Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel

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CHAPTER ONE

The modern novelist as redeemer of the nation

James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ends his diary entry for April 26 with a declaration that could stand as a motto for many of the novelists of his day: "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."[1] The conjunction "and" in this little manifesto suggests the close but oblique relationship between the two goals the aspiring novelist has set for himself. The encounter with experience seems a deeply personal goal, while the forging of the conscience of the race has important political implications. Stephen links the personal and political goals by claiming that the forging will take place in the smithy of his soul. The problem that has faced many literary critics in interpreting Stephen's goal, as in understanding modernism more generally, has been that the quest for an authentic form of a pure, inner experience seems at variance with the desire to transform the race. If Stephen really wants to serve his race, then why does he leave Ireland and bury himself in books? Why not join the nationalist movement and fight for political independence? Or why not, at least, write a work that will rouse other Irishmen and women to political action?

Stephen's answer to these questions depends on a rather odd form of theology in which the idea of the "race" takes the place reserved in the Catholic tradition for the idea of God, the only "uncreated" being. The actual living members of the Irish nation become the Church of this new religion. Stephen himself plays the role of Christ in a new nationalist theology, redeeming his nation by reshaping the conscience of his race. This theology places an emphasis on the role of the race in shaping the individual's experience that Joyce's critics have often ignored. Stephen's use of the expression "uncreated" has often been taken to imply that Stephen plans to create a brand new racial conscience from nothing (to "forge" in the sense of "inventing"). Most critics assume that

Stephen wishes to break free from Irish tradition and to invent something entirely new, in a Godlike *creatio ex nihilo*. Seamus Deane, for example, writes of the passage: "Endlessly repeated experience is going to be made into something that has so far remained 'uncreated,' . . . [as Stephen produces] a writing that is not embedded in or reducible to the categories of previous Irish experience."[2] The original and most common meaning of "uncreated" suggests precisely the opposite interpretation, however. In Christian dogma, "uncreated" refers to the Creator, who is "of a self-existent or eternal nature," precedes Creation, and is the source of the entire created world.[3] By calling the racial conscience "uncreated," Stephen suggests not that this collective soul remains to be invented, but rather that it is itself the source of all experience. In forging the uncreated conscience of his race, then, Stephen will not be inventing something entirely new, but re-enacting and thus reshaping an eternal substance that precedes and conditions all his personal experiences. Stephen's experience, like the flames of the smithy, will give a new form to this substance, which he has inherited and which inhabits his soul. The racial conscience is the source of all Stephen's experiences, but, as a great soul, Stephen in turn transforms the racial conscience. Thus the individual, unique encounter with reality that Stephen plans for himself in Paris has not only a personal but a racial, and national, significance. Contrary to much of the Joycean critical tradition, Stephen imagines not an absolutely original creation but a transformation of the ideal racial conscience he embodies through yet another encounter with the reality of experience.

The racial conscience is a sort of god that Stephen plans to serve through his writing and his personal experience. Stephen proposes to do rather more in his writing, however, than simply justify the ways of God to Irishmen. In Christianity, the only "uncreated" being is God. In Stephen's theology, it is "the conscience of [the] race" that is uncreated, and Stephen himself is its prophet, or perhaps its redeemer. Just as Christ stands for all humanity in his death on the cross, Stephen plans to become a Christ-figure, redeeming his "Godforsaken" race by symbolically standing for the Irish nation as a whole (p. 37). This image of the modernist novelist as redeemer of the nation contributed to Joyce's reworking of a literary archetype of nineteenth-century realism, the novel of disillusionment. The heroic narrator-protagonist became, in Joyce's vision, the focus for a reawakening of national consciousness centered on the awareness that individuals are both subjects and objects of historical processes. The sovereign nation-state was, for Stephen

Dedalus as for many of his contemporaries, the social unit that could allow individuals who shared nothing but a common cultural heritage to grasp the fact of their conditioning by historical circumstances and to come to consciousness of their collective ability to shape their own destinies. This awakening of national consciousness from the nightmare of history was a primary concern of the novelists who undertook the literary experiments we have come to label "modernist."

