

AP English Notes
December 3, 2004

Notes are pasted from Portrait of the Artist from Grade Saver.

We jump forward in time; Stephen is now a teenager, a reluctant leader in his own way, and a successful essayist and actor at his school. It is the night of the Whitsuntide play, and Stephen is taking a moment for himself as he prepares to go onstage and act his part. Outside, he runs into Wallis and Heron, two other boys at Belvedere; Heron is both his rival and his friend, as Stephen and Heron are the two brightest boys in their class. Heron and Wallis tease Stephen about a girl in the audience. Their chiding makes sets off a new train of thought for Stephen, as he remembers an incident that took place during his first term at Belvedere. A teacher found heresy in one of Stephen's essays, but Stephen simply explained that he meant something different; still, the idea of heresy gave him a strange feeling of joy. Some time later, Heron, Nash, and Boland caught up with Stephen outside and pulled him into a conversation about writers. Stephen refuses to say that Tennyson was a better poet than Byron, even though Byron was a heretic, and the boys physically attacked him, trying to get him to say that Tennyson was better. He managed to escape. We are brought back to the evening of the Whitsuntide play, as Stephen, Heron, and Wallis continue to make light talk. Stephen looks at Heron now, remembering the past incident and Heron's cowardice, but he realizes that he feels no anger. He thinks about the girl sitting in the audience, remembering their shy contact and his unfulfilled desire to kiss her. A boy comes to tell Stephen to get dressed and ready for his part. As the curtain is about to go up, Stephen thinks about the silliness of his part and feels humiliation. After the play is over, he does not socialize but instead goes for a walk, restlessly searching for something. The crisp night air, occasionally heavy with the odours of the city, calms him, and he goes back.

Some time later, Stephen is taking a voyage by train with his father. They are going to Cork to sell property at an auction. The trip is marked by Simon's attempts to bond with Stephen, but Stephen feels embarrassed by his father's intense nostalgia and trite advice. Images of the dead are unreal to Stephen, save that of his dead Uncle Charles (this is the first time we hear of Charles' death). In Cork, his father chats up everybody about old times and how things were; only when Stephen goes with his father to Queen's College do his father's stories come to life. There, in an old anatomy theatre, Stephen sees the word *Foetus* carved into a desktop. Suddenly, he sees the world of the students come to life: he can imagine the boy carving the letters, the students of the past sitting and studying, all of them now aged or dead. The word also reminds Stephen of his increasing preoccupation with sex. He tries to remember his own childhood but the memories seem faded and unreal; he is a different person now. He suffers through the rest of the trip with his father, meeting with Simon's old friends and sitting through sessions of wet-eyed nostalgia and avuncular advice.

We are back in Dublin. Stephen has won a hefty sum in an essay contest. Rather than save the money, he begins a prolonged spending binge, buying useless gifts for everyone and indulging himself. When the money is gone, he feels ashamed. He had tried to use the money to create a feeling of elegance and affluence, but in reality they are as poor as ever. He also wanted to use the gifts to bring himself closer to his mother and his many younger siblings; however, he feels as isolated from them as ever. He wanders the streets of Dublin, lonely and suffering from intense sexual longing. He accepts the proposition of a prostitute; his time with her is his first sexual experience.

Stephen continues to see prostitutes, and enters a period of deep confusion and spiritual paralysis. He considers his actions to be terribly sinful, but he becomes strangely indifferent toward the idea of eternal damnation. He continues his studies and his duties in the society of the Blessed Virgin, strangely numb towards his own hypocrisy. He finds himself an altogether less pleasant person, as if his violation of one rule has led to a complete loss of self-control; although he began with Lust, he lately finds himself tainted

AP English Notes
December 3, 2004

by all of the Seven Deadly Sins. St. Francis Xavier's Feast Day approaches, and every year for three days before the feast day the boys of Belvedere have a spiritual retreat.

