A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Chapter 3
By James Joyce

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Period 1
In chapter three, Stephen is still seeing prostitutes, which affects Stephen and sends him into a spiral of confusion and spiritual paralysis. He is also studying the Blessed Virgin, and he doesn’t even realize the hypocrisy of him studying it. He has lost all of his self control, and he is therefore a less pleasant person to be around. He then starts to realize that he is demonstrating the Seven Deadly Sins, beginning with lust that is relieved from visiting the prostitutes. Every year, Stephen’s school holds a feast, and prior to the feast all of the boys go on a spiritual retreat. On every day of the retreat, sermons were given by the priests about the torments of hell. Throughout the retreat, Stephen is panicking due to his belief that the sermons were being given specifically for him. He attempts to relieve his guilt, however, he is unable to do that and decides that the only way to be free of his sins is to confess. Stephen experiences horrific nightmares from his guilt, and wakes up deciding to find a church where he can confess anonymously. After he confesses, he feels like a new person and decides to live a life of piety.
Sensory Descriptions:

Throughout chapter 3, Stephen is plagued by his sins in the form of sensory descriptions. In the beginning of the chapter, he begins by thinking about the “perfumed flesh” (Joyce 103) of the prostitutes he continued to visit. His obsession with these women show that for Stephen, they are the only way he escapes reality’s harshness. This sense of smell becomes important for him to express his ideas about objects or people, but also as a way to recognize intense fear, especially after Father Arnall’s sermons:

“An evil smell, faint and foul as the light, curled upwards sluggishly out of the canisters and from the stale dung” (Joyce 140).

After the third day of sermons, Stephan returns to his room and falls into a hallucinogenic sleep where he believes he witnesses hell. This scent of decay and evil is so strong there, that he feels frightened enough to vomit out the evil:

“He sprang from the bed, reeking odour pouring down his throat, clogging and revolting his entrails” (Joyce 141).
As Stephen continues to smell horrible stenches, another heavily repeated sense is the feeling of burning alive:

“A wave of fire swept through his body: the first...Flames burst forth from his skull like a corolla, shrieking like voices” (Joyce 127).

His guilt over his numerous sins literally consumes him in flames. The only way his mind and body are able to process his ultimate demise in hell is by simulating what hell-fire would feel like.

As well as smell and feeling, Stephen also hears the “laughter of a girl [that] strokes his heart more strongly than a trumpet blast” (Joyce 117) and the “quiet of the classroom” (Joyce 128) during these intense couple of days. Seemingly ordinary sounds in this chapter serve to either make Stephen recognize his unholy desire for women or bring him back into reality after feeling as if he’s been transported into hell during the sermons. After he is cleansed of his sins, sounds begin to be explained more sweetly and pure, demonstrating the life altering state of mind Stephen experienced.
Indications of a Turning Point or Climax for Stephen

As Stephen grows away from his religion, he tries to reconnect himself to it. After Father Arnall’s sermon, he prays about his loss of innocence, and reflects on the many sins he has committed. When Stephen leaves the sermon, he realizes that he can still repent for his sins. He resolves his internal conflict of the guilt of his sins by going to a chapel to confess them. For the first time in eight months, he describes his sins to the priest. The priest desperately recommends that he stops his habits. Stephen walks home feeling more pure and innocent, as he is absolved of his sins by the priest. Prior to this experience, Stephen experiences hellish circumstances as he sleeps with a prostitute in chapter two, breaking the morals of which he was raised up on. After Stephen breaks his faith and hears the sermon about death and judgment, he is fearful over what will happen to him when he dies. Stephen is ashamed of his past sins and the dirty thoughts he had about the prostitute in the last chapter. Because of this, he acts on his realizations and cleanses himself through confession. This is a major turning point for Stephen, as readers could have previously inferred that Stephen will completely lose his Catholic upbringing but he makes a turn for the better and comes back to his faith in chapter three. It is also indicated that here is a turning point for Stephen as he grows more respect for women, and more specifically, the prostitute. He finally learns her name and does not only think of her because of her appearance, but more as a human.
Indications Continued

“He had sinned. He had sinned so deeply against heaven and before God that he was not worthy to be called God’s child. Could it be that he, Stephen Dedalus, had done those things” (73)?

“At last it had come...God could see that he was sorry. He would tell all his sins” (76).

