

JOYCEAN NOVELS A Broad Secularizing Project

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Abstract: This paper discusses how the Irish novelist James Joyce used the Novel form as an interface of religion and secularism in fiction. The secularism of his novels is a nuanced, complex project, as he was deeply haunted by the fabric of religious upbringing which he had only partially disowned. Joyce's works as well as life reflect an ambiguous relationship to religious texts, themes, and institutions. A non-teleological concept of modernity is what is present in the works of Joyce especially in his novels, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. Here, the secular and the religious exist in an intimately antinomian, mutually defining opposition in many aspects of cultural life, including literature.

Keywords: Ideology, Irish, Joyce, Language, Nationalism, Modernism, Post-secular, Religion, Race, Secular, Theology

1. Introduction

The Irish Novelist James Augustine Aloysius Joyce, one of the most influential writers of the early 20th century, was the eldest of ten children of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Murray Joyce. From an early age, Joyce showed not only exceeding intelligence but also a gift for writing and a passion for literature. He taught himself Norwegian so he could read Henrik Ibsen's plays in the language they'd been written, and spent his time reading Dante, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas. Largely educated by Jesuits, Joyce attended the Irish schools of Clongowes Wood College and Belvedere College and finally University College Dublin, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with a focus on modern languages. After graduating he left Ireland for a new life in Paris

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where he hoped to study medicine. He returned, upon learning that his mother had become sick. She died in 1903. Around this time, Joyce also had his first short story published in the *Irish Homestead* magazine. His literary career could not keep him in Ireland and in late 1904 he and Nora Barnacle settled in the city of Trieste. There, Joyce taught English and learned Italian, one of the seventeen languages he could speak, the others included Arabic, Sanskrit, and Greek. Joyce continued to write and in 1914 he published his first book, *Dubliners*, a collection of 15 short stories. Two years later Joyce came out with a novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.¹ Then Joyce embarked on his landmark novel, *Ulysses*.² The story recounts the happenings on a single day June 16, 1904 in Dublin; this is the same day that Joyce and Nora met. The novel follows the story of the three central characters, Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, a Jewish advertising canvasser, and his wife Molly Bloom, and the Dublin life that unfolds around them. *Ulysses* is also a modern retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*, with the three main characters serving as modern versions of Telemachus, Ulysses, and Penelope. In 1939 Joyce published *Finnegan's Wake*,³ his last novel.

This paper looks at the novels, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* as an interface of religion and secularism in fiction. Joyce's literary secularism went beyond national and religious boundaries and it was stable as a political platform. The secularism of his novels is a nuanced, complex project, as he was deeply haunted by the fabric of religious upbringing which he had only partially disowned. Joyce's works as well as life reflect an ambiguous relationship to religious texts, themes, and institutions. In the selected novels, a non-teleological concept of

¹James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The definitive text corrected from the Dublin Holograph by Chester G. Anderson and ed. Richard Ellmann, London: Jonathan Cape, 1968. Hereafter it is referred in the text as *Portrait*.

²James Joyce, *Ulysses*, London: Flamingo Publishing, 1994. Hereafter references are in the text as *Ulysses*.

³James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, London: Faber & Faber, 1964. Hereafter references as *Finnegans* in the text.

modernity is presented. Here, the secular and the religious exist in an antinomian, mutually defining opposition. The paper argues that the complex discourses of political and religious concerns led to diverse responses by Joyce, which he was successful in representing in the two novels, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*.

2. Secularism: A Political Ideology

Joyce was hardly an apolitical writer when he began his career as a writer. A glance through the essays, speeches and newspaper articles he wrote reveals an intellect intensely concerned with and pointedly thoughtful about the Irish ‘race’, the ‘Irish Question’ and imperial England, voicing political arguments and consistently iterating positions on these topics, which he represented, developed and further nuanced in his fiction during the remaining part of his life.

There was also a studied approach to his responses, which is why according to his own admission, he had to use “exile, cunning and silence” (*Portrait*, 202) to put them forward. As Stephen Dedalus admits in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* it is “nationality, religion and language” (*Portrait*, 203) that entrap him and which constitute the institutions of hegemonic authority over Stephen and by extension to Joyce himself.

