

Opposing Ideals in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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Stephen Dedalus, of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, is constantly torn by two opposing ideals. One is that which the institution of the Irish Catholic Church imposes on him, and the other is insisted upon by his independent thoughts and feelings. Stephen chooses between these two [ideals](#), and he rejects the religion offered him by his upbringing and early education in favour of individualistic thought.

The most obvious aspect of these opposing ideals is in Stephen [Dedalus](#)'s name. His first name, rooted in religion, is that of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. His last name comes from the pagan and Greek myth of [Daedalus](#) and Icarus. The myth of Daedalus centres on the theme of freedom, which coincides with Stephen's journey of self-discovery. However, is he Daedalus, the great architect and inventor, or is he Daedalus's prideful and rebellious son Icarus? Certainly, Stephen embodies aspects of both mythological figures. He is both the intellectual Daedalus, and the rebel Icarus. From the very beginning, the two names are separate from one another. Stephen's parents call him Stephen - "Goodbye, Stephen,

goodbye!" (5). This is ironic as sending Stephen to the convent exposes him further to the hypocrisy that he will see in the priests at the convent and in Catholicism as a whole. Thus, they are saying goodbye to "Stephen", the name rooted in religious tradition as he will become "Dedalus", the man who seeks his own freedom. On the other hand, Stephen's classmates call him "Dedalus". Stephen is not one of "them". Stephen is set aside as intellectual and moral - "Dedalus is a model youth. He doesn't smoke and he doesn't go to bazaars and he doesn't flirt and he doesn't damn anything or damn all (71)." Indeed, "Dedalus" is not one of the hypocrites. He is labelled as a "heretic" as he refuses to conform to ideals which are not his own (76). At first, he merely defends poets (i.e. Byron), but soon he is defending his entire way of life and his views thereof. "Dedalus" is the individual.

Stephen's childhood in the convent and with his family is shaped around conformity. Phrases such as "Pull out his eyes / Apologise / Apologise / Pull out his eyes" continually insist on the strict code of behaviour that Stephen is expected to uphold (4).

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