

# Stephen Dedalus and Contemporary Youth: A Comparative Study of Identity, Rebellion and the Quest for Freedom in a Changing World

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## Abstract

*James Joyce's A portrait of the artist as a Young Man, focuses on hardships and goals of young individuals. In this paper through Stephen's journey we go through similarities of his life and challenges faced by contemporary youth. Both struggle to overcome the complexities of identity formation, complaints of traditional education, search for intellectual freedom. When comparing to modern expression of individuality Stephen's quest for artistic autonomy this paper highlights the relevance of Joyce's protagonist. The novel is highly experimental. When we compare Stephen's quest for identity to modern individuality like social media activities and their creativity using technology. This paper highlights the relevance of Stephen Dedalus. Through this comparative analysis we get an insight into the dynamics of youth, education and society.*

**Keywords:** Identity, Rebellion, Creativity, Education, Individuality, Freedom

## Introduction

James Joyce's *A portrait of the artist as a Young Man* gives an exploration of the struggle of young individuals navigating the complexities of identity, culture and personal Freedom. It is a Künstlerroman or artist's bildungsroman novel. In this novel Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist, whose journey pictures the dilemmas faced by contemporary youth. Stephen Dedalus, named after the master craftsman of Greek mythology Daedalus. When he was young he questions the rigid catholic doctrines and Irish nationalist sentiments of his time. Through this rebellion he goes on the path of intellectual and artistic self-discovery. He exiles from Ireland to Europe to get a life of creative freedom.

Stephen reinforces today's youth who often face similar changes; restore cultural heritage with individual ambitions, seek autonomy in this globalised world. Stephen's rejection of belief and striving for self-expression reflects the universal desire among youths to define their identities on their own.

Joyce's use of complex symbolism and use of techniques like stream of consciousness intensify the themes which is a timeless portrayal of energetic and adventurous goal of authenticity. Dedalus this we can say a symbolic figure who inspires modern reader to live through the complexities of tradition and Modernity.

## A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

*A portrait of the artist as a Young Man* was the first novel by James Joyce. It is a unique novel. It is narrated by the main character Stephen Dedalus. When the novel starts Stephen was a toddler and his father told a story about a moocow. Stephen's parents were very poor and religious. Due

to many debts, they had to frequently move houses. His mother was also very religious.

They had no interest in entertainment like art. Stephen and his siblings were taught by a religious lady named Dante during their childhood. Stephen then send to a boarding school, Clongowes wood college, for study. Due to the poverty at home and falling behind in extracurricular activities, Stephen faced a lot of teasing and trouble. One day, the other children pushed him into a muddy puddle, and he fell ill. As a young boy, he was allowed to eat at the dining table with the adults. Since it was a conventional family, young children were usually not allowed to sit with the elders.

After some time, due to a financial crisis, their family moved to Dublin. There he met Emma Clair. Stephen joined in a private school. He realised his talent in art from there. And he participated in many competitions and won prizes. He also won the best actor prize in the school. During that time he developed interest in sex and engaged in sexual relationship with a prostitute. This became a habit for him. Later he realised that this habit is against his religion , and he realised will get hell as the punishment for this. He again started to live with religious conventions. After spending some days in religious life, again feel frustrated. He felt that continuing as a priest was not the life he wanted. While walking along the beach, he saw a beautiful girl and praised her beauty. After that, he joined a new university. In university college he is inspired by the beauty concept of St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle and he has his own aesthetic theory. Though he was a university student he had no friendship and felt isolated. Then he thought that Ireland is a trap , he wants to escape from the concept of religion, family and politics. He realised that he cannot develop his aesthetic creation living in Ireland. Finally he gets disillusioned with his life ,his family, his religion and leaves for Paris. This exile was compared with the myth of Daedalus. The Greek mythological figure Daedalus and his son Icarus was imprisoned in an island prison. They want to escape from there, so Daedalus made through his art and attached them with wax. Father and son flew high away from the island prison. Icarus got so excited because he is flying, he flew so high up to the sun, the wax melted and he dropped into the ocean and died. Stephen Dedalus wants to escape from family and religion.

