

ARTIST IN PROGRESS: LITTLE CHANDLER, MR. JAMES DUFFY  
AND GABRIEL CONROY AS SKETCHES  
FOR THE 'ARTIST' STEPHEN DEDALUS

Die Literatur ist überhaupt kein Beruf, sondern ein Fluch, -damit Sie's wissen. Wann beginnt er fühlbar zu werden, dieser Fluch? Früh, schrecklich früh. Zu einer Zeit, da man billig noch in Frieden un Eintranch mit Gott un der Welt leben sollte. Sie fangen an, Sich gezeichnet, sich in einem rätselhaften Gesensatz zu den anderen, den Gewöhnlichen, den Ordentlichen zu fühlen, der Abgrund von Ironie, Unglaube, Opposition, Erkenntnis, Gefühl, der Sie von den Menschen trennt, Klafft tiefer und tiefer, Sie sind einsam, und fortan gibt es keine Verständigung mehr ... Einem Künstler, einem wirklichen, nicht einen, dessen bürgerlicher Beruf die Kunst ist, sondern einen vorbestimmten und verdamnten, ersehen Sie mit geringem Scharfblick aus einer Menschenmasse. Das Beobachtetseins, etwas zugleich Königliches und Verlegenes ist in sienem Gesicht<sup>1</sup>. (233-34)

These words were uttered by Tonio Kröger, the protagonist of the homonymous *Künstlerroman* written by Thomas Mann, in which as we have witnessed the German writer expressed his views on the artist's work and identity. Many other writers have portrayed their own perception of the genius and I am sure that all of us have met books in which the genesis and development of the artist is fictionalized.

I have begun this essay quoting Thomas Mann since he is one of the writers who has payed more attention in his fiction to the artist-figure, presenting us a composer like Adrian Leverkühn in *Doktor Faustus*, a successful mature artist like the protagonist of *Death in Venice*, Gustav Aschenbach and giving us his own version of the artistic breeding and evolution in the character of Tonio Kröger whose words we have already quoted.

James Joyce did also want to write his own portrait of the artist, of the poet in particular. Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* represents as the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Mann, *Sämtliche Erzählungen*. Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1963. "Literature is anything but a job; it is a curse. When does that curse begin to be noticed? Soon, Terribly soon. At a time when one should live at ease with God and men. One begins by feeling oneself singled out by a mysterious antagonism against the others, common people; afterwards, an abism of irony, lack of faith, opposition, knowledge and feelings between oneself and the others is stressed; finally, one is isolated and from that moment onwards there can be no possible communication ... You don't have to be very shrewd so as to single out the artist from a given crowd, the genuine artist, not someone whose bourgoise and civil job is art, but the predestined and condemned artist. The sense of isolation, of not belonging to any group, of being acknowledged and studied, everything is revealed in his face, something magnificent and lowly at the same time" (My translation).

title of the novel suggests an image of a would-be-artist, of a young man with particular interests, with a peculiar close attachment to literature, language and words.

At the present time I am specially concerned with Stephen as a fictional character, as a human type created by Joyce so as to depict a special, or at least different type of human being -the artist. In this novel -and to some extent it is continued in *Ulysses*- Joyce explicitly 'paints' and describes the poet, the literary artist -at least the artist in the making.

In *Dubliners* there are characters like Little Chandler in "A Little Cloud", Mr. James Duffy in "A Painful Case" and Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead" who already present vestiges, blurred traces, vague features in their descriptions that are clarified and made distinct in the later image and portrait of Stephen Dedalus. All these characters besides sharing a common interest in literature and an implied bias towards the artistic vocation, have similar attitudes towards their native country and their disposition with regards to other human beings is also akin. And we shall try to demonstrate how the features that they claim for themselves, taken as a whole, would make us consider them artists.

James Joyce would then have been practising in *Dubliners* the character of the artist. This topic would be of course very close to the Irish author's own experience since, as Richard Ellmann says in his *James Joyce*, when the young Joyce wrote his "Portrait of the Artist" -the initial version of the later novel- what he aimed was 'to gather the stages of his spiritual experience together in a connected pattern'. Later on Ellmann comments how 'at the age of twenty-one Joyce had found he could become an artist by writing about the process of becoming an artist, his life legitimizing his portrait by supplying the sitter ...'

The process of characterization that Joyce's heroes undergo coincides in many stages with what criticism has acknowledged as the representative one for the artist-figure<sup>1</sup>, and we can call to mind Maurice Beebe's article "The Artist as Hero" from which I shall only recall the three basic concepts that Beebe relates to universal traditions in the literary portraits of the artist, 'the Divided Self', 'the Ivory Tower' and 'the Sacred Fount'. Each of the terms characterize respectively the inner world of the artist, his relationship with the outer space that surrounds him and the source of inspiration.

