

# Stream of Consciousness in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce

In "A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," James Joyce extensively uses the *stream of consciousness* technique, a stylistic form in which written prose seeks to represent the characters' stream of inner thoughts and perceptions rather than render these characters from an objective, external perspective. This technique is used in this novel mostly during the opening sections and in Chapter 5, particularly to analyze the **mind of Stephen**, the protagonist of this novel. However, it has also importance in other respects. In the opening section, the use of stream of consciousness is seen. Wells, a fellow, once asked Stephen whether Stephen

kisses his mother before going to the bed. Stephen answered, "Yes". The other fellows laughed and Stephen blushed and said, "I do not. They all laughed again. Stephen tried to laugh with them. He felt his whole body hot and confused in a moment. What was the right answer to the question . . . Was it right to kiss his mother or wrong to kiss his mother? What did that mean, to kiss? ...Why did people do that sort of things?"

This is perfectly realistic as such questions do normally arise in the minds of children. Joyce here uses this technique in order to analyze the mind child Stephen.

Then we also find another example of stream of consciousness technique at the time of Stephen's illness. This shows how can be the feelings of a sick child. He was sick and thought of his own death. He

takes pleasure in his own sad thoughts. He thought “He might die before his mother came. Then he would have a dead mass in the chapel like the way the fellows had told him it was when Little had died. All the fellows would be at the mass, dressed in black, all with sad faces.. . there would be tall yellow candles on the altar . . . and he would be buried in the little graveyard.” A child’s inner feeling is represented here through stream of consciousness. Joyce presents the feelings of a child in a manner a child generally feels and thinks. Joyce says, “He wanted to cry quietly but not for himself: for the words, so beautiful and sad, like music. The bell! The bell! Farewell! O farewell!”

This technique reveals the realistic picture of the feelings of a child when he thinks about his death.



During the conversation between Stephen and Athy, the latter has told Stephen a riddle. Athy tells that **"There is another way but I won't tell you what it is."**

Stephen does not respond but retreats into his thoughts: **"Why did he not tell it? His father, who kept the racehorses, must be a magistrate too like Saurin's father and Nasty Roche's father. He thought of his own father, of how he sang songs while his other played and of how he always gave him a shilling when he asked for sixpence and he felt sorry for him that he was not a magistrate like the other boys' fathers. Then why was he sent to that place with them?"** It helps to see the psychological life of Stephen.

Joyce shows much subtly of insight into the complex mind of the adolescent Stephen. For instance in chapter II, Section

IV, we come across the following examples of this technique.

Stephen was listening a story of his father, a repeated story of some “scattered and dead revelers” who were his father’s companion when he was young. Hearing these nostalgic stories, he sighed and “he recalled his own equivocal position in Belvedere, a free boy, a leader afraid of his own authority, proud and sensitive and suspicious, battling against the squalor of his life and against the riot of his mind.”

Stephen’s reactions to Father Arnol’s sermon in chapter 3, are also conveyed to us by stream of consciousness technique which successfully catches every twist and turn of Stephen’s long drawn out spiritual turmoil. It is the harness of the unrepentant heart that is first conveyed to us. “A cold lucid indifference reigned in his soul lusted

after its own destruction?”.

Stephan's agony on hearing Father Arnall's sermon is also described through this method. He came to realize the sinful state of his soul. He believed every word of the preacher was for him and he could understand the wrath of God aimed at him. He felt that it was God's turn and his doom is at hand. **“Every word of it was for him. Against his sin, foul and secret, the whole wrath of God was aimed. The preacher's knife had probed deeply into his disclosed conscience and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin. Yes, the preacher was right. God's turn had come.”**

In chapter 4, James uses this technique to analyze the mind of Stephen after he leaves the director who offers him the vocation of priesthood. The rejection of the priesthood is followed by his decision to



join the university. Several stream of thought run through his mind after leaving his father at a public house. The analysis of Stephen's mind does with his recognition of his true destiny which is to become an artist.

In the end of 5th chapter, the diary entries are a superb illustration of this technique. These entries contain random thoughts written as they came into Stephen's mind. For example: "Long talk with Cranly on the subject of my revolt. He had his grand manner on. I supple and suave. Attacked me on the score of love for one's mother. Tried to imagine his mother: cannot. Told me once, in a moment of thoughtlessness, his father was sixty-one when he was born. Can see him. Strong farmer type."