It then becomes necessary to know the meaning and place of ‘Race’ followed by ‘Nationalism’, ‘Religion’ and ‘Language’ as concepts in England and Ireland during the 19th century in terms of an English-Irish discourse and Joyce’s re-appropriation of its implications. The prevalent discourse was racialized in a binary axis that posited the English race as one pole (the positive) and the Irish as the other (the negative), in which the Irish were defined as everything not desirably English. This binary pattern was a trap that essentialize and limit representation to precisely its own terms, terms one should play by, if one were to accept binary oppositions.

Buying into these binary terms simply meant subverting the paradigm and this was how Irish Nationalism and the Celtic Revival responded. Irish nationalism tried to do for the Irish race

what Anglo Saxon racism did for the English. They exalted the Self's own proclaimed racial and cultural superiority in comparison to all other races and cultures.

Joyce breaks this binary trap by telling his compatriots to cease being "provincial and folklorist and mere Irish."⁴ He himself rejects the limitations of a narrow and provincial nationalism to speak to an international community, advising the Irish to look towards Europe and other international communities as "its bar of public opinion" (*Critical Writings*, 9) rather than trying to define itself in the English construction of race and nationhood. Through Stephen in *Ulysses*, Joyce's logic is found to be operating, by deliberately choosing not to 'play by' the same terms as the binary system which would make him the primitive and racialized Celtic 'Other' but to 'play along' with such racial comparisons by re-functioning them and activating them in an enabling fashion rather than a disabling one.

In *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce turned the racialized derogatory analogies into enabling bonds of shared ethnicity and shows that being this 'Other' race is very positive. Joyce rejects the Celtist argument for racial purity and argues that the Irish are in fact are a very mixed race - "Do we not see that in Ireland the Danes, the Furblogs, the Milesians from Spain, the Norman invaders and the Anglo-Saxon settlers have united to form a new entity? - including many Irish patriots like Parnell in whose veins there was not even a drop of Celtic blood" (*Critical Writings*, 156). Joyce is actually rejecting the ideological foundation of the Citizen, the Gaelic League and the Literary Revival's motivation. In arguing that in Irish civilization "the most diverse elements are mingled" (*Critical Writings*, 165) he is acknowledging the hybridity, ambivalences and interpretations involved in hegemonic and discursive formations. The structures of colonial power and racial discourse should not likewise be premised upon binary hierarchies that occlude heterogeneity and difference by positing oppositional and essentialized

⁴Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann, eds., *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, New York: Viking Press, 1959, 8. Hereafter references are in the text as *Critical Writings*.

extremes, but should rather be envisioned as composed of heterogeneous multiplicities spanning a spectrum of difference.

Joyce found the imperium of Rome inseparable from the politics of nationalism and empire in Ireland. With Stephen, religion is a major element within the hegemonic power of institutional authority which would influence and restrict him not only because of the church’s direct role in Irish politics (as in the case of Parnell) but also in betraying the Irish cause. The church also represents for Stephen a generalized authority over his mind and person. He explains his hostility thus: “I fear... the chemical action which would be set up in my soul by a false homage to a symbol behind which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration” (*Portrait* 243). Religion here includes not only the Roman Catholic Church, where the ‘fathers’ ruled Ireland’s spiritual and moral powers but also the Protestants ascendancy over Catholic Ireland, suggesting similarities between the English political tyranny over the Irish body and the Catholic spiritual tyranny over the Irish soul. In *Stephen Hero*,⁵ he says, “The toy life which the Jesuits permit these docile young men to live is what I call a stationary march” (*Stephen Hero*, 187). Stephen thinks of the church in terms of militaristic and imperial rule. This is later corroborated by one of the characters in *Ulysses*, Punch Costello, when in an inebriated state he talks about the limitations imposed upon him by the Catholic Church. He turns deathly pale at the sound of thunder, thinking it is God’s voice chastising him for the blasphemy that he has uttered and hurriedly makes the sign of the cross to appease God. Catholicism becomes just a substratum of the pagan religion that the Irish believed in. The collusion between imperialism and the ecclesiastical order in the conquest of foreign colonies and their subsequent economic exploitation, and the church’s role in encouraging Irish Nationalism, makes Stephen suspect the ‘holy’ intentions of the church.