On each of the three days of the retreat, Stephen hears a fiery sermon on the torments of hell and the punishments meted out by the just but stern God. The first day's sermon is on the inevitability of judgment. God, who gave many opportunities for repentance during life, will be transformed from God the Merciful to God the Just. Stephen is made sick with fear; the sermons seem as though they were written specifically for him. He thinks about his sins, and is too fearful to confess to God, who seems too fearsome, or the Blessed Virgin, who seems too pure. He imagines being brought back to God through Emma, the girl to whom he tried to write a poem. She seems approachable enough. The second day's sermon is on the incredible physical torment of hell. Stephen feels that he must confess, but he is too ashamed to do so. The third day's sermon elaborates on hell's tortures, the greatest of which is being cut off from God. That night, Stephen has terrible nightmares about hell; the dreams are so intense that he wakes and vomits. He searches for a church where he can go and make his confession with true anonymity. He finally finds one, and he confesses all. The world seems born anew when he steps out of the church. He resolves to live a new life of piety.

Stephen becomes almost fanatically pious, devoting himself daily to prayer and contemplation of Catholic doctrines. He sweeps away any doubts or misgivings he has with the idea that at a later stage of his spiritual development, all will be clear. He forces different forms of unpleasantness on himself to punish each of his five senses. He prays fervently, and attends mass every day. At times, he is gripped by a great, spiritual love for God and His Creation.

But before long, Stephen's old independence begins to reassert itself. He finds it difficult to maintain a state of saintly serenity. If anything, his various methods of self-discipline make him more irritable. He does not grow more charitable or kind to his family or his peers. He thinks of the various clergymen he knows, and how they seem just as subject to human pettiness and irritability as everyone else; he also has some doubts about the rather rigid Catholic compartmentalization of different virtues and wisdoms.

The director of the school asks Stephen to his office. Having noticed Stephen's piety and his academic talent, the director wants Stephen to consider the priesthood. The director tries to draw Stephen to the calling by describing the incredible responsibility and power of a priest. The idea is not without its appeal for Stephen. But after he leaves the rector's office, he continues to reflect on the life of a priest. He thinks about a long life of pondering obscure questions of Catholic doctrine. Even more vividly, he imagines the stale odour in halls of Clongowes, and of spending his life wandering through corridors such as these; in the end, he realizes that such a life repulses him. The life of a priest would be contrary to Stephen's desire for freedom and independence. On the way home, he sees a tidy shrine to the Virgin; walking in a lane that leads to his home, he notices the faint smell of rotting cabbages coming from the kitchen gardens down by the river. He realizes that his soul belongs to this kind of disorder rather than to the tidiness of the shrine to Mary: he prefers the simple smells and sensations of life and living.

Back home, he looks at his brothers and sisters, reflecting on how everything that has been denied to them has been given freely to him. Yet they do not hate him for it. We learn that the Dedalus family will be moving again, no doubt because of another blunder of Stephen's father. The children begin to sing, and behind the hope and innocence of their voices Stephen feels a weariness and a deep sorrow.

Later, Stephen waits for his father and a school tutor, who have gone into a building in the city on

AP English Notes
December 3, 2004

Stephen' behalf to get some information regarding university. Stephen grows impatient and takes off for a walk. The idea of going to university thrills him, although he is not sure yet what his calling is. He encounters some school chums, who are swimming in the sea; the sight of their spindly teenage bodies makes him somewhat anxious, reminding him of his discomfort with his own half-grown body. They call out to him, inviting him to swim, but he does not come. As they call his name, he thinks of Greek myth's great artificer, Dedalus, who fashioned a pair of wings that enabled him to escape from his island prison. He has a sort of vision of the flight, imagining himself as the one who soars through the air.

He continues to walk along the beach. He comes across a beautiful girl, near his own age, wading in the water. The vision of her makes him feel something akin to divine revelation. This is his epiphany and changes his life. He falls into a deep, long nap on the beach. When he wakes up, it is night.

What is a "sign upon the flesh"?