THE MODERNIST NOVEL AND THE CRISIS OF LIBERAL NATIONALISM

In linking the novelist's personal lived experience with the forging of a national consciousness, Stephen epitomizes an attitude that influenced the development of modernism in the European novel around the turn of the century. This study addresses the role of the modernists' experiments with the form of the novel in their attempts to rethink the values and institutions associated with the sovereign nation-state. In various ways, the novelists considered here (Joyce, Conrad, Proust, and d'Annunzio) used their own experience as a model of the national situation. They shared Stephen Dedalus's interest in a mystical relationship between the novelist-hero and his people (the novelist-hero in these cases is nearly always male; clearly, the discourse is "gendered"). The modernists represented this relationship through an account of the vagaries of the novelist-hero's consciousness of the nation-race rather than through a chronicle of the external social and political events of their era. They frequently concerned themselves with what Louis Althusser would later identify as the subject's "interpellation" by society and the state, that is, with the processes whereby an individual comes to inhabit a particular set of beliefs (an ideology) and to "live, move, and have [his] being" within that set of beliefs, as Althusser says, quoting St. Paul.[4] The aspect of this interpellation that seemed most fundamental to many of them was the individual's belonging to a particular nationality. Today, we might refer to this shaping of the individual by the nation as an effect of "culture," but each of the modernists considered here described nationality in terms of "race." Like Stephen, these novelists tended to use the word "race" to refer to the complex amalgam of biological and cultural factors that made up their conception of the nation, although each used the term in a way conditioned by his particular political and intellectual heritage.

Many critics have interpreted the modernists' concern with psychology, with the subjective experience of time, and with the form of the

novel itself as a sign of "introversion"[5] or of a lack of political commitment, corresponding to a rejection of the "external reality" that concerned nineteenth-century realist novelists. Yet, as Stephen's diary entry suggests, the modernist novel does not reject external reality entirely; rather, it concerns itself with the relationship between the individual consciousness and the external reality that it confronts. Perceiving a gap between the meaningful inner life of the individual consciousness and an outer world that shapes that inner life but seems in itself devoid of spiritual meaning, the modernists sought a means to bridge that gap, to glean a meaning from that apparently senseless outer world. Famously, they found in art itself the means of transforming the contingencies of everyday life into a meaningful formal structure. Yet many novelists of the modernist period found another, less often noted means of mediating between the apparently hostile and meaningless social world and the meaningful but powerless consciousness of the individual novelist-hero. They found it in the idea of a national consciousness, which lent an apparently eternal, if not universal, significance to their isolated experiences and offered a matrix through which to interpret events that otherwise appeared to lack any internal logic.

Many of the characteristic formal concerns of the modernist novel first found expression in the works of novelists who reached maturity in the 1890s. The use of multiple and highly subjective narrators, attempts to transcribe the "stream of consciousness," the non-linear representation of time, poetic prose, self-consciousness about the form of the novel, and reliance on myth, private symbolism, the leitmotiv, and literary allusion all arose from the reaction against realism and naturalism during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Each of the main formal elements of modernism had appeared separately by the time that the fictional Stephen proposed, around 1902, to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race. It was in the period leading up to the First World War that they began to coalesce in the forms that, after the war, would characterize "high" modernism. In the novel, these formal experiments were linked by a rethinking of the relationship between the objective, omniscient narrator and individual characters with limited, subjective perspectives.

The novel, as a genre, had always depended on – and played with – this relationship.[6] Stories had been told by unreliable first-person narrators since Defoe and Richardson. Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* called attention to the artificiality of realistic narrative conventions. What distinguished the first generation of modernists, however, was their

shared concern to work out, in novelistic form, the implications of perspectivism, the notion that no purely objective account of the external world is possible – that any such account would necessarily be the product of a particular consciousness and perspective. The solution of this philosophical problem was a primary concern of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and the problem itself was already latent in Descartes's *Meditations*. It was Nietzsche, however, who pushed the implications of perspectivism furthest, for example in his statement that "everything has become: there are *no eternal facts*, just as there are no absolute truths."[7] The modernists differed from earlier novelists not in recognizing the fact that our perceptions of reality are always mediated by language and by consciousness – that recognition was at the root of the very form of the novel in general. Rather, the modernists were remarkable for investigating in a concerted way the possibility that the mediated nature of our consciousness might preclude our ever arriving, by rational means, at a consensus as to the nature of external reality. Modernist experiments implied that our perceptions of the outside world and of each other are so tainted by culturally specific or individually idiosyncratic values that there might be no way of arbitrating fairly between the competing claims of various individuals or groups – no eternal facts, no absolute truth, hence no absolute justice.

