

SUBJECTIVITY IN STEPHEN DEDALUS, THE MAIN CHARACTER IN JAMES JOYCE'S *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*

Anisa Rahmatika Sari, and Mugijatna

Universitas Sebelas Maret

anisarsari@gmail.com, ykmugijatna@gmail.com

Abstract

Subjectivity is a philosophical concept of how one, as a subject, gains the sense of identity through the interaction with the external world. The theorization on the conception of subjectivity itself has ranged from the early modern thinkers to post-modern thinkers. This research's objectives are to describe the struggle of Stephen Dedalus, the main character in James Joyce's novel entitled A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man, to gain his identity as a form of subjectivity, and to describe how the model of subjectivity is reflected through the character of Stephen Dedalus. This research is a descriptive qualitative library research with philosophical approach using Descartes, Kant, Freud and Lacan theories. From the analysis, first, it is found out that Stephen Dedalus underwent a journey of figuring himself out through a series of events that profoundly shape his sense of identity. The involvement of many external factors like the field of art, religion, and nationality is important in constructing Stephen Dedalus' subjectivity. Secondly, by taking into account the theorization on the idea of subjectivity from the early modern philosophers such as Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, to the post-modern philosophers such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, it can be seen that Stephen Dedalus' stream of consciousness as the main tool in perceiving his journey of life embodies the early modern conception that subjectivity is grounded on one's independent consciousness.

Keywords: *subjectivity, modernity, philosophy*

Abstrak

Subjektivitas merupakan konsep filosofis tentang bagaimana seseorang sebagai subjek mendapatkan rasa identitas melalui interaksi dengan dunia luar. Teorisasi konsep subjektivitas itu sendiri mempunyai rentang mulai dari pemikir modern awal sampai pemikir pasca modern. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menggambarkan perjuangan Stephen Dedalus, karakter utama dalam novel yang ditulis oleh James Joyce yang berjudul A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man untuk mendapatkan identitasnya sebagai bentuk subjektivitas, dan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana model subjektivitas direfleksikan melalui karakter Stephen Dedalus. Penelitian ini merupakan kajian pustaka deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan filosofis dengan menggunakan teori Descartes, Kant, Freud dan Lacan. Dari hasil analisis, ditemukan bahwa pertama, Dedalus sedang dalam perjalanan pencarian jati dirinya melalui rangkaian kejadian yang secara mendalam membentuk rasa identitasnya. Adanya banyak faktor eksternal seperti bidang seni, agama, dan kebangsaan penting dalam membangun subjektivitas Stephen Dedalus. Kedua, dengan mempertimbangkan teorisasi pada konsep subjektivitas dari filosofis modern awal seperti Rene Descartes dan Immanuel Kant sampai ke filosofis pasca modern seperti Sigmund Freud dan Jacques Lacan, dapat dilihat bahwa arus kesadaran Stephen Dedalus sebagai alat utama dalam memandang perjalanan hidupnya membentuk konsepsi modern awal bahwa subjektivitas didasarkan pada kesadaran independen seseorang.

Kata kunci: *subjektivitas, modernitas, filosofi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Human nature has always been an interesting topic to explore either in the form of scientific study or literature. The exploration about human nature in various perspectives has already birthed many

beneficial discoveries and theories in order for human being to get a better understanding about himself/herself and the world around him/her. Often, the exploration about human nature is beautifully constructed in the form of story in literature. The representation of a character in literary text is often portrayed along with its complexities of human's personality (Aras, 2015). Just like a human being, the depth of a character's personality can reflect values that are quite vital to look at. The emphasis of the uniqueness in each character in literary text may refer to the concept of self.

The concern over the notion of selfhood itself has been something that goes around in the long discussion since the early modern era. Philosophers such as René Descartes, John Locke, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche all emphasize on the idea of human's rationality that later develops to the notion of individual liberation. The philosophy of human's liberation in relation to the perception of selfhood can also be traced from the writing of some modernist novelist. James Joyce through his novel entitled *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is one of the prime examples of the literary text that uses the journey of selfhood as the key of the story. The journey of Stephen Dedalus as the main character of the story exemplifies the philosophy of human liberation.

