Spring 2020

Floral Personification in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2020

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to my senior project advisor Alys Moody, whose patience and constant encouragement throughout made everything possible. Thank you for listening to all the changes in my topic, cheering me on when I was stressed, and never giving up on me.

Thank you to Marissa Libbon and Matthew Mutter who made the impossible seem possible by being there every step of the way. Marissa, thank you for providing essential research and writing strategies which made the whole process much smoother. Matthew, since I first took your class on T.S. Eliot you pushed me to think more deeply and critically than ever before. Thank you for taking interest and excitement in my ideas, and for the games of squash.

Thank you to all the friends I made over the years at Bard who made sure that levity and good humor is the best possible distraction when life gets stressful: Artun Ak, Theo Webb, John Michael Richards, and Marko Jukic.

Additionally, thank you to coach Craig Thorpe-Clark who instilled in me a passion for squash and gave me structure during a time when I was badly in need of it. Thank you for showing me that a sound mind requires a sound body.

On a more personal note, I want to thank my sister Sarah. Four years goes by fast, but I count myself lucky to have gone to the same college with the best sister in the world. A constant source of light and laughter, you make me smile like no one else can. I take pride in calling myself *your* brother.

Lastly, I want to thank the rest of my family for their support over the years. Thank you to my Father for teaching me at a young age to love reading, even in my moments of wayward adolescence. Mom, thank you for putting everything in perspective during times when I struggle to see past what is simply immediate. Thank you to my older sister Anna, whose passion for art inspires me to be fearless. Thank you to my older brother Jacob who sets the standard to which I constantly strive.

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Introduction:

> A little wave of quiet mirth broke forth over the class of boys from the rector's grim smile. Stephen's heart began slowly to fold and fade with fear like a withering flower.[1]

For the casual reader of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* there are certain symbols that are easy to pick up on. The name Stephen Dedalus, the main protagonist, suggests that birds and water are important symbols to keep in mind since the surname brings to mind the mythological story of Icarus and Daedalus. Another leading symbol that many often think of are the use of colors symbolizing larger religious and political tensions in Ireland during Joyce's upbringing. These symbols have for the most part been universally acknowledged in both *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Ulysses.* So, it is quite surprising that the use of flowers, specifically the rose, has hardly gained critical attention.

There is a certain amount of silence within the scholarly field in regards to how flowers operate within Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist,* and this is one which I hope to fill. In terms of what has already been written, Ramon Saldivar's book *Figural Language in the Novel* offers a chapter titled "The Flowers of Speech: James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses,*" which provides a framework from which we can come to an understanding of the general usage of flowers within Joyce's work. Saldivar only briefly looks at the image of the flower, and when he does so it is in conversation with Stephen's aesthetic theory near the end of the novel. Saldivar writes, "according to that theory, meaning and materiality can be reconciled in a transfigurative flash. For one fragile, heroic instant, a surge of spirit illuminates and redeems

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[1] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Seamus Deane, Penguin Books (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 115.

the material world from within."[2] When we trace the use of the flower in *A Portrait of the Artist*, as Saldivar claims, we come to a moment of a "transfigurative flash." What this transfigurative flash means according to Saldivar is defined in terms of "reconciliation," where the material world and "meaning" are harmonized. Ultimately, however, Saldivar claims that "the aesthetic theory is a statement about literary language and about the way in which narratives create meaning" which "allegorize the procedures of meaning-creation throughout their narrated stories."[3] A slight problem with Saldivar's analysis is that he only focuses on a single instance of the flower in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* when Stephen's "soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings. A world, a glimmer, or a flower?"[4] By the time Saldivar gets to his analysis of the flower, here, he concludes it is only "a product of the seductive physical pleasure of pure linguistic creation."[5] It is important to note that from the outset Saldivar's main occupation is with Stephen's aesthetic theory and not with how the floral language of the novel develops. When he gets to his analysis of *Ulysses,* his inquiry into the floral dimensions are more ranging. However, by only focusing on this single instance, Saldivar neglects Joyce's larger symbolic usage of flowers. For our sake, Saldivar's argument about the flower in *A Portrait of the Artist* as a type of transfiguration which offers a source of reconciliation that questions the degree to which language and narrative create meaning is an important contribution to keep in mind, and specifically how Saldivar synthesizes the notion of transformation as a central component.

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[2] Ramón Saldívar, "The Flowers of Speech: James Joyce′s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses,*" in *Figural Language in the Novel* (Princeton University Press, 1984), 246, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7zvvnp.9.
[3] Saldívar, 187.
[4] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 187.
[5] Saldívar, "The Flowers of Speech," 204.

Apart from Saldivar's brief foray into Joyce's flowers, Barbara Seward looks specifically at the image of the rose in her essay *The Rose and the Artist,* which in turn provides the most in depth analysis of how flowers operate in the novel. In Seward's analysis we are able to see why Saldivar felt the impulse to put Stephen's aesthetic theory in conversation with floral images: "as the flower of beautiful women, it has long been allied with both sensual and spiritual love; and association with the beauty of women is but a short step from association of the rose with the beauty of art."[6] The image of the rose, thus, represented a means for Joyce to be able to provide a symbol for Stephen's aesthetic theory as it applies to the beauty of women rather than the transcendental doctrine of the divine. Seward's main claim is that the rose "blossom[s] at crucial stages of Stephen Dedalus' experience in association with three of his principal concerns: women, religion, and art."[7] By tracing the development of the rose Seward indicates that the symbol is able to express "various levels of conscious and unconscious meaning" that allows the reader to view the "full expression of [Stephen's] emotional state."[8] Seward continues by saying "beyond this, his emotional state itself is dynamic and fluctuating, so that the rose takes on additional significance in conveying vital changes in attitudes and reactions determining Stephen's course on the road to maturity."[9] The focus of Seward's claim, here, is an essential one, since she argues that when we follow the rose symbol as it progresses through the novel we are afforded a window into the fluctuating emotional state of Stephen as he develops into maturity, thus providing clarity and structure to the thematic elements of the novel.

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[6] Barbara Seward, "The Artist and the Rose," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (January 1957): 180, https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.26.2.180.
[7] Seward, 180.
[8] Seward, 180.
[9] Seward, 180.

That being said, Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* is carefully constructed with floral images in mind. The first usage of the flower is tied to its religious ceremonial usages, and represents Stephen's interior emotions as he interacts with the religious sphere. A young Stephen Dedalus while ruminating on a bit of gossip about a group of boys who stole wine from the cellar of the chapel locates God "on the altar in the middle of flowers and candles" and thinks about how terrible a sin it must be to steal from a place where God resides.[10] In another instance when Father Arnall, the rector of the college, is giving a lecture during the student's Jesuit retreat, Stephen feels that his "heart began slowly to fold and fade with fear like a withering flower."[11] The image of a "withering flower" is reiterated again during the sermon as Stephen "withered up like a flower of the desert that feels the simoom coming from afar."[12] Whenever Joyce uses repetition, as Seamus Deane indicates in his introduction to the novel, the reader ought to pay close attention, as "it emphasizes for us the asphyxiation of Stephen's surroundings, their limited and limiting character."[13] Joyce's repetition of the word withering is thus important to understand in its religious connotation. As Deane suggests "repetition is, in its monotony, variety and intensity, the rhetoric of hell, and, as in hell, its worst aspect is that it goes on forever."[14]

We see, here, that the image of the flower begins to gesture towards religion. As Stephen is at his most pious he thinks that "every instance of consciousness could be made to reverberate radiantly in heaven," and "feel[s] his soul in devotion pressing like fingers the keyboard of a great cash register" that records not numbers "but as a frail column of incense or as a slender

