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Modern and Medieval Literary Aesthetic Objects : Joyce's"A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man" and Dante's "Divina Commedia"

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A comparative study of James Joyce and Dante Alighieri's treatments of the literary object as aesthetic reveals the difference in outlook between Joyce's modern vision and Dante's medieval outlook. For Joyce, literature becomes religion and replaces it; for Dante, the highest aesthetic moment in the *Divina Commedia* occurs when he perceives the Beatific Vision in *Paradiso* 33, where literature mirrors, but does not replace, religious aesthetic experience. Literature here is mimesis – a replication of an actual contemplative experience of God. Although both writers through aesthetic experience confirm their respective value systems, for Joyce, secular values, arising from his newly discovered celebration of individualism, override traditional values associated with family, country, and religion. Dante's medieval beliefs, on the other hand, culminate in his experience of the Mystic Vision, where art, theology, and personal religious response coincide.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce presents Stephen Dedalus, whose religious, philosophical, cultural, social, and political values derive initially from his family and education. The novel, a *bildungsroman*, narrates the five stages of Stephen's development : 1) childhood : innocence and the growth of

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consciousness; 2) the loss of innocence, or sin : 3) conversion and devotion to religion : 4) the refusal to become a priest : and 5) the decision to become an artist. As an account of the hero's passage to adulthood, the novel moves thematically from innocence to experience (reminiscent of William Blake). Starting with his childhood recollections and the gradual growth of his awareness, Stephen loses his innocence when he gains a knowledge of evil by sinning. His adolescent sexual fantasies and experiments cause him both euphoria and guilt so that he falls from grace and the bosom of the Church. Subsequently, he reforms his errant ways after being frightened by a sermon on hell, and he experiences a conversion to spirituality, in particular, practicing devotion to Mary. After a period of religiosity, Stephen briefly considers a vocation to the priesthood, which he ultimately refuses. Afterwards, he discovers his calling to be an artist, and he fashions his life as an object of art. For Stephen, the moment of "epiphany" (when he sees the girl on the beach) is the peak aesthetic experience. This moment decides what his future will be : a call to life, to art, and to experience (Joyce 172). For Joyce, the aesthetic experience centers finally upon self development. His modern value system reinforces the celebration of the individual, divorced from family, country, and religion.

In contrast, Dante by his journey through the *Inferno,Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* builds towards the climax of the concluding cantos when he, in heaven, beholds the resplendent Beatrice, as well as the Virgin Mary, before the final rapture of the Beatific Vision. His medieval values coalesce in the aesthetic object of the Godhead : religious, philosophic, cultural, literary, and even political values fuse in this scene (*Par.* 33).

To compare the development of literary aesthetics in the *Commedia* and *The Portrait*, one may note that certain parallels and similarities exist between Dante and Joyce, even though their work is separated by nearly eight centuries. Both writers model their heroes after themselves. Dante the pilgrim has the same name, acquaintances, relatives and experiences as his creator. Dante, for example, uses the *Commedia* as a vehicle for his revenge and self vindication by naming his sufferings in the prophetic discourse of Caccaiguida (*Par.* 17). Although the *Commedia* is fiction, it does contain a large measure of autobiography, and Dante as writer blends with Dante as protagonist at various points in the poem. Stephen, a fictionalized version of James Joyce, also resembles his maker as to family, schooling, and general experiences outlined in the book. However, in neither work can the reader wholly identify the writers with their protagonists, in spite of the temptation to do so, based on the strong autobiographical elements in each case.

Besides the autobiographical strains, both writers base their intellectual endeavors upon Thomistic philosophy and Catholic tradition. Both men possess a keen sense of self. Dante implies he is guilty of the sin of pride in *Purg.* 11, when he says Oderisi's speech "abates a great swelling in me" "e gran tumor m'appiani" (129 148-491) Stephen's Promethean pride even keeps him from offering a prayer to God : "His pride in his own sin, his loveless awe of God, told him his offence was too grievous to be atoned for..." (104). Dante offers his devotion to Beatrice Portinari. the Florentine woman who inspired him in life and in death, in *La vita nuova* and in the *Divina Commedia.* Joyce presents the reader with various portraits of real and ideal women, ranging from Mercedes, Emma, and Davin's peasant woman, to the Virgin Mary. Dante, likewise, renders homage to the Virgin Mary, as an idealized female. Both writers struggle with their political and cultural identities : Dante hurling invectives at the Florentines who barred him from his homeland, and Joyce eschewing all that is Irish, as he says of the old Irish man who symbolized his country : "I fear him. I fear his redrimmed horny eyes" (252).

