

# Literature and Commitment: The Formalist Model in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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## Abstract

*James Joyce had always been described by Marxist critics as an apolitical writer. These critics claim that Joyce's artworks express an absolute detachment from the socio-political issues of his time. The present paper, however, operates a redefinition of the issue of commitment in literature, and presents a critical re-reading of his autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) by relying on Roland Barthes's aesthetic theory illustrated in *Writing Degree Zero* (1953). In re-reading *A Portrait* through Barthes' aesthetic approach, Joyce's text demonstrates commitment through form opposing Sartre's Marxist model based on meaning.*

**Keywords:** *James Joyce, a portrait of the artist as a young man, roland barthes, jean-paul sartre, commitment, the formalist model.*

## النموذج الشكلي في صورة الفنان في شبابه لجيمس تغيير مفهوم الالتزام السياسي

### ملخص

لطالما وصف النقاد الماركسيون جيمس جويس بأنه كاتب غير سياسي. ويعتقد هؤلاء أن أعمال جويس الفنية تعبر عن انفصال تام عن القضايا الاجتماعية والسياسية الرائدة في وقته. لذا يقدم هذا البحث قراءة نقدية لصورة الفنان في شبابه (1916) اعتماداً على النظرية الجمالية لرولان بارت الموضحة في درجة الصفر في الكتابة (1953). وبالتالي، فإن فكرة الالتزام 'الشكلي' لبارت تعتبر نموذجاً آخر للالتزام السياسي، متميزاً عن نموذج جان بول سارتر لأنه يحدد الالتزام السياسي على مستوى الشكل لا المحتوى وعليه فإن تصنيف جويس ككاتب غير سياسي مهمت بجماليات اللغة على حساب المحتوى يعتبر تهميشاً للمواضيع السياسية والاجتماعية التي تطرق إليها في نصوصه.

**الكلمات المفاتيح:** جيمس جويس، صورة الفنان في شبابه، جان بول سارتر، التزام، رولاند بارت، نموذج الشكلي.

## Littérature et engagement: le modèle formaliste dans *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune homme* de James Joyce

### Résumé

*James Joyce a toujours été considéré par les critiques littéraires marxistes comme étant un écrivain apolitique. Ces critiques affirment que ses œuvres expriment un détachement absolu des problèmes sociopolitiques de son époque. Cet article propose une analyse de *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune homme* (1916,) en nous appuyant sur la théorie esthétique de Roland Barthes, développée dans *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953). La recherche montre que le texte *Portrait de l'artiste en jeune homme* de Joyce est engagé à travers sa forme, mais aussi, il est en opposition avec le modèle marxiste de Sartre qui est basé sur le sens.*

**Mots-clés:** *James Joyce, portrait de l'artiste en jeune homme, Jean-Paul Sartre, engagement, Roland Barthes, modèle formaliste.*

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“I shall say that a little formalism turns one away from history, but that a lot brings one back to it.” Barthes, *Mythologies*, 111.

### Introduction:

The Hungarian-born, Marxist critic Georg Lukàcs offers an aesthetic reflection on the modernist doxa<sup>(1)</sup> which condemns its ideological ‘mystification’, its aesthetic primacy of style and form, its ‘failure’ to discover the essence of the individual, and its ‘reified and alienated’ conception of the world or *weltanschauung*<sup>(2)</sup>. The subject in the realist literature, Lukàcs argues, is defined as a *Zoon politikon*<sup>(3)</sup> or a social animal, whereas the modernist subject is given an ahistorical appearance. The modernist subject, Lukàcs adds: “is thrown-into-the-world: meaninglessly, unfathomably. He does not develop through contact with the world; he neither forms nor is formed by it”<sup>(4)</sup>. As an anti-modernist, Lukàcs states that the role of the artist is to “penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society”<sup>(5)</sup>. Lukàcs describes avant-garde writers, such as James Joyce as apolitical and disinterested in the real dynamics that bind their subjects’ experiences to the underlying social forces which create them.

