

Art is visionary, even prophetic, having the peculiar power to open before humanity as yet unseen worlds of experience, foreseeing or forecasting in history states of awareness and insight that can only later be taken possession of in fully formed speculative consciousness. Great works thus exhibit the uncanny capacity to suss out the unfolding path of human experience that as yet lies in any given moment still ahead of, or beyond us. Yet note my reliance here on the language of speculation, that is, the language of vision, to describe the process by which what art intuitively of our coming experience emerges into consciousness with the progress of thought. Our thought, our conscious thought, is dominated by the metaphors of certainty that depend at root on the objectified clarity of our sense of vision. To know something with certainty is to see it in our mind and make it visible in our language.

So it was when Krissy King began her study of olfaction in Joyce's quasi-autobiographical novel that I could foresee that she would come up against the daunting challenge of rendering, or translating, the essentially unconscious experience of smell into the conscious language of literary critical exposition. The problems attendant upon this surfaced early on for her and led her, in conference, to a point of decision: would she be able to sniff her way through the enigmatic unconscious vapors of Joyce's foray into his own quasi-objectified unconscious experience? She would have to find a way of opening her own experience to the freedom, the uncertainties, the anxieties of the unconscious that Joyce himself was seeking to liberate through his novel creative process. This creative process would anticipate by half a century the clear critical formulation of Wimsatt and Beardsley of the 'intentional fallacy,' that is, the realization that the full measure of what a work of art achieves could not finally be taken from the conscious intention of its author, even if such could ever be known.

In other words, to do justice to this critical problem, Krissy would have to put herself in the creative place of Joyce's own most open and even chaotic uncertainty. But should she have the courage to do so, she would be doing a certain honor to the very—you will see below that I shared with Krissy my close attention to this word—challenge that Joyce himself took on as he sought to find a new balance between actual lived experience and conscious reflection in leaving behind the cloistered security of the objective remove of speculative aesthetics to descend into the stink of the real world! At this moment a word of encouragement was in order: "go for it"! So it is that we leave it to her to lead us by the nose through the fetid alleyways and ethereal sublimations of Joyce's unconscious to inhale the incense of his most intimate and ineffable experiences!

— Michael Degener

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Prize Essay Winner

A KEY TO HIS CONSCIOUSNESS: SMELL IN *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS YOUNG MAN*

James Joyce, in writing *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, made sure to equip Stephen Dedalus with a realistic sense of smell and, therefore, kept in mind the random and highly subconscious nature of olfaction as opposed to other sensual faculties. However, as the writer and creator of the world in which Stephen lives, Joyce faced the paradox of deliberately and consciously crafting Stephen's smell so as to *seem* random and subconscious. The problem becomes even more complicated when one factors in the recurrence of figurative and imagined smells in *Portrait*, which often correlate with concrete smells that have occurred earlier in the text. What results is a tension between reality and contrived reality, as Joyce, in allowing Stephen to develop an "autonomous" sense of smell, subconsciously unleashes his own olfactory associations; as a result, we catch glimpses of Joyce's consciousness filtered through the lens of Stephen's perspective.

Before dissecting the intricate relationship between Joyce and Stephen using smell as a catalyst, it is important to outline the three interactive beings present in varying degrees throughout the novel. First, of course, we have Stephen, who grows to understand himself in spite of and because of obstacles, such as his Jesuit upbringing and his father's strident nationalism; then, there is the narrator, an older Stephen, who has the advantage of having lived through everything Stephen experiences and thus knows the outcome of every choice that Stephen makes; and, finally, there is Joyce himself, the invisible but omnipresent artist of Stephen's world, who has created every obstacle Stephen faces and guides the choices that resonate throughout Stephen's life. If Joyce were the artist of Stephen's aesthetic theory, he would remain "within or behind or beyond or above