While Dante was forcefully exiled from Florence by his enemies, Joyce, and his character Stephen, voluntarily left Ireland. Thus, the theme of exile looms as a significant factor in both works. For Dante, his real life exile is noted by Cacciaguida in *Par.* 17, where the latter predicts his progeny's misfortunes :

> Thou shalt leave everything loved most dearly, and
> this is the shaft which the bow of exile shoots first.
> Thou shalt prove how salt is the taste of another
> man's bread and how hard is the way up and down another
> man's stairs.
> Tu proverai si came sa di sale
> lo pane altrul, e come e duro call
> lo scendere e' l salir per l'altrui scale. (58-60 : 244-45)

In addition to the account of his actual exile, Dante creates in the *Commedia* a symbolic-mythical structure using the motifs of the Prodigal Son, Exodus, sea-voyage figures, and the lost regions of the soul-starting in *Inf.* 1. where the pilgrim finds himself in a dark wood (2:22). In this mythic world the movements and counter-movemements from innocence to sinful experience reinforce the archetypal return to the Father.

For Joyce, also, the theme of exile reflects both actual and mythic events. Stephen's revolt and exile can be understood in terms of his inability to achieve an adequate sexual and/or spiritual balance with regard to women. The

defiant "non serviam" of the hero is addressed not only to the Church, but to the female figures as well. Belief is not the central issue. If it were, Stephen would have uttered a "non credo." Instead, his pride, wounded by unsatisfactory sexual and spiritual experiences, forces himself from mother, belover, Church, and country, in search of his father, the, "old artificer," the father of the mythic Icarus.

On one level, there is a blending of elements of the Dedalus myth and of the Christian myth, and on another level, underlying these mythes, is a more primitive archetypal organization which provides a key to the complexities of Stephen's reactions to women. These various mythic strands are closely bound by controlling images and symbols : color images of red, green, and white ; mother and father symbols ; and water and rose symbols.

A brief scrutiny of the Dedalus myth in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* reveals the link between it and the Christian myth. Dedalus is a symbol of God the Father, the Creator. Icarus corresponds to Stephen, the son or Christ, who also becomes the artist-creator, redeemer and priest. Stephen, like Christ, is betrayed and crucified symbolically by Church and nation. Like Icarus, Stephen must experience the flight into exile from home and country (Anderson 268). Besides the father figure, the Christian myth furnishes the pervasive image of the mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who represents for Stephen the spiritual principle. However, Picasso-like, the Virgin has another face-that of the whore. The tension between physical and spiritual love which exists in the *Portrait* parallels the polarity between St. Augustine and St. John, between the Whore of Babylon and the Bride of Christ (Kenner 61). The Virgin, of course, is a symbol of the Church itself, wedded to Christ, yet in Stephen's mind she assumes the figure of the double female. It is this same doubleness which pervades Stephen's relations with the opposite sex.

Besides aspects of the Dedalus and Christian myths which help to clarify Stephen's views towards woman, the Jungian mother archetype acts as a primeval substratum of the novel. Carl Jung stresses the importance of the mother figure, and identifies her with other women who may become mother figures for the son :

> The East calls it the 'Spinning Woman' – Maya, who creates illusion by her dancing. Had we not long since known it from the symbolism of dreams, this hint from the Orient would put us on the right track : the enveloping, embracing, and devouring element points unmistakably to the mother, that is, to the son's realation to the real mother, to her

image, and to the woman who is to become a mother, for him. His Eros is passive like a child's ; he hopes to be caught, sucked in, enveloped, and devoured. (654-55)

Thus the son may find in other women the image of his own mother, particularly in his love relationships. This vision of the mother figure projects itself into other areas as well. The Virgin, the Church, the university, the city, the country, Paradise and the Kingdom of God, the sea, or any still waters are all mother symbols, according to Jung. Symbols of fertility link with the mother : a spring, a deep well ; various hollow vessels, such as the baptismal font or vessel-shapped flowers like the rose ; even animals such as the cow (657).

