James Joyce and Aesthetic Gnosticism

THOMAS H. LANDESS

THE PLIGHT of the artist in the modern world has been the topic of too much fiction, poetry, and commentary to require extensive definition. I would only point out what is already obvious to members of the academy: that the haunting sense of alienation attributed to urban residents of the sixties and seventies was precisely analyzed and rendered by a number of poets and novelists even before the turn of the century; and between 1900 and 1950 virtually every major literary figure addressed himself to this question. Among the most important of these was James Joyce, one of the few genuinely influential figures in the development of twentieth-century fictional technique. His three novels—*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*—mirror, as well as render, the significant plunge into the pool of self that has been a predominant subject of the novel since the late Victorian period.

Ulysses and *Finnegan's Wake* are undoubtedly the most ambitious of Joyce's works; for in their radical departure from conventional modes of narration they suggest the triumph of individual consciousness over the traditional ordering of action—the subjugation of time and space by the active imagination in league with the will. To a lesser degree *A Portrait of the Artist* suggests the same modernist tendencies, though its meaning is rendered more often in discourse than in the implications of formal complexity; and for this reason *Portrait*, Joyce's first novel, provides us with one of the purest examples in modern literature of the gnostic impulse as it manifests itself in the artistic imagination.

On its most obvious level the central action of the novel is concerned with the intellectual and spiritual growth of Stephen Dedalus, a pattern of development that seems to some critics to include no more than an abnormally painful childhood followed by adolescent rebellion, maturity, and a satisfying sense of true vocation. To such commentators, Stephen is simply Everyboy, his sensibilities heightened by an acute and instinctive awarenss of the created order that surrounds him. But he is something more than a Wordsworthian poet, however Romantic his own conception of himself. For Wordsworth conceived of the imagination as responding to some great force from without (call it nature or call it God); and while Joyce's artist has a keen eye for the natural image, he is more interested in the universe of words, for him a realm of existence that transcends the merely given of the created order. In one sense, then, the meaning of *A Portrait of the Artist* can be found in the progression of Stephen Dedalus' soul from the mundane to the supra-mundane, a journey of the spirit that finally culminates in a tenuous flight from the constitution of being itself, a "gnostic" escape in which the author imperfectly believes and which the reader can finally accept only if he is highly credulous or very young. I say "finally accept" because this novel is one of the most carefully wrought in all of English literature, and in the tightly woven texture of the narrative Joyce is able to ensnare even the wariest and most meticulous of readers.

II

PROFESSOR ERIC VOEGELIN has told us that the central element in all gnostic experience is that of "the world as an alien place into which man has strayed and from which he must find his way back home to the other world of his origin";[1] and such an attitude is implicit in the first sentence of *A Portrait of the Artist,* for as several critics have noted, through the suggestive use of sounds Joyce has implied an external frame of reference with important meaning:

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was 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.
>
> His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.
>
> He was a baby tuckoo.[2]

Although this bit of childish nonsense seems to have been taken from Joyce's own experience, it has additional significance in terms of Stephen Dedalus' evolution; for in the jumble of words one can discern an allusion to the cuckoo which lays its eggs in the nests of other birds.[3] This reference suggests that Stephen's story may be read as a variant of "The Ugly Duckling" in which the young boy, awkward and strange, is raised among an alien brood and suffers painful abuse until he finally matures and then flies away to join his own kind in the community of a finer species. This ancient folk tale in its various versions clearly embodies the potential for a gnostic sense of alienation as defined by Voegelin and others. The implied image of the earth-bound cuckoo or duckling, struggling among inferiors who taunt him for his failure to conform to their communal norm, is a precise analogue to Stephen Dedalus' incipient sense of his own superiority over family, nation, and church. The potential for rebellion against the prison of his world is realized both in the resolution of the ancient tale and in Joyce's development of his central action. The bird flies away, transcending the earth to which he has been confined, and seeks his place in the sky where he sings or soars with a grace and beauty beyond the capabilities of those whom he has left behind.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen eventually rejects the communal world into which he has been born, a world filled with creatures who are human and hence fallibly annoying to his sensibility. His rejection manifests itself in two ways analogous to the movement of the folk tale. First, he makes a figurative flight into aesthetic gnosis, devising a "theology" of his own which occupies his attention in the latter portions of the novel. Second, he literally abandons Ireland for the freedome of Paris, which was just beginning to serve at this time as the international gathering place for expatriate artists.

