ulysses'* end, Stephen rejoins the world and assumes a more optimistic, or in any case a less pessimistic, perspective.

¹³⁴ "*sein Künstlertum*" is a term used by Herbert Marcuse in his dissertation to describe an artist's being. Refer to footnote 11, page 8.

product of her creative personality but of her productive personality. Isabel is not destroyed by her ego and her creative self never seeks to glorify itself through any artistic idealization.

We have seen how the development of the personality – both artistic and psychological – is responsible for the various forms and manifestations of art. The purpose of this comparative study was not so much as to establish similarities and differences in personality or experiences, as to establish a connection between the artist-type and their society. Herman Melville and James Joyce show that we must understand the art-life relationship to arrive at a deeper understanding of the artist.

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