One typical response to the problems of perspectivism raised in Nietzsche's thought was a turn to an organic conception of the nation as the source of all values. The old God was dead, but in the nation many intellectuals and popular movements found a new God. Ernest Gellner has observed: "Durkheim taught that in religious worship society adores its own camouflaged image. In a nationalist age, societies worship themselves brazenly and openly, spurning the camouflage."[8] The last decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic increase in the influence of the organicist conception of the nation-state. Nationalism had, from the French revolution to 1848, largely been associated with political liberalism, with which it shared the principle of the self-determination of peoples. As Eric Hobsbawm has noted, however, a "sharp shift to the political right of nation and flag" occurred after 1870, partly as a result of attempts by authoritarian governments to make use of nationalist sentiment for their own ends and partly because the apparent triumph of liberal nationalism in Western Europe had failed to secure in a meaningful way the long-awaited goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.[9] From the 1870s onward, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy were ruled by liberal political systems that included representative bodies such

as parliaments. In the period preceding the first world war, national liberation movements gained in strength throughout Europe and emerged in the rest of the world. Liberal nationalism seemed to triumph in 1919 in the Treaty of Versailles, by which the victorious powers redrew the map of Europe along national lines, enshrining the "principle of nationality" in international law.

Yet, during this same period, the principles of nationalism and liberalism were increasingly at odds. New, "organic" conceptions of the nation-state undermined the traditional politics of nineteenth-century liberal nationalism. The institutions of the liberal nation-state, newly established in much of Europe, were under attack from the authoritarian right. In Great Britain, the term "imperialism" was given its modern use to describe nationalist propaganda in support of overseas adventures. The imperialist conception of the national interest conflicted with that of traditional British liberalism, and the British Liberal Party split in two over the question of Home Rule for Ireland. In Ireland itself, after Parnell's death in 1891, a new, "cultural" nationalist movement subscribed to a theory of the "Celtic Race" and excluded Protestants from its definition of the Irish nation.[10] In France, the nationalist side in the Dreyfus affair questioned the liberal principle that all citizens should be equal before the law. A racial conception of "Jewishness" contributed to a uniquely modern form of anti-semitism in which Jews were represented as incapable, for reasons of racial heredity, of being assimilated into the French nation. Right- and left-wing opposition in Italy led to a continual crisis of the liberal parliamentary system there from the late 1890s onward. Radicals and ultra-conservatives formed a strange alliance in 1910 in the "Nationalist" party, which would agitate in favor of intervention in the First World War and eventually ally itself with the Fascist party. Prefiguring Fascist ideology, the Italian Nationalists demanded expansionist foreign policies and a corporatist economic system.[11] In various ways, then, most of the countries of Western Europe experienced the growth of modern forms of nationalism as a threat to the established (and often very recently established) liberal political order.

These conflicts between liberalism and organic nationalism all pointed to the problem of whether the nation should be understood as a legal and political unit, defined by the voluntary membership in it of individual citizens, or as an ethnic and social unit, defined by the shared culture, history, and (perhaps) biological inheritance that was thrust upon individuals, not chosen by them. The newer, organicist forms of

nationalism depended on a definition of the nation as ethnically and linguistically homogeneous. Often drawing for their intellectual justification on forms of Darwinism, they claimed that the ethnic group, rather than the individual, was the basic unit of society. The individual was primarily an emanation of the national "character." According to organicist theology, national destiny, rather than individual qualities or choices, determined the individual's actions. The legal, formal equality of citizenship in the liberal state was insignificant next to what the organicists considered the real brotherhood arising from shared blood and a shared linguistic or cultural heritage. Organic nationalists found the existence of ethnic minorities within the borders of European states intolerable, since it meant that citizens of a given state might not share the same nationality, while people who shared a nationality might not have access to a common state. As Hannah Arendt has observed, in organic nationalism, the state was transformed "from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation."[12] Instead of representing justice in the abstract, the state was to represent the interests of the nation understood as a homogeneous ethnic group.