It is important to note that the nature of Stephen Dedalus' early alienation is further reinforced by the abundant implications of his name. As "Stephen" he is the counterpart of the first martyr to the Christian faith, stoned to death by Pharisees, the intractable adherents of the old religious order. "Stephen" is the sufferer of corporate abuse, the visionary who preaches a special truth to a world which responds with vindictive hostility. Joyce does little more with this first name than assign it to his character, but Stephen himself recognizes his identification with Daedalus, whom he calls "the old artificer," creator of the labyrinth and escapee from the island prison of Crete. This myth, which, like the cuckoo story, has many potential meanings, may also embody the essentials of gnostic experience. For in Joyce's version the maze which his hero begins to build is his own aesthetic, a private system whose meaning he partially shares with fellow students, lesser intellects incapable of grasping its full significance. The flight of Daedalus, however, is obviously an analogue *in potentia* of the gnostic impulse, particularly when one considers the fact that the mythical artist is accompanied in his ingenious escape by Icarus, whose proud flight too near the sun results in the melting of artificially constructed wings and a consequent fall to his death.

In the initial stages of Joyce's narrative, the folk tale and the Greek myth coalesce into a single action which prefigures the "epiphany" of the hero, that moment when he comes to the realization that he has at last put behind him all of the communal concerns which have bound him to the world:

> Now at the name of the fabulous artificer he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawklike man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being?
>
> His heart trembled; his breath came faster and a wild spirit passed over his limbs as though he were soaring sunward. His heart trembled in an ecstasy of fear and his soul was in flight. His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he knew was purified in a breath and delivered of incertitude and made radiant and commingled with the element of the spirit.[4]

This passage, which forms a portion of the novel's peripety, renders in unmistakeable terms the "religious" nature of this important moment in Stephen Dedalus' life. In the first place, the figure of the flying man is not a creature of this world but is generated in the imagination of the hero/artist as a result of the spoken word, the name "Daedalus." The relationship between the word and the image (word) is immediate, like the leap of an electric spark from pole to pole. The world of concrete things does not seem to intervene, and in the higher order into which his soul has ascended he is transfigured.

The vision of the winged man, whose identification with Horus as well as Daedalus has been noted, is an absurdity that the reader may accept only with a "willing suspension of disbelief," despite the equivocal word, "seemed." Do Stephen's eyes actually participate in a delusion or does the flying form exist only within his imagination? In either case, the moment exemplifies Stephen's rejection of the constitution of being which, as Voegelin has written, "is what it is, and cannot be affected by human fancies." "Hence," he continues, "the metastatic denial of the order of mundane existence is neither a true proposition in philosophy, nor a program of action that could be executed. The will to transform reality into something which by essence it is not is the rebellion against the nature of things as ordained by God."[5]

And indeed both Stephen and Joyce seem to understand this point precisely, when the hero speculates about the origins of his vision as "a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols." He has, after all, been reared by scholastics who recognize magic for what it is—a tool of the devil. The allusion to such sorcery as the alchemical, cabalistic, and hermetic traditions is unmistakable and suggests the degree to which the reader is to understand this scene as the rendition of a desire to transform the given world into something more pleasing to the will, and to do so on a higher level of being.

On the next page the same idea is reintroduced, in even more specific terms: "Yes! Yes! Yes: he would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable."[6] Here there can be no mistake about what moves Stephen, if not Joyce. He now believes he has transcended the given world and has become God the Father, able to create *out of himself* a living thing which is to be the beautiful, impalpable, imperishable *logos*. Having been affronted by the alien world into which he has been born, he has success-fully escaped into a reality of his own creation where mythological figures can fly above the Irish Sea in response to the implacable urge within him that requires them to do so. And along with the image of Daedalus, his soul also takes leave of its prison, as he sees it, "soaring in an air beyond the world."[7]

But what can he do with the magical powers he has gained? Can he actually control being, reconstitute it? He believes he can, has always coveted such powers. In the first few sentences of the novel, for example, he sings a childish song about a rose, altering its natural color to green in order to suit his fancy. Later, while still a small boy, he acknowledges the impossibility of the green rose in the world as it is constituted; yet he holds out the promise to himself that "perhaps somewhere" such a thing might exist. The union of the rose with the color green is a state of being which the poet, the free soul, has the power to create, just as he is able to make the image of Daedalus fly in order to symbolize his own aspirations.