Jung recognized the negative aspect of the mother archetype in its associations with the secret, the dark, and the terrifying. Historical examples of the dual nature of the mother are the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother but his cross (in medieval allegories), and the Indian goddess Kali, "the terrible and loving mother ' (658). The son, then, caught up in the enveloping world of the mother, seeks to throw off her restraints and find the real world. Jung states that "the unsatisfied longing of the son for life and the world ought to be taken seriously....."because" the mother, foreseeing the danger, has carefully inculcated into him the virtues of faithfulness, devotion, loyalty, so as to protect him from the moral disruption which is the risk of every life adventure" (655). The son may escape the mother's influence by projecting a new image – that of woman – which stems from another archetype, the "anima," the male's archetype of the female. The anima functions as the seductress who draws the male into life.

An analysis of the *Portrait* reveals the workings of the mother and anima archetypes, as well as the Dedalus and Christian myths, through the structural devices of images and symbols. In particular, the color images of red, green, and white are important, as well as water and rose symbols. A recurring strand of symbolism is the water-mother device, for example. Whenever a reference is made to water either the mother image is recalled directly or through symbolism. Stephen, for instance, thinks of the cold, slimy water of the ditch into which he was thrown and then of kissing his mother :

> His mother put her lips to his cheek : her lips were soft and they whetted his cheek, and they made a tiny little noise : kiss. (7)

It appears that either the idea of water evokes mother or mother evokes water. In a feverish dream Stephen believes his mother has kissed him. Immediately, phallic imagery follows mention of his mother. 'There was a noise of curtain rings running back along the rods, of water being splashed in the basins" (120). At the end of the first chapter, he speaks of a "vague fear of

warm turf-coloured bogwater" (22). Then he equates the sound of cricket-bats with falling water : "They said : pick, pack, pock, puck : like drops of water in a fountain falling in the brimming bowl" (41). Again, the image of water falling in a bowl recurs, and "puck" sounds suspiciously like "suck."

While the mother figure is linked to water and rose imagery, often in an unpleasant way, motherhood evokes various feelings of security, sex, and disgust. However, Stephen's sensations and feelings about motherhood are not limited to his own mother, Mary Dedalus, but are also complicated by his relations to other women and the Virgin Mary. Eileen, associated in Stephen's mind with the Blessed Virgin and the spiritual principle, is Protestant, and Mrs. Riordan warns Stephen not to play with her because Protestants ridicule the litany in which the Blessed Virgin is called a "Tower of Ivory." Puzzling over this situation, Stephen realizes that Eileen's "thin cool white hands" are like "ivory ; only soft. That was the meaning of 'Tower of Ivory'....." (42). Thus, he forges a relationship between beauty, love, and spirituality ; however, both Eileen and the Blessed Virgin are unattainable, with imagery of white and cold supporting this fact.

Since Eileen is real, but unattainable, Stephen's imagination creates Mercedes, unreal, but attainable. As a dream figure suggested by *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Mercedes foreshadows a real transfiguration of love. She reflects the anima arthetype struggling to project an ideal female image :

> 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 be alone, surrounded by darkness and silence : and in that moment of supreme tenderness he would be transfigured. Weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in that magic moment. (73)

In this encounter Stephen imagines a kind of religious ecstacy in meeting her. On the one hand, she represents the same spiritual love as does the Blessed Virgin, but on the other hand, she anticipates a sexual epiphany. Hugh Kenner's "double-woman" analogy posits Mercedes as the prostitute's opposite (61). Another critic, William York Tindall, supports this dichotomy between sex and religion by pointing out that Mercedes, who is ethereal, suggests the Virgin, yet "monstrous" thoughts blemish her (236). Stephen, troubled by adolescent sexual desires, indulges in "secret riots" and defiles innocent figures of the day, but when he turns back to Mercedes ("a softer languor"),

his frame of mind is romantic : she is spiritualized and idealized in his reveries :

> the image of Mercedes traversed the background of his memory...he remembered the sadly proud gesture of refusal which he was to make there, standing with her in the moonlit garden after years of estrangement and adventure. (99)

Mercedes, then, who exists solely as a dream-image, finally disappears as Stephen seeks reality. He turns from her to the prostitute. Preceding this experience is a religious description which again emphasizes the link between sex and religion :

> The yellow gasflames arose before his troubled vision against the vapoury sky burning as if before an altar. Before the doors and in the lighted halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some rite. (99)

Another aspect of the sex-religion connection emerges in the identification of Emma with the Blessed Virgin. When Stephen first meets Emma, her eyes address him "beneath their cowl" (69). Later when she does not meet him after his play, "pride and hope and desire like crushed herbs in his heart sent up vapours of maddening incense"(86). Incense with religious overtones turns into "horse piss" and "rotted straw" (86).