These transformations in the political significance of the nation-state were a source of concern for many novelists around the turn of the century. Stephen Dedalus exemplifies their obsession with problems of national identity. One of the motives of modernist formal experiments was, as Michael Tratner has shown, to gain access to the collective myths through which individuals interpreted the world.[13] Tratner argues that the dawning of the age of mass politics and the perceived replacement of nineteenth-century individualism by twentieth-century collectivism inspired much modernist experimentation. A particular form of collective myth that strongly influenced the modernists was the desire to tap into a national unconscious. The modernists' concern with the nature of consciousness in language, in particular, points to the sense that the nation shapes the individual through the national language. The modernists typically responded to the organic theory of the nation in two related ways. Sometimes, as in the case of d'Annunzio, they embraced it wholeheartedly and sought to serve it. More frequently, however, they treated the influence of "national character" on the individual as a fundamental existential fact and developed a heightened sense of irony that allowed them to investigate the shaping effects of nationality on the individual's destiny. Thus, if an unmediated objectivity was impossible, they attempted to offer at least a sort of objectivity-through-subjectivity, a joyful or anguished acceptance of the limited perspective bestowed on

each individual by her or his belonging to a given culture, to a given nation. Stephen Dedalus accepts his condition joyfully, but his creator, James Joyce, expresses more anxiety about it. Conrad, drawing on the traditions of English utilitarian liberalism and Darwinism, expresses a nostalgia for an English character he imagines to be on the verge of extinction. Proust, drawing on the voluntarist conception of the nation-state derived from the French revolution, eagerly deconstructs the idea of a French "racial" identity, but still finds in the nation-state one key to the possibility of human freedom. In all of these cases, the conventional critical wisdom that associates modernism with individualism, cosmopolitanism, or a rejection of society seems inadequate. The modernists' encounters with organic theories of the nation suggest, on the contrary, an abiding concern with the social and its impact on the individual, and a vision of the novelist's role as central to the national life.

The modernists' reworking of the techniques of the realist novel involved a rethinking of the political and epistemological theories on which realism had drawn. The techniques by which the nineteenth-century realist novel had represented the relationship between individuals and society reflected assumptions about human nature, knowledge, and history that realist novelists shared with contemporary liberal political theorists. As exemplified by such mid-nineteenth-century thinkers as Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill, liberal theory held that individuals, by nature, pursue their own private interests, which the liberal tradition had defined primarily in economic terms. Left to pursue these interests without outside interference, individuals would find the most efficient means of achieving their ends, thus leading to increased productivity and the growth of civil society – the process of "civilization." According to classical liberal theory, society progresses according to its own immanent laws, which are not immediately evident to individual social actors. The role of the state is to facilitate this progress by avoiding any undue interference in it while ensuring that no member of society infringes on the rights of another. The state may also encourage patriotic sentiments and forms of sociability, but ultimately it is the aggregate welfare of the individuals in society that measures the success of a liberal political system.

The conception of society in canonical realist novels, such as those of Balzac, resembles that of early nineteenth-century liberalism in several respects: autonomous individuals pursue their own interests, motivated by the desire for material gain and for social esteem; they share a common human nature, although the circumstances of their birth and

upbringing shape their characters in diverse ways; the shared social reality in which they interact is governed by immanent laws of its own that are not in themselves evident to the individuals who make up society. The formal techniques of the realist novel reflect this conception of society. Individual characters have only limited perspectives, and their perceptions of reality often reflect their selfish interests and their inability to see their own cases objectively; in the words of liberal theory, "no man is a fit Arbitrator in his own cause."[14] The dialogic character of the novel, the fact that it represents the many perspectives taken to this shared reality by individuals from different backgrounds, resembles the liberal model of society in that it acknowledges the extent to which differing interests shape the various perceptions members of society have of the world and of each other. The functioning of the novelistic universe depends on the narrator's role as a neutral arbiter. He stands aloof from the characters and disentangles their competing claims and perceptions. Like the state in liberal political thought, he acts as the guarantor of the shared, social reality. Just as the liberal state is the instrument of a neutral law and justice, so in the realist novel the narrator is the instrument of objectivity and truth in a world in which the competing claims of individuals threaten to undermine social harmony. Even when he speaks against the vices of "society," the narrator is the voice of a shared reality within which the characters interact and to which they must adapt themselves. The realist novel, then, represents a parliamentary, rather than an absolutist, conception of reality and truth. The shared world of "society" exists independently of any single one of its members, but it also embodies the consensus among these members.