⁵James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, Theodore Spencer, ed., revised edition with additional foreword by John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon, London: Jonathan Cape, 1956. References are in the text as *Stephen Hero*.

3. Joyce and Religion

In Joyce's Ireland the Roman Catholic Church was a potent force not only in terms of the doctrinal and spiritual guidance it provided but also because of the influence it exerted upon the cultural and political life of the country. It had also been a focus of nationalist resistance against English colonialism, such that "Irishness had come to be seen by many as synonymous with Catholicism."⁶ Joyce renounced Catholicism, objecting to the interference of the Church in Irish politics,⁷ and rejecting its attitude to sexual morality: "I left the Catholic Church, hating it most fervently. I found it impossible for me to remain in it on account of the impulses of my nature."⁸ In correspondence, he wrote that his series of short stories, *Dubliners*, was intended "to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city."⁹ Joyce believed that the individuality of the inhabitants of Dublin had been subsumed in a religion whose moral, political and cultural influence denied them any opportunity to make choices for themselves.¹⁰ The Irishmen's attitude towards their religion was, in the words of Stephen Dedalus, that of "a dull-witted loyal serf" (*Portrait*, 139). Joyce attacked notions of "essentialised collective identity" as being over simplistic, whether derived from Roman Catholicism or from any other form of retrogressive construct.¹¹ At the end of *Portrait*, Stephen sets out to escape that nightmare and "to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (*Portrait*, 196). His attempt to take flight as an artist away from the cultural and spiritual labyrinth of Dublin is also a conscious

⁶Jacqueline Belanger, "Introduction," *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2001, xx-xii.

⁷Belanger, "Introduction," vi.

⁸Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965, 1.

⁹Stuart Gilbert, ed., *Letters of James Joyce*, New York: Viking Press, 1957, 55.

¹⁰Peter Childs, *Modernism*, London: Routledge, 2000, 202.

¹¹Jonathan Mulrooney, "Stephen Dedalus and the Politics of Confession" in *Studies in the Novel* Vol. 33, No. 2 (summer) 2001.

effort to side step the common and popular tropes of the man on the street and his poverty and history and head straight into the self-sufficiency of art. Although he acknowledges the logic and coherence of the philosophical and moral system of Catholicism, and its apparent solidity, underpinned as it is by “twenty centuries of authority and veneration”, ultimately Stephen rejects Catholicism as an absurdity (*Portrait*, 188).

Sigmund Freud’s work on psychoanalysis was a huge influence on Joyce, and it stated that, there was no such thing as a stable normative self to which everyone might conform; instead, the self was “evolving, fluid, discontinuous and fragmented.”¹² *Portrait* therefore highlights Stephen Dedalus’ emotional, spiritual and aesthetic development as a “fluid succession of presents,”¹³ through which what Joyce calls “the curve of an emotion” is drawn out, culminating at the point where Stephen affirms his identity as a young artist.¹⁴ To reach this point, Stephen has had to change: “I was someone else then ... I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become” (*Portrait*, 185). Stephen makes this observation during a discussion with his friend Cranly, in which he admits that he had believed in religion while at school, but that he has now lost his faith. Stephen acknowledges the influence of his background upon his individuality - “This race and this country and this life produced me ... I shall express myself as I am” (*Portrait*, 156); however, he also recognizes the renunciation of religion as a key element in the emergence of his artistic identity.

Religion influences his home life, his school life, his induction into the adult world of Irish politics, his expectations for the future, much of the literature he reads, and even the language with which he expresses himself. Nationality, language, religion,

¹²Childs, *Modernism*, 51.

¹³Breon Mitchell, “A Portrait and the *Bildungsroman* Tradition,” in *Approaches to Joyce's Portrait: Ten Essays*, ed., T. F. Staley, and B. Benstock, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976, 70.