his handiwork ... indifferent, paring his fingernails" (Joyce V.1467–9). However, Joyce cannot remain indifferent. *Portrait* is the chronicle of a character as complex as any real human being—and, as Jerry Allen Dibble points out, Joyce "recogniz[es] implicitly the impossibility of bringing a character to life without giving up an enforced detachment which is, after all, as much an intrusion of the author's personality on the lives of his characters as explicit, intrusive commentary would be" (37). In order to create a living human being within the pages of a novel, Joyce must make Stephen in his own image and pour fundamental elements of himself into Stephen's creation. Not only that, but Stephen Dedalus's story is that of an *artist*. For this reason, Joyce intervenes within the novel in order to allow Stephen to experience certain things guiding Stephen's ultimate choice to become an artist. By doing this, he continually calls attention to the artifice of the entire novel, to its status as a work of art, and to his awareness of the impossibility of an "indifferent" author.

How, then, does smell fit into this grand scheme of the artist creating an artist? Smell, by its very nature, functions as the most fitting tool with which to understand Joyce's presence in Stephen's life. The sense of olfaction subtends consciousness, revealing one's subconscious desires and drives. According to a recent study of smell in relation to social preference, smell is directly connected to emotional response, and subliminal smells can even markedly influence one's judgment of a person's likeability (Li et al. 1044–5). In short, smell is the gateway not only to self-perception, but also to perception of others and the environment. In *Portrait*, Joyce has created Stephen's environment, and, of course, the smells around him. Most of the time, Joyce adheres to realistic parameters when introducing a smell into Stephen's environment. At certain moments, however, he uses literal and figurative smells to influence Stephen's unconscious experience of his environment and to guide him to a greater understanding of the world and of his calling. These smells give Joyce leverage in defining certain aspects of Stephen's life; the level of Joyce's conscious control over Stephen's subconscious oscillates throughout Stephen's development and reveals much about the process Joyce underwent in writing *Portrait*.

In chapter I, for example, Joyce exerts a hefty measure of control over Stephen's susceptible, and relatively binary, mode of thinking. As a young boy far from home in the dark corridors of Clongowes, Stephen's

frame of mind is simple and understandable: he dislikes school and wants to go back home to his mother. Fittingly, Stephen's reaction to the various scents of Clongowes is repeatedly negative: he fears the bath and the "smell of the towels, like medicine" (I.551-2), wrinkles his nose at the "stinking stuff to drink [...] in the infirmary" (I.689-90), and dislikes the "weak sour smell" of burning charcoal in the sacristy (I.1194). Most telling is his unpleasant bout of nausea on the day of his first communion; he feels a tinge of guilt that "the faint smell [of wine] off the rector's breath had made him feel a sick feeling" because he has been told that "the day of your first communion was the happiest day of your life" (I.1402-4). Much of this negativity can be attributed to childish tendencies both to think in black and white and to over-exaggerate experiences; however, the question becomes why these particular smells fall decisively on the negative side of this binary. Granted, it makes sense that a child would have an adverse reaction to medicinal towels and a most likely unsanitary bath, but the smells of charcoal and wine by themselves are not necessarily regarded as unpleasant. In fact, the word "wine" triggers a pleasant linguistic association in Stephen's mind (I.1399-1401). It is a subconscious aversion to the winy residue from the rector's breath and the atmosphere of the church that offends Stephen's nostrils.

Here is where Joyce comes into the picture: he stands something to gain from Stephen's instinctive repugnance toward the "faint winy smell" (I.1398). Of all the things to be repulsed by that are conducive to a later rejection of the Church, why not Stephen's first communion, which represents both his initiation into the Church and his first contact with Christ? Stephen, being too young to have formed moral and intellectual objections to the Church that would create such an aversion, is easily controlled by Joyce, who has implanted this drive in Stephen's unconscious as a foundation for his repudiation of Church doctrine as a young adult.