The crisis of liberal nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century revealed the extent to which liberal values and institutions depended on the shared assumptions of a national culture and in particular on the idea that the interests of the nation-state could be identified with the common good of all the individuals in a given society. The idea of the sovereign nation, whose individual members all shared common interests and cultural assumptions, underlay much of the actual working of liberal political systems. To the extent that some inhabitants of a given territory did not share, or were not seen to share, these common national interests and assumptions, liberalism increasingly came to seem incapable of reconciling their needs and interests with those of the national majority. This obstacle appeared even more insurmountable when such interests came to be associated with biological inheritance. A cultural minority, or a given class of citizens, might easily be assimilated into the national

mainstream, but it appeared to many political thinkers that a minority or a colonized people, when identified by putatively inherited racial characteristics, could never share the cultural and other assumptions of the nation as a whole. Thus the Irish, Africans, and Indians appeared to many English liberals incapable of national self-government, and many French thought the Jews incapable of full French citizenship.

The modernists' reworking of the techniques of realism responded to the contemporary crisis in the institutions associated with the nation-state and the liberal conception of society. According to organic nationalist theorists, the basic unit of society was not the individual but the ethnic group (variously labeled the "nation" or the "race"). Individuals, then, rather than being autonomous, rational agents who pursue their own interests, were projections of an underlying ethnic identity, unconsciously pursuing the interests of the group. Their membership in the national community molded their consciousness. The sense, in modernist novels, that consciousness is always overdetermined by what T. S. Eliot called "vast impersonal forces" reflects the growth of a conception of individuals as the playthings of such collective identities as national wills. This study complements earlier approaches to the rise of those "vast impersonal forces" by focusing on the centrality of the problem of the nation-state to the crisis of liberalism and by directly relating the modernists' formal experiments to their active political concerns. I hope that the comparative nature of this study will underline the common problems facing novelists in four very different Western European political contexts as well as the unique intellectual and political concerns each of these major contributors to literary modernism brought to his work. I focus in particular on the increasingly problematic role of the narrator in modernist novels, which exemplifies the changing conception of the nation-state around the turn of the century. The objective, omniscient narrator, correlate of the liberal state, disappears in modernism. What takes over the storytelling is either a projection of the consciousness of an individual protagonist (as in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, or *Heart of Darkness*) or a more generalized projection of a collective consciousness (as in *Ulysses* or the novels of Virginia Woolf; this technique is also foreshadowed in the last novels of Henry James). Either form of representation reflects a conception of objectivity as always shaped by the mediating forces of culture and consciousness. The narrator is no longer the instrument of justice, divine or earthly; he has become a sort of super-ego, a figment of the collective imagination.

By describing the highly subjective experiences of their protagonists, the modernists demonstrated the inevitable lack of an Archimedean point from which to judge the world. Far from abandoning realism's concern with politics, they used these experiments to examine the shaping of knowledge by nationality and the limitations of "realistic" and liberal conceptions of society. These experiments all drew attention to the crisis of the liberal nation-state, although the solutions to this crisis envisioned by the various modernists differed widely. The modernists scrutinized the distinction between an objective narrator and subjective characters with limited perspectives, and gave life to a whole generation of narrator-heroes who forged social realities in their own images. They sought to demonstrate the power of national myths to shape even apparently "objective" perceptions of reality. Whereas realism accepted the liberal bifurcation between private, ethical life and public, socially assigned roles, the modernists sought through their experiments to achieve a unified, public morality that would overcome the ironic structure of life in a society constantly being transformed by history. Their various attempts to unify the first- and third-person perspectives served this goal and led them to describe a "dialectic of enlightenment," which revealed the dependence of the enlightened ideals of liberty and equality on the myth of national fraternity. Conrad's multiple narrators, Joyce's transcriptions of consciousness, Proust's appeals to involuntary memory, and d'Annunzio's intermingling of lyric and narrative all focused attention on the shaping of the individual by the nation and on the potential for the individual in turn to redeem the nation in time of war or crisis. While these authors appear today as great canonical figures of their respective national literatures, I hope to call attention also to their marginality, the fact that modernism was largely a creation, as Terry Eagleton has noted, of "exiles and émigrés."[15] Although these figures are not always seen as political novelists, I hope to demonstrate their engagement with the crisis of the nation-state and their explorations of the possibilities and limits of liberalism. The literary works are, of course, not simply coded philosophical messages, but the attempt to place them in the context of debates about contemporary politics should reveal that they were complex attempts to grapple with political, epistemological, and existential problems that remain crucial to contemporary cultural and social thought.