### **Major Themes in a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man**

#### **Identity**

Stephen Dedalus national identity plays a significant role in this novel. He grows up in a situation where there is a lot of political and religious controversy. The separatist leader Parnell exposed as an adulterer. Parnell was condemned by the Catholic Church. The 19th century was a turbulent time in Ireland. It is a time of emotional suspense and he was awaiting for his destiny and there is a difficulty in him because he could not perceive it. Throughout his life he feels alienation and difference for him he was a person fated to stand outside the society.

Similarly contemporary youth struggle with societal pressures in different form such as social media expectations strict educational system and cultural stereo types. They often feel the tension between modernity and tradition. Like Stephen they are also struggling to balance personal desire with social demands. Amidst these influences the process of forming an authentic identity gives a clear picture of Stephen's refusal to confirm and his pursuit of self-expression.

#### **Freedom**

Stephen want to liberate himself from the constraints of religion, nationalism and social expectations. He seeks to define himself and on his own and rejects the imposed identities, this symbolises his rebellion against Catholic orthodoxy and Irish nationalism.

His challenging disobedience can see in his decision to leave Ireland and a commitment to artistic and intellectual freedom. Stephen wants intellectual and spiritual freedom. For him freedom is not only a physical one but also include the autonomy to think, create and live without external limitations.

The youth today desires freedom that is both mental and physical. They need freedom to express their interests without fear of judgement. Like Stephen, for them, there is no place for social obligations politics or religion. Here we can see their priorities were personal enthusiasm and self-expression, which take priority over traditional social framework.

### **Religion**

When Stephen turns to adulthood he leaves behind his religious identity. After returning as an artist he start feeling sexual interest and take part in sexual relation with prostitutes. When he realised this is against religion and will lead to hell he becomes religious again. Thus he rejects Irish identity and religion identity and rejection of these identities is also embrace of freedom in identity. Stephen rejects to do his duty during the church's central sacrament Eucharist. He counterparts the literary artist with Catholic priest and art with Eucharist.

Contemporary youth in their journey echoes their struggle with inherited belief system and societal expectations. Many youth struggled with redefining their religious and cultural identities in this rapidly changing world. Stephen rejects imposed identity's and his thought of spiritual and artistic purpose serves as a powerful reminder of self authorship. Like Stephen youngsters have a universal conflict, a desire to restore tradition with individuality.

### **The Artist**

The theme of art plays an important role in this novel. Both Joyce and Stephen were writers in the University College. Stephen is inspired by St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. He transforms from a dutiful Catholic to rebellious artist. Stephen's life gives the importance of imagination and art as driving force in the search of personal identity. Today young people struggle, like Stephen, with cultural and personal identity they seek ways to express themselves beyond conventional frameworks.

### **Dedalus and Contemporary Youth**

Both Stephen dedalus and the Greek mythological figure Dedalus is somehow gives a parallel to the life of contemporary youth. The myth of Dedalus is a metaphor for the struggle to break free from societal expectations. Stephen's journey inspires individuals towards self realisation and gives the creative power of rebellion. This myth makes Stephen as a timeless figure of innovation, creativity and authenticity. He forms his identity through challenging religion, family and society. Modern youth gives their identities on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok Snapchat etc. For modern youth rebellion often see in the form of self-expression on social media, through social media they challenge Societal norms.

### **Conclusion**

James Joyce a portrait of the artist as a young man is an exploration of identity, rebellion and artistic creation. These themes are deeply relevant to contemporary audience. Stephen dedalus is a complex character through him Joyce's presence the personal struggles with religion nationalism and societal expectation of contemporary youth.

Joyce frames Stephen's journey as a narrative of rebellion, creativity and determination, through the use of myth of Daedalus. In this novel there is an integration of Catholic theology to Stephen's aesthetic theory which elevates artist's role to that offer divine Craftsman. Stephan is both a mirror and gate for contemporary youth, his life reflects the struggles of traditions and societal pressures and inspires them to embrace individuality and authenticity. There is an introspective journey to self study with the rejection of traditional structures and values. Modern youth and Stephen have common goal, they break free from external forces to seek self identity.

A portrait of the artist as a young man is a work of enduring relevance and significance because it is meditation on human life pursuit of freedom transformative power of creativity.

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