Having rejected the constitution of being, then, he is ready to exercise the new potential that he has acquired in the course of discovering his true vocation; and in one of the most celebrated passages of modern literature we see him in the process of performing such magical transformations. He is walking along the beach, in the throes of his newly discovered gnosis, feeling that he is about to be introduced to "strange fields and hills and faces," when he sees a girl, "in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea." During the course of the novel Stephen has been defined in terms of his changing relationships with women, and thus far his attitudes toward his mother and toward the girls he has known are recognizable as normal developments in the life of a young man. But at this point he looks at the beautiful stranger with a new precocity born of his rejection of the world, and in his eyes she undergoes a miraculous transformation:

> She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and softhued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some dark plumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish; and girlish and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty her face.[8]

Again, as with the image of the flying man, what *seems* to be is confused with what is; and an alteration of the order of mundane existence takes place. It is possible, of course, to argue that Joyce is merely making use of conventional metaphor here in an effort to render the excitement of Stephen's active imagination. But what follows this extraordinary moment of perception is too charged with abnormal meaning to support such a view, for Joyce makes it explicit that the transformation that Stephen effects is magic and that the girl indeed has been changed (or half-changed) into a winged creature, something like an Egyptian bird god, an analogue to the winged man of the young artist's earlier fancy.

It is important to note that she is no longer herself at all but has become a creature made in the image of her creator. Whatever integrity she has as an object in the real world gives way to the machinations of the artist's will. Therefore the accidental properties she displays are altered in Stephen's perception of her and become a significant contribution to the transformation of her substantial being.

Thus has the gnostic imagination, freed from its prison, captured and subjugated the phenomenal other-than-self and then recreated it on a "higher level" in the image of the ego—Eve reverted to the status of rib, with Stephen, the newest Adam, performing the role of God. The girls whom he has known, desired, failed to win or else paid for in the marketplace: these have coalesced into one image and become the passive instrument of the artist's stricken pride. As he contemplates her standing "in quiet sufferance of his gaze," the passive feminine spirit accepting the form imposed by the active masculine impulse, Stephen is overcome with a fervor which can only be described as that of the religious pagan:

> Heavenly God! cried Stephen's soul in an outburst of profane joy. Her image has passed into his soul forever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped to the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life. A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal 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.[9]

The diction in this passage clearly and intentionally suggests the degree to which Stephen's experience is to be understood as the founding of an *Ersatz* religion in which he is both Creator and a portion of the "recreated" order of existence as well. In speaking of the urge to "recreate life out of life" and in designating Stephen's joy as "profane," Joyce gives his reader (and himself) some hint of the mischief that his character is up to. However, the young convert has yet to understand the full implications of his religious zeal, though he is, at this point, thoroughly committed to its authenticity.

Notice that even in the passages quoted above, when Stephen is immersed in the transformations wrought by his own imagination, the reader never quite loses the sense of an old order still surviving and coexistent with the new; for at this stage Stephen still submits partially to the images of color, shape, and motion which in some respects root his experience in the events of a world of particularity.

The awareness of things as they are, however, is increasingly compromised as the novel unfolds; and the latter pages are not dominated by scenes in which Stephen's experience of the concrete is the avenue by which the meaning of the action is explored. Instead, Joyce gives the reader a series of "Platonic dialogues" punctuated by occasional interior monologues, a few fully-rendered moments of dramatic confrontation, and (at the very end) entries in the hero's diary which somewhat ambiguously present his thoughts and feelings as he is about to fly from Ireland. And it is in these passages of argumentation between Stephen and his philosophical adversaries that the author attempts to suggest the final stage of his young rebel's development as an artist—a stage in which the youth uses his scholastic training to forge an aesthetics which will serve him as a credo in lieu of the traditional pieties which he has chosen to reject.

At first glance Joyce's motives in creating a discursive resolution to his action may seem obvious. Stephen wants to be a writer above all else; he must reject other considerations as secondary; and of greatest importance, he needs a well-formulated aesthetic theory in order to undergird his attempts to "recreate life out of life." But, as Walter Sullivan has observed, there are more basic reasons for Joyce's decision to end his narrative in a flurry of discourse. Mr. Sullivan has suggested the use of the Faustian legend as an analogue to *A Portrait of the Artist;*[10] and though in his discussion he is substantially right, I would merely like to approach the same structural problems with a somewhat different comparison in mind.