Two opposing forces war within Stephen : his youthful sexual drive versus his reverence for the Blessed Virgin. The word "foetus" carved into a desk shocks him as being the objective correlative of his emotions : it is the outer reality which corresponds to his state of mind. After his experiences with prostitutes. Stephen finds himself drawn closer to the Blessed Virgin. Superficially, a strange contradiction exists, but on a deeper level, Mary is an all-embracing archetypal mother. "The glories of Mary held his soul captive" (106). He cannot approach God the Father, yet Mary becomes for him "the refuge of sinners" [105]. Not only is she a mother figure who embodies the spiritual principle, but she is also womanhood idealized. Stephen wishes fervently to "cast sin from him" and to be her knight [105]. During the retreat he tries to unite the chivalric ideal, as knight of Mary, with his lust, and obliquely identifies Emma with the Blessed Virgin :

> The image of Emma appeared before him and under her eyes, the flood of shame rushed forth anew from his heart. If she knew to what his mind had subjected her or how his brutelike lust had torn and trampled upon her innocence : Was that boyish love ? Was that chivalry ? Was that poetry ? [115]

Finally, in an abject mood, Stephen despairs of approaching either God or Mary. ("God was too great and stern and the Blessed Virgin too pure and holy" [116I]). Therefore, he conceives of Emma as an intercessor between himself and Mary, "But he imagined that he stood near Emma in a wide land and, humbly and in tears, bent and kissed the elbow of her sleeve" [115]. And like Dante's advocate, Beatrice, "she manifests in his earthly experience the Church Triumphant of his spiritual dream" [Kenner 62].

As the scene of forgiveness fades, rain is falling on the chapel. Stephen associates the rain with forgiveness, purification, and release from sin—like the waters that covered the earth for forty days and nights when only Noah's ark was saved. Water, again, is the means of purification as the weary voice of the professor "fell like sweet rain upon his parched heart" [145]. The blending of water-rose imagery reappears as the hero's prayers ascend to heaven "from his purified heart like perfume streaming upwards from a heart of white rose [145]. Here the white rose signifies that state of grace in which Stephen now finds himself, as well as the Blessed Virgin through whom as mediatrix he is able to effect his forgiveness.

Water-rose imagery takes on other meanings besides forgiveness and purification. In sharp juxtaposition to waters of forgiveness are the waters of temptation. During the period when Stephen devotes himself to God, temptations of the flesh gradually beset him: "He seemed to feel a flood slowly advancing toward his naked feet....." [152]. The rose of purification becomes the sensual "rosesoft stuffs" that form the texture of a woman's stocking [Stephen, at this point, finds female underwear fascinating].

In yet another context, water prefigures the epiphany scene where Stephen meets the wading girl. His flesh dreads the "cold infra-human odour of the sea" [167]. The sea projects the mother archetype and symoblizes death and rebirth. Stephen must, in a mythic way, enter the waters and die to self in order to be reborn But he is repelled by cold water and must conquer his fear in order to discover the mystery of self. After the vision of Dedalus, as the tide runs out, he goes barefoot down the breakwater and wades among warn isles of sand. In contrast to the cold sea, he is baptized in warm waters. He sees before him a gazing out to sea.

> She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird...her eyes turned to him in quiet sufferance of his gaze without shame or wantonness.....—Heavenly God ! cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy. [171]

The sacred and profane here symbolize the unity of flesh and spirit he perceives in the girl. She is a "wild angel," an anima figure who calls him "to live, to err to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life" [171]. The anima figure, like a goddess arising out of the sea, seduces him with her eyes and calls him to life, to break the bonds of the mother figure and the mother substitutes. As the seductress who draws him into life, the wading girl boldly accepts Stephen's interest, but he does nothing. The moment of epiphany falls flat because Stephen takes no action. Instead of answering the wading girl's call, Stephen lapses into sleep and dreams of a mystic rose which represents his new world :

> A world, a glimmer or a flower ? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unflooding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson, 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. (172)

Various strains of meaning coalesce in the rose : it is the symbol of spiritual fulfillment, a Dantesque vision of heaven following the hell of the sermons and the purgatory of repentance (Tindall 235). It is a symbol of artistic creativity, like the womb of imagination : it is also a symbol of the mother archetype and the women associated with it. Moreover, this mystic rose appearing at the climactic moments in the novel provides structural link to the events preceding and following it. Reminiscent of his "swoon of sin" when he visits the prostitute (101), during the rose vision Stephen's "soul was swooning into some new world" (172). Later his langorous soul contemplates "scarlet flowers" and "roseways" (222).