While I treat the development of discourses about the nation-state in a historical perspective, I also attempt to uncover the systematic underpinnings of liberal theories of the nation-state. These underpinnings

developed, of course, out of a particular historical context. As well as embodying a rather broad set of doctrines about the nature of human relations, liberalism is a historical phenomenon. Perhaps, as Robert Denoon Cumming has suggested, liberalism has even more of a tendency than most belief systems to undergo crises, for liberalism is "at once a *tradition* and an attempt to go beyond the *limitations* of that tradition which its *crisis* exposes."[16] In other words, liberalism is not simply a specific set of doctrines – for example, rule by law, equality of legal condition, freedom of conscience, speech, and association, the right to private property, popular sovereignty, limitation of state power – but a tradition of developing solutions to political problems by a reasonable overcoming of differences and a faith in the capacity for self-improvement (within limits) of human beings. In particular, as John Burrow has shown, liberalism has often sought to reconcile the participant's and the observer's (or the ethical and the sociological) perspectives on human nature, or rather not to reconcile the two perspectives so much as to find in the duality of human nature the conditions of possibility for moral and political progress.[17] The nation presented itself for a time as the site of identification at which the ethical self and the sociological self could find peace with one another, but ultimately liberalism seems to demand a distinction between the realms of ethics and sociology, of freedom and necessity, at odds with the nationalist urge toward *Sittlichkeit* or moral unity.[18]

Even more than most other institutions or ideas, the nation is both a "product" of and a contributor to the processes of history, because of its powerful emotional and intellectual appeal and its role in the development of the modern state. Like a fetish, the product of people's work that they worship as a god, the nation has stirred people's admiration and affected their actions. Like a fetish, too, it continues to have great power no matter how much "clear-sighted analysis" explains away its imagined magical powers.[19] Yet the nation-state is a very complex fetish, complete with heads of state and government, ministries, literary and philosophical traditions, territory and citizens. Max Weber showed that ideas can be more than mere epiphenomena produced by inevitable historical forces and capable simply of serving one set of social forces or another. They can also influence action in unpredictable ways. As Weber argued, "Magical and religious forces, and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them, have in the past always been among the most important formative influences on conduct."[20] I am concerned here with one such magical and religious force, the idea of the nation.

JOYCE, BALZAC, AND THE DYNAMIC OF DISILLUSIONMENT

This magical force held James Joyce in its thrall. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, and by extension Joyce himself, have gained a reputation among some literary critics as apolitical "individualists" because Stephen rejects overtly nationalistic art. Yet, even as he refuses to learn Irish or to endorse the program of the Gaelic League, Stephen affirms the importance of his nationality to his art: "This race and this country and this life produced me . . . I shall express myself as I am" (p. 203). This budding artist proposes to use the fact that he himself is a product of a particular race and country as a means of achieving a new sort of freedom. This freedom will consist in using his experience and his self-expression to embody the fate of the race that has created him. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, although Stephen does not endorse the nationalist political program, he does set himself the typically nationalistic goal of reviving his nation-race. He hopes to do so, however, not through traditionally political activity but by searching within his own soul to make his writing embody the fate of his race and thus to afford his race an opportunity for rebirth. Joyce's narrative technique emphasizes the close relationship between Stephen and the Irish race. In revising the traditional plot structure of the novel of disillusionment, Joyce attempts to overcome the radical distinction between the objective viewpoint of the omniscient narrator and the limited perspective of the individual character. It is through the fusion of these two perspectives at the end of the novel, with Stephen's ascension to the role of narrator, that Joyce inaugurates a radical revision of the novelistic tradition. At the same moment, Stephen attempts to overcome his own subjectivity by merging it in the larger fate of his nation. The overcoming of the bifurcated perspective of novelistic realism embodies in literary form Stephen's longed-for synthesis with the conscience of his race.