In this article Beebe takes also into consideration the different variations that diverse writers have included in their portraits. Precisely, my aim in this essay is not only to prove how Joyce was already practising in *Dubliners* his fictional characterization of the artist, but also to point out how the genius that he depicts poses a series of problems since it is not a mature artist as such. In order to accomplish this last aim I shall recall different literary portraits of the artist, paying special attention to Thomas Mann's fiction for the reasons already mentioned. All the-

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth remembering the words of W. H. Auden who, in his article on Ibsen "Genius and Apostle" included in *The Dyer's Hand* (1963), expressed how for the modern novelist, 'the public realm has been less and less of a realm where human deeds are done, and more a realm of human behaviour', adding that Romanticism had placed on the stage a new kind of hero, 'the artist-genius'. Article included in James McFarlane (ed.), *Henrik Ibsen. Penguin Critical Anthologies*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.

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se characters wish 'to know', but the kind of knowledge they long for was defined by Hélène Cixous in the article entitled "Reaching the Point of Wheat or a Portrait of the Artist as a Maturing Woman" where she distinguished two types of knowledge, 'there is the knowledge we learn here in universities which is the knowledge of knowing, which has to do with mastering' and the knowledge that these artists would be wishing to attain and this kind of knowledge according to Cixous 'does not derive from education but from the highest education and that is knowledge through pleasure'. Considering this distinction, we go back to Stephen Dedalus, a young man who isolated from the others embarks himself in a personal project. Only his own thoughts and his literary interests accompany him. He is portrayed as a young man with a special penchant for literature. We are told not only of his ability at writing -he even wins a prize, in spite of being accused of 'heresy' or his lack of inspiration being commented at certain moments- but also of his literary priorities reported throughout the book. Dumas, Byron, Shelley, Horatio and Aquinas are among his favourites. Little Chandler does also have literary bias, and he even claims for himself his own artistic and creative vocation,

He remembered the books of poetry upon his shelves at home. He had bought them in his bachelor days and many an evening, as he sat in that little room of the hall, he had been tempted to read out something to his wife. But shyness had always held him back; and so the books had remained on their shelves. At times he repeated lines to himself and this consoled him. (66)<sup>1</sup>

He recites mentally lines from his favourite authors, as he does later with a poem from Byron (79), something that Stephen Dedalus -who also counts Byron among his preferences- does constantly in the *Portrait*. Literature, music and art are also Mr. James Duffy preferred hobbies and we also get to know his literary choices among whom are Wordsworth and Hauptmann. Besides, we are told that on his desk there was always writing materials (103).

Gabriel Conroy is a lecturer and a literary critic. Christopher Baker in his article "The Dead Art of 'The Dead'" singled out Gabriel from the rest of the characters in the story due to his literary bias 'Gabriel's appreciation of literature is enough to set him apart from the others, as his worries over his speech reveal'; but we shall comment later on the importance of his speech and the relevance of his doubts about it. For the present time it is enough to point out that Gabriel has a way with words and that he is firmly concerned with literary freedom, rejecting political or social conditioning.

These character's artistic bias is framed in a common tendency of self-examination. Their identities seem to depend upon this self-scrutiny. It is as if they wanted to grasp their own 'self' avoiding the spell of their 'ego'<sup>2</sup>. With such an aim in mind they have to objectify

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<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992. From now on all the references to the three stories "A Little Cloud", "A Painful Case" and "The Dead" will correspond to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> I am using here 'self' in the same way in which Mihaly Csikszentmihaly used it in his article "Imagining the Self", where he stated that, 'the self refers not just to the visible features of the physical body, but includes psychological qualities, the spiritual essence that people experience about themselves or would wish to attain', adding that, 'it is

themselves, in the same way a little child who talks about himself in third person does. Stephen does something similar when he writes his name and spatial situation on the paper,

Stephen Dedalus  
Class of Elements  
Clongowes Wood College  
Sallins  
Country Kildare  
Ireland  
Europe  
The World  
The Universe (12)<sup>1</sup>

Freud in “The Poet and daydreams” said that ‘The modern poet tends to dissociate his ego by means of self-examining it in partial egos, and personifying consequently in several heroes the opposing currents of his animic life’. This habit of self-estrangement and self-scrutiny which could be shared by any person -poet or not-acquires a particular relevance in the artists, since they personify themselves with certain features -we shall see some of them- which they relate to the image of the artist. It is as if being in front of a mirror they projected and image of themselves, the image of the craftsman, the creator, the artist they want to become.