After the epiphany scene in which the wading girl appears as an anima figure enticing Stephen to accept life, a momentary glimpse of his mother reveals a breakfast with fried bread and its yellow drippings associated with the "dark turf-coloured water of the bath in Clongowes" (174). Then his mother washes his neck and ears. Several meanings arise from this context : there is a prescience of Stephen's refusal to make his Easter duty and of his pride. It is Maundy Thursday, the day of the liturgy when the Bishop washes the feet of his priests in memory of Christ washing the apostles' feet. The washing of feet is an act of humility which precedes the celebration of the Eucharistic rite. Significantly, Stephen's mother takes on the role of the priest who humbles himself, yet Stephen will later refuse to make his Easter duty, even for his mother's sake. This family scene, with its distasteful picture of fried bread as analogous to the Eucharist, foreshadows Stephen's break with family, religion, and country.

The beginnings of Stephen's rebellion occur while he, as a boy, starts to question the "hollow-sounding voices" of his father and teachers, telling him his duty is to be a gentleman, a good Catholic, manly, and patriotic (83). His doubts increase as he struggles with his youthful sexual temptations and his encounters with real and imagined women. In Stephen's mind, motherhood and women figures gradually blend, reminding him of his mother, his religion, and his country. When Matt Davin, his university friend, recounts the story of a peasant women who tried to entice him, Stephen remembers other peasant women like her "as a type of her race and his own, a batlike soul waking to the consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness....." (183). He even identifies Emma with the peasant woman, when he calls her "a batlike soul" who leaves him to flirt with Father Moran-(221).

Disappointed in Emma, his earlier romantic scene associated with water and rose imagery is negated. In his encounter with Emma, he speaks of "rose and ardent light," "roselight," and a "roselike glow" [217]. He stares at scarlet flowers on dilapidated wallpaper and imagines a roseway leading to heaven. Co-existent with the rose descriptions is the water symbolism :

> He lay still, as if his soul lay amid cool water.....
> A spirit filled him, pure as the purest water..... (217)

And again :

> Her nakedness yielded to him...enfolded him like water with a liquid life ; and like a cloud of vapour or like waters circumfluent in space the liquid letters of speech, symbols of the elements of mystery, flowed over his brain. [223]

Even though this scene recalls the encounter with the whore and the wading girl, a note of false sentimentality creeps in. The promise of a call to life, of what might have been sexual and spiritual fulfillment in Stephen's meeting with the wading girl fades. Joyce successfully lampoons Stephen's romantic sensibility and his immature relations with Emma in an ironic passage :

> Yes, it was her body her smelt : a wild and languid smell : the tepid limbs over which his music had flowed desirously and the secret soft linen upon which her flesh distilled odour and a dew [233].

Hardly has this ecstasy been grasped by the reader when it is abruptly dissipated Stephen, feeling a louse crawling on his neck, kills it. Any romantic vision of his lovelife shatters, as well as any notion that he has actually acheived sexual or spiritual fulfillment.

The promise of the moment of epiphany when he encounters the wading girl – the moment of aesthetic rapture – fails. Ironically, even though Stephen invests this moment with the highest reach of his aesthetic imagination, the fact that he does so, and that he creates an aesthetic object of great beauty and power, results in a disparity between the ideal and the actual. When asked by the dean of studies to define "the beautiful," Stephen responds in a long discussion (which is his way of coming to grips with what an artist must understand if he is to pursue his art), concluding with a Thomistic aesthetic, when he tells Lynch :

> The radiance of which he [Aquinas] speaks is the scholastic *quiddatas*, the *whatness* of a thing...the instant wherein that suppreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure.....(213)

The aesthetic moment serves as a revelation in which he understands his call to be an artist The inherited values of motherhood, country, religion, and the attendant morality derived from such values appear to him as 'nets" keeping his soul from being born Breaking with his past, Stephen announces he will express himself "in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning" (247).