Gunes (2002) points out that in the attempt of Stephen Dedalus figuring himself out, the complexities of historical figures, social institutions, culture, religion, politics and the field of art and literature play a major role in constructing Stephen's identity. However, Stephen's characteristic shows a big tendency of individual liberty that stands against the constraint of societal values around him. Emmanuel (2010) contextualizes Joyce's interest in Nietzschean philosophy of the aesthetic of egoism portrayed through the character of Stephen Dedalus. El Genaidi (2012) specifies the struggle of Stephen Dedalus with Nietzsche's idealism of romantic freedom. Baspinar (2014) also explores in many aspects about the huge relation of Stephen Dedalus and Nietzschean philosophy that cover up how Stephen's aspiration of becoming a pagan artist is the model of human's autonomy and individual liberation.

From the conception of identity crisis and individual autonomy that are mainly derived from Nietzschean philosophy, it leads to the pattern of how the character of Stephen Dedalus undergoes the process of gaining his subjectivity. It has to be understood first that the root of the word 'subjectivity' derives from the word 'subject'. Subject in philosophical context is an entity in relation to the sense of self-identity in the way that it is always related to social and cultural entanglement (Mansfield, 2000, p.2).

The theorization on the notion of subjectivity itself has ranged from the early modern era to post-modern era of Western philosophy. The early modern thinkers such as René Descartes and Immanuel Kant emphasize that key of human's subjectivity is mainly based on the realm of consciousness. On the other hand, the post-modern thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan underlined that the way human perceive identity is heavily influenced by the unconscious part of the mind.

2. METHODS

This research belongs to descriptive qualitative library research. The descriptive technique is employed to describe phenomenon and to identify certain kind of issues in the form of description. Qualitative research mainly concerns with meaning and interpretation. As “qualitative is based upon the interpretation of the world according to concepts which are typically not given numerical values” (Stokes, 2013, p. 18), this research focuses on the interpretation of literary document through existence of words, phrases, and sentences. Library research uses text of literary work as the main data and other types of document as the supporting data.

The primary data of this research is taken from the novel of James Joyce’s novel entitled *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*. The secondary data are all supporting the primary data which are taken from books, articles, journals, critics, and other academic writing.

The researcher applies philosophical approach, particularly theories from Descartes, Kant, Freud and Lacan regarding the idea of subjectivity, in identifying and analyzing the data in accordance to the proposed research question. Those theories on subjectivity are used to clarify how Stephen Dedalus as the main character struggles to gain his identity that reflects the subjectivity in him.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1) Stephen Dedalus’ Struggle as a Form of Subjectivity

The journey of a protagonist in a story is often portrayed as a journey of figuring one’s self out. This formula of story is what being highlighted in James Joyce’s coming of age story entitled *A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man* through the character of his protagonist, Stephen Dedalus. The significance of one’s identity in relation to many conflicting external factors outside of one’s self as a subject is played through the journey of Stephen Dedalus’ youth. It has to be understood first that Stephen is placed as a subject whose construction of identity cannot be separated with the involvement of the complexity of social and political situations around him. In this context, Stephen’s interactions with many aspects including the subject of religion, politics, and artistic field become the base of the discussion about the development of his subjectivity.

Before going further to Stephen’s journey of figuring himself out, the meaning of his name is important to be understood. In relation to his journey to discover his true identity, the meaning of his name is significant as it shows the kind of person Stephen strives to be. Fagnoli writes, “in Christianity Stephen’s first name strikes as St. Stephen, the martyr who was stoned to death by a mob because he claimed that he saw God appear in the heavens” (Fagnoli, 1996, p.55). Meanwhile the meaning of Dedalus, as what Kamarzade (2014) writes, cited from Online Etymology Dictionary, Daedalus from

Greek mythology was the name of a skillful craftsman and artist. Deena El Genaidi writes, “during Stephen’s epiphany, Joyce calls on the myth of Daedalus, a myth closely connected to Stephen by name, and in this way he illustrates Stephen’s deep sense of Romanticism” (El Genaidi, 2012, p.59). Stephen’s future inclination of breaking free from the traditional constrain of religious and societal values equals Daedalus’ myth of making a way to escape the imprisonment.