¹⁴Edmund L. Epstein, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus: The Conflict of the Generations in James Joyce's a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971, 102-103.

the “nets” (*Portrait*, 157) which enclose Stephen as he grows up, are in fact inextricably intertwined, with religion as the central strand.

An awareness of the interrelationships between Catholicism, family life, guilt, fear and punishment is ingrained into Stephen from an early age. As a young boy, he says that he will marry Eileen, his friend’s sister, a Protestant. The response from his family and friends, is mocking. By hiding under a table, the boy manifests his awareness of culpability, even if he does not yet fully understand his crime. Similarly, acceptance of the intellectual authority of the Church has been instilled into Stephen at a very young age. He knows that Dante, his housekeeper, is a clever and well-read woman, but at the same time he believes that “Father Arnall knew more than Dante because he was a priest” (*Portrait*, 6).

What should have been a happy milestone in Stephen’s development leaves him ‘terror-stricken’ and confused about the relationship between politics and religion (*Portrait*, 29). The image of home as a haven of security and certainty, which sustains Stephen during his early schooldays at Clongowes, is shattered by the argument over the role played by the Catholic clergy in the downfall of Parnell, which ruins his first Christmas dinner with the adults. As he matures and gains a clearer understanding of the fate of Parnell, and others like him, who devoted their lives to their cause only to be betrayed with the complicity of the Catholic clergy, Stephen, who was himself named after a martyr, (*Portrait*, 123) begins to identify to some extent with Parnell. Recalling the dream of dying which he experienced during his confinement in the infirmary at Clongowes, and which coincided with the death of Parnell, Stephen reflects: “But he had not died then. Parnell had died” (*Portrait*, 70). Enlightened by Parnell’s fate, Stephen refuses to sacrifice his individuality to the cause of narrow Irish nationalism, dissociates himself from an Ireland that he describes as “the sow that eats her farrow” (*Portrait*, 157), and concludes that he can only realize his identity as an artist abroad.

The process of undermining Stephen’s confidence in the priesthood, which begins at the Christmas dinner table, is exacerbated by the arbitrary punishment he receives at the hands of Father Dolan when he accidentally breaks his glasses at Clongowes. However, his faith in clerical authority and in justice is restored by the Rector’s apparently sympathetic response to his complaint. He resolves that, despite his triumph, he will continue to be “quiet and obedient” (*Portrait*, 44). He will not commit the sin of pride. However, when he is about to be enrolled at Belvedere, Stephen learns from his father that the Rector had regarded the whole incident as a joke (*Portrait*, 54). This is the first instance in the novel of a pattern in which moments of spiritual elevation are followed by episodes of deflation.¹⁵

Stephen, who had thought of love in spiritual terms as a “holy encounter” in which he would lose his weakness, timidity and inexperience (*Portrait*, 75), now seeks transcendence through sin. In the arms of a prostitute, Stephen is recreated as “strong and fearless and sure of himself” (*Portrait*, 77). However, this moment of epiphany, of transcendent awareness, is succeeded by cold reality. Brief moments of ardour with prostitutes are succeeded by a continued awareness of the squalor of his existence and “a cold indifferent knowledge of himself” (*Portrait*, 78-79). Conscious that his every sin multiplies his guilt and that he faces eternal damnation, Stephen is unable to repent. However, he retains the shell of his former identity, continuing in his prefecture of the sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary at college. This hypocrisy also suggests that the religious impulse remains alive in Stephen, for in Catholic doctrine Mary is the refuge of sinners, and signifies the possibility of intercession and redemption.