Stephen's dilemma centers on how to escape the restraints of the mother and answer the call to life, as expressed by the anima, when, in fact, he remains emotionally attached to the mother by bonds of love and loyalty. Complicating the problem is his inability to achieve satisfactory sexual or spiritual relationships with women. Eileen is unattainable and linked to the Blessed Virgin ; Mercedes, a dream figure, is unreal and unsatisfying; the whore takes care of his physical needs, but not his spiritual ones ; Emma he associates with the Blessed Virgin and the "batlike" soul of Irish women. As extensions of the all-embracing, devouring mother, these female figures alternately repel and fascinate Stephen. He begins to break free of the mother when he encounters the wading girl, who symbolizes what might be – the identification of art with sex ; the marriage of the aesthetic with the physical. As such, she projects the anima archetype and seductress trying to make the male need the call of life. Yet, Stephen, while agreeing in principle, fails to realize her call in action

At the end of the novel Stephen rejects the mother figures whom he believes have tried to devour him. His apostasy seems less a declaration of

disbelief than a denial of the mother archetype's dominion. Having said "non seriviam" to the mothers, he looks forward to exile where he hopes to find his father, Dedalus. In the final analysis, Stephen gives up family, country, and religion in his search for experience. He *is* and *must be alone*. He seems incapable of love or of achieving an intimate relationship with another person (although he comes closest, perhaps, with his friend, Cranly). Hostile to family, church and country, Ireland fails him ; his religion fails him, or does he fall country and religion ? The last lines of the novel reinforce his casting off the "nest" or values hindering him :

> Welcom, O life ! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. (253)

While in Stephen's experience, the highest aesthetic perception is for him the moment of epiphany, when he realizes his vocation is to be an artist and to cast off the values that have burdened him, for Dante, the culminating aesthetic experience of the *Commedia* serves instead, to confirm his value system. Whereas Stephen decides to celebrate the self and its development, Dante contents himslf with submitting his will to Gods will, Clearly, Joyce's insistence upon individual self development through the negation of his hero's value structure contrasts sharply with Dante's self-fulfillment through his experience of the Beatific Vision.

Like the Prodigal Son, Dante has erred, and only through the ministry of Beatrice can he be saved. Unlike the women figures in the *Portrait* whom Stephen ultimately rejects (except the wading girl), Beatrice becomes the vehicle for the pilgrim's salvation and his return to God. Through the resplendent and apotheosized Beatrice, Dante glimpses Christ as a shining sun, allowing him to view the wonder of Beatrice's smile (Dante, *Paradiso* 23. 27-30 : 332). The journey or return to divine grace from the state of sin figures in the journey of the Prodigal Son back to his father, in the Exodus of the Israelites to the Promised Land, and in metaphors of ship and sea-voyages. The journey's purpose is the conversion of the will from the state of sin to grace, After his voyage of repentance through the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*, Dante, prior to seeing the Heavenly Rose and the Beatific Vision, must be Baptized in the river of light (*Par.* 30. 82-90). He exclaims : "O splendour of God by which I saw the high triumph of the true kingdom, give me power to tell of what I saw there !" ("O isplendor di Dio, per cu'io vidi/l'alto triumfo del regno verace,/dammi vertu a dir com'io il vidi !" [97-99 : 434-351]).

Because of the *Commedia*'s progressive insistence upon spiritual acuity, the piligrim needs to see God as a result of his particular development. He also represents the Christian's experience after death. His confession to Beatrice in *Purg.* 31 resembles the Last Judgment, when, after this final reckoning the redeemed soul will see God in His Essence. By giving his readers a preview of what the future can hold for them, his recreation of the Vision constitutes a moral lesson and acts as an incentive for his audience. Dante describes the supra-sensible by means of sensible imagery, and he defines the Infinite God as "Eternal Light" ["la luce etterna," *Par.* 33. 83 : 482-83] ; "three circles of three colours" ["tre giri de tre colori," 116-17 : 483-84] ; the likeness of Christ, the Incarnate, is "an image ritted to the circle" ["si convenne/l' imago al cerchio," 137-38 : 484-85]. Artistically' the post convinces because his account is necessarily partial and incomplete : he admits the inadequacy of words to communicate the whole of his extemporal moment.