Joyce makes it quite clear from the way the readers get to follow Stephen’s consciousness that Stephen’s artistic tendency has developed since he is really young. He also has shown a deeper understanding about words. He is often intrigued over how the words are played like in a poem, and such. Unlike most of the boys in his age, Stephen is quite more sensitive and sensible about his feelings. He likes to contemplate and daydream about the world around him. Because of this, he grows a sense of differentness and alienation from the other boys who are mainly into athletic things rather than this kind of contemplative thought like Stephen has.

Stephen likes to identify himself in relation to the world he lives in. As what Kamarzade (2014) writes, from such a young age, Stephen has tried to contemplate about the significance of his identity in relation to the physical world in which he lives in. He is aware that he is only a small part of the bigger picture in the universe. He is able to graphically establish his own sense of identity. The awareness of his very own of subjectivity marks the beginning of Stephen’s long journey to consciously make sense of the world. Stephen’s stream of consciousness early in his childhood has shown that he is aware of his distinct quality as a subject.

As much as highly thoughtful and intuitive young Stephen Dedalus is, there is an area of life that is still very far away from his level of comprehension. This area of life is very close and personal to him but at the same time very intriguing to question about. Religion is the grey area that Stephen likes to think about. Stephen does find some comfort in reciting the prayers he practices everyday but at the same time, he is haunted by the thought of the notion of God’s eternal damnation and other mysteries regarding what has been taught in his religion. Akca (2008) highlights that “Joyce felt that the attitude of the mass of Irishmen towards religion was dull-witted loyal serf” (Akca, 2008, p.52). Such prayers murmured by Stephen does not offer the ultimate sense of peace as Stephen likely does not even understand the meaning behind those words.

Throughout the early adolescent phase of Stephen’s life, Joyce displays the beginning of Stephen’s disdain towards the religious values that he has been taught to believe since he was a kid. Other than through the blind fanaticism embodied in the character of Dante, Stephen’s begins to see the flaws in his belief in religion through the terribly stern and strict figure of Father Dolan. As Bulson (2006) concludes, Stephen’s disdain towards the figure of Father Dolan as a priest is one of the main reasons of why Stephen identifies Cruch with betrayal.

Stephen really loves to immerse himself in the romantic language of that novel. Drowning in such a great pleasure as he reads the novel, Stephen even tries to act out his fantasy and pretend as if he is the young heroic lover of the beautiful Mercedes, the characters in the novel that he idealizes. This is clearly Joyce's way to portray Stephen's outgrowing desire in the world of romance and adventure. As Stephen grows up into the adolescent phase, he starts to idealize about romance a lot. This is also to mark the development of Stephen's great appreciation for the world of art and literature.

In the middle of Stephen's deep insecurity of his family's changing fortune of life, Stephen makes use of his love for the world of romance to distract his unhappiness in life. His fantasy starts to take over his mind as he longs for adoration for beautiful woman. He attempts to express his adoration for the girl in his dream through writing a poem. Stephen uses his love for art and literature to cope with his emotional turmoil. This clearly shows how the romantic and sexual urges start to strongly get into young Stephen's mind. He feels the urge so naturally like the boys in his age normally experience. Stephen's desire for love, both romantically and physically later will become the triggering factor that lead him into experiencing something outside his control.

Another hint to Stephen's early years in his new school also highlights that Stephen has manifested his energies working hard to be a top model student. Catherine Akca mentions that "academic success becomes a means to construct a new identity" (Akca, 2008, p.57). During this phase of Stephen's life, a lot of his friends mock Stephen's serious way of life by calling him "Nobel Dedalus". Later the readers get to learn that Stephen has already established a position as a top essay writer, an actor for the school's theater club, and a class leader.