On this impressionistic mind fall the words of Father Arnall’s sermons during the three day religious retreat at Belvedere. After Arnall’s sermon on Lucifer’s pride, Stephen is offered a chance to “join the order” being informed of the “awful power” he could wield. It is consequently of some significance that “a flame began to flutter ... as he heard in this proud address an

¹⁵Belanger, “Introduction,” xv-xvi.

echo of his own proud musings" (*Portrait*, 219). The authority of the church accordingly comes for Joyce from the very 'sin' it condemns Lucifer for committing. Stephen experiences a crisis of conscience that is "Irish and Catholic in its terror, its ardour and its intensity."¹⁶ The awareness of religious authority, the notions of sin and guilt, and the terror of punishment which had been indoctrinated into Stephen from his earliest formative years are resurrected and reinforced. The prospect of an eternity of physical and spiritual torment in hell is set against the prospect of repentance and divine mercy. Stephen suffers agonies of terror, guilt and shame. Stephen feels that the very core of his being has been exposed: "The preacher's knife had probed deeply into his disclosed conscience" (*Portrait*, 88). He is humiliated by his fall, weeps for his lost innocence, and resolves to confess his sins truly and repentantly so that he might again be at one with God.

Stephen after having rejected the call to a religious life, experiences another of the epiphanies, or sudden moments of revelation, which mark each climax in his search for identity.¹⁷ As he hears his surname called aloud by his friends, he recognises the prophetic quality of its association with Daedalus, "the fabulous artificer," who took flight from the Labyrinth, with his son Icarus, on wings of his own devising. He experiences a vision of "the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood" (*Portrait*, 130). The vision is confirmed by the actual presence of a beautiful, bird-like girl in the sea. He will forge a new identity as an artist: "To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life!" (*Portrait*, 132).

Ironically at the very moment of rebirth, Stephen expresses his sense of release from the fear and guilt associated with Catholicism in terms of death and resurrection. He continues to employ the discourse of the religion whose call he has renounced: "His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her grave-clothes" (*Portrait*, 130). Likewise, in his

¹⁶Mulrooney, "Stephen Dedalus," 160.

¹⁷Childs, *Modernism*, 199.

search for the essence of beauty, Stephen turns not only to Aristotle but to the scholastic philosopher Aquinas, one of the doctors of the Church (*Portrait*, 126). Similarly, in propounding his aesthetic theory, Stephen likens the dramatic artist to “the God of creation, who remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (*Portrait*, 166). Later, drawing upon the liturgy of the Eucharist for his metaphor, Stephen describes himself as “a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of ever living life” (*Portrait*, 170). He employs similar imagery in his villanelle (*Portrait*, 172). In other words, although Stephen has denied the call to the priesthood and lapsed from religious practice, the language with which he seeks to construct his new identity remains, as Cranly in *Portrait* puts it, “supersaturated” (*Portrait*, 165) with Catholicism. However, he is repeatedly confronted and confounded by the influence of his environment, and in particular his cultural and religious heritage. At the end of the novel, Stephen resolves to escape the constraints of family, narrow nationalism and religious tradition by moving abroad. He proclaims that he has found his identity as an artist.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce sets forth a new gospel and a new morality: He substitutes the principles of existential humanism for an outworn ethic of defilement. ‘Sin’ and ‘guilt’ belong to a dead past solidified into paralytic stasis; they are part of the historical nightmare that Stephen, Bloom, and Molly all attempt to destroy. According to Richard Ellmann, “the whole conception of sin became repugnant to him. He allowed instead for ‘error’. To quarrel with the Church . . . led him to quarrel with his mother and by extension with his motherland, in which he saw a secret collusion of Catholic and British authorities threatening hell or jail.”¹⁸ In the course of the novel, the three protagonists escape from ‘sin’ into a realization of existential *Dasein*. By virtue of the intellectual imagination made possible by language, they

¹⁸Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 2.

transcend inherited modes of perception and begin to fashion a new reality from the present, 'epiphanic' moment.

In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce describes *Ulysses* as his "moraculous . . . sindbook," an epithet that came to seem increasingly appropriate as the world of *Ulysses* began to reveal itself.¹⁹ In German, *sind* is a form of the verb 'to be;' and the noun *Sinn* denotes 'meaning' or 'sense.' The title conflates a number of Joycean themes: the concepts of morality and sin, the authorial preoccupation with *Sein* or 'being', and Joyce's artistic celebration of the miraculous powers of human consciousness.