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[10] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 47.
[11] Joyce, 115.
[12] Joyce, 116.
[13] Seamus Deane, introduction to A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce, ed. Deane (1916; New York: Penguin Publishers, 1993), p.xxviii-xxix.
[14] Deane, xxix.

flower."[15] Religious obedience makes Stephen–when thinking about his soul pressing on the cash register of heaven–into a "slender flower." This sense of insubstantiality that Stephen feels when attempting to follow religious dogma presents itself most fully when Stephen is holding "the rosaries" and they "[transform] themselves into coronals of flowers of such vague unearthly texture that they seemed to him as hueless and odourless as they were nameless."[16] The transformation of the rosaries into "coronals of flowers" evokes in some sense the crown of thorns placed on the head of Jesus. And yet there is something demystifying about this moment, as the flowers lack any substance, without odour, color, or even a name. It is also, of no coincidence, that the word rosary contains on an etymological level the word rose, from the Latin *rosarium* meaning a rose garden. When Stephen views the rosaries in a way that hints at its etymology, we can see why Saldivar suggests that the usage of flowers represents a "pure linguistic creation." What this means is that Stephen is able to penetrate the substance of a thing and bring it to the realm of language, without the attachment to religious symbolism. And yet, Stephen sees the transformation of the rosaries into flowers take place when he is at his most religiously obedient, suggesting that his attempt at being pious is almost contradicted by his interior emotional state. What we see, thus, is that Joyce's use of floral language explicitly shows the fluctuation of Stephen's emotional state, seen clearly in the terms "withering," "slender," and the linguistic transformation of the rosaries into "coronals of flower." But perhaps the most intriguing aspect of how Joyce uses flowers is that, when it is coupled with Stephen's interaction with the religious sphere, it shows that his emotional state is weak and impotent, stuck in the realm of childhood.

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[15] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 160.
[16] Joyce, 160.

If we take an image of a flower and put it in a time lapse we will see a progression from a small indiscernible seed to a full bloom and finally its decay as it withers and dies. Under certain conditions, say a limited amount of sunlight or an extended drought, a flower cannot develop fully; it will have withered before it has yet to bloom. However if the flower is given the right amount of sunlight, water and soil to grow in it will develop fully and live out its biological purpose as nature intends. When Joyce uses flowers as a personification of Stephen's interiority we might think about the time lapse of the flower as indicative of the proper conditions necessary for Stephen to flourish. If we think of the role of religion as it affects Stephen's emotional interiority we can look to the flower as an expression of his inability to grow and develop. In essence, religion can only offer a limited amount of water and sunshine. There is a moment about two-thirds of the way through Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* when Stephen asserts his intention to become an artist. After experiencing a state of youthful rapture and boundless ecstasy, Stephen finds a moment of calm to close "his eyes in the languor of sleep."[17] In his tired state Stephen describes the feeling of his eyes "[trembling] as if they felt the strange light of some new world." [18] The world for Stephen suddenly splits into one with a distinct past which no longer holds sway over his newfound present. Closer inspection of the rest of the passage reveals this new terrain that Stephen traverses:

> His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under a sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings. A world, a glimmer, or a flower? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of

[17] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Seamus Deane, Penguin Books (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 187.
[18] Joyce, 187.

> light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other.[19]

Stephen's soul enters into a space that is "fantastic, dim, uncertain" and "traversed by cloudy shapes and beings." Stephen cannot see through the dim and unknown territory as one could at the top of a mountain on a clear day looking upon an empty valley. And yet this is a fantastic space where Stephen's soul "swoons." The term swoon describes a state of such ecstatic joy that one is on the point of fainting and losing consciousness. Within this strange state of neither full lucidity nor complete unconsciousness, Stephen ponders whether his soul is in "a world, a glimmer, or a flower." In an instant the more spiritual inner realm of Stephen's soul is able to be expressed through the metaphor of "an opening flower." What is striking about this moment is that the naturalism of the flower metaphor is defined by an almost religious experience. His soul, in the allegorical symbol of an opening flower, is "trembling and unfolding…in endless succession to itself…flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes." Similar to the temporal process of a blooming flower, Stephens soul is expanding outwards to the point where the flushness of the leaves encompasses all of earth and floods heaven with its light.

Stephen's perception of the world, here, is one that changes again to a flower. Yet this time, it is marked by a change from a withering flower to "an opening flower." Saldivar would claim that this is the instance of a "transfigurative flash" of a purely linguistic creation. Yes, it is true, that as Saldivar claims that the world for Stephen becomes imbued with meaning, but it is important to keep in mind why the flower finally opens up when Stephen is no longer tied to the chains of religion. While Saldivar is able to suggest correctly that a transfigurative flash has occurred, he fails to account for the reason why the flower is opening up and what it is opening

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[19] Joyce, 187.

up into. By the time Stephen gets to this point, Joyce has fully developed the usage of the flower within the novel and makes it represent his own detachment from religion.

By following the image of flowers throughout Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* we can see that they give structure to Stephen's development, specifically as it pertains to his loss of religious faith and his call to the vocation of the artist. My inquiry into the usage of flowers in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* concerns itself specifically with how flowers are personified to Stephen's emotional growth as he goes through the process of changing from a "withering flower" to one that is "opening up." Taking Saldivar's and Seward's analysis of floral imagery as a guide, I will pay close attention to the reason Joyce employs floral language within *A Portrait of the Artist* to suggest that he is participating in a larger tradition of flower language. By doing so I add to the standard scholarly narrative of Stephen's transformation from religious obedience to secular artist.

The most general biological definition of a flower is that it is the reproductive structure for flowering plants. A rather simple definition that suggests flowers are generally associated with sex. A flower also describes the finest individuals in a group and when it is used as a verb it suggests full development. As we get to more specific flowers the general definition changes to encompass specific emotions and sentiments, creating a specific language of flowers. We all know the formula; a red rose associates with love and passion while a white one is used for purity and innocence.

How many times have you been out walking on a path, a trail, or a street and suddenly had the urge to stop in your tracks, never mind the destination in hand, simply to look and smell a colorful flower? There is something quite arresting about this moment. Against the humdrum

of our complex daily lives a flower appears seemingly out of nowhere and for a small instant all we desire is to revel in its beauty. And then life resumes, we go about our day, all the while forgetting about the flower and the sliver of joy it provided as a reprieve from our immense weariness. Oftentimes they are just decorative pieces meant to add to the aesthetic of the scene, planted in little pots adorning the bland white window sills. But Joyce paints a different picture. He glorifies ordinary objects and raises them to mythical heights. With Joyce a simple milkmaid becomes the personification of Ireland, a morning shave becomes a mock catholic mass, and the flower becomes the window to the soul.

Chapter 1: The Flower as Religious Symbol

The use of flowers has a long tradition in Western literature. Beverley Seaton's essay *Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification* seeks to trace the development of flowers, or more specifically "flower personification"–that is "signification in any form that brings together flowers and human beings"–in literature "from classical times to the end of the nineteenth century."[20] In doing so, Seaton notices two types of "sign-function."[21] The first type of signification that Seaton points to is a "biological" function, where "flowers are seen to represent persons in their relations to nature, in their sexual roles, in the place of mankind in the cosmos."[22] The second type of signification Seaton calls "social," where "flowers are seen to represent persons in their ranks in society, in their interaction with others, in their characters as different one from another, in their religious orientations."[23] While comparing the biological and social basis of flowers in terms of psychology, Seaton writes that "the biologically based perceptions tend towards emotion" while "the socially based towards ideas."[24] What Seaton means by emotions is rather straightforward, but a little confusing when it comes to ideas. For Seaton, we might say that when flowers are personified to represent ideas on a sociological basis, representing "persons in their ranks in society" or "their religious orientations."