Dante's marvolous Visions functions as the vehicle for the conjunction of human and divine, for the union of subject and object. Consequently, *Paradiso* 33 may be studied on two levels : the aesthetic and the theological. In both cases, God, the object of contemplation, is apprehended as intrinsically beautiful. It is this beauty that the soul of the pilgrim joins with in a mystical union – like the rapt synthesis of the aesthetic experiencer with a beautiful object in its full presentational immediacy (Vivas 95). In Dante's mind no disjunction exists between either the most significant form of theological of aesthetic experience. Vision and experience fuse in that unique moment fixed against the onrush of time. And what accounts for the curious power of the Vision is its meta-aesthetic quality. Furthermore, this meta-aeshetic experience lies within a work itself capable of effecting an aesthetic experience and of existing as object. Dante's experience of God, observed in its meta-aesthetic character, points outward to the reader experiencing the poem. And the *Divina Commedia* moves full circle, closing in the reader within the sphere of eternity. Since divine creativity is analogous to the human art of Dante, the very qualities which Aquinas uses to describe a beautiful object – wholeness, harmony, and brilliance – may be extended, finally, to Dante's poem as well (*Opuscula Selecta* 21).

Dante's apprehension of God is wholly attuned to Thomistic theory, for the perfection, harmony, and brilliance which Aquinas established as his criteria for a beautiful object apply to the description of the Trinity. The light or brilliance of God appears in three equal circles and three colors, perfectly proportioned and harmonious. Moreover, the Trinity manifests divine art (Foster 59). God the Father thinks of Himself and begets the Logos, His Son ;

mutual love between Father and Son breathes forth as the Holy Spirit. Thus Aquinas' definition of beauty applies to the Beatific Vision in both a theological and aesthetic sense : God is the highest good, for He is a spiritual beauty. God is a beautiful object : perfect, harmonious, and brilliant in all its parts. The Godhead, consisting of one essence and three divine persons, is an object suitable for aesthetic contemplation because in its manifestation as the Trinity, it is a divine art work.

The unique moment when Dante undergoes the Vision is a fixed point in time, when all time becomes one :

> A single moment makes for me deeper oblivion than five and twenty centuries upon the enterprise that made Neptune wonder at the shadow of the Argo. Thus my mind, all rapt, was gazing, fixed still and intent, and ever enkindled with gazing,
>
> Un punto sole m'e maggior letargo
> che venticinque secoli all 'mp ess,
> che fe Nettuno ammirar l 'ombra d' Argo.
> Cosi la mente mia, tutta sospesa,
> mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,
> e sempre di mirar faciesi accesa. [94-99 : 482-83]

Dante's apprehension of the Vision is the most significant form of aesthetic experience. As subject who is immobile, fixed, and oblivious, he sees God in His full presentational immediacy Dante's experience of God is intransitive because for a single moment a one-to-one relationship exists. The experience cannot pass beyond the object, for beyond God there is no place to go.

It is immportant that the subject converge with the object in a special relation of knowability which recognizes the attributes of wholeness, proportion, and clarity within the beautiful object. Joyce calls the moment of recognition an epiphany, when the subject not only recognizes the "whatness," or essence of the object, but in contemplating it, he is drawn into it in a momentary fusion out of time. As the Beatific Vision possesses the apotheosized Dante and he, in turn, possesses it, the purpose of the journey is fulfilled. In returning to the Divine Father, Dante must try to apply the new knowledge to his life when he resumes his role in society. His "desire and will, like a wheel that spins with even motion, were revolved by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" [143-45 : 485]. The metaphor of the wheel suggests that his memory of the Vision will persuade him to persevere in his "new life". The Vision which is the final goal of the pilgrim's will unites him with God's will.

Joyce and Dante in their treatment of the literary aesthetic object reflect the contrast between modern and medieval outlooks. Dante expresses a medieval vision integrating art, theology and applied religion. The Beatific Vision culminates his journey as an errant Christian returning to God the Father. The aesthetic object, the Godhead, unifies his values and beliefs. Thus art and religion become one, with literature mimetically replicating the mystic experience Joyce's protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, while subscribing to a Thomistic definition of a beautiful object, rejects inherited values, discovering for himself within art, a secular substitute for religion. Like Dante, Stephen reverts to the Father, after being led by his anima, the wading girl, but in this case, the mythical Dedalus stands for the call to art and experience. Stephen chooses self development and individual values rather than the "nets" of country, family and religion. He chooses exile and isolation to pursue his vocation as an artist. While based on the scholastic definition of beauty, the literary aesthetic object, for both writers, marks the acceptance or rejection of traditional values. For Dante, the Godhead becomes the peak artistic and religious experience, arising from an integration of his beliefs ; for Joyce, the aesthetic object heralds a break with familial and patriotic values and the beginning of his lonely vocation.

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