Even as a young child, however, Stephen is aware of the boundaries Joyce has delineated for his life. After rereading his inscription on the flyleaf of his geography textbook, which is a list beginning with his own name and expanding its scope until it reaches "The Universe," Stephen reflects upon the borders of this universe in which he is placed: "What was after the universe? Nothing. But was there anything round the universe to show where it stopped before the nothing place began? It could not be a

wall but there could be a thin thin line there all round everything" (I.318–321). There is a high degree of irony in the seemingly innocent questions Stephen asks. Although Stephen matter-of-factly replies that there is "nothing" after the universe, we as readers know that there is not "nothing" after the universe: there is Joyce. In fact, Stephen's further reflections hint that he also is aware of Joyce's presence beyond Stephen's microcosmic universe. His ostensibly hypothetical exploration of the "thin thin line" separating his universe from the "nothing place" evidences his knowledge of the boundaries someone (whom we know as Joyce) has placed around him. Stephen intuitively knows that if he were to travel to the end of the earth or even to the end of existence, he could not possibly break through the thin line that is Joyce's artistic control. The fact that this element is included in the text points to two things: one, that the teller of the tale (an older Stephen) finds it important enough to include in the story and thus remains painfully aware of Joyce's inescapable presence in his life; and two, that Joyce himself wanted this ironic statement to be included in order to remind his readers of the artifice of the entire novel. However, as the "god" of Stephen's universe, Joyce allows Stephen to more freely develop an identity and sense of self, as evidenced by his more relaxed sense of smell in chapter II.

Here, there is a marked transition from the rigidity of Stephen's previous olfactory perceptions—a rigidity that ascribes only negative reactions to church smells and positive reactions to those evocative of the home—to the realistic ambiguity of his perceptions in chapter II. He has less of a sense of "good" and "bad" smells, and some of Stephen's perceptions regarding smell are even contrary to what one might expect. For example, as Stephen approaches Heron and Wallis smoking before the Whitsuntide play, he "became aware of a faint aromatic odour" (Joyce II.541). Contrasting his childhood tendency to characterize smells into defined categories, Stephen does not react particularly strongly to the scent. The clear departure from Stephen's black-and-white reaction to smells in chapter I is worth noticing, if only by virtue of its contrariness to what we have come to expect. Certainly, it marks a transition toward Stephen's maturity, for in the adult world not every smell must be judged as pleasant or unpleasant. When observed from the point of view of Joyce's

control over Stephen, however, it takes on added significance as a greater allowance of freedom on Joyce's part.

It is important to note the phrasing here: rather than there merely being an odor, he "became aware" of it. When contrasted with phrases in chapter I such as "*there was* a cold night smell in the chapel" (I.381), the diction gives Stephen a sense of self-awareness and a feeling of autonomy over his own conscious processes. "There was" causes one to think of a smell merely *being* there, placed there as if by some outside force that gives Stephen no choice but to inhale it. In chapter II, on the other hand, Stephen is the acting force that becomes aware of this smell, and he is aware that he becomes aware of it. In short, Stephen is afforded control over his consciousness because Joyce has no need to steer him in any given direction. Joyce allows Stephen to grow as a character through adolescence, without any supernatural-seeming interventions beyond the reality Joyce has created for Stephen.

If only things remained that simple. Joyce, as the creator of a literary masterpiece, would not instate such a dynamic of control and freedom without baffling his readers through such developments as figurative smells. Take, for example, the scene in II.3 in which Stephen tears away from the object of his passion, Emma. As he realizes he has lost the chance to kiss her, "pride and hope and desire like crushed herbs in the heart sent up vapours of maddening incense before the eyes of his mind" (II.930–932). Here, Stephen does not literally smell anything; even figuratively an odor is not explicitly mentioned, only the fact that his eyes burned. Yet it is strange that the narrator describes these abstract emotions as "crushed herbs" and "maddening incense," both of which emit powerful, intoxicating aromas. It can also be argued that so far, none of the smells in Stephen's world have actually been described as entering his nostrils—whether it be the "there was" of chapter I or Stephen's "[becoming] aware of" smells in chapter II, the fact that the narrator doesn't mention Stephen's intake of the smells does not discount their presence. The problem becomes what to make of this strange metaphor that is not even entirely consistent—first the "maddening incense" goes up before the "eyes of his mind" (II.932) and then again before his actual "anguished eyes" a few lines later (II.935). For now, we will leave this dilemma; in chapter V, several instances in the text will shed light on the meaning of this mixed metaphor of a "smell."