Jean-Paul Sartre, the French Marxist writer, literary critic and philosopher, shares Lukàcs’ criticism of the modernist novel and writer as being respectively formalist and alienated, and goes so far to exclude poetry from the realm of politically committed writing. Sartre claims that modernist novels, such as Joyce’s, cannot be committed because they suggest myth as an alternative to history and, consequently, prevent the immediacy of historical events and sever the communicative relationship between the author and his readers. Furthermore, Sartre considers modernist writers to have no form of writing and no political allegiance since they seem to be made uneasy with both Western Capitalism and Soviet Communism. Ultimately, with modernist literature, Sartre declares: “We have fallen outside history and are speaking in the desert”<sup>(6)</sup>.

In this paper we argue that Lukàcs’ and Sartre’s respective positions do not account of the historicity of the literary forms used by avant-garde authors and their expressive functions in modernist texts. The historicity of literary forms is developed by the French critic Roland Barthes in his *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), a study which is contemporaneous with the Second World War Lukàcsian and Sartrean debates over the issue of commitment in literature. In his book, Barthes revises the Marxist definition of political commitment and questions the assumption that formalist and aesthetic writing leads to apoliticism by arguing that literary forms and aesthetic devices have their own content, and therefore, express the writer’s commitment.

Hence, the objective of this article is to shed light on the historicism of the aesthetic forms used in Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and demonstrate that those forms, such as symbols and myths, do not depoliticize writing, but re-insert it within the frames of politics and history. In other words, this paper foregrounds Joyce’s formalist model of commitment and shows its historical and political implications in the Irish context which saw its publication.

In *What is Literature?* (1948) Sartre considers literature in utilitarian terms and defines prose as committed in essence because the writer deals with meanings<sup>(7)</sup>. Regardless of the intentions of the writer, the artwork, Sartre argues, is committed to human freedom because words are instruments having certain functions<sup>(8)</sup>. In dealing with the meaning of words, literature appeals to human freedom by disclosing the world to the readers, thus involving change<sup>(9)</sup>. Change requires responsibility from the reader to choose between acting according to the message conveyed by the writer, or persisting to act in the same way they always have been, but in total knowledge of their acts’ consequences<sup>(10)</sup>.

For Sartre, prose is in essence politically committed because the writer draws a “pact of generosity” with his readers by choosing to speak to them directly as free agents. The writer should commit himself to the task of naming and changing because “words are actions”<sup>(11)</sup>:

“To speak is to act; anything which one names is no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence”<sup>(12)</sup>. Indeed, aesthetic forms are renounced in favor of political content in that politics is more important than aesthetics because the latter blurs the meaning and creates confusion and bias. Sartre insists on the transparency of language which expresses direct and clear meanings in order to help readers identify the writer’s message and respond to his call<sup>(13)</sup>. In short, Sartre favors utilitarian over ornamental language and defines literature as committed prose.

In publishing *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes questions Sartre’s theory of literature’s obligation to be socially committed. He does not claim that literature should exist outside the historical, social and ethical realm, yet he repudiates the idea of confining literature to the social or ethical context. He opposes Sartre who puts literature at the service of a social group instead of being a matter of conscience, and explains that literature is more complex than Sartre conceived it to be. Whilst Sartre accepts the dualism of language and style and asserts that style is the most capable means of expressing the subject, Barthes rejects this dualism and suggests a triad of language, style and writing<sup>(14)</sup>. Unlike Sartre who defines style as the servant of content, Barthes affirms that it is a personal process which is indifferent to society. It is, for him, situated outside art and outside the pact that relates the writer to the reader.

According to Barthes, language and style are objects which cannot express commitment while writing is a function<sup>(15)</sup>. It occupies a middle ground between the historical and personal, and is therefore, the writer’s “zone of freedom”. Barthes defines “writing” as: “an ambiguous reality: on the one hand, it unquestionably arises from a confrontation of the writer with the society of his time, on the other hand, from this social finality, it refers the writer back, by a sort of tragic reversal, to the sources, that is to say, the instruments of creation”<sup>(16)</sup>. Writing is the locus of commitment since it owes its existence to “the writer’s consideration of the social use which he has chosen for his form and his commitment to his choice”<sup>(17)</sup>. It is the area of freedom of the writer because it assembles the general choice of tone, mood, purpose, delivery and naturalness of expression. This third dimension of form, thus, reveals the writer as an independent subject of writing and establishes his formal identity.