In the first place, the desire to be a literary artist is distinctly different from a poet's urge to write poetry; and Stephen's preoccupation with literary theory as a mode of pure speculation is an important indication of what impulse really lies behind his aspirations. In order to write, poets do not need to understand a well-developed literary theory any more than they need to master the discipline of formal grammar, though I suspect the latter would prove more useful than the former, since literary theory of a purely *a priori* nature might tend to lead the would-be artist away from the genuine problems he needs to confront in the act of composition. I would suggest, then, that Stephen the artist does not necessarily benefit from the aesthetics he insists on devising. Certainly the poetry he offers in evidence would tend to refute such a claim.

But Stephen the religious convert absolutely requires this system, because it becomes for him a new theology to replace the old. In lecturing the dean and his friend Lynch on the nature of art and tragedy, Stephen is really satisfying a religious rather than an aesthetic need, and therefore the full implications of this segment of the novel might be better understood after an examination of the faith he has rejected and the manner in which his new religion is defined.

The "old religion," of course, is not merely Roman Catholicism but a more all-encompassing *pietas* which includes a devotion to family, Ireland, and the Church. Stephen's alternative faith is one in which the artist is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, his own family and community as well as transcendent being. This new vision is born out of the failure of the former orthodoxy, which, as Joyce presents it, has become effete and corrupt, a religion of empty forms and endless hypocrisies. Its priesthood is composed of liars, bullies, drunkards, dullwits, and false rhetoricians. Some of the spokesmen for this moribund establishment speak for Church, some for Ireland, and some for the family; but all are the Pharisees of the *status quo*. Smug or shortsighted, they propagate the cant of a faith which, through Joyce's meticulous rendition, the reader must reject as decadent while applauding the prophet who can proclaim a gospel of regeneration. The moment of that prophet is at hand when Stephen sees (or seems to see) the image of the winged Daedalus and undergoes his ecstatic conversion.

The analogue between the development of Stephen's New Testament and that of first-century Christianity is striking and significant. Forgetting for a moment the idea that Stephen is both creator and incarnate word, let us consider him as a convert become exegete, the St. Paul of his own divine revelation; for in the spiritual journey of Saul of Tarsus is embodied the fullest range of the religious founding that Joyce imitates in this novel, the movement from absolute commitment to the old order to a creative formulation of the theology of the new.

As Stephen becomes in early maturity the chief pride of his Jesuit instructors, so was Paul a brilliant and dedicated Pharisee who held the coats of those who stoned the first Christian martyr. Yet on the road to Damascus Paul was struck blind by the brilliance of Christ's image and immediately submitted without question to a truth he had previously denied with all his considerable intellectual resources. At that moment, drained of theology, he gave himself completely to the all-absorbing other-than-self. As I have already suggested, precisely the same thing happens to Stephen Dedalus.

Yet for Paul and for Stephen, the moment of ecstasy cannot be indefinitely prolonged, but the significance of the truth revealed is followed in both instances by exegesis, a process in which the reason analyzes and then synthesizes the meaning of the irrational revelation. Paul, after regaining his sight, begins to reflect on the life of Jesus and His reported words; and in his Epistles (particularly in *Romans*) he spends much of his time quarreling with the old religion, in order to define the new. Yet as a Jew, trained by "the party of circumcision," his understanding of the new is articulated most often in the terms and rhetoric of the old.

And the same is true of Stephen Dedalus, whose exegesis is grounded in the theology of the faith he has rejected. "McAlister," he says, "would call my aesthetic theory applied Aquinas. So far as this side of aesthetic philosophy extends, Aquinas will carry me all along the line. When we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction, I require a new terminology and a new personal experience."[11] And so he should, for the two must, of necessity, go hand in hand. Yet the key word in this passage is "personal." Paul's revelation could by no means be termed a pure illumination of self. Indeed his ego was largely submerged in the image of Christ (though there are those who say it surfaces from time to time in a kind of fastidious priggery). But with Stephen the expression of self is the ultimate devotional act. If there is any muse, it is *his* muse rather than *the* muse; and no one else may lay claim to her.

Thus in his arguments with the Pharisees of Ireland he insists on the ultimate supremacy of the so-called "creative act," which he believes must take place outside the community of family, church, and nation. As he puts it in one dogmatic statement to his foil Davin, "The soul is born first in the moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets."