A Portrait tells the story of Stephen's emergence into consciousness as an emergence into Irish history. Political events that play a crucial role in Stephen's conception of his place in history, such as the fall of Parnell, precede Stephen's conscious understanding of Irish politics, and Stephen's attempts to understand such events are part of the novel's drama. From the first page of the novel, references to the Irish historical and political situation fill Stephen's growing mind. Dante's two brushes – a maroon one for the radical Michael Davitt and a green one for the moderate Parnell – color his childhood perceptions before he even knows what the colors may signify. As a child, Stephen cannot solve

the problems that theology and politics raise for him: "It pained him that he did not know well what politics meant and that he did not know where the universe ended. He felt small and weak" (p. 17). Stephen is conscious of growing up in a world in which politics and history weigh upon the brains of the living. He is surrounded by discussions of Irish politics and particularly of Parnell's campaign for Home Rule. Without being able to articulate the reasons for his fate, the young hero feels himself to be growing up as part of what his father calls a "Godforsaken priestridden race" (p. 37). Stephen's entrapment in the nightmare of Irish history and his living out of its logic make him the potential author of an Irish national epic. In his epic, however, the artist himself will play the role of redeeming hero who, by his mystical union with the conscience of the race, helps to transform the Irish people.

A Portrait exemplifies the heightened attention to the conflict between objective and subjective modes of narration that marked the modernist transformation of realist literary techniques. Joyce's experiments with narrative technique contribute to his reworking of the disillusionment plot, which, in Georg Lukács's description, portrayed the fate of the individual whose soul was "wider and larger than the destinies which life [had] to offer it" in a world "abandoned by God."[21] Honoré de Balzac's *Lost Illusions* was the model for the novel of disillusionment, which formed an important sub-genre of the nineteenth-century realist novel. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus resembles in many respects Lucien de Rubempré, the hero of *Lost Illusions*. Like Lucien, Stephen is a young, naïve, provincial genius who hopes to become a great author in Paris. Joyce seems to have based Stephen's motto "silence, exile, cunning" on Lucien's "Fuge, late, tace" ("Flee, lurk, be silent").[22] *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* also suggests a more fundamental similarity between Stephen and Lucien by using the language and archetypes of the many nineteenth-century novels of disillusionment: the obscure young man from an impoverished but respectable country family, closely identified with the author, who wants to become his country's national novelist; his admiration for Napoleon and the romantic poets; his scorn for the "mob" and for liberal or democratic politics; his loss of innocence; his disappointment in romantic love and his subsequent turn to prostitutes; his prodigality at his devoted family's expense; his attempted return to the fold of family and church; the novel's conclusion with his apparent, but suspect, arrival at maturity. Yet, whereas the events of *Lost Illusions* take place in Paris, and Paris represents for Lucien the "reality of experience" that will shatter his illusions, the events of *A Portrait of the Artist*

take place in Stephen's childhood, before he has even formulated his plan to go to Paris. For Balzac, the encounter with the disagreeable realities of life begins when the young provincial leaves for Paris and ends in defeat and return to the provinces; for Joyce, the encounter starts soon after birth, and the projected trip to Paris is only the millionth manifestation of a process which will continue unto death. This difference between the two novels points to the rethinking of the metaphysics of disillusionment that underlies Stephen's conception of himself as a Christ-figure for the Irish nation and his plan to "forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race." Joyce's reworking of Balzacian themes and techniques owes much, of course, to Flaubert and to what Lukács has described as the "crisis of bourgeois realism" after 1848, but I focus here on the two novels, *Lost Illusions* and *A Portrait*, as models, respectively, of realism and modernism, which demonstrate the radical change in the conception of the individual's relationship to the nation-state that contributed to the development of modernism in the novel.[23]