“He had confessed and God had pardoned him. His soul was made fair and holy once more, holy and happy” (78).
Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy (The Inferno): The Sins of Incontinence and Their Corresponding Punishments*

*Divine Comedy* is an epic poem with three major sections—*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*—written by Dante Alighieri, an Italian poet, from 1308 to 1321 (when he died). The story follows Dante on his journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven. In *Inferno*, the ancient Roman poet Virgil, who represents the epitome of human knowledge, guides Dante through the nine circles of Hell where people are punished according to their sins. Upper Hell, excluding Vestibule and Limbo (the First Circle), is reserved for the sins of incontinence: sins of the flesh that emerge from passions and emotions.

**Second Circle (Lust):** Here, the lustful are blown forever by strong winds, keeping them from finding rest.

**Third Circle (Gluttony):** The gluttonous are forced to lie in a vile slush produced by never-ending icy rain and are unable to see those lying around them, symbolizing their cold and selfish lives.

**Fourth Circle (Greed):** Hoarders and spendthrifts fight each other with heavy weights that they push with their chests, representing their drive for wealth in their lifetimes.

**Fifth Circle (Anger):** The wrathful viciously fight each other on the surface of the river Styx and the sullen (passively wrathful) lie beneath the water, refusing all action.
Similarly to how Dante takes a journey through Hell in *Inferno*, Stephen experiences Hell in chapter three when the priest thoroughly describes the fire, darkness, and torment of eternal damnation. As a result, he begins to feel guilty for the sins that he has committed, most of which are sins of incontinence, and believes that it is too late for his soul to be redeemed.

**Stephen’s Sins of Incontinence:**

“He would pass by them calmly waiting for a sudden movement of his own will or a sudden call to his sin-loving soul from their soft perfumed flesh” (82).

Stephen commits the sin of lust when he wanders the streets desperately in search of prostitutes.

Greed, gluttony, wrath/sullenness: “From the evil seed of lust all other deadly sins had sprung forth:...covetousness in using money for the purchase of unlawful pleasures,...gluttonous enjoyment of food, the dull glowering anger amid which he brooded upon his longing, the swamp of spiritual and bodily sloth in which his whole being had sunk” (85).
In chapter 3, Stephen continues to be encapsulated by his desires. The more he distances himself from his family, the Irish-Catholic church, and the values associated with the church, the more he feels as if he has fallen from grace into some shroud of darkness and sin. Stephen views churchgoers as hypocrites, and yet finds himself in conflict between his reverence for certain aspects of religion and his own “sinful” desires.

Stephen’s fall from light to dark is illustrated throughout the chapter. The structure of Joyce’s writing itself is reflective of this fall. Many of the paragraphs in chapter 3 begin with light, hopeful diction then tumble into cold, dark diction. For example, “The dull light fell more faintly upon the page whereon another equation began to unfold itself slowly and to spread abroad its widening tail. It was his own soul going forth to experience, unfolding itself sin by sin, spreading abroad the balefire of its burning stars and folding back upon itself, fading slowly, quenching its own lights and fires. They were quenched: and the cold darkness filled chaos” (110).
Fall from Grace, Repentance, and Redemption

Stephen is suffering in conflict between the light of God’s majesty and his desire to wander into the realm of sin. In chapel, Stephen learns of hell’s physical torments in the morning and its spiritual torments in the evening. He is overcome by feelings of regret for his wrongdoings and prays for forgiveness. After he believes he has had a “vision” sent by God, Stephen is sickened and knows he must confess.

“His eyes were dimmed with tears and, looking humbly up to heaven, he wept for the innocence he had lost” (150).

Once Stephen has confessed in church, he feels as if his life has become far more simple and beautiful. He is overjoyed once he discovers that his body has been purified by God.

“Another life! A life of grace and virtue and happiness! It was true. It was not a dream from which he would wake. The past was past” (158).
The Biblical story of Jonah describes his rejection of God after being asked to preach in the city of Nineveh. Instead of listening he chooses to evade God by taking a boat in the opposite direction of Nineveh, to the city of Tarshish. While sailing, a huge storm surrounded the ship. After Jonah admitted that the storm was because of him, the sailors threw him overboard. At this point, a big fish swallowed Jonah and took him to the city of Nineveh. For three days and three nights Jonah lay in the belly of the fish and prayed to God for forgiveness. When the fish arrived in the city of Nineveh he threw up Jonah, who agreed to listen to God and preach within the city.
The Biblical story of Jonah relates to Stephen through the decision to sin, or in other words directly disobey God. Stephen’s sinful journey and contemplation all occur within three days. On the last day, Friday, he gives into his guilt, and confesses for his sins “then, bowing his head, he repeated the *confiteor* in fright” (125) to return to God. This also happens to be the same amount of time that Jonah spent in the belly of the fish while also contemplating his sins before returning to God. Stephen and Jonah’s experiences run parallel to each other in that after running away from God, they soon return to him due to confusion, guilt, and regret.