Again the image of flight with its echoes of the cuckoo tale, the Daedalus myth, the legend of Horus. But here the mystical experience of flying becomes a trope in discourse, the occasion for a programmatic statement on the creation as defined by the new orthodoxy. And so it goes with Stephen as he contends with adversary after adversary, vanquishing them with an ease that belies the complexity of the positions they advocate. (We might all wish for philosophical opponents so muddle-headed and inarticulate!)

Yet in his last encounter, he meets a formidable peer in his friend Cranly, who is able to teach him the limitations of his own arrogant intellect. The occasion of this final dialogue is initiated by Stephen himself, who, despite his frequent declarations of independence, is deeply troubled by a family quarrel.

> —With your people? Cranly asked.
> —With my mother.
> —About religion?
> —Yes, Stephen answered. After a pause Cranley asked:
> —What age is your mother?
> —Not old, Stephen said. She wishes me to make my easter duty.
> —And will you?
> —I will not, Stephen said.
> —Why not? Cranly said.
> —I will not serve, answered Stephen.
> —That remark was made before, Cranly said calmly.
> —It is made behind now, said Stephen hotly.[12]

Cranly immediately gains the upper hand in this initial segment of the conversation; for not only does he maintain his equanimity, but he also puts his finger precisely on the pressure point of Stephen's rebellious nature: "I will not serve" is the devil's line, and anyone who refuses to live within the constituted limitation of God's autonomy is by definition satanic. Cranly is calm in pointing out the truth because for him it is no shocking discovery: he already knows his friend well. But the interesting thing about the brief exchange is the manner in which Stephen reacts to Cranly's remark. Instead of being amused or coldly contemptuous, he is angered to the point of responding with a silly and ineffectual play on words. Why should the charge of diabolism so disturb him if he has rejected the Church and its dogma? Cranly pursues this question with Jesuitical skill, determining that Stephen neither believes nor disbelieves in the Eucharist and is unwilling to attempt a resolution of this crucial dilemma, largely because in his intellectual pride he is pleased with the new man he has become. The dishonesty of his position is apparent, particularly in light of the pain he causes his mother in refusing to make his communion. Cranly presses him on the issue, first testing him with a statement that Jesus may have been a charlatan, then noting Stephen's manifest shock and asking, "And why were you shocked if you feel sure that our religion is false and that Jesus was not the Son of God?" When Stephen equivocates, Cranly raises essentially the same question in a more sharply focused formulation: "And is that why you will not communicate, because you are not sure of that too, because you feel that the host too may be the body and blood of the son of God and not a wafer of bread? And because you fear that it may be?" "Yes," replied Stephen, "I feel that and I also fear it." "I see," says Cranly.[13]

And so do we. The rebellion, the rejection of the old faith, the mystical revelation, the carefully devised theology—they are all part of a fragile and tenuous system that might well fall to pieces under close and persistent scrutiny. "But does it matter" one is tempted to ask, "if Stephen is skeptical in regard to the Church and credulous in his dedication to the religion of art?" The answer to this question should be clear from Stephen's attitude toward his easter duty and from his later replies to Cranly: his peculiar commitment to art is born of extravagant pride, pride in his own intellectual integrity; yet it is obviously impossible for any honest thinker to enthrone an ideal and absolute freedom in his heart without first disposing of the other question, the truth or falsity of Christian revelation. For if the eucharist is the body and blood of Jesus Christ, then the artist cannot "recreate life out of life" or "refuse to serve." And an unwillingness to pursue this question is no more or less than a refusal to confront the ultimate lie of his life.

This attitude, of course, is typical of the gnostic, as Voegelin has pointed out:

> The gnostic thinker really does commit an intellectual swindle, and he knows it. One can distinguish three stages in the action of his spirit. On the surface lies the deception itself. It could be self-deception; and very often it is when the speculation of a creative thinker has culturally degenerated and become the dogma of a mass movement. But when the phenomenon is apprehended at its point of origin, deeper than the deception itself will be found the awareness of it. The thinker does not lose control of himself: the libido dominandi turns on its own work and wishes to master the deception as well. This gnostic turning back on itself corresponds spiritually, as we have said, to the philosophical conversion, the *periagoge* in the Platonic sense. However, the gnostic movement of the spirit does not lead to the erotic opening of the soul, but rather to the deepest reach of persistence in the deception, whose revolt against God is revealed to be its motive and purpose.[14]