"In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh in the form of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The theme of Saint John's gospel is also the motif of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a work that preaches the 'good news' of the Logos and offers the promise of a "new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future."²⁰ Like Stephen Dedalus, Joyce was determined to use his artistic talents for the transformation of humankind. Throughout the canon of his work, he utters the "word known to all men" (*Ulysses*, 581) – the Logos that defines being, engenders sympathy, and identifies the symbol-system of the race. From the material of words, the artist creates worlds: with godlike omniscience, he fashions an aesthetic microcosm, a fictional 'postcreation' that expands the collective horizons of human awareness.

The structure of Stephen's aesthetic theory in *Portrait* is based on Aristotle's *Poetics*, filtered through the writings of Thomas Aquinas. The function of the artist is to perceive the 'thing in itself' as it really is, shown forth in wholeness, harmony, and radiance. *Claritas* gives birth to the notion of epiphany, the revelation of the 'whatness' of an object or event. An epiphany connotes "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself" (*Stephen Hero*, 3). In this "most delicate and evanescent of moments" (*Stephen Hero*, 211), the "soul of the

¹⁹Suzette Henke, *Joyce's Moraculous Sindbook: A Study of Ulysses*, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1977, 5.

²⁰Henke, *Joyce's Moraculous Sindbook*, 6.

commonest object . . . seems to us radiant.” (*Stephen Hero*, 213). Stephen leads us through an Aristotelian maze, but he ultimately discards the categorical nets that bind his artistic vision. His description of epiphany initiates an aesthetic celebration of phenomenal reality, perceived and sanctified in the present moment.

In the ‘Telemachus’ episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen, threatened by the claustrophobic forces of Irish society, struggles for the physical and psychological space necessary to function as a priest of art, forging in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race. Most of the Dubliners who surround him have been trapped in a stultified world of spiritual paralysis. The citizens have been psychologically reduced to particles of matter and energy that function mechanically, according to predetermined modes of behaviour. The past, whether racial, social, or personal, constitutes a dead weight of determinism that destroys individual freedom.

The nets of family, church, and state all are supported by a philosophical vision grounded in Aristotelian categories. “History . . . is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (*Ulysses*, 134), Stephen proclaims—whether it be his own personal history of irrational guilt, a religious history of subservience to Irish Catholicism, or a national history of British political oppression. The historical model is linear and archetypal: it depends on a serial repetition of instants progressing toward “one great goal” (*Ulysses*, 134). A character like Garrett Deasy in *Portrait* claims to be in total possession of the light and looks forward to the manifestation of an “allbright” (*Portrait*, 36) deity. In contrast, Stephen peers into the darkness of private consciousness and turns to the shadowy regions of his own creative will. As a modern, “vivisective” artist, he rejects the nightmare of tradition and clings to the present moment: “Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past” (*Stephen Hero*, 186).

4. Post Secularism of Joyce

In the course of *Ulysses*, Stephen moves from an enclosed world of determinism to the existential liberation of artistic consciousness. With a Luciferian gesture of independence in “Circe” “non serviam” he professes moral and creative freedom in a realm of infinite possibilities. According to Henke, “He becomes the *Urbemensch*,”²¹ who embodies “the new, the unique, the incomparable, making laws for ourselves and creating ourselves.”²² Joyce’s artist-hero Stephen becomes a Nietzschean overman, the messiah and priest of a new religion, who affirms the “spirit of man in literature” (*Portrait*, 104) and “creates a meaning for the earth” (*Portrait*, 105). Nietzsche wrote in 1883 in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “A new pride my ego taught me, and this I teach men: no longer to bury one’s head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth.”²³ Compare this to *Stephen Hero*: “To walk nobly on the surface of the earth, to express oneself without pretence, to acknowledge one’s own humanity! You mustn’t think I rhapsodise: I am quite serious. I speak from my soul” (*Stephen Hero*, 142). Declaring an aesthetic autocracy, the artist becomes godlike in his power to fashion a new reality from the “flesh made word”: “In woman’s womb word is made flesh but in the spirit of the maker all flesh that passes becomes the word that shall not pass away. This is the postcreation” (*Ulysses*, 391).