Seaton looks at five distinct periods of literature as dominated by either a biologically based or socially based forms of flower personification: classical, medieval, renaissance, eighteenth century and nineteenth century. For Seaton the classical period and the nineteenth

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[20] Beverly Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification," *Poetics Today* 10, no. 4 (1989): 679, https://doi.org/10.2307/1772806.
[21] Seaton, 681.
[22] Seaton, 681.
[23] Seaton, 681.
[24] Seaton, 681.

century were predominantly dominated by a biological sign-function basis whereas the medieval period and the eighteenth century were socially based. The renaissance, interestingly, presented a type of crossover between the two. In the classical period Seaton looks at Ovid's *Metamorphosis* that showed a "cosmic biology" where "flowers are associated with persons in their shared mortality."[25] To use Ovid as an example, we see that flowers are always used in moments of transformation and metamorphosis, specifically when characters die. The best known being the story of Narcissus who drowns in a pool of water by looking at his own reflection and turns into a bed of gold and white flowers. Stephen's transformation in the novel, while not as dramatic as that of Narcissus', undergoes a similar metamorphosis. This can be seen when Stephen chooses the life of the artist and he feels "his soul was swooning into some new world," the new world being the "opening flower."[26] As he opens up into this new floral world there is a newfound recognition of his place in the cosmos. What is interesting about this moment for Stephen, however, is that Stephen's recognition of his place in the cosmos is one that is closely associated with his religious orientation and rank in society, suggesting a closer approximation to a social based version of floral personification. How Stephen gets to his point of transformation, however, is a complex process.

In order to understand the context of Stephen's transformation it is important to recognize that Stephen believes the necessary conditions for his metamorphosis stems from a tension with his desire to be religiously obedient and his desire to act upon his sexal impulses. One way to tackle this problem is to first look at the early criticism around Joyce's writing, and look at the context in which Joyce is associated with religion. The reason why this is important to do is that

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[25] Seaton, 683.
[26]Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 187.

Stephen is loosely modeled after Joyce himself, and to some extent Stephen is an autobiographical, albeit fictional, portrait of Joyce. When we do this we notice that the emphasis has always been on Joyce's intellectual brilliance as a form of satanic rebellion against religious dogma. The earliest surviving pieces of criticism that we have on Joyce comes from a letter from George Russell, famously abbreviated to AE in *Ulysses,* dates to 1902 in which he calls the young Joyce "preposterously clever" and "my young genius."[27] Russell later goes on to joke that, "I wouldn't be his Messiah for a thousand million pounds. He would be always criticizing the bad taste of his deity."[28]Another early piece comes from Joyce's brother Stanislaus from 1903 in which he says that "the keen observation and satanic irony of his character are precisely, but not fully, expressed."[29] The satanic irony Stanislaus indicates presents itself most clearly in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* with the lines of Stephen's proclamation to Cranly that "I will not serve." [30] The sentiment of non-servitude recalls Father Arnall's sermon in which he speaks of Lucifer's sin by saying, "theologians consider that it was the sin of pride, the sinful thought conceived in an instant: *non serviam: I will not serve.* That instant was his ruin."[31] We can see this irony in Cranly's voice when he responds "that remark was made before,"[32] showing that Stephen, while desiring to be free from servitude, particularly servitude in his religious obedience, cannot escape from the literary tradition informed by religion. The fall from religion and the sin associated with such fall is a thematic element central in Joyce's personal rebellion with the church. It is why Russell says so jokingly that he refused to be Joyce's "deity," since to be such would invite

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[27] Robert H. Deming, ed., *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage Vol One 1902-1927* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1970), 32–33.
[28] Deming, 33.
[29] Deming, 34.
[30] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 260.
[31] Joyce, 126.
[32] Joyce, 260.

criticism. When we think of the flower as an expression of Stephen's interiority alongside Joyce's crafting of Stephen as partaking in a satanic rebellion, we might look at the process of withering as an expression of Stephen's dissatisfaction with religion because it constricts his freedom.

The flower withers in association with Stephen's religious guilt, which itself stems from the guilt he has by acting upon his sexual desires. Again, this can be viewed from the basis of Joyce's own experience with religion. In the February 17th, 1940 issue of the New Yorker Magazine, Clifton Fadiman reviewed Herbert Gorman's biography of James Joyce in a rather unfavorable light, concluding that "his book will probably not prove standard."[33] Within Fadiman's scathing assessment of Gorman, however, we are presented a rather standard narrative of Joyce's upbringing:

> At six, James was dispatched to a Jesuit college. For the next fourteen years he was subject to a rigorous Jesuit training. This means, first of all, that he received a sound education; second, that he became an Aristotelian; third, that though he rebelled against the Catholic dogma, its subtlety and passion and logic were to inform his work for ever after. From one point of view it is not impossible to think of Joyce as the latest and one of the greatest of Jesuit writers…Catholicism and Ireland are the two hollow teeth which torment Joyce but which he can never let alone.[34]

A strong Jesuit education that informed an Aristotelian framework and the eventual troubling rebellion against the Catholic Church are not surprisingly the attributes Joyce ascribes to Stephen. Fadiman makes a rather interesting claim, however, when it comes to his third point. Although Joyce rebels against "Catholic dogma" he is viewed by Fadiman as "one of the greatest of Jesuit writers." The claim that Fadiman makes is a rather peculiar one. He essentially views

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[33]Fadiman, Clifton. "Gorman's Joyce–Rauschning's Hitler" *The New Yorker,* 17 Feb. 1940, pp. 78
[34] Fadiman, 78.

Joyce as the greatest Jesuit writer through a type of rejection that works through the foundations of Jesuit doctrine.

The society of Jesus, whose members are fashioned as Jesuits, was founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. The founding principles of the order are expressed in the fundamental charter of the order. We can see what these are in Pope Julius III's papal bull dated to July 21, 1550, titled the *Exposcit Debitum,* which means in Latin "the Duty requires," which is the final approval for the foundation of the society. In it, Julius III writes:

> Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the Cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the Name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth, should, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience, keep what follows in mind. He is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures and any other ministration whatsoever of the Word of God, and further by means of retreats, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments.[35]

If we take Ignatius' formula of religious servitude at face value, then to be a Jesuit means to take a "solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience," to spread the word of God by "preaching," "retreats," "education of children," "confessions and administering the other sacraments." Throughout Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* the fundamental charter of the order is worked through as Stephen struggles with his sexual appetite, as the financial state of his family slowly deteriorates from middle class to near poverty, as he ebbs from obedience to defiance in trying to keep the sacraments, as he goes on a Jesuit retreat where four lectures are given, and as he eventually makes confession. However, when Stephen is offered a chance to become a priest

[35] "The Portal to Jesuit Studies," accessed May 2, 2020, https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1550_formula/.

by the director of the college he is warned that "once a priest always a priest" and that by taking the vows it "imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark which can never be effaced."[36] Stephen knows that if he were to take this vow "he would fall" due to the "snares of the world."[37] Similarly, in a famous letter Joyce wrote to Nora Barnacle, his wife and longtime muse, during "the early weeks of their acquaintance" he says:

> Six years ago 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. I made secret war upon it when I was a student and declined to accept the positions it offered me. By doing this I made myself a beggar but I retained my pride. Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do.[38]

Although Joyce claims to have left the Church "hating it most fervently," a noteworthy aspect of this letter is the reason. Joyce says he could not stay because of the "impulses of my nature," meaning his sexual appetite which inevitably would cause him to break the vows of chastity. And, by leaving he is at least able to retain his pride, which is the sin of Lucifer mentioned by Father Arnall during Stephen's retreat. What we see is that Joyce, like his auto-biographical hero, is a Jesuit in training, but one who cannot abide by the charter set down by Ignatius, and clarified by Julius III. It is true, then, that Joyce can be seen as one of the greatest Jesuit writers, but it is important to note that this means he becomes one through a fundamental rejection of the foundational principles of the order, and a satanic rebellion that affirms his sexual desires and freedom.