“Shame rose from his whole heart and flooded his whole being” (101)

“Ah yes, he would still be spared; he would repent in his heart and be forgiven” (110)
The Descent of Christ into Hell

In Catholicism, Christ’s descent into hell is the event after his Crucifixion and before his Resurrection in which Jesus descended into Hell, which at the time was simply the land of the dead where all souls went after they died. Catholics believe that the sin of Adam and Eve closed the gates of Heaven, so Jesus’ death was a sacrifice to bring salvation the righteous who had died before him. The Apostles’ Creed (a statement of faith) states that Jesus “was crucified, died and was buried, he descended into hell,” and that “on the third day he rose again from the dead”.
The Descent of Christ into Hell (Continued)

In the novel, Christ’s descent into Hell is represented by Stephen’s retreat and his sins. The retreat lasts three days, much like how Jesus spent three days in Hell following his crucifixion. During this retreat, Stephen descends into Hell after hearing a vivid description of the fire and torture of Hell. Consequently, he becomes extremely guilty for his sins and enters a Hell of his own imagination. He longs for redemption and confesses to his sins, reflecting Jesus’ sacrifice of death, which allowed for the salvation of the faithful souls in the realm of the dead.

“He had died. Yes. He was judged. A wave of fire swept through his body...Flames burst forth from his skull like a corolla, shrieking like voices:
- Hell! Hell! Hell! Hell! Hell!” (101) - Stephen has a delusion in which he dies and is punished with eternal damnation, representing his own descent into Hell.

“He knelt there sinless and timid; and he would hold upon his tongue the host and God would enter his purified body” (118). - After Stephen confesses to his sins, reflecting Jesus’ sacrifice that led the worthy souls in Hell to salvation.
Thomas Aquinas and the Seven Deadly Sins

Thomas Aquinas was an Italian philosopher and theologian. He was an authority figure in the Roman Catholic Church and is considered one of the most influential thinkers of his time. In the novel, Joyce writes about art, beauty and its qualifications, and how an artist views their work, that are all borrowed from Thomas Aquinas’ own theories. Aquinas is also known for using and defending the list of Seven Deadly Sins because he believed them to be considered “capital sins.”

The Seven Deadly Sins are pride, envy, gluttony (desire for food), lust, anger, greed, and sloth (laziness, physical or spiritual).

Stephen reflects on his violation of all of the seven sins: “He had sinned mortally not once but many times and he knew that, while he stood in danger of eternal damnation for the first sin alone, by every succeeding sin he multiplied his guilt and his punishment. His days and works and thoughts could make no atonement for him, the fountains of sanctifying grace having ceased to refresh his soul” (55). Stephen is fully aware that he has sinned and continues to sin. He also is aware of the consequences that come with sinning, and he does not seem to be deterred by them. This is evidence that Stephen is sinning consciously and has not yet reached the point where he feels any guilt for his actions.
Specific examples of Stephen’s violation of the Seven Deadly Sins