The first part of the article qualifies the view which sees Sartre’s model of commitment as the only approach of articulating commitment. It considers Joyce’s ‘writing’ through the study of tone and mood in order to reveal that commitment is also fulfilled through the form of language, not only through the ideas that Joyce transmits in his fiction. The second part deals with the relationship between Joyce and his readers, and discusses Sartre’s view that the relationship between writers and readers is based on direct communication and transparent language. This part shows that aesthetic language and forms communicate their own content in an indirect way. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that literary forms, such as myths and symbols, are effective forms of expressing commitment.

### **1- Writing as the Locus of Commitment**

At the outset, it is of great importance to give a definition of tone and mood in order to foreground the discussion of Joyce’s commitment in *A Portrait*. Tone is the attitude the writer adopts to approach the theme of his/her fiction. It decides how the readers read a literary work and how they should feel about it. In addition, tone confers voice to the characters and sheds light on their personalities and temperament so that readers better understand the characters’ opinions<sup>(18)</sup>. As for mood, it is what the reader feels while reading the story. It is not the readers’ emotions but the atmosphere the author provides for a scene<sup>(19)</sup>. It is significant to trace the pace of mood throughout fiction because it increases in intensity by the end of the story. Tone and mood are related to each other as they bind the writer to his audience, constructing a distinct kind of relationship between authors and readers apart from the “pact of generosity” established by Sartre.

Investigating tone and mood in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is an attempt to unravel both Joyce’s point of view concerning the Irish complex political context and his

purpose in writing his autobiography. As the narrative unfolds, Joyce is interested in Stephen's emotional and intellectual development and reveals the changes that his personality has undergone due to the major events that he witnessed in his family and school. Stephen Dedalus' character develops from the beginning to the end of the novel, and his reactions to authorities transform according to the degree of maturity he reaches. The end of *A Portrait* shows Stephen strong-minded and determined to utter the most rebellious declaration in his life.

The first chapter of *A Portrait* shows Stephen as an alienated individual experiencing multiple confrontations with authorities attempting to control him. Through his reactions, we notice that Stephen has a strong inclination to rebellion. In fact, his rebellious mind-set helps him resist the authorities which seek to make him conform to their laws and practices. In what follows, focus will be put on passages that are rebellious in tone in order to portray the progress of Stephen Dedalus towards maturity.

The first authorities Stephen confronts in his life are those of his father, mother, and aunt Dante. While his mother is a nice person, his aunt Dante is cold, strict, and unfriendly. She is rigid and brutal and his relationship with her is based on obedience, terror, and passive insolence. However, the father's authority was initially accepted by Stephen. This chapter is written in a child language to convey Stephen's childhood thoughts and memories. One of these memories is associated with his father who told him a fairy tale:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby His father told him that story<sup>(20)</sup>.

The story told by Mr Dedalus symbolizes his peaceful representation of life in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. He says the moocow 'met a nicens little boy', meaning that Ireland and the church are positively marshaled to help Stephen<sup>(21)</sup>. The latter passively believes what his compassionate father tells him because he accepts paternal authority. However, Stephen is threatened by his aunt Dante and he has to assume a self-protective attitude against her. As a child he plans to marry a Protestant girl, Eileen, and is menaced by his aunt to pull out his eyes if he does not apologize:

He hid under the table. His mother said:

-O Stephen will apologize

Dante said:

-O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes.

Pull out his eyes

Apologize

Pull out his eyes<sup>(22)</sup>

The above passage describes Stephen's reaction to authorities. The tone is rebellious since Stephen hides under the table in an act of unconscious defiance and refusal to apologize. Stephen has to keep himself away from the symbols of authority, mother, auntie and Church which require apology or punishment by the eagle. In this scene, Stephen tries to escape the 'nets' which he will recognize later when he constructs his objectives and the policy that he will willfully assume: 'silence exile and cunning'<sup>(23)</sup>. The tone provides us with information about Stephen's unconsciousness which determines his rebellious reaction to authority. It also defines the mood of the reader who shares the emotions of terror and fear with Stephen while trying to evade the demands of paternity, nation and language. Mood, indeed, helps to construct the relationship between the author and the reader because by sharing the same sensations and feelings with the protagonist, the reader easily reacts to the novel's demands made by the author.