Joyce's rejection of religion and the narrative around his loss of belief is a source of contentious debate amongst scholars. Richard Ellmann writes that when Joyce was at his most

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[36] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 173.
[37] Joyce, 175.
[38] *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, Main edition (London: Richard Ellmann, 2003), 25.

religious "his sister Eileen saw him saying his rosary piously on the way to school."[39] The image of a young Joyce whispering his rosary quickly on his way to school did not last, as "what had seemed piety now seemed only the last spasm of religious terror."[40] This image made its way into the novel when Stephen is walking to school and describes his rosaries turning into "coronals of flowers." Ellmann further writes that "he felt he must choose between continual guilt and some heretical exoneration of the sense. By conviction Joyce could not abase himself before Catholic doctrine; by temperament he could not abase himself before other men."[41] Ellmann shows how religious terror is a method that forces Joyce into a false piety, as it does for Stephen, but only makes him weary since he constantly has to live in "continual guilt" and "heretical exoneration of the sense."

The guilt and religious terror over Joyce's childhood that forced him into being pious eventually weakens as he gets older. However, Joyce still retained the intellectual religious Ellmann says that "he was no longer a Christian himself; but he converted the temple to new uses instead of trying to knock it down, regarding it as a superior kind of human folly and one which, interpreted by a secular artist, contained obscured bits of truth."[42] Unlike Joyce's brother, Stanislaus, who outright rejected his Christianity and openly declared himself to be an atheist, Ellmann describes Joyce's loss of faith as a complex "transmutation,"[43] from himself being a Christian to "secular artist." The point of Joyce's transmutation occurred, Ellmann claims later in an essay titled *The Politics of Joyce,* when "religious and secular morality impinged directly

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[39]Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce, New and Revised Edition*, Revised ed. edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 49.
[40] Ellmann, 49–50.
[41] Ellmann, 50.
[42] Ellmann, 66.
[43] Ellmann, 65.

upon him was its demand that he restrain his sexual impulses, or, as he interpreted the doctrine, that he masturbate rather than copulate."[44] The old temple of religion, which Fadiman describes as a hollow tooth that Joyce can never let alone, becomes for Ellmann a source that Joyce can now interpret as a "secular artist," since religion could now be seen as a folly, or type of human error.

Ellmann is adamant about the fact that although Joyce's transmutation to a secular artist while appearing to be a rejection of the church is more complicated than it seems. As Ellmann puts it, by choosing transmutation over denial "he would retain faith,"[45] but with different objects." This can be seen when "Morris L. Ernst asked Joyce, 'When did you leave the Catholic Church?' and he replied unhelpfully, 'That's for the Church to say.'"[46] Joyce's remark holds a similar tone that Stephen seems to express when Cranly asks him whether he believes in the Eucharist and he says "I do not," but later says "I neither believe in it nor disbelieve in it."[47] Stephen's doubt becomes central to Stephen's relationship with the church, and is something which is a far cry from all out rejection. This type of doubt translates over into Joyce's later work in *Ulysses* and is brought to the fore with Stephen's statement,"I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief. That is, help me to believe or help me to unbelieve?"[48]

During the sermon scene of the novel is the moment when Stephen's soul is described as "withering." From the act of withering, we can see where Ellmann gets the notion that religious terror and the inability to constrain his sexual impulses is what causes Joyce, and here it is

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[44] Richard Ellmann, "The Politics of Joyce," June 9, 1977, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1977/06/09/the-politics-of-joyce/.
[45] Ellmann, *James Joyce, New and Revised Edition*, 65.
[46] Ellmann, 65.
[47] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 260.
[48] *James Joyce: Ulysses (Gabler Edition) (Paperback); 1986 Edition* (James Joyce, 1672), 176.

Stephen, to have a falling out with the church. In this scene the suggestion is that religion is the cause of his soul withering. What we see is that for religion to retain its power over Stephen it uses terror, shame, guilt, and fear to solidify order and obedience. But no matter how much Stephen tries to be obedient he feels empty and devoid of any passion.

The retreat is a series of four lectures given by Father Arnall and is structured around "the four last things," meaning "death, judgement, hell and heaven."[49] During the beginning of the retreat we see that Stephen gets the feeling that he "became again a child's soul,"[50] and that he "had withered up like a flower." While the use of the term withering, here, is used to mean the feeling of humiliation, it also evokes the action of scorching caused to a plant that makes it shrivel. The act of shriveling that Stephen feels becomes a temporal return to childhood. For instance, when speaking about death and the judgement of the soul, Stephen returns to "the image of Emma" and a "flood of shame rushed forth anew."[51] Moreover, Stephen also recalls the "sordid details of his orgies" and from the "agony of shame" Stephen gets this sense of "abject powerlessness."[52] After the sermon, Stephen feels an incredible sense of guilt, but is mainly defined by a newfound fear of damnation, which brings about a desire to confess.

If we apply this to Seaton's tracing of floral personification within the medieval period, we can get to an understanding of how Joyce is using the flower to represent a shift from a cosmic biological personification to "abstracted spiritual qualities" that sought to "distance Christian ideas from the pagan background."[53] In the medieval period, Seaton claims flowers

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[49] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 117.
[50] Joyce, 116.
[51] Joyce, 124.
[52] Joyce, 124.
[53] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification," 683.

were no longer biological in their association with emotions, but tended towards the social as they began to personify ideas. While citing Pliny and Tertullian, Seaton points to the flower becoming a "Christian symbol" that first attempted to reject the pagan "ceremonial use of flowers" by shifting the focus from "the body" to "the head," from emotions to ideas.[54] While the classical period focused on stories of metamorphosis, in the Middle Ages it would instead focus on symbolism as the main form of floral personification. The church would take the "rose, lily, and violet" as the "three great floral symbols of the church" and use them to "represent Christian virtues and the abstract qualities of major saints. Those virtues derive from the qualities of the flowers-color, odor, growth habits, uses-making them strongly iconic."[55] We can see this type of ceremonial quality of the flower as Stephen locates god "on the altar in the middle of flowers and candles," and with the image of his rosaries changing into "coronals of flower" that seemed to him "hueless and odourless as they were nameless." What this suggests is that the flowers Stephen perceives, if we are to use Seaton's analysis that the qualities of the flowers represent religious virtue, become devoid of their Christian symbolism.

The most potent symbol that we see in the medieval period in terms of floral personification, and one that Joyce uses is the image of the Virgin Mary as that of a rose, which symbolizes her motherly and virginal virtues. While Stephen is about to hear Father Arnoll's sermon Stephen says "the glories of Mary held his soul captive: spikenard and myrrh and frankincense, symbolizing her royal lineage, her emblems, the late-flowering plant and late-blossoming tree, symbolising the agelong gradual growth of her cultus among men."[56] The

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[54] Seaton, 685.
[55] Seaton, 686.
[56] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 112.

focus of Mary here, by Stephen, is imbued with a symbolic tone, where Mary represents a type of “agelong gradual growth” for those who have sinned. Stephen thinks as much when he recounts “his sin, which had covered him from the sight of God, had led him nearer to the refuge of sinners.”[57] Later when Stephen is feeling immense shame for his sinful behavior there is a plea:“O Mary, refuge of sinners, intercede for him! O Virgin Undefiled, save him from the gulf of death!”[58] What develops is another symbolic type of floral personification where Mary is the protectorate of sinners souls, particularly Stephen’s. Seward confirms as much when she writes that “since the rose is traditionally symbolic of the Virgin as well as of womankind, Stephen's experience of penance as expressed in prayers to Mary is appropriately conveyed by the same flower that has been associated with his earlier female idol:"his prayers ascended to heaven from his purified heart like perfume streaming upwards from a heart of white rose."’[5960]

[57] Joyce, 112.
[58] Joyce, 135.
[59] Seward, “The Artist and the Rose,” 183.
[60] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 157.