And, as if to prove Voegelin's thesis some thirty-five years before its publication in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* Stephen flees from Cranly back into the narrow and comfortable confines of his gnosis, betraying once again the deceitful nature of his flight: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning."[15]

No more perfect analogue to Satan could exist in a work of realistic fiction, and thus he retreats from the only discursive encounter of the novel in which the question of the constitution of being is placed squarely in the path of his perilous journey. Significantly, this combat is his last. Henceforth he will speak not to others but to himself, in a diary which epitomizes his struggle to sustain the self-illusion. And the last two entries signal his success as a practicing gnostic, whatever his occasional horror at the vision of damnation, an old man with "redrimmed horny eyes." In his valedictory he tells us that he will persist in worshipping the God of self and to recreate self out of self in order to devise some object for adoration: "Welcome, 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 . . . Old father, old artificer, stand me now and forever in good stead."[16]

Who is he at the end of this novel? Is he Daedalus or Icarus? Is this narrative the portrait of the triumphant artist-as-hero or is it the portrait of a damned soul? The critics who have best addressed themselves to this ultimate question, Walter Sullivan and Caroline Gordon, disagree on whether or not the author and the hero are to be equated, though both understand Stephen's story as rooted in impiety. Mr. Sullivan is firm and terse in his conclusion: "Stephen is Joyce." Miss Gordon, on the other hand, seems to say that Joyce's obvious contempt for Stephen continues throughout the narrative beginning with an ironic stance toward the child and ending with the final paragraphs in which the hero's damnation is rendered as deplorable and even tragic.[17] How, then, are we to resolve such an argument in the light of the novel's apparent gnostic implications?

In the first place, I would argue that if Miss Gordon is correct, then Joyce has misapplied his considerable talents as a rhetorician; for those passages which display the full range of his lyric prose are the ones which celebrate Stephen's aesthetic ecstasies, while, with the exception of the Cranly segment, he reserves his keenest irony for scenes in which he renders spokesmen for the old order.

But more importantly, Joyce's structuring of the action makes clear the meaning of his narrative. He spends too many pages of his novel in denigration of the spokesmen for family, Ireland, and church to untie all his intricate knots with one scene featuring Cranly's well-executed attack. However Miss Gordon—all of us—might wish Joyce to be Daedalus, grieving for his fallen son but himself redeemed, we must finally conclude that at this stage of his career, like Stephen, he has mastered the finer techniques of gnostic self-deception and has been trapped by the artifice of his own creative imagination, the monumental achievement that both tells his life's story and intimates its inherent tragedy.

"Free. Soul free and fancy free. Let the dead bury the dead."[18] This is the new Christ speaking, Stephen/Joyce, the redeemer of self; and we the readers who are allowed into the sanctum sanctorum of his inner soul must listen to his voice in hushed adoration. For it is his spirit that has bridged the gap of years and informed the time in which we live. The rhetoric of freedom so prevalent in our decade is only in part the result of the political revolutions of the eighteenth century. The kind of freedom people speak of today is more likely than not the freedom of Stephen Dedalus and James Joyce, which is something more than emancipation from political tyranny. It is freedom from social custom, freedom from family, freedom from tradition, freedom from church, freedom from the other-than-self, freedom from the created order, freedom from God. And if we as a generation believe passionately and absolutely in this beautiful, impalpable, imperishable illusion, we may in part thank James Joyce for our troubling faith.*

*This article is based on a paper given at the conference on Gnosticism and Reality, held at Vanderbilt University in April of 1978 under direction of Dr. Richard J. Bishirjian and Dr. William Havard. Sponsors were the Earhart Foundation, the Vanderbilt Research Council, and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Inc. This article will subsequently appear as a chapter in a book to be published by the Louisiana State University Press.

[1] Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1968), p. 9. [2] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 7. [3] See John Kelleher, "The Perceptions of James Joyce," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March, 1958), 86. [4] Joyce, p. 169. [5] Voegelin, p. 169. [6] Joyce, p. 170. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 169. [8] *Ibid.*, p. 171. [9] *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172. [10] Walter Sullivan, *Death by Melancholy: Essays on Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), pp. 97-113. [11] Joyce, p. 209. [12] *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239. [13] *Ibid.*, p. 243. [14] Voegelin, pp. 32-33. [15] Joyce, pp. 246-247. [16] *Ibid.*, p. 253. [17] Caroline Gordon, *How to Read a Novel* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), pp. 210-214. [18] Joyce, p. 248.