Stephen commits all of the Seven Deadly Sins as he goes through his eventful transition into adulthood. There are specific mentions to all of these sins in chapter three. At the beginning of the chapter, Stephen is daydreaming of a December feast where “he hoped there would be stew for dinner, turnips and carrots and bruised potatoes and fat mutton pieces to be ladled out in thick peppered flour-fattened sauce. Stuff it into you, his belly counselled him” (54). Stephen is committing the sin of gluttony by thinking about the excess amount of food he wants to eat at the dinner. Stephen seeks and dreams of worldly pleasure from the food he wishes to eat. His stomach is described as encouraging this gorging of food to exemplify how he is so wrapped up in the sinning that his whole body craves it. As seen in chapter two, Stephen continues to commit the sin of lust when he imagines the late night wandering around whore houses that he will embark on: “He would follow a devious course up and down the streets… He would pass [the whores] calmly waiting for a sudden movement of his own will or a sudden call to his sin-loving soul from their soft perfumed flesh... His senses [were] stultified only by his desire” (55). Stephen’s lust for the pleasures he feels when he is with prostitutes highlights the intense desires he now feels as he matures into adulthood. He cannot stay away from the prostitutes and feels strongly motivated to see them most nights. Joyce’s use of the word “stultified” to describe how Stephen’s senses are impaired also proves how the sin has corrupted Stephen significantly and nothing can stop him from continuing to commit it.
Stephen experiences spiritual sloth as he contemplates his religious beliefs alongside his sins. He realizes his “devotion [to God] had gone by the board. What did it avail to pray when he knew that his soul lusted after its own destruction?” (55). Stephen is fully aware that he has been sinning. At this point in the novel he is giving up any devotion to God and religion in favor of these seven sins. Stephen feels that it is acceptable to keep sinning because his own soul is urging him to. Stephen’s sin of sloth, or laziness, is evident in how quickly he gives up his faith. He makes no effort (at this point in the novel) to change his sinning habits or ask for forgiveness from God. Stephen continues questioning his faith in God and describes himself feeling “a certain pride, a certain awe, [withholding] him from offering to God even one prayer at night, though he knew it was in God’s power to take away his life while he slept” (55). Stephen commits the sin of pride as he feels himself above the act of praying to God even though he knows he should be. The pride he feels in himself and his own sins stop him from taking any action to repent and be forgiven for them. Stephen’s pride also stops him from feeling any guilt for his sins as he finds pleasure in sinning against the church. His sloth and pride lead him farther away from his religious beliefs and his faith in God and the church. Stephen then realizes that his initial sin of lust was the trigger that sent him down the path of committing all of the Seven Deadly Sins. Stephen explains how he feels “[covetous] in using money for the purchase of unlawful pleasures” (57). Stephen violates the sin of greed with his strong desire for money. He wishes to use this money for purchasing more pleasure for his sinful activities. His strong desire for money mirrors his powerful desire for pleasure; he feels greedy for both.
In his further exploration of the cause of his sinning, Stephen notices his sin of anger has also stemmed from his initial sin of lust: “the dull glowering anger amid which he brooded upon his longing” (57). Stephen is angry about the longing and lusting he feels within himself during this stage in his life. The anger festers and grows as his sinning continues because his sinning (aka lusting and longing) feeds into his anger with himself. Stephen feels angry about these urges for pleasure because he is starting to question his enjoyment of sinning against the church. Finally, Stephen commits the sin of envy as he is walking home in the town square: “the light laughter of a girl reached his burning ear. The frail gay sound smote (hit) his heart more strongly than a trumpet blast… Shame rose from his smitten heart and flooded his whole being. The image of Emma appeared before him, and under her eyes the flood of shame rushed forth” (61). Stephen feels envious of the little girl he hears laughing because she is innocent and he is not. Hearing the laugh takes him back to an innocent time in his life with the girl Emma. However, he feels deep shame for all for all of the sinning he has committed as he wonders what Emma would think of him if she knew what he’s done. He is envious of this unknown child as she does not feel any of these complex emotions that lead Stephen to sin and to feel shameful. He wishes he could go back to a time of innocence like the laughing girl.
Methods that Stephen uses to try to avoid guilt and/or punishment

After Father’s sermon, he requested that the boys pray to repent for their sins: “He calls you to Him. You are His. He made you out of nothing. He loved you as only a God can love. His arms are open to receive you even though you have sinned against Him. Come to Him, poor sinner, poor vain and erring sinner. Now is the acceptable time.” (Joyce 124).

Because of the sins Stephen had committed in the previous chapter, he now experiences an immense amount of guilt and shame. After he attends the Sermon about the monstrosities that occur in Hell, Stephen feels even more guilty for the sexual encounters he had had with the prostitute--for he believes that he will be sent to Hell. So, his first instinct is to pray. Through his prayers and confession, Stephen attempts to avoid the guilt of his past sins and the punishment of hell and damnation.
Later on that night, Stephen wakes up from a hellish nightmare: “He flung the blankets from him madly to free his face and neck. That was his hell. God had allowed him to see the hell reserved for his sins: stinking, bestial, malignant, a hell of lecherous goatish fiends. For him! For him!” (Joyce 127). Stephen had seen his hell and decided that he needed to repent in order to escape the punishments that hell had to offer.

After his dreadful nightmare, he decides to find a confessional and confesses his sins to the priest. He confesses to his sexual relations and asks for forgiveness—which he later receives. Stephen's methods of prayer and confession to avoid guilt and punishment had cleansed his soul and had allowed him to find a new respect for his religion to avoid being sent to hell in the afterlife.
The Function of Chapter 3 in Joyce’s Chiasmic Structure

Chapter 3 contributes to Joyce’s chiasmic structure because it is the middle chapter/center of the novel and it represents a turning point in the book, much like a reflection. For most of the first two chapters of the novel, Stephen is portrayed as an innocent and pure character. However, in the end of the second chapter and the beginning of the third chapter, Stephen begins to commit sins and his morality declines. In the end of the third chapter, Stephen confesses to his sins and redeems his innocence. This shift from innocence to immorality and back to innocence reflects the mirror image that Joyce’s chiasmus provides in the novel.

“Another life! A life of grace and virtue and happiness! It was true. It was not a dream from which he would wake. The past was past” (118).
Questions???

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