Chapter 2: The Flower as Sex Symbol

The shift from the Medieval period to the Renaissance Seaton claims was defined by a type of "intertextuality," whereby the religious symbolism of the Medieval period changed into more "spiritualized sexual association."[61] The Renaissance, Seaton says, can be thought of broadly as "humanism fueled by sympathy with the classical world" that "react[ed] against the strong religious associations of flowers"[62] by associating them with erotic images. Joyce's reverence for Dante is a particularly keen example of the role of floral personification as Seaton views it during the Renaissance. While Dante is considered to be a late Middle Ages writer, the way in which Joyce uses Dante-esque imagery conveys the type of spiritualized sexual associations characteristic of the Renaissance. Seward while discussing the use of Stephen's fascination of Dumas' Mercedes as a version of Dante's Beatrice says that "Stephen, still preoccupied with the religion he is repudiating, has used Dantesque imagery to translate his sexual desire into anti-Catholic terms and to create of its object an inverted Virgin who is as potent a force for damnation as Mary is for salvation."[63]

A look at how the image of Mercedes is constructed in the novel clarifies how Joyce constructs Stephen's subversion of religion through sexual associations. There is a moment in the novel when Stephen is transferring schools from Clongowes to Belvedere College where we are given a glimpse into his leisurely summer. He spends most of his time reading and wandering around Dublin, but is struggling with boredom. Slowly he begins to notice "slight changes in his house" which "were so many slight shocks to his boyish conception of the world."[64] Change to

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[61] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification," 683.
[62] Seaton, 688.
[63] Seward, "The Artist and the Rose," 188.
[64] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 67.

the perception of things deemed unchangeable begins to occur to Stephen in his lethargy. And while it does:

> He returned to Mercedes and, as he brooded upon her image, a strange unrest crept into his blood. Sometimes a fever gathered within him and led him to rove alone in the evening along the quiet avenue. The peace of the gardens and the kindly lights in the windows poured a tender influence into his restless heart. The noise of children at play annoyed him and their silly voices made him feel, even more keenly than he had felt at Clongowes, that he was different from others. He did not want to play. He wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld. He did not know where to seek it or how: but a premonition which led him on told him that this image would, without any overt act of his, encounter him. They would meet quietly as if they had known each other and had made their tryst, perhaps at one of the gates or in some more secret place. They would be alone, surrounded by darkness and silence: 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 that magic moment.[65]

The magical moment of transfiguration, where form and appearance alter into a higher dimension, is a dark and silent becoming. It is a moment of liminality that occurs when one wakes from the depths of the monotonous lull of the unconscious "real world" by encountering an imaginative "unsubstantial image." The enchanted instant of transfiguration requires two experiences: the everyday real world and that of a literary world. A question arises as to what is more real; the noise of the children playing or the image of Mercedes? While one possesses a concrete reality, in the sense that it is substantial, the imaginative realm is valued higher than that of everyday reality due to its reality aligning closer to truth. The children in their adolescence are annoying so Stephen does not desire to play with them. Even though the children possess a literal form of substantiality, since Stephen can interact with them, they only elicit feelings of

[65]Joyce, 67.

differentiation and separation in their association with his past memories at Clongowes. And through their association with the past they become a literal unsubstantial memory.

The unsubstantial image of Mercedes that Stephen's "soul so constantly beheld" is an image of a purely literary imagination that is only real in the mind. But why, then, is Mercedes more real to Stephen than the children? While Mercedes can only live within the world of the novel, the desires that sprout from his experience of the image holds more power over Stephen's inner emotions and development than the very real children at play. What Joyce shows us here is that reality is something to be dissatisfied with. We see this as the image of Mercedes' elicits an emotion that holds more power than the annoyance of children at play. However, the unsubstantial image of Mercedes is also a source of dissatisfaction; he cannot meet her in reality. A solution presents itself through Stephen's dissatisfaction with imaginative reality when Stephen, although not with intention or "without any overt act of his," seeks the emotions that Mercedes makes him feel in a magical encounter.

The main emotion Stephen feels and desires is seemingly purely sexual, and is one which gives shape to the experience of a liberating transfigurative moment that permeates throughout the passage. However, there is something rather calming about the passage which shows his sexual desires are detached from his religious guilt. Stephen believes that the cause of his transfiguration will be presented like a Mercedes as a veiled and almost ambiguous image of an idealized female "under her eyes" when "they meet" in "some secret place." The construction of a female Other holds tremendous power over Stephen, as he will "fade into something impalpable" and suddenly "weakness," "timidity" and "inexperience would fall from him." The use of impalpable, here, turns Stephen's body into something incorporeal and unsubstantial, as

his own being, his soul, aligns with figures like Mercedes. Seward shows Stephen's crafting of Mercedes as the "unsubstantial image" is constantly coupled with the image of a rose garden. Stephen says "only at times, in the pauses of his desire, when the luxury that was wasting him gave room to a softer languor, the image of Mercedes traversed the background of his memory. He saw again the small white house and the garden of rosebushes on the road that led to the mountains."[66]

Closer inspection at the moment of Stephen's first sexual encounter with a prostitute reveals that it is not in fact the magical moment that Stephen thought it would be. It is a moment that is shrouded in shame. Stephen is out walking the streets when the image of Mercedes comes to his mind again and he is then reminded of the "holy encounter"[67] in which he will be transfigured. What becomes of this moment is one that fills Stephen with a demonic prowl of the beast as he becomes quite literally a demon:

> His blood was in revolt…he wanted to sin with another of his kind, to force another being to sin with him and to exult with her in sin. He felt some dark presence moving irresistibly upon him from the darkness, a presence subtle and murmurous as a flood filling him wholly with itself. It's murmur besieged his ears like the murmur of some multitude in sleep; its subtle streams penetrated his being. His hand clenched convulsively and his teeth set together as he suffered the agony of its penetration. He stretched out his arms in the street to hold fast the fail swooning form that eluded him and incited him: and the cry that he had strangled for so long in his throat issued from his lips…He was in another world: he had awakened from a slumber of centuries…His lips would not bend to kiss her. He wanted to be held firmly in her arms, to be caressed slowly, slowly, slowly. In her arms he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself. But his lips would not bend to kiss her.[68]

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[66] Joyce, 105.
[67] Joyce, 106.
[68] Joyce, 106.

While the scene and emotion seems to match what Stephen had earlier described in his moment of transfiguration where his soul would meet in reality the unsubstantial image through a sexual awakening, it turns into a somewhat dissatisfying moment. The scene is “dark,” Stephen is in a moment where he is finally “under her eyes,” although the exact details seem to reject that exact placement of Stephen in location to her eyes, and in “her arms” while he has this feeling that he has become “strong and fearless and sure of himself.” However, it does not exactly match in a satisfactory way. One obvious reason why it does not exactly match is that there is a clear absence of silence similar to the noise of the children. Stephen hears “the murmur of some multitude in sleep” and he lets out a “cry” that is described “like a wail of despair from a hell of sufferers.” The moment of transfiguration is one that is meant to be calm and peaceful, almost tranquil in its evocation of tenderness. It is nothing like the sound issuing forth from the multitude suffering in hell. Also there is an issue with the eyes. The eyes of the prostitute are described as “frank uplifted eyes.” Within the holy encounter, the magical moment of transfiguration, Stephen is located “under her eyes,” and yet in this moment his eyes are kept “closed.” In a way their eyes never meet, indicating a reservation.