As we can gather from this practise of theirs they do not enjoy a stable identity and we should not be surprised that they constantly need reassurance in the role they have allotted for themselves since as Gilbert -a painter in Albert Camus’s story “L’artiste au travail”- expresses ‘beaucoup d’artistes ... ne sont pas sûrs d’exister, même les plus grands. Alors ils cherchent des preuves, ils jugent, ils condamnent. Ça les fortifie, c’est un commencement d’existence’ (128). We are told that Mr. James Duffy lived also ‘at a little distance from his body’,

Regarding his own acts with doubtful side-glances. He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in past tense. (104)

We witness Conroy personifying himself in different shapes according to the new situations he has to confront that displace him from his habitual self: for instance, immediately after being revealed the existence of Michael Furey in his wife’s sentimental past, we are told,

He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. (221)

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not too far-fetched to claim that if human evolution is to continue, it will involve our attempts to try living up to increasingly positive images of ourselves’. *Poetics* 21 (1992): 153-167.

<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992. From now on all references to the novel will correspond to this edition.

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This readiness to self-representation is related to Beebe's 'the Divided Self' which implied that the artist-hero undergoes a constant struggle between his human desires and his will of excelling human bonds in search of an artistic almost spiritual way in life. His aim is not so much to enjoy life but to transcend it by means of the creative effort. This step seems to be crucial and quite difficult to take as Gilbert -the already mentioned artist portrayed by Camus- declares that 'il était difficile de peindre le monde et les hommes et, en même temps, de vivre avec eux' (124). However, before achieving these transcendental and spiritual state these artists aspire to, they have to undergo a series of previous stages in which the artist is isolated, sheltering himself in the loneliness of his mind. James Joyce paid more attention to these previous phases than to the final one, proposing different examples of loneliness and isolation in the characters under survey. Stephen is described as a solitary youth who is conscious of his own isolation that he considers as a way of approaching the spiritual life he strives for,

He was alone. He was unheeded, happy and near to the wild heart of life. He was alone and young and wilful and wildhearted, alone amid a waste of wild air. (185)

In "A Little Cloud" loneliness is not overtly mentioned, yet Little Chandler suffers from it. We are told that he is not able to find a confident even among his nearer relations. He is not able to trust his wife nor his best friend Gallaher with his most valuable secret -his literary aspirations. And Mr. James Duffy can be defined as the epitome of the solitary human being who is resolutely isolated from the rest of the world. He is unable to approach his kind,

He had neither companions nor friends, church nor creed. He lived his spiritual life without any communion with others, visiting his relatives at Christmas and escorting them to the cemetery when they died. He performed these two social duties for old dignity sake but concealed nothing further to the conventions ... (105)

And he goes as far as to turn down Mrs. Sinico's friendship when she 'menaces' him with sharing more than their spiritual life.

Gabriel's loneliness -in spite of his being continually surrounded by his kinsfolk- is derived also from the ignorance and intolerance that it is normally showed towards the artist. And here we should recall Milton's invocation to Urania -his muse- in *Paradise Lost*, asking her a 'fit audience' for his poem,

In darkness, and with dangers compass round,  
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou  
Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn  
Purples the East: still govern thou my Song,  
Urania, and fit audience find, though few. (ls.27-31)

Linked to the insecurity the artist feels of his work's reception it is presented both in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* the artist's fear of failure. Gabriel Conroy is obsessed with the possibility

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of not succeeding with his speech, of his speech not being welcomed by his friends and relatives, and he utters his fears in the following words,

He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers. Some quotation that they would recognise from Shakespeare or from the Melodies would be better. The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his. (179)

Later on he will refer to his audience at his aunt's party in terms of 'vulgarians' (221). Little Chandler wants to become a writer, but he is not longing to be famous and popular, in fact he realizes that even if he succeeded only a little group of kindred souls would share his views of life and art,

He would never be popular: he saw that. He could not sway the crowd but he might appeal to a little circle of kindred minds. (68)

Mr. James Duffy assumes a radical decision when he rejects every possibility of being understood. In fact he denies the existence of a fit audience for his thoughts. That is why when Mrs. Sinico suggests him writing his thoughts, James Duffy cuts her shortly,

For what, he asked her, with careful scorn. To compete with phrasemongers, incapable of thinking consecutively for sixtyseconds? To submit himself to the criticism of an obtuse middle class which entrusted its morality to policeman and its fine arts to impresarios? (107)

Stephen Dedalus does not hide his interest in literature, his literary pursuits and his fears of failure, relying in those classmates that better understand him -Lynch and Cranly. Yet he only shares with them his aesthetic and literary theories, keeping for himself his first literary attempts like his poem of the "Villanelle"<sup>1</sup>.