Balzac's novel depends on a sharp distinction between the inner world of his heroes' personal fantasies and illusions and the outer world of a hostile, conventional society. The protagonists must adapt their fantasies to the unchangeable outer world or die. The role of their perceptions and their consciousness is to make them aware of a reality outside themselves to which they must conform. "Disillusionment" is the process of the individual's learning his (or her) proper relationship to society as a whole and to the nation in particular. (The typical hero of a novel of disillusionment is male, but there are some interesting female examples, especially Emma Bovary and to a certain extent George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver. A major obstacle to a woman's encountering society at large was of course the fact that the woman was expected to stay home, not to venture out into the hostile external world. Even the slightest attempt to leave home ends in disaster for most nineteenth-century heroines.) Upon arriving in Paris, Lucien confronts the conventions of society as "a foreigner ignorant of the language" (*LI*, p. 174). In order to support himself, he writes for the newspapers. His friend Etienne Lousteau explains to him that the newspaper "accepts as truth [*vrai*] anything that is plausible [*probable*] . . . We start from that assumption." The world of journalism stands in the novel for the conventionality of society in general, with its interest in mere appearance rather than spiritual essence (p. 350). Having failed to make his way in society, Lucien at the end of the novel reaches the point of disillusionment and contemplates

suicide. Balzac writes: "The day when a man despises himself, the day when he sees that others despise him, the moment when the reality of life is at variance with his hopes, he kills himself and thus pays homage to society, refusing to stand before it stripped of his virtues or his splendour" (p. 633). For Balzac, the "illusions" or fantasies of the individual soul are in a sense truer than the artificial "reality" of society at large. Yet, in *Lost Illusions*, the "reality of life" triumphs. The illusions of youth are beautiful, necessary, and destined for defeat.

Lost Illusions confronts the hero with a hostile external world that seems to offer sterile ground for the fulfillment of his developing personality. Like later novels of disillusionment, it describes a world in which the hero is condemned to an apparently permanent state of "transcendental homelessness."[24] In order to fulfill his destiny, Lucien must leave behind his literal and spiritual home. He must go out into the world in order to grow and to make his life meaningful, but – to his surprise and disappointment – he encounters a world that is dominated not by spiritual truth or a meaningful structure but merely by social convention. The novel thus opposes the empirical "reality" of "society," which appears to the hero to be purely arbitrary and to lack any internal logic, to the inner truths of the hero's soul. Balzac uses language with a political valence to describe Lucien's failed attempt to master that social reality. At the beginning of the novel, before Lucien leaves Angoulême for Paris, Balzac attributes to him "the normal tendency a man has to view everything in terms of himself. We all say, more or less, like Louis XIV: 'I am the state'" (p. 71). Lucien must learn that, unlike an absolutist king, he is not the state. Rather, the state represents a society that, while made up of people more or less like himself, is indifferent to him personally. Lucien manages, with the help of some journalist friends, to rise fairly high in society, but as he approaches his inevitable downfall, Balzac writes of him: "To every man who is not born rich comes what we must call his fateful week. For Napoleon it was the week of the retreat from Moscow" (p. 448). Like Napoleon, Lucien has overreached himself. The comparison of the hero to Napoleon points to the inevitable collapse of the illusion that one person can come to embody the state, to create reality in his own image.

In the novels of Balzac, each character is born effectively outside society and must, in order to pursue the goals of profit and honor, or more generally to fulfill his or her individuality, enter into society, abandoning some freedom and independence in exchange for the recognition of other characters. In *Lost Illusions*, the narrative voice offers on the

one hand a third-person account of the external events of the plot and records on the other hand the subjective impressions of individual characters, including their ambitions and emotions. What the novel treats as objective "reality" is the world governed by the conventions of society. The narrator typically offers the reader two types of information: the impressions of individual characters, which he reports through indirect discourse or direct quotation, and the general social knowledge which is at the same time the property of everyone and of no one in particular. The "omniscient" narrator, so often compared to God, in fact embodies not God's perspective but that of society in general. He reports general social knowledge in tones approximating those of a tour guide, a gossip columnist, or a university professor, depending on the exact object of social knowledge at hand. In *Lost Illusions*, social knowledge of this sort includes knowledge of paper-manufacturing processes, fashion, and the politics of the Restoration period.