The main reason why this moment does not accord with Stephen’s desire for a holy encounter has mainly to do with a form of reservation. Although he does feel himself becoming stronger in this instance, a moment where weakness and inexperience seems to fall from him, he is nevertheless still timid and full of shame. When the prostitute tells Stephen to “give me a kiss” he is unable to respond as “he would not bend to kiss her,” and he can barely stand to look at her. The reason as to why Stephen does not bend to kiss her in this instance is deserving of unpacking as it suggests his reservation is driven in part by a moral dilemma rift with an Oedipal complex.

Early on in the novel there is a moment when a group of boys are picking on Stephen and they ask him "do you kiss your mother before you go to bed."[69] Confused at what they mean by the question, Stephen responds first by saying that he does kiss his mother before going to bed, and then after they laugh at him he responds by saying that he does not. The confusion becomes a moral question: is it right to kiss his mother or wrong. This moral dilemma eventually becomes a semantic question; what does it even mean to kiss. Unable to answer these questions, and being embarrassed by his friends, Stephen is left in a state of uncertainty. That is why when the prostitute tries to kiss Stephen he is unable to look at her, he is still afraid, unsure of himself, and unable to make sense of the situation since it recalls the childhood memory of his mother giving him a kiss and the boys at school making fun of him.

Stephen's reservation towards kissing cannot be fully understood without a reference to how religion operates early on in the text. In the opening of the novel, the influence of a religious ethos over Stephen's childhood imagination is subtly the most pervasive element that gives shape to Stephen's early interactions with reality. It starts with a bedtime story told to Stephen by his father: "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo."[70] While the story is being told to him, Stephen begins to differentiate between things. He first differentiates between the "moocow" and the "tuckoo," a type of father-son differentiation. Stephen then makes a differentiation in a song between "wild roses" and "green roses," saying that the song is his. Then the narrative continues to Stephen making sensory differentiations between touch and smell. Joyce writes,"when you wet the bed first it is warm

[69] Joyce, 10.
[70] Joyce, 3.

then it gets cold. His mother put on the oilsheet. That had the queer smell. His mother had a nicer smell than his father."[71] Next there is the transition to differentiation between the nuclear family and the extended family; "Uncle Charles and Dante clapped. They were older than his father and mother but Uncle Charles was older than Dante."[72] The next level of differentiation goes outside of the extended family to encompass neighbors: "The Vances lived in number seven. They had a different father and mother. They were Eileen's father and mother. When they were grown up he was going to marry Eileen. He hid under the table."[73] After Stephen hides under the table Dante says to the Vances, "O, Stephen will apologise…if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes."[74] The act of differentiation throughout the first sequence of the novel in effect imitates the story of Genesis after the fall of Adam and Eve. As we all know, once Eve eats from the tree of knowledge she is able to differentiate between good and evil, but she also begins to feel shame in her nakedness and clothes herself. In a similar manner, when Stephen "wets the bed," the suggestion here of an unconscious sinful act, he immediately differentiates between a pleasant "warm" transitioning into "cold." One could then imagine, in Stephen's childhood, that he feels some form of shame and embarrassment when his mother must come and change the sheets to an "oilcloth" after he has wet the bed and it has gone cold, as indicated by the perception of the "queer smell," and the fact that Stephen now has to be literally covered, just as Adam and Eve do once they realize that they are naked. In another instance we are given the notion that the feeling of shame one gets when committing a sinful act can be resolved through confession. When Stephen finds out that when he grows up he will have to marry Eileen his embarrassment caused

[71] Joyce, 3.
[72] Joyce, 3.
[73] Joyce, 4.
[74] Joyce, 4.

him to hide under the table. In this moment, just as in the moment with the oilsheet, Stephen mimics the shameful act of concealing oneself once they possess a type of moral knowledge. The problem of religious morality presents itself here in the form of confession. If Stephen does not "apologies" the eagles will come and pull out his eyes, meaning that when one sins only by seeking God's forgiveness can they avoid punishment. From this we can see that Joyce mimics the didactic element of genesis in the earliest moments of Stephen's childhood. Shame and guilt in the earliest formative moments of Stephen's childhood indicates that religion controls his interaction with reality. Like the embarrassment he feels with Eileen causing him to hide under the table, and the reservation towards kissing.

The personification of the flower as it pertains to the realm of sexual desire and religion shows that Stephen is still stuck in an emotionally undeveloped state. The personification of the flower represents these two sides. As Seward claims, "the use of rose symbolism for both Mary and Mercedes to evoke analogous moods of elevated serenity makes apparent a parallel between Stephen's divine and earthly ideals."[75] Mary, being the white rose of innocence and purity, ends up coming to represent the divine ideals that Stephen struggles to conform to but also the type of "unsubstantial image" that provides him with a mode of salvation. Mercedes, on the other hand, comes to represent Stephen's earthly ideals, what Seward calls "the worship of things earthly"[76] meaning things and people of actual substance, which despite being a source of damnation, allows him to grow and develop without fear. This can be seen just before Stephen has his first sexual encounter with the prostitute where he imagines Mercedes and "and the garden of rosebushes on the road." As Seward puts it rather elegantly:

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[75] Seward, "The Artist and the Rose," 183.
[76] Seward, 184.

> Certainly the fantasy of Mercedes contains in embryo both religious and profane poles of Stephen's conflict, while his subsequent worship of the Virgin represents his first conscious choice between opposites. Since the choice is contrary to his nature, his repudiation of the Virgin in favour of a secular ideal is almost inevitable. Significantly, his reversal, the climax of the book, again reminds us of Mercedes and this time culminates in a gigantic red rose.[77]

The struggle between the two, the erotic and religious, ends up becoming embodied by an overarching sense of expansion and growth. As the body flowers so does the soul, albeit in a negative way. Mercedes contains both Stephen's erotic sexual fantasies and the religious components of the Virgin Mary as a harbor for sinners. This idea holds particular bearing in T.S. Eliot's famous essay on Baudelaire when he writes that "damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation"[78]since it saves us from "the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living."[79] This is not to say that damnation is itself a form of salvation for the soul, whereby after death one is granted admission into heaven, or that the ability to save oneself from the "ennui" of the quotidian is what gives life a source of meaning outside of the prescribed ethics of religion. What this means, when we view it from Stephen's angle, is that damnation, the choice of earthly ideals over divine, is a transcendence that allows the glorification of the body, its growth, to lead to the spiritual growth of the individual, which becomes a choice of Mercedes over the Virgin Mary.

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[77] Seward, 184.
[78]T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays, 1917–1932*, Revised edition (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 343.
[79]Eliot, 343.