A final significant moment in the realm of Stephen's freer subconscious is his perception of what many of us would find to be a repulsive odor. Eventually, Stephen's frenzy of emotion quiets, and "a power, akin to that which had often made anger or resentment fall from him, brought his steps to rest" (II.938–9). Considering this from a control standpoint, we might be tempted to ask: what is this awesome power that can subdue his overwhelming array of emotions so rapidly? Once again, the phrasing is significant. The teller has not only implied that there is an outside "power" in play, giving Stephen no control over his actions, but he has also connected previous occurrences of this mysterious force to this present moment, evidencing his retrospective acknowledgment that this power is not unique to this moment, but something that has long played a part in Stephen's life. Could it be a "divine intervention" on Joyce's part, guiding Stephen to this alleyway for a specific purpose? A further examination of the succeeding passage makes this interpretation plausible.

After Stephen "breathe[s] slowly the rank heavy air" in the lane, he finds a strange sort of comfort in its fetid fumes: "—That is horse piss and rotted straw, he thought. It is a good odour to breathe. It will calm my heart" (II.943–4). With this unorthodox reaction to what many would consider a revolting smell, Stephen embraces the stench of reality as opposed to the stifling, musty corridors of the church. While it may not be of great significance to Stephen now, later he will realize that he is called to be an artist immersed in the odors of the world rather than cloistering himself away in the confessional. The narrator, however, is well aware of the importance of this moment, as evidenced by the narrative shift that takes place. John Paul Riquelme, in his essay "Dedalus and Joyce Writing the Book of Himself," astutely notes that in chapter II, the teller uses "the same typographical indicator, the dash, that previously identified only direct discourse" (372). In a certain sense, Stephen engages in direct discourse at this moment, a discourse in which the interlocutors are both the present Stephen himself and the future Stephen who tells the story. Although the teller cannot physically answer the past Stephen, he can include this firm statement of Stephen's in the text to show that it has resonated with the teller over the years.

Joyce, as we know, is the power that has led Stephen to this cobbled lane, guiding him on his path to becoming an artist by showing him that

he is not meant to dwell within the Church. What separates this intervention from Joyce's necessary authorial manipulation of Stephen's actions is that Joyce has endowed the narrator with a peculiar self-awareness of the forces at play in his life. He has made the conscious decision to let the narrator know that Stephen's sudden halt in the alleyway was not of Stephen's will but of someone else's. In this instance, Stephen is unaware of what this force is or what it entails. In chapter III, however, he mistakenly comes to believe that this acting force is the Christian God.

Something during the priest's harrowing sermons at the retreat instills in Stephen a renewed sense of fear of the Lord. The lurid depiction of hell, which Stephen believes to be his destiny, sends him into a paroxysm of guilt and disgust for his previous sexual acts. As memories of the past flood his brain, "the sordid details of his orgies stank under his very nostrils" (Joyce III.488–9). Once again we must grapple with the concept of figurative versus literal smell. It would be easy to dismiss this statement as a mere rhetorical device, but, as Professor Michael Degener of Boston University points out, the phrasing of "under his *very* nostrils" would defy our attempts to do so. This syntactically unnecessary phrase draws attention to the unreality of the entire statement, for it does not leave the stink of these "sordid details" as a quaint metaphor, but, rather, thrusts it directly under Stephen's nose to wreak physical havoc on him (just as the "maddening incense" did in part II). Considering that this diction is the choice of the narrator, for the exact words themselves were most likely not running through Stephen's mind at this moment, it becomes evident that the older Stephen purposely blurs the line between real olfaction and imagined olfaction. Joyce, by including this segment in the first place, reminds his readers once again of the contrived reality of the entire novel—for, whether literal or figurative, both are ultimately artificial because they are created by Joyce. Both are shown to have equal power over Stephen, and both are able to affect his mind as well as his body.

