

AP English Notes  
December 6, 2004

Research Papers are due on Friday, December 10.

Notes from Portrait of the Artist Notes by Will McNamus

*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. (Joyce)*

Religion becomes a less important part of Stephen's life with every passing day. When his great-uncle Charles asks him to go to church, Stephen remains indifferent and makes excuses. Stephen continues along this moral down-spiral until, at the end of the second section, he visits a prostitute and begins his exploration of life through sin. But although he continues to live in sin, he acts as a religious leader at the University College. It is this role that leads a church official to offer Stephen an opportunity to study to become a priest.

During the period in which Stephen decides his future: to become a priest or not, Easter rolls around. While in school he has kept in the habit of skipping confession, but his mother begs him to go to confession before Easter. It would break her heart to see him commit sacrilege. Stephen chooses not to go to confession, and thereby becomes more of a hypocrite (a religious leader who has committed sacrilege) and has taken the first blow at breaking his mother's heart. His mother perceives becoming a priest as his only salvation.

On a visit to the beach Stephen falls asleep. When he wakes up he immediately sees a beautiful girl standing several yards away, gazing at some distant object over the water. He is completely overcome by her beauty and the magnificence of that moment. That is his epiphany. Stephen immediately decides he must commit his life to art - to expressing the beauty he sees in the world.

That one shining moment was not the only event that lead to Stephen's decision to become a writer. His experience at Clongowes and experiences with writing about personal experiences had a profound influence on his choice. At Clongowes he buries himself in his writing and in his work while his fellow classmates spend their time fretting over politics and culture. Stephen is even able to fund part of his education by publishing essays that he has written. When an essay brought in money, Stephen and his entire family celebrated. While the money lasted, Stephen could briefly relive some of the wonder of his past. This was Stephen's first incentive to become a writer.

During his struggle with religion, Stephen took to writing to help ease his conscience. Writing replaced confession as absolution for his sin. Gradually, writing also began to replace the actions that were his sins. Rather than seeking women for physical gratification, Stephen contented himself to watch, observe, and write about them. He captured their sensuous movement, their low tones and fragrant calls with his pen in short verse rhythmic rhymes.

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From the opening of the novel, to the close of the final chapter, Stephen Dedalus's life has been a journey. A jumble of politics, religion, and family ties left Stephen needing to escape. With his pen ready, Stephen sets out to discover the world anew - free from the expectations and drudgery of his former life. The pen has become his wings so that he may fly.

**Notes from Monarch Notes Online**