Chapter 3: The Flower as the Artist's Symbol

If the flower is withering in the realm of religion, what then causes it to open up? Again, the use of floral personification allows us to see that Stephen is able to develop once he chooses art, and the life of the artist. What stands out throughout Joyce's imitation of the story of Genesis in Stephen's childhood is the image of a green rose. While the image is stylistically one of differentiation, meaning he differentiates between wild roses and green roses, it is one that holds particular bearing on floral imagery in the novel due to its appearance on the first page. In it, Stephen recalls a song with the lines, *O, the wild rose blossoms/On the little green place.*"[80] It is clear that the green rose is a personification of Ireland, while the wild rose blossoms are seemingly Stephen himself. This is an important aspect to note according to Seward since "the green rose…hints of Stephen's artistic inclinations."[81] We can see how Stephen's artistic inclinations are presented. As Seward says, "by altering the wording he is exercising incipient creativity, and by positing a green rose he is creating in imagination that which does not exist elsewhere."[82] The green rose symbolically foreshadows Stephen's proclamation at the end of the novel where he will "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."[83]

Joyce again returns to the literary tradition of floral personification as a basis for Stephen's flower to open up. The eighteenth century, for Seaton, placed emphasis back to a social basis, which was characterized generally by "the age of Enlightenment" and "the age of sentiment" where "botanical science" and "fables" were used for "teaching moral lessons to

[80] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 3.
[81] Seward, "The Artist and the Rose," 181.
[82] Seward, 181.
[83] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 276.

children."[84] Pointing to John Langhorne's *The Fables of Flora* and John Wynne's *Fables of Flowers for the Female Sex,* Seaton claims that "in such fables as these, the flowers represent persons in society, and the lessons they teach are meant to socialize their reader."[85] While the scholarly consensus of Joyce as a thoroughly anti-didactic writer is one that I hold to be true, the degree to which Stephen can be considered to be socialized into society is a concern that the reader bears witness to while Stephen develops.

While Seaton's distinction between biological and social differences in floral personification represents one paradigm of understanding, the *Bildungsroman* tradition, first presented in the eighteenth and brought to full form in the Victorian era of the nineteenth century, hold particular bearing on how we understand flowers, and plants more broadly, as a way of grappling with pedagogical notions of aesthetic and moral education. While Seaton is correct in saying that fables were used to teach children morals and "socialize their reader" in a slightly didactic way, she misses out on the philosophical tradition that greatly informs why flowers were personified. In doing so, she does not provide an entirely accurate caricature of the use of floral personification during the time and thus does not fully develop a key social component, if we are to use her word. M.H. Abrahms writes in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* that Hegel's "metaphysical system" is one that is "biological" like "the growth of a living organism."[86] Abrahms further writes that, "'the idea' Hegel says, is like a flower, 'a unity of leaves, of form, of color, of smell, something living and

[84] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification," 683.
[85] Seaton, 692.
[86] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, The Norton Library (New York: Norton, 1973), 175

growing.'"[87] The notion that an idea could be like a flower fits into the writing of Wilhelm von Humboldt when comparing the growth of flowers to that of man. In *The Limits of State Action* Humboldt writes:

> In the vegetable world, the simple and less graceful form seems to prefigure the more perfect bloom and symmetry of the flower which it precedes, and into which it gradually expands.[…] The flower fades and dies, and the germ of the fruit reproduces the stem[…] to ascend slowly through the same stages of development as before. But when, in man, the blossom fades away, it is only to give place to another still more beautiful; and the charm of the most beautiful is only hidden from our view in the endlessly receding vistas of an inscrutable eternity.[88]

For Humboldt each stage of man's developmental process is marked by stages similar to flowers. A flower begins as a seed, sprouts into a seedling, blooms, and slowly fades away until it dies. Yet when the flower dies it recreates another flower which goes through the same formative stages. In man the death of one stage marks the birth of a new one. The new flower, under the right conditions, "give[s] place to another still more beautiful" until it is concealed "from our view in the endlessly receding vistas of an inscrutable eternity." In a similar fashion Walter Benjamin notes the importance of education while describing Kafka's parables when he says "the word 'unfolding' [*Entfalten]* has a double meaning. A bud unfolds into a blossom, but the boat which one teaches children to make by folding paper unfolds into a flat sheet of paper."[89] The temporal aspect of how a flower unfolds compared to how a piece of paper unfolds is a small but essential element. When one unfolds a piece of paper it is a temporally bounded event; one moment of unfolding transitions into another distinct fold. When it comes to a flower unfolding into a blossom we are no longer in a temporally bounded event but rather in a process.

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[87] Abrams, 175–76.
[88] Wilhelm Von Humboldt, *The Sphere and Duties of Government* (Martino Fine Books, 2014), 14.
[89] *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927-1934*, First Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 802.

The moment when Stephen's perception of the world changes to "an opening flower" is described in similar terms as the flower "spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose."[90]

The German word *Bildung* describes the type of education necessary for an individual to blossom fully, like a flower, into a functioning adult. One aspect of *Bildung* that has already been discussed is that of biology which provides us with the terms unfolding, development, growth, and formation that focuses on education as a process. While the term translates to education or self-cultivation, it is important to keep in mind the etymology; it contains the word *Bild,* which can mean an image, creation, or shape. Like the Greek *poiesis* which gives rise to the English word for poetry and means to make or create, the cultivation of man is one that can be shaped and created into a particular form similar to a work of art, or a piece of poetry. The image of a flower provides us with an image, or *Bild,* that allows us to chart Stephen's own emotional development.

The end goal of *Bildung* is tied closely with notions of freedom, as Wilhelm von Humboldt expresses when he says:

> the true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the first and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes; but there is besides another essential–intimately connected with freedom, it is true–a variety of situations. Even the most free and self-reliant of men is hindered in his development, when set in a monotonous situation.[91]

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[90] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 187.
[91] Humboldt, *The Sphere and Duties of Government*, 11.

In order to have proper *Bildung* there needs to be "harmonious development" in order for a person to develop into "a complete and consistent whole." For this to be the case, Humboldt claims, freedom and a non-monotonous condition is required. Returning to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist,* with Seaton's distinction between biological and social uses of flower personification and the tradition of *Bildungsroman* informed by Humboldt and Benjamin in mind, we can see that Joyce is participating within this tradition with how he crafts Stephen's aesthetic theory.

Joyce's aesthetic theory is heavily informed by Aquinas when it comes to both his fiction and non-fiction writing. From March of 1903 to November of 1904 Joyce first began a serious contemplation of his aesthetic philosophy in his Pola Notebook. In it he pulls two quotes from Aquinas' *Contra Gentiles* which focus on the nature of goodness, beauty, and truth in relation with each other. The two quotes are: "*Bonum est in quod tendit appetitus"* and "*Pulchra sunt quae visa placent.*"[92] In the same order, Joyce translates it as "the good is that towards the possession of which an appetite tends," and "those things are beautiful the apprehension of which please."[93] This formulation finds its way into Joyce's *Stephen Hero* when he writes "Aquinas has defined the good as that towards the possession of which an appetite tended, the desirable. But the true and the beautiful were desirable, were the highest, most persistente orders of the desirable, truth being desired by the intellectual appetite which was appeased by the most satisfying relations of the intelligible, beauty being desired by the esthetic appetite which was

[92]James Joyce, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellman, Sixth Edition (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), 146.
[93] Joyce, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, 146–47.

appeased by the most satisfying relations of the sensible."[94] And, in *A Portrait of the Artist,* Stephen reiterates both phrases from exactly as they are written in his Pola notebook.[95]

What is extremely noteworthy about Joyce's and Stephen's usage of Aquinas here is the manipulation of how beauty is apprehended through a moral construct. For Aquinas the nature of goodness and beauty is one that is divorced from individual appetites. O'Rourke claims that Aquinas' overall perspective in discussing briefly beauty, truth, and goodness "had been the focus of profound speculation as early as Plato and developed into the highly sophisticated theory of the so-called 'transcendental' i.e., those characteristics pertaining to all things simply by virtue of the fundamental richness of their existence."[96] We can look at the floral image in *A Portrait of the Artist* in Saldivar's understanding as a "transfigurative flash" that possesses a similar type of religious transcendence that Thomistic theory posits. This interests Aquinas since it allows an inquiry into "the pristine characteristics of divine being."[97] The transcendental quality of apprehending a beautiful object, which allows one to think of the divine, is something that Joyce uses when crafting Stephen's view of women. This can be seen when Joyce uses the same formula to reject the Thomistic transcendental doctrine of beauty by showing that,"intellectual appetite" and "esthetic appetite," as Stephen calls it, are desirable. This translates roughly into Stephen's subversion of the religious morality against having sex, allowing him to come to terms with his sexual impulses by freeing him from guilt and shame.