It is in his rejection of Dublin and Ireland where Stephen utterly agrees with the rest of the characters we are studying. This rejection implies an attempt to transcend a given cultural, religious and political tradition. Dublin and its paralysed atmosphere seem to hinder these characters from succeeding as artists -or at least in such terms do they justify their repulse towards their native place, their urge to abandon Ireland and their inability to create. Stephen believes Dublin and Ireland to be an exhausted and fallen town and country, and having to confront their imposed tradition, rigid morals and aimless future he decides to exile himself: "His soul was still disquieted and cast down by the dull phenomenon of Dublin." (82).

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of this poem and its relevance to Stephen's characterization as an artist was studied by Robert Scholes in his article "Stephen Dedalus, Poet or Aesthete?" in *PLMA*, LXXXIX (Sept. 1964): 448-89.

Little Chandler and Mr. Duffy also reject Dublin's atmosphere. This city seems to stop their minds and bodies. Chandler's artistic designs seem to depend on his leaving Dublin,

For the first time his soul revolted against the dull inelegance of Chapel Street. There was no doubt about it: if you wanted to succeed you had to go away. You could do nothing in Dublin ... Every step brought him nearer to London, farther from his own sober inartistic life. (68)

And Mr. Duffy, in his mental and physical isolation, tries to avoid Dublin's society, living as far as possible from the centre of a city that he considers to be 'mean, modern and pretentious' (103). Gabriel would not allow any Irish political tradition to interfere with his literary work and he would reject any kind of imposition alien to the proper realm of literature. With this design in mind he also feels himself compelled to leave Ireland. With the exception of James Duffy who more or less has already decided to give away his chances of becoming a writer, the rest of the characters seem to be urged to experience life thoroughly so as to recreate those experiences in their creative work. Stephen defines this attitude in his well-known statement 'to live, to err, to fail, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!' (186). According to Little Chandler genius and inspiration rely in the dark eyes of Eastern Women and not in the cold eyes of his wife. And Gabriel acknowledges that it is better to risk oneself and live passionately than endure a dull aimless life without any apparent purpose, personifying himself this time in a Romantic poet that would rather extinguish himself in a moment of passion,

Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age. (224)

The importance of exile as a narrative support in James Joyce's works was already commented by Juan Ignacio Oliva who asserted that 'el exilio vamos a encontrarlo también como postura intrínseca, como *leitmotif* de unas historias que contraponen la *stasis* al movimiento, la muerte a la vida, el fluir a la parálisis'. Nonetheless, all these characters had already begun their own individual exile. The exile to which these would-be-artists had already submitted themselves involves besides isolation, rebellion against familiar duties -Little Chandler-; rejection of friendship when it menaces ones spiritual designs -Mr. Duffy-; denial of national politics that threaten artistic freedom -Gabriel Conroy-; and a refusal of any religious, social, and political authority in the case of Stephen<sup>1</sup>.

We are suggested that this is the means of becoming a genuine artist and of developing the creative activity successfully. Richard Rowan -the protagonist of the play *Exiles*- is the only character in Joyce's fiction that gets to publish a book, and he manages to do that abroad -in Italy- although he afterwards publishes it also in Ireland -something quite similar to what happened to Joyce in his literary career. Joyce apparently suggests leaving Ireland in order to

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<sup>1</sup> This last example of exile was studied in the two first chapters of the *Portrait* by Manuel Augusto Fernández in "El exilio de Stephen". *Revista Canaria de estudios ingleses*. Universidad de la Laguna. 24 (1992): 107-18.

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grasp the true essence of life and be able to represent it in the creative work. Yet, not all the fictional characters included under the 'artist' label seem to share this urge to experience and enjoy life to the full so as to succeed in depicting it fully and freely in the work of art. For instance, Tonio Kröger would consider this attitude as a sort of incongruity since for him,

es ist widersinnig, das Leben zu Lieben und dennoch mit allen Künsten bestrebt zu sein, es auf seine Seite zu ziehen, es für die Finessen und Melancholien, den ganzen kranken Adel der Literatur zu gewinnen (238)

He even states 'es ist aus mit dem Künstler, sobald er Mensch wird und zu empfinden beginnt' (238)<sup>1</sup>.

Heidegger had already adopted a similar pose when writing on 'the origin of the work of art' -the title of one of his essays- since for him the artist's identity is blurred out almost till disappearing in the work of art, 'it is precisely in great art ... that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge'.