When Stephen is unfairly punished at school, his disappointment reaches its peak and he feels that his faith in the peaceful image his father gave him is roughly smashed up. At this stage, young Stephen has not yet realized that life in Ireland was not as quiet as his father told him. His first conscious rebellious attitude is exhibited when he faces rector Conmee to

protest against his unfair sentence, a brave action that differentiates him from his mates. In defying the rector, Stephen plays the role of a martyr for the sake of justice.

Intellectually, Stephen wants to rebel in order to be independent, but psychologically he is overcome by fear of punishment: "God had promised to forgive him if he was sorry. He was sorry Sorry! Sorry! O sorry!"<sup>(24)</sup>. The tone in this passage shows Stephen's anxiety and fear of sentence, two emotions that hold him back from rebellion. However, Joyce's conscious change in prose style makes it clear that this immaturity would not last long as Stephen is growing up and elaborating his ideas and feelings towards consistent aims to challenge the authorities that thwart his progress towards freedom. In fact, his fear of the authority of the Church is a transitory state of mind, and would soon be substituted by a stronger stand of a more mature character.

In his process towards maturity, Stephen makes wrong judgment but these are inevitable steps towards maturity. At the end he achieves a considerable degree of freedom from what he calls the 'nets'. He is capable to distinguish and identify the 'nets' over which he must fly to obtain independence: "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 flight by those nets"<sup>(25)</sup>. The tone of this political statement reveals Stephen more rebellious than ever as he is confident and mature enough to realize the 'nets' that prevent him from achieving his goal. The reader is put in the picture that Stephen has made up his mind to revolt against the authorities which restraint his freedom and the Irish freedom as well. In his last conversation with his friend Cranly, Stephen makes his wishes, fears and objectives obvious. He utters, ultimately, the strongest and most developed announcement in the entire novel:

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life for art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use - silence exile and cunning<sup>(26)</sup>.

Stephen chooses 'silence, exile, and cunning' to counter language, nationality, and religion. Exile from Ireland was primarily to evade the 'nets' which, he thinks, were going to put an end to his artistic ambitions. The passage's tone is strong and decisive as Stephen is determined not to serve home, fatherland and church. This decision is a result of various states of mind such as fear, hesitation and reflection which Stephen has already undergone.

As has been shown, 'writing', the third dimension of form, reveals Joyce as an independent subject and establishes his formal identity thanks to the choice he makes at the level of tone and mood. He reveals his ability to choose and impose his attitude towards the identity of the Irish artist in the modern time. Choice involves commitment and Joyce demonstrates that he is able to voice his sense of freedom and express his commitment via 'writing'. However, in the Sartrean model of commitment, the writer is unable to choose and is, therefore, not free. Sartre falls in a contradiction because his model is based on freedom of choice while at the same time the writer finds himself confined within a writing style that engages no choice.

## 2-Aesthetic Forms and Commitment

In What is Literature? Sartre writes:

Reading is a pact of generosity between the author and the reader. Each one trusts the other; each one counts on the other, demands of the other as much as he demands of himself. There is then established going-and-coming; when I read, I make demands; if my demands are met, what I am then reading provokes me to demand more of the author, which means to demand of the author that he demand more of me. And, vice versa, the author's demand is that I carry my demands to the highest pitch<sup>(27)</sup>.

In the above quote, Sartre defines the relationship that exists between authors and readers as being communicative. He confines commitment in the writer's call upon the freedom of readers to respond to his/her call in order to achieve change and evolution in society. However, Barthes declares that "writing is in no way an instrument of communication"<sup>(28)</sup>. He

foregrounds a challenging view to Sartre's conception of committed literature as he suggests a formalist approach to express commitment.