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[94] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, 171.
[95] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 201.
[96] Fran O'Rourke, "Joyce's Early Aesthetic," *Journal of Modern Literature* 34, no. 2 (2011 Winter 2011): 100.
[97] O'Rourke, 100.

Stephen's aesthetic theory, informed greatly by the *Bildungsroman* tradition of the Humboldtian model, holds a strong significance on how the flower is represented for Stephen when it is opening up. As Seward puts it, "Joyce, seeking symbolic expression for Stephen's secular aesthetics, continues to choose the transcendental of literary roses to emphasize the supreme importance to Stephen of his doctrine of earthly beauty in art."[98] After Stephen has chosen the vocation of the artist over that of the priesthood he is walking around Dublin where he finally encounters the Mercedes-esque "unsubstantial image." Stephen notices that "a girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea."[99] She makes him feel all the sexual desires he felt with Mercedes and the prostitute, as "his cheeks were aflame; his body was aglow; his limbs were trembling."[100] The girl is further described as "a wild angel" who "had appeared to him, the angel of moral youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory,"[101] which recalls Seward's view of Mercedes as an "inverted Virgin" that is a potent force for damnation. After this, similar to the calming balm that Mercedes and the Virgin Mary offer from his sexual desires, Stephen enters into a moment of quietude where "he felt above him the vast indifferent dome and the calm processes of the heavenly bodies; and the earth beneath him, the earth that had borne him, had taken him to her breast.,"[102] again a shift from the divine to earthly ideals. Finally, we are presented with Stephen's transformation from a withering flower to that of an opening flower:

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[98] Seward, "The Artist and the Rose," 187.
[99] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 185.
[100] Joyce, 186.
[101] Joyce, 186.
[102] Joyce, 187.

> His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under a sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings. A world, a glimmer, or a flower? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other.[103]

For Saldivar this moment represents the "perception of quidditas,"[104] meaning the "whatness of a thing,"[105] in Stephen's aesthetic theory insofar the "ecstatic moment" represents the moment when "artistic creation takes place only after the empirical impulses of sexual arousal are transformed into an allegory of spiritual ecstasy."[106] Seward furthers this by saying "his conceptions of art and woman are, then, at this time inseparable. Both are aesthetic, sensual, and anti-Catholic, and both rest on the same infirm emotional foundation."[107] It thus becomes clear that only in the moment of Stephen's "holy encounter" with the "unsubstantial image" is the moment that causes the flower to open up suddenly and calmly into a world of artistic creation. This is why at the moment when Stephen mediates on the phrase "a day of dappled seaborne clouds," he is able to leave behind the "sensible world" and enter into the "prism of language"[108] the only prism where the flower opens.

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[103] Joyce, 187.
[104] Ramon Saldivar, *Figural Language in the Novel:* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 193, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400856770.
[105] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 231.
[106] Saldivar, *Figural Language in the Novel*, 193.
[107] Seward, "The Artist and the Rose," 188.
[108] Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 180–81.

Conclusion:

When we look at how Seaton traces the uses of floral personification throughout Western literature, it becomes apparent that Joyce is participating within this tradition throughout *A Portrait of the Artist,* but only till a certain point. For instance, the shift from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century represented a return to a biological mode in which the basis was on "emotions" and the "desire to internalize flower 'feelings.'"[109] Seaton points to the famous "language of flowers" from the Victorian era that essentially listed a bunch of flowers in association with their representative emotions, or sentiment, and provided a litany of poems by romantic poets. The phenomena of floral dictionaries in turn gave shape to the standard definitions we now associate with flower emotions and has now become highly conventionalized. Two extremely popular books in this period were the book *Language of Flowers* by Kate Greenaway, published in 1884, and Frederic Shoberl's *Floral Poetry and the Language of Flowers*, each of which provides a glossary of flowers and a one word description of its corresponding meaning. For instance in Greenaway's book white lilies mean "purity" and "sweetness," while yellow lilies mean "falsehood" and "gaiety."[110] In Shoberl's book, however, one major difference stands out. Instead of giving a clear meaning, each flower is said to contain a "sentiment" informed by romantic poets.[111] The flower when given as a gift was like giving a piece of poetry to someone else since the flower itself contained a certain feeling or emotion.

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[109] Seaton, "Towards a Historical Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification," 683.
[110] "The Project Gutenberg EBook of Language of Flowers, by Kate Greenaway," http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31591/31591-h/31591-h.htm.
[111] J. H. S., *Floral Poetry and the Language of Flowers* (London, Marcus Ward & Co., 1877), 266, http://archive.org/details/cu31924068941578.

Seaton says this idea that flowers could represent emotions "rests on the notion that flowers 'speak the language of love' across centuries and cultures."[112] Furthermore, flower personification during this period "were considered suitable to express the reader's most precious emotions, in an internalized way," by "trying to bring man back into the realm of sentiment nature, to fit mankind into the cosmos by showing how nature represents human emotions and situations."[113] Joyce's use of floral personification in *A Portrait of the Artist* does not use flowers the way the Victorians do, since the emotional focus is on Stephen's fluctuating internal state rather than the physical meaning of flowers themselves.

Seaton's analysis ends in the nineteenth century and she only speculates about flower personification in the twentieth century very briefly. Seaton claims that flower personification in the twentieth century is defined by a mode of "parody."[114] She points to the famous lines "a rose is a rose is a rose"[115] by Gertrude Stein that conveys a notion that "our Western culture is demythologizing again, stripping the flowers of their spiritualized universe,"[116] indicating that "flowers cannot and do not speak for us."[117]We all know that Joyce continues the story of Stephen over into *Ulysses,* and continues to work through the themes he began in *A Portrait of the Artist.* A project seeking to look at how Joyce furthers the development of floral personification over into *Ulysses* as a modernist parody of the Victorian era's language of flowers has yet to be fully undertaken in context to the longer tradition going back to the classical era. Many have noted that Joyce uses the image of flowers as central to the plot of

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[112] Seaton, 696.
[113] Seaton, 697.
[114] Seaton, 697.
[115] Seaton, 697.
[116] Seaton, 697.
[117] Seaton, 697.

Ulysses, particularly with Leopold Bloom's letter to his speculative mistress where he uses the pseudonym Henry Flower.

How the symbolic usage of flowers operate in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist* is a question which contains a strong thread in structuring Stephen's emotional development. The process of the flower's growth is crafted around a symbolic and transformative nature. It comes to represent the symbolic sphere of religious dogma, presented with the image of white rose with the Virgin Mary and its ceremonial placement in Stephen's early childhood memory. Yet we see that Stephen is unable to flourish in his attempt at being obedient, as he becomes a withering flower. While sexual desire is seen as a type of solution to the withering flower problem, we notice that when Stephen acts on his desire he is still trapped in childhood modes of guilt and shame. The elusive image of Mercedes constantly presents itself in Stephen's mind as a reprieve from this guilt, but we are unable to understand why. Finally, towards the end of the novel, the moment comes when Stephen's encounters the unsubstantial image and his world becomes an opening flower. Through his rejection of the priesthood and decision to become a writer, Stephen can indulge in his sexual desires free from the guilt imposed upon him from religion.

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