After experiencing his first sexual encounter with the prostitute, Stephen begins to feel vaguely guilty because of that. Growing up in an environment that has a strong tide with Catholic values, Stephen is fully aware that his sexual experience is an extremely sinful behavior viewed from the perspective of his religion. Furthermore, the next series of event from this chapter of Stephen's life highlight on the theme of Stephen's guilt from his previous sinful action. This event marks Stephen's beginning of turning point in the direction of his life.

In the early part of chapter three, Stephen is in contemplation about his recent sexual experience. Stephen can still remember the atmosphere of the night and how everything gives pleasure to his senses and body. Then he always ends up feeling empty and cold like how he believes his feeling of pleasure will not last long. The source of his longing does not come only from his desire for romance and sex. Above that, Stephen begins to understand that it is his soul that is in the middle of crisis as he thinks "it was his own soul going forth to experience, unfolding itself sin by sin...." Chapter 3, page 125. Here comes a pattern that shows Stephen's growing sense of guilt as the result of his rebellion against what has been taught by the religious values. The depiction of Stephen's feeling of guilt emphasizes how

religion here is placed as an external factor that represses the earthly desires that Stephen, as a subject, naturally experiences.

Joyce furtherly shows the sense of irony portrayed through Stephen's rational nature. There is a strong sense of conflicting belief systems between Stephen's religious background of life and his own sense of rationality. This idea is portrayed through the passage showing that although feeling overwhelmed by the guilt of his own behavior, Stephen feels strangely indifferent to confess his sin through praying.

In regard to how Stephen's growing feeling of guilt as a result of the internal repression that has been imposed by the law of religion, Baspinar (2014) also points out how religion in this novel especially takes the individual under the fear of God and punishment. The portrayal of religion in the novel functions to kill Stephen's earthly desires by promising that the real happiness takes place only after the death of the individual.

Perona (1999) highlights that the event of the sermons is one of the profound examples of "a use of words that goes beyond the simply evocative or instrumental". The heavy rhetorical element in Father Arnall's speeches is vital in constructing Stephen's sense of perception. Father Arnall's indoctrination affects Stephen's mind profoundly. In the middle of his soul crisis, Stephen's perception is distorted by his outgrowing fears of the punishment he has to endure later in the next life. Through the lens of his distorted mind, Joyce depicts the period of disillusionment in Stephen's phase of life.

El Genaidi (2012) writes that Joyce makes use of Stephen's religious period of time to portray how religion is used by Stephen only as a mean of an escape from Stephen's feeling of entrapment. In this context, Stephen's devotion can be seen as an attempt to fulfill his internal dissatisfaction and a lack of direction in life. Religion gives a temporary sense of purpose and order in the middle Stephen's mental crisis. However, in the end of the day, that is not what Stephen's heart genuinely yearns for and Stephen is fully aware of that.

During this stage of Stephen's life, the elements of his past gradually fall apart and are replaced with the new and fresh perspectives as Stephen get to interact with the new people who bring the broader sense of aspirations. Stephen's encounter with his new friends in the university provides him the opportunity to explore the nature of his developing artistic side. Joyce clearly uses Stephen's interactions with some of the characters presented in this last chapter to highlight Stephen's evolving sense of intellectualism and attitude. Compared to when Stephen was really young, Stephen's eloquence in speaking up his belief becomes much more apparent.

Stephen's life in the university enables Stephen to learn furtherly about art, literature, and philosophy which are the most fundamental aspects in Stephen's transition of becoming the true artist as his identity. The key theme throughout the last chapter of the novel is the development of Stephen's aesthetic of philosophy as a big part of his identity.

The long journey of Stephen's epiphany depicted in the novel is eventually closed with him flying abroad to leave Ireland. This event marks Stephen's final decision to fully live his internal philosophy that has evolved into maturity. Baspinar (2014) also highlights the importance of Stephen's moving from Ireland as a way of fully embracing his individual liberation and autonomy away from external factors. The novel is concluded by how Stephen asks some guidance to his mythical inspiration, Daedalus, to accompany him in his next stage of life as a whole liberated artist. This is the final form of Stephen's subjectivity captured in the the novel.