This overlap of figurative and actual smell continues as Stephen's thoughts are increasingly consumed with the weight of his sin. Paralyzed with guilt, Stephen fixates on his past despite his attempts to fall asleep. A futile struggle takes place in which "he desired with all his will not to hear or see . . . till his frame shook under the strain of his desire" (III.1257–8), yet he falls into a lurid nightmare of repulsive goat-like creatures circling

him in a field of thistles and crusted excrement. However powerful Stephen's will may be, he cannot repress the deluge of dread and terror that has been lurking deep within his unconscious since the priest's first hominy. His guilt is not the only thing taking hold of him: "an evil smell, faint and foul as the light" (III.1265) pervades the dream, yet another imagined odor that somehow infiltrates his nostrils as well as his consciousness. It is strange that the smell is described as "evil" in light of Stephen's more ambiguous reactions in chapter II, contradicting his previous categorization of horse urine and rotting straw as a comforting smell. Even stranger is that the revolting stench follows Stephen through layers of consciousness separating his dream from reality: "He sprang from the bed, the reeking odour pouring down his throat, clogging and revolting his entrails . . . clasping his cold forehead wildly, he vomited profusely in agony" (III.1288-93). Somehow this "imagined" smell, which entered Stephen's dream despite resistance of the body and soul, has the power to physically enter his throat and prompt a violent, visceral reaction—surely no mere figment of the imagination could have such an effect. With this powerful smell that affects several layers of Stephen's consciousness, Joyce creates a stench that Stephen, since Joyce has crafted him to seem like a realistic human being, cannot possibly interpret as anything but otherworldly. Stephen believes that "God had allowed him to see the hell reserved for his sins" (III.1285-6), but, in reality, it is Joyce who has consciously intervened within the fabric of his own contrived reality in order to propel Stephen towards the chain of events that will lead him to artistry.

This chain of events culminates in chapter IV with Stephen's epiphany. For the final time, we see Joyce intervene beyond the demands of his authorial presence with a supernatural smell. The catalyst is the director of Belvedere's invitation for Stephen to join the priesthood, which then prompts an intensive consideration of the calling that would irreversibly alter his future. Suddenly, his anxieties come rushing forward, and he realizes that "it was a grave and ordered and passionless life that awaited him" (Joyce IV.480-1). But it is not even his potentially mirthless life that repels Stephen from accepting the call to the priesthood; rather, it is the "troubling odour of the long corridors of Clongowes" that returns to him and fills him with dread and unrest (Joyce IV.484). The effect is immediate and terrifying. Assaulted with "a feverish quickening of his pulses" and "a

din of meaningless words . . . his lungs dilated and sank as if he were inhaling a warm moist unsustaining air which hung in the bath in Clongowes" (Joyce IV.487–92). It is well known that smell is able to evoke strong and often emotionally charged memories without any conscious decision on our part. Why, however, does the smell arise in the first place, and why are its effects so debilitating? This turning point in Stephen's life is facilitated once again by Joyce, who reaches out to save Stephen by awakening "some instinct, stronger than education or piety" that makes him realize "the chill and order of the [priesthood] repelled him" (IV.493–7). This instinct, stemming deep from within Stephen's subconscious, has slowly been gaining strength because of key events in the text—his childhood at Clongowes, his religious experience in chapter III, and, most importantly, the real and figurative smells that have implanted themselves in Stephen's memory—and was cultivated by Joyce himself, who has not pared his fingernails, but has gotten his hands dirty with his subtle interventions in Stephen's life. The result of these interventions is Stephen's rejection of church doctrine and acceptance of the call to be an artist. Now that this has been accomplished, Joyce sets his character free in the world and observes the fruit of his creation in action.

Evidencing this new freedom is a fundamental change in the nature of Stephen's olfaction. In chapter V, Stephen finally experiences smell as it exists in reality: random, unstructured, with links to the subconscious that are not immediately obvious. Smells often trigger linguistic associations that lead to wordplay, and certain scents even precipitate Stephen's creative process. Nonetheless, as Joyce looses Stephen's subconscious, so must he set his own subconscious free in order to create linguistic associations that are neither forced nor contrived, but natural. For this reason, chapter V is as much about Joyce as it is about Stephen; more specifically, we learn what is at stake for Joyce in creating a character who seemingly possesses a subconscious mind of his own.