Eamonn Hughes maintains that Joyce takes a dialectic approach, both assenting and denying, saying that Stephen’s much noted *non serviam* is qualified – “I will not serve that which I no longer believe...,” and that the *non serviam* will always be balanced by Stephen’s “I am a servant...” and Molly’s “yes”.²⁴ In the words of his brother,

²¹Henke, *Joyce’s Moraculous Sindbook*, 3.

²²Henke, *Joyce’s Moraculous Sindbook*, 4.

²³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 144.

²⁴Eamonn Hughes, *Irish Writers and Religion*, Robert Welch, ed., London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992, 116-137.

My brother’s breakaway from Catholicism was due to other motives. He felt it was imperative that he should save his real spiritual life from being overlaid and crushed by a false one that he had outgrown. He believed that poets in the measure of their gifts and personality were the repositories of the genuine spiritual life of their race and the priests were usurpers. He detested falsity and believed in individual freedom more thoroughly than any man I have ever known. ... The interest that my brother always retained in the philosophy of the Catholic Church sprang from the fact that he considered Catholic philosophy to be the most coherent attempt to establish such an intellectual and material stability.²⁵

Gibson argues that Joyce “remained a Catholic intellectual if not a believer” since his thinking remained influenced by his cultural background, even though he dissented from that culture.²⁶ His relationship with religion was complex and not easily understood, even perhaps by himself. He acknowledged the debt he owed to his early Jesuit training. Joyce told the sculptor August Suter, that from his Jesuit education, he had “learnt to arrange things in such a way that they become easy to survey and to judge.”²⁷

Joyce’s objection to the Church of Rome was inspired according to Douglas Kanter by the type of spiritual torpor caused by what he perceived to be the oppressive religiosity of Catholic Culture in Ireland. He felt that Roman tyranny was much more oppressive and worse than its English equivalent. But for all his misgivings about the church’s negative influence on the social and political sphere, he nevertheless remained steeped in its vocabulary and rituals.²⁸

²⁵Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper*, London: Faber and Faber, 1982, 120.

²⁶Gibson, *James Joyce*, 41.

²⁷Gibson, *James Joyce*, 41.

²⁸Douglas Kanter, “Joyce, Irish Paralysis, and Cultural Nationalist Anticlericalism,” *James Joyce Quarterly* Vol. 41, No. 3 (Spring, 2004), 381-396.

When an ethics emerges that might release one from the hatred of the other to love, through a new way of thinking, it is called 'Postsecular thinking' according to Eric Santner.²⁹ There is a post secular miraculous dimension in Bloom's sympathy and compassion. For Santner, miracles occur when ethics triumphs over historically embedded conflicts and thus concerns itself with cataclysmic descriptions of the physical itself less with what he calls the "psychology of everyday life world." He says,

Miracles happen when we feel ourselves able to suspend a pattern...whereby one 'culpabilizes' the other or in more Nietzschean terms, cultivates resentment, with respect to a fundamental dysfunction or crisis within social reality. Miracles which are manifested in the secular social realm reflect the theological aspects in the writings of Joyce, which engage with the possibility of theological presences in his works.³⁰

It is this secular social theology that one finds consistently running as a thread in all of Joyce's major works. It is almost like a project that Joyce successfully accomplishes as a novelist.

5. *Ulysses*: A Comment on the Sterile Catholic Cult of Ireland

Sexuality in *Ulysses* is marked by an inability to move past an abstract barrier within the Irish mind set. Sexual confusion saturates the lives of the characters that populate Joyce's Dublin. Years of sexual repression in the country has left the young Irishmen and women of Dublin with an inability to discuss or express their sexuality in the ways they wished to. The Church condemns the display of sexuality out of marriage and even punishes characters for implied sexuality, leaving the men and women of Joyce's Ireland in a state of sexual failure. In the 14th episode of *Ulysses* titled "Oxen of the Sun", a group of seven young men and Bloom meet in a hospital. They are all there to enquire after Mrs Purefoy who is in labour with her twelfth child.