Both attitudes -the one proposed by T. Mann and Heidegger, and that suggested by Joyce's characters- are not irreconcilable, and in fact they can be conciliated and clarified in the two traditions that Maurice Beebe referred to as 'the Ivory Tower' and 'the Sacred Fount' respectively. Apparently Joyce's 'artists' by equating experience and art would represent the 'Sacred Fount' tradition, while Thomas Mann's spiritualized artists and Camu's painter -Gilbert, whom we symbolically see painting on a platform above his family and friends- would be representative examples of the 'Ivory Tower' conception of the artist that places the genius above human desires and bonds. Yet we should not forget that at a given stage Stephen considers the artist as a god who 'remains within or behind or beyond, or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails'. Besides throughout the *Portrait* there are several episodes in which the artistic vocation is described with a religious terminology and this would remit us back to the 'Ivory Tower' conception of the artist. This apparent contradiction reveals us that what Joyce was trying to portrait was the inner divisions, doubts and appeals the artist has to struggle and live with and that are defined by Beebe with the label 'The Divided Self'.

Yet, it can be argued that with the exception of Richard Rowan none of Joyce's characters is an example of a genuine artist, since even Stephen whom we see in *Ulysses* back from exile does not seem to have accomplished his artistic aims, his lack of production being criticised in the novel<sup>2</sup>. Maybe Joyce only pretended to represent the difficulties not only of becoming

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<sup>1</sup> It is an inconsistency to love life and persist in grasping it by all possible means, gaining it for the subtleties and melancholies, for the morbid literary nobleness ... The artist that turns into a man and begins to feel is extinguished. (Translations are mine).

<sup>2</sup> Juan Ignacio Oliva commented that '*Ulysses* retorna al Stephen adolescente y continúa cronológicamente con su biografía, trayéndolo de la promesa creadora del *Portrait* al hastío y agotamiento de una sociedad que marchita los



an artist but also of defining what an artist is or should be. He was perhaps questioning the artistic vocation, something on what Tonio Kröger had also reflected,

Aber was ist der Künstler? Vor keiner Frage hat die Bequemlichkeit und Erkenntnis-trägheit der Menschheit sich Zäher erwiesen als vor dieser. »Dergleichen ist Gabe« sagen demütig die braven Leute, die unter der Wirkung eines Künstlers stehen, und weil heitere und erhabene Wirkungen nach ihrer gutmütigen Meinung ganz unbeding- ingt auch heitere und erhabene Ursprünge habe müsen, so argwöhnt niemand, dass es sich hier vielleicht um eine äusserst schlimm bedingte, äusserst fragwürdige >Gabe< handelt ... Man weiss, dass Künstler leicht verletzt sind, -nun, man weiss auch, dass dies bei Leuten mit gutem Gewissen un solid gegründetem Selbstgefühl nicht zuzutreffen pflegt ...<sup>1</sup>

I have tried to explain why I consider these characters as would-be-artists in Joyce's fiction and I shall emphasize once again that Little Chandler would represent the artist that cannot break the wall that comes between himself and the artistic activity; Mr. James Duffy is the epitome of the isolation all artists experience and Gabriel Conroy exemplifies the uncertainty and fear of failure that overwhelms the genius. Finally, Stephen stands for 'a portrait of the artist' in James Joyce's view.

We could also consider Little Chandler, James Duffy and Gabriel Conroy as other portraits of the artist, but since their artistic tendencies and abilities are not so much emphasized as in Stephen's case, and since all their features are fused in Stephen's portrayal I have preferred to consider them as previous approaches, sketches in Joyce's fiction towards the characterization of the artist-figure. I would have attempted to arrive at the origin of Stephen's character by exploring Joyce's previous creative activity since as Martin Heidegger stated, 'the work createdness, can obviously be grasped only in terms of the process of creation. Thus, constrained by the matter at issue, we must consent after all to go into the activity of the artist in order to arrive at the origin of the work of art.

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impulsos'. "James Joyce: el exilio como sustento narrativo". *Revista Canaria de estudios ingleses*. Univ. de La Laguna. 21 (1990): 179-85.

<sup>1</sup> 'But then, what is it to be an artist? Humankind's convenience and intellectual laziness have never been as insistent as with regards to this issue. "Those qualities are a gift", says humbly the good hearted who are under the spell of an artist, and in their good natured minds, they believe that pleasant and sublime effects must also have a pleasant and sublime origin. Nobody conjectures that it could be a dubious and highly problematic "gift" ... It is well know how sensitive artists are and it is also acknowledged that they are not people that enjoy peacefulness nor have they a sound awareness of themselves' (Translation mine).

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