Stephen's journey of trying to make sense of the world around him is the key theme of the idea of subjectivity. The entanglement of external factors in the process of gaining one's identity is very obvious in Stephen's story. The construction of the story revolves around how Stephen perceives the world around him and how his perspective keeps evolving before arriving into maturity. As a subject, Stephen has shown the fluidity in the development of his character from the moment he barely understands about the world as a kid until when he is mature enough to make the decision of totally dedicating himself into the life of art and philosophy away from the societal constrains. This model of Stephen's series of interactions with the external factors creates a pattern that molds his character. Therefore, this is the emphasize of how Stephen's coming of age story can be read as a model of subjectivity.

2) The Model of Subjectivity Portrayed Through Stephen Dedalus

From the early passage of the story, the model of subjectivity centers around Stephen's stream of consciousness. As Joyce himself is well-known for his method of writing in the form of stream of consciousness, the narration of his piece of coming of age story is told from the perspective of the protagonist's perception of his own experiences. This is a major point to be explained as consciousness is located at the center of the story plot. Everything that Stephen experiences throughout the novel is explained through the development of Stephen's understanding about the world around him.

Stephen's stream of consciousness at the center of the how the story develops can refer to Descartes' concept of 'I think therefore I am'. The model of character development from early in the story is based around Stephen's way of thinking and understanding about the world around him. Just like how human's individuality is placed as the main source of one's subjectivity, Stephen's early story of childhood highly revolves around his sense of individuality. Stephen has grown a sense of alienation from early of his childhood. His sensitive and contemplative nature stands in contrast to most of his rather athletic friends.

Another point to add, Stephen's radical skepticism in relation to his belief in religion shows another characteristic of his model of subjectivity. The way young Stephen Dedalus processes his overall understanding as well as confusion regarding the area of religion parallels with Descartes' concept about

the philosophy of the self. Human's skepticism is a radical concept glorified by Descartes' philosophy. Being an extremely emotionally critical self that he is, Stephen Dedalus always doubts and wonders about the meaning of everything happening around him. Just like the principle of Descartes' philosophy that employs "a method of doubt in order to establish one single indubitable fact from which all other truths could be determined" (Atkins, 2005, p.8).

Another main element of the model of subjectivity grounded from Descartes' philosophy is the separation of the mind and the body. In the novel, the struggle of the unity between the mind and the body is depicted through Stephen's experience of sexual encounter with the prostitute. Stephen's urgency to give pleasure to his body opposes Stephen's rational faculty that ultimately knows what this action costs him with. In the end, it is proven that Stephen's desire to seek pleasure to his body does not solve the salvation of his soul. There is a huge gap between what Stephen wants for the sake of giving the earthly pleasure for his body and what he wants for the internal crisis of his mind and soul.

Stephen's highly awareness of rational matter can also be explained from Kant's conception about consciousness as the defining faculty of human's knowledge. Adding the point of Descartes' model of autonomous subjectivity, from the lens of Kant, Stephen's constant observation about the world around him is the ground base of his subjectivity. The way young Stephen's pure reason works to make sense of the world around him is heavily linked with the concept of time and space as the outer constructions that influence Stephen's perception.

This concept of one's knowledge being subject to experience is also portrayed in the journey of Stephen Dedalus. Stephen's shifting perception about many things revolving his life, especially in the area of religion, is subject to his own experience. All the observations that Stephen does eventually lead to the representations of such understanding. Stephen does not simply think to gain his sense of awareness, but he, before all, perceives the nature of the world based on his own experience.

Shifting from the topic of the use of consciousness as a mode of gaining the sense of subjectivity, there is an area which post-modern philosophers attempt to uncover through the domain of unconsciousness. Although in most part of the novel it is Stephen's active mind that is being highlighted through Joyce's method of stream of consciousness, in some cases it is also the domain of Stephen's unconsciousness that is being depicted. For post-modern philosophers, especially in the early development of one's subjectivity which is during one's childhood, it is important to take a note on how one undergoes the process of identifying one's self before having the full grasp of conscious mind.