According to Sartre literature is a utilitarian institution because it is used to express the writer's political commitment. Language is used to "designate, demonstrate, order, refuse, interpolate, beg, insult, persuade, insinuate"<sup>(29)</sup>. However, Barthes' conception of literature is ornamental and instrumental in that form does not serve content, but communicates its own content. Modernity has brought forth a plethora of modes of writing which have led to the emergence of new profiles of writers:

There begins now to grow up an image of the writer as a craftsman who shuts himself away in some legendary place, like a workman operating at home, and who roughs out, cuts, polishes and sets his form exactly as a jeweler extracts art from his material, devoting to his work regular hours of solitary effort<sup>(30)</sup>.

The modernist author is more like a craftsman than as a writer who simply reflects reality throughout his writing. Barthes uses the aesthetic material to express political commitment because commitment is transmitted beyond any message or content. Accordingly, aesthetic forms do not lead to a radical separation with the sociopolitical context as has been claimed by Marxist critics. On the contrary, they result in a distinct type of commitment which is aesthetic in form and political in content. This Barthesian model contradicts the Sartrean one, which conveys commitment through direct messages communicated through the medium of transparent language. Myth and symbols, other elements of fiction, reveal commitment through aesthetic forms. The two elements oppose the claim that aesthetic techniques alienate the author and detach him/her from the socio-political context.

In his 1923 review "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", T.S Eliot describes the use of myth in fiction as performed by Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922), the so called 'mythical method', as: "A continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity"<sup>(31)</sup>. Joyce's use of myth in *Ulysses*, Eliot explains, helps in creating an oblique network of intercultural connections between past and present, since it is: "A way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history"<sup>(32)</sup>. Eliot observes that myth provides cultural order to the crisis of history and to the chaotic world of modernity which is marked by the separation of the traditional and the modern. Since then, the modernist return to myth has often been read as an escape from history, and a form of alienation; however, in *Mythologies*, Barthes uses the concept of semiology developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and emphasizes that myth is a further sign<sup>(33)</sup>. According to Barthes, there are always communicative objectives in myth because it grasps the relationship between language and power and contributes in creating an ideology. As an aesthetic form, myth does not depoliticize the text as much as it politicizes it. Therefore, myth as a narrative method expresses commitment.

*A Portrait* starts with an epigraph from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*: "Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes"<sup>(34)</sup>, meaning, "And he applies his mind to unknown arts" and ends with invoking the 'old father, old artificer'<sup>(35)</sup>. The epigraph puts the whole novel within the frames of mythology; it is read and understood in the light of the objectives and the possible connotations that the myth adds. The intertextual nature of the epigraph enriches the temporal and spatial characteristic of *A Portrait*, which in turn contributes to the universal aspect of human experience in the course of time inattentive to differences in setting. Myth as introduced by the epigraph is an alternative to history because it is an historical artifact which fulfills aesthetic and ideological functions in the text. In like manner, Joyce's appropriateness of myth in *A Portrait* is directly linked to his need to create an innovative method to express his opinions about politics, religion and society.

In *A Portrait*, mythology is personified through Joyce's protagonist's name "Daedalus", the Greek artificer. Myth in this novel is displaced to connect the past with the present and assert the artistic identity of Stephen. It also provides a timeless dimension to the narrative which puts the work outside the limits of any historical record. At the same time, it creates an

alternative history, tackled in an indirect way. Put differently, the mythical form of narration generates a quasi like legendary, past history rather than immediate and actual history. For example, giving the name of the Greek artificer to his protagonist endows him with power to change his life from a bullied pupil at school, and an alienated adolescent to a mature young man aware of the necessity of rebelling against authorities to be a creative artist who deserves the name he bears. Through his mythical surrogates, Stephen and by extension Joyce expresses a rebellious attitude towards what he believed was acting against his will of becoming an artist.

The paradoxical use of myth in Joyce's autobiographical novel detaches the artwork from immediate history and its explicit ideological implications. Myth gives a stable appearance as opposed to the fluctuation of the immediate history. Indeed, it offers indirect insights difficult to decipher by simple readers. Unlike the transparent language which Sartre employs, myth incites readers to meditate on its connotations in order to understand its relevance to the context. The mytho-historical approach that Joyce adopts reflects history via myth. Hence, the potency of myth becomes a vehicle for ideological functions of history.