An excellent example of the budding connection between smells and words can be found as Stephen takes a stroll along Stephen's Green toward his next class. As he passes along the Green, "the rainsodden earth gave forth its moral odour, a faint incense rising upward through the mould from many hearts" (V.363–4). Many elements from previous chapters collide in this cryptic statement. For one, it must be determined whether

these words are Stephen's or the narrator's. The answer to this query is far from simple because, as Jerry Allen Dibble puts it, "the personality or identity of the narrator [in *Portrait*] is . . . constantly in the process of breaking down as it flows toward the main character in the story, taking on his 'personality,' vocabulary, syntax, and even his values as the narrative distance lessens" (34). In short, as the novel draws near its close and the temporal distance between the narrator and Stephen—who is growing older twice as fast as the narrator—lessens, so do the differences in outlook, personality, and experience between the two of them. The decreasing narrative distance between Stephen and the narrator thus makes it more difficult to differentiate between them, especially in combination with the stream-of-consciousness sequence of this paragraph (V.362–9).

What, then, do we make of this "incense" that bears much similarity to the metaphor of the "crushed herbs" and "maddening incense" in chapter II? Both describe this metaphorical incense as rising or wafting up, either "before the eyes of his mind" (II.932) or "through the mould from many hearts" (V.364). Both descriptions are also inconsistent: in the former instance, the incense is said first to go up before the "eyes of his mind" and later before his actual eyes, whereas the latter describes the odor first as "moral" (V.363) and then as "mortal" (V.366). It should be noted that the "incense" of Stephen's Green is an actual smell, as opposed to the precarious metaphor of the crushed herbs and incense in chapter II. The similarities between the two lend support to the idea that in the universe of *Portrait*, literal and figurative smells have the same properties. However, their differences say more about the progression of Stephen's artistry. The first "incense" makes for a clunky metaphor, whereas the second is more sophisticated, albeit equally enigmatic. The improved fluidity of the second allusion shows Stephen's enhanced aptitude for aesthetic and linguistic sensibilities.

That said, it must be remembered that Stephen's linguistic associations were crafted by Joyce and are thus inescapably his wordplay intended to seem like Stephen's. Taking this into account, we learn something about Joyce's creative process: that his words at times are not chosen solely based on their exact denotations, but rather by virtue of their sounds, shapes, and the connotative imagery that arises from them. Moist, rainy earth is imbued with an odor that is "moral" as well as "mortal," a toying with

syllables that allows Joyce to continue with his metaphor based on a free association with the “[moral] incense” that wafts “through the mould of many [mortal] hearts.” The pattern is thus established of art through association, in which loose subconscious connections create an ambient aesthetic. Now that we have an inkling of Joyce’s artistic process, we realize that it is in large part incompatible with Stephen’s aesthetic theory—for Joyce does not create art through the “luminous silent stasis” (V.1401) of aesthetic apprehension, but by playing around with words and sounds, which is, in large part, a fluid process of trial and error rather than a sudden, overwhelming moment of insight.

Even after seeing both Joyce’s conscious maneuvers and subconscious associations at work within Stephen’s world, is it possible to determine how much of *Portrait* is a result of the former and how much is a result of the latter? To what extent did Joyce, in writing *Portrait*, surrender to the deeper layers of his own mind, over which he himself had no control? It is impossible to know completely, for we cannot permeate Joyce’s mind. However, we can see that Joyce’s consciousness, while fundamentally intertwined with Stephen’s at all times in the novel, becomes more apparent and richly embedded within the text as Stephen matures and solidifies into the complex character he is at the end of the novel. In this way, Joyce gradually erodes the barrier that he has constructed between Stephen and himself, and Stephen’s consciousness (as well as his subconscious) converges with his own. Certainly, by *Portrait*’s final pages, Joyce himself found it impossible to discern which of Stephen’s olfactory associations were consciously crafted and which stemmed from the deepest layers of Joyce’s own subconscious mind.

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