The representation of the unconscious area of Stephen Dedalus is depicted through the nightmares he continuously had during his childhood. The images of dark cottage and terrible creatures filled his mind even after he did the daily night prayer before going to sleep. The nightmares Stephen often had during his childhood show another side of the things he repressed from his conscious mind. Such representation of the dark world outside symbolize his deepest fear. During the time young Stephen

stayed in his school, he felt extremely alienated from his surrounding that creates an unhealthy pattern of mental growth. The repression of all the uncomfortable and unpleasant feelings of Stephen is manifested through this kind of nightmares.

The dimension of language as the governing system in constructing one's sense of subjectivity is also subtly manifested in a passage of Stephen's life. The field of language as the ruler of perception that molds one's identity can be seen in a passage when Stephen listens to Father Arnall's speech on a retreat. Like what has been discussed previously, Father Arnall as an evocative speaker succeeded in imposing the fear of disobeying the law of religion to Stephen's mind. The retreat brought Stephen to the new understanding that he should devote himself in the religious way of life. This is one of the most profound events that mold Stephen's sense of identity. Therefore, this passage can be read as how Lacan sees language as the system that actually governs mankind's perception.

However, the use of unconscious realm of Stephen Dedalus is just slightly portrayed compared to how the novel basically sums up the journey of Stephen's stream of consciousness. In most part of the story, Joyce clearly elaborates Stephen's area of conscious mind. The shifting of Stephen's sense of identity is explored through the nature of Stephen's highly contemplative nature rather than how his unconscious domain influences his perception.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this research aims to view the subjectivity portrayed in the main character of James Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man*. The journey of Stephen Dedalus as the main character in this novel exemplifies how the portrayal of one's subjectivity develops as Stephen, as the subject, interacts with many aspects surrounding himself that mold his sense of identity. The involvement of external factors is highly emphasized in the process of Stephen figuring himself out.

Finally in overall, the model of subjectivity depicted in the journey of Stephen Dedalus is highly based on Stephen's stream of consciousness. Stephen's interactions with those external influences are mainly perceived by his contemplative mind. Although Stephen keeps on undergoing the shifting of perception in some most important area in his life, in the end of the day, Stephen always uses his rational mind in creating the meaning from his experiences.

5. REFERENCES

- Akca, C. (2008). Religion and Identity Crisis in James Joyce's "A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man". *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*, 1(1). 51-61.
- Atkins, K. (2009). *Self and Subjectivity*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell.
- Aras, G. (2015). Personality and Individual Differences: Literature in Psychology. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 185, 250 – 257.

- Baspinar, H. (2014). *Nietzsche's Influence on Modernist Bildungsroman: "The Immoralist", "A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man", and "Demian"*. Retrieved from: <http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12617813/index.pdf>
- Bulson, E. (2006). *The Cambridge Introduction to James Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- El Genaidi, D. (2012). *Nietzschean Freedom in James Joyce's Fiction*. Retrieved from: <https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/doc/1038966473.html?Fmt=ABS>
- Fragoli, A.N. (1996). *James Joyce from A to Z: The Essential Reference to the Life and Work*. New York: Oxford UP.
- Gunes, A. (2006). Crisis of Identity in "A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man". *Dogus University Dergisi*. 6. 37-49.
- Hibbs, T.S. (2000). *Portraits of The Artist: Joyce, Nietzsche, and Aquinas*. Retrieved from: <https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/ama/Ramos/Ramos09.pdf>
- Kamarzade, S. (2014). Study of "Stephen Dedalus", The Main Protagonist of A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man. *Advance in Language and Literary Service*. 5(2). 162-165.
- Mansfield, N. (2000). *Subjectivity: Theories of the self from Freud to Haraway*. New York: New York University Press.
- Perona, M.A.C. (1999). *An Aesthetic of Sacredness: A Nietzschean Reading of James Joyce and T.S. Elliot*. Retrieved from: <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/4289/>