The conflict between Stephen, the protagonist, and his family refers to the conflict between the free-thinking artist and the narrow-minded mass. The artist's anti-capitalist and anti-colonial attitude is apparent through the perspective of the traditional myth. Daedalus' struggle to free himself and his son Icarus from imprisonment in his own creation refers to Stephen's fighting against the external forces that restraint his freedom of choice<sup>(36)</sup>. Therefore, reading *A Portrait* via myth demonstrates the artwork as a means to create a new world in a radical way.

Joyce's use of myth achieves both aesthetic and historical functions. Acting against the explicit political tendency of realist artworks, Joyce adopts an antagonistic interest in the aesthetic component of art. As an opponent of literary conventions, Joyce aims to innovate literary writing through creating distinct narrative methods and experimenting with the language and its forms. His use of myth has aesthetic implications as the mythological acts against the realist tendency of nineteenth century writers. Myth is, therefore, a poetic strategy which serves as a method to re-establish social agency in the art text. Accordingly, the process of the reconstruction of social agents, such as Stephen in *A Portrait*, involves authors in the project of social change.

The re-appropriation of myth in the modern context refers not only to past history, but also to the present condition, and future actions as well. Therefore, Joyce's recourse to myth helps him sever his artwork from the immediacy of history while inscribing it in a legendry like history as a strategy to express political content and perspectives which convey his attitude towards the authorities of state and church as well as his reactions to the injustices that prevent him from achieving his aim of becoming an artist. The myths of the artificer and the martyr strongly foster in the narrative the themes of sacrifice, rebellion and martyrdom for the sake of freedom.

Dublin is an important constituent of *A Portrait* because it tells Stephen's dissatisfaction with Ireland's political atmosphere bursting with ideological conflicts and tensions between various religious and political groups, portrayed in the text via the arguments between Mr. Casey and Aunt Dante. The entire novel reflects Stephen's unhappiness and resentment at the failure of Irish independence which prevents him from developing into an independent artist. Stephen is anxious because he thinks that, as most Irish, Parnell was the only chance for Ireland to obtain home Rule, and that he was betrayed by the moralists. Stephen also believes that Dublin, unlike most Cosmopolitan cities of Europe, is in absolute state of stagnation and is unable to modernize because of its population's inaction and paralysis.

James Joyce communicates the Irish political crisis and social stagnation through symbols, loaded with ideological and historical meanings, in order to raise the reader's awareness of the necessity to change. Symbols are not only ornamental but constitute a distinct language

that articulates political discourse in an indirect but deeply significant way. They are historical aesthetic materials because they are cognitive and full of meanings which require mediation.

In Joyce's text, color symbolism plays a substantial role in the text. For example, the colors of aunt Dante's two brushes, which are aesthetic materials, have historical and political connotations. Stephen associates them to two historical figures: Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt: "Dante had two brushes in her press. The brush with the maroon velvet back was for Michael Davitt and the brush with the green velvet back was for Parnell"<sup>(37)</sup>. Davitt and Parnell contributed in the Irish struggle for independence. Michael Davitt was a member of the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood (IRB) and served some time in prison because he smuggled arms. Parnell was a political man whose major achievement was the alliance of many nationalist groups in Ireland. After his sexual scandal with the wife of an MP, the Catholic Church withdrew its support to him and denounced him as an 'adulterer'.

Aunt Dante tore the green velvet off her hair and told young Stephen that Parnell was a bad man. Stephen is confused and does not know which side to take. The aesthetic material used by Joyce is not absolutely visual or subjective; on the contrary, it is cognitive in character as it leads the reader to meditate on the relationship between symbols and their significance in Irish society. Though color is a symbol that does not come up obviously in the rest of the text, it clearly highlights an ideological conflict, which is very important for Stephen as a child because of his limited understanding of politics. Therefore, colors are a pertinent tool to discuss and reflect upon political issues; such as the ones which stormed the Irish struggle for independence at the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Another important symbol in the novel is birds and the notion of flight which signify exile and freedom. The flight symbol occurs first at the Clongows College when Stephen's feelings are explained by "A heavy bird flying low through the grey light"<sup>(38)</sup>. The symbols of birds and flight tells much about Stephen's denunciation of the socio-political atmosphere prevailing over the colonized Ireland, and it seems that exile is a solution for Stephen to express his refusal of political and intellectual impasse. In other terms, Stephen leaves Ireland because he firmly rejects the authority of church and state and expresses his anger about it. He decides to develop himself into an artist in order to be able to condemn the atrocities of British colonialism and the extremism of the Catholic Church.