²⁹Eric Santner in Brian Matthew Nicholas, *"Scrupulous Sympathy": James Joyce's "Ulysses" and the Ethics of Modern Sentimentality*, Washington University in St. Louis: ProQuest 2008, 228.

³⁰Nicholas, "Scrupulous Sympathy," 226.

Unlike the virile fertility symbols of the Helios cows in Homer’s *Odyssey*, the drunken bawdy young men in Joyce’s *Ulysses* are far from being virile and potent. There is only talk and no action in these debauched and drunk youth. Joyce seems to be raising a pertinent question. Who is an Irish man? Is he a man of action or a man of words? If it is a man of action that Ireland needs, to liberate her, then Blazes Boylan who is carrying on an affair with Molly Bloom or old Mr Purefoy who is begetting children on his old decrepit wife is the answer. If it is the man of words, then the answer seems to be in Stephen, Costello, Mulligan and the other oxen who are of no consequence either. It is also ironic that the ox is a castrated bull and that the ‘oxen’ in Horne’s hospital fit that description better as the fertility symbols of the Sun God. This is a masculine dualism that continues to engage Joyce; for the imperium of Church is a eunuch outfit, not fit to do anything manly but just shows off his male organs to women and children who are easily impressed. Joyce implies that the man may be left with the option to masturbate and it can be surmised that this act instils in him a Catholic shame with regard to sexuality. The shame associated with premarital expressions of sexuality in Ireland is informed by the Church’s omnipresent cultural power and stunts a liberal view on sex.

Many of the characters in *Ulysses* have grand aspirations that they never reach and yet most of them seem to be passive to a large extent. The ominous engine that drives much of what happens to these people is the spectre of Catholicism. In their quest for an identity for the Irish future the Irish people end up bogged down by a false representation of their past.

Joyce portrays the possibility of an Irish identity not only independent from England, but also from the Church and the regressive Irish Revival. The Dubliners of Joyce’s narratives cling on to the unchanging tradition of Catholicism and the false mystic charm of the Celtic Revival, while always knowing that the world was on the verge of immeasurable change. Joyce sees the Revival’s failure to look forward to a modern Irish nation in favour of looking back to an idealized Irish past as unproductive and sterile. In his view, the Church is inimical to man’s natural

urges and yet grandiosely exhorts them to 'go forth and multiply,' and distanced himself from the church. The Church, a supposedly phallogocentric imperial institution, is challenged by the oxen.

6. Conclusion

James Joyce is a secularist. Through the characters of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, he attempts at a particular kind of liberation from the shackles of a religion that was restricting the Irish voice from being heard. Both *Portrait* and *Ulysses* are novels of resistance, concerned with an extraordinarily arduous struggle towards a freedom that its author knows is at best partial or equivocal. In *Ulysses*, when antagonism traps Stephen in particular structures of thought and feeling: melancholy, sullen hatred, spiritual violence, despair of the soul, the intimate complicity born of polar oppositions, Joyce turns to Bloom. As a Jew whose family has not been long in Ireland, Bloom is not caught in the same trap as Stephen. He is thus an extremely effective weapon against colonial discursive and ideological formations. Joyce locates him right in the Dublin Catholic community, a community whose politics Bloom is broadly in sympathy with, yet radically different from that community. Bloom's perspective on the colonizer's culture is a result of acculturation and therefore a doubly alienated one. Joyce recognizes that Bloom's position as a Jew and the kind of anti-Semitism he encounters is particular to colonial Irish culture, which bears the scars of its own deep rooted racial distinctions. Bloom thus becomes a secular character in *Ulysses*.

For James Joyce, his literary secularism was an ideological position. There were only two positions that were available to an Irish to occupy in the socio-political scene of the 19th century. One was the English, Imperialist, Protestant and the other was the Irish, Nationalist and Catholic. James Joyce refused to occupy either of the positions in the binary. He found a third position more liberating and full of possibilities: a terrain in his novels where the Greek (Dedalus), Jew (Bloom) and the Irish (Dubliners) would all wander the streets of Dublin with the aspirations of being heard and acting with agency.