When Stephen marches through Dublin's streets and finds himself at the sea: "he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air"<sup>(39)</sup>. Stephen fulfills his objective in life, and sees his "soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and body"<sup>(40)</sup>. He experiences "an instant of wild flight"<sup>(41)</sup> which "delivered him"<sup>(42)</sup> free from the burden of his past. At the end of the novel, he cries out to Daedalus, his "old father, old artificer",<sup>(43)</sup> and prepares for his own flight to artistic autonomy. The notion of flight stands for Stephen's commitment to freedom. As aesthetic devices, symbols do not depoliticize the narrative as most Marxist critics claim; on the contrary, they better incarnate the socio-political situation because they provide the novel with utilitarian and ornamental elements.

## Conclusion

As shown above, re-reading James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by relying on Roland Barthes' aesthetic theory expressed in *Writing Degree Zero* allows us to demonstrate that the experimentation with the language does not lead Joyce to alienation and his text to disinterestedness in politics. On the contrary, the narrative forms and aesthetic devices that Joyce uses in *A Portrait* communicate a socio-political content. Through mood and tone, Joyce displays his protagonist's rebellious attitude towards the underlying social, religious and political forces controlling Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, Joyce manipulates the readers' mood and succeeds to create a distinct type of relationship between the writer and his audience founded on indirect communication. This type of communication achieved through aesthetic forms opposes Sartre's established 'pact of



generosity' based on direct ideological messages transmitted via the medium of a transparent language devoid of literariness.

The article demonstrates that Sartre's model of writing is not the only one able to express commitment. Though language is aesthetic and content is conveyed metaphorically through forms such as myths and symbols, the novel reflects the Irish socio-political context and expresses Joyce's commitment to political, intellectual and religious freedom. In other words, Joyce does not only communicate his opinions about the authorities controlling Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century, but structures the whole autobiographical novel within the frames of artistic maturity which provides him with the ability to assume his commitment freely. The findings of this study allow us also to succeed a political analysis of modernist novels and to consider a 'formalist' model of commitment of modernist authors completely distinct from the Marxist model.

#### Notes and references:

- 1- "Doxa": In classical rhetoric, the Greek term doxa refers to the domain of opinion, belief or probable knowledge in contrast to episteme, the domain of certainty or true knowledge. In Martin and Ringham's *Key Terms in Semiotics* (2006), doxa is defined as "public opinion, majority prejudice, middle-class consensus. It is linked to the concepts of doxology, to everything that is seemingly self-evident in terms of opinion, or conventional practice and habit."
- 2- "Weltanschauung" is a German word that is often translated as 'worldview' or 'world outlook'. A "Weltanschauung" is a comprehensive conception or theory of the world and the place of humanity within it. It is an intellectual construct that provides both a unified method of analysis for and a set of solutions to the problems of existence. The concept of "Weltanschauung" has played an important role in the development of psychoanalysis, critical theory, and nineteenth and twentieth century hermeneutics. Thomson Gale (2008), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*: [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com).
- 3- "Zoon politikon" is Aristotle's quote meaning "man is a political animal", man becomes man among others, living in a society ruled by laws and traditions. See Herbert Gintis, Carel Van Schaik, and Christopher Boehm, "The Evolutionary Origins of Human Political Systems" in *Current Anthropology*, Chicago, Vol. 56, N° 3, June 2015.
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- 34-** Joyce, 2012, p 160.
- 35-** Ibid, 346.
- 36-** Tudor Balinisteanu, *Violence, Narrative and Myth and Yeats: Subjective Identity and Anarcho-Syndicalist Traditions* (2013), Palgrave MacMillan, England, p 96.
- 37-** Joyce, 2012, p 161.
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- 40-** Ibid.
- 41-** Ibid, 283.
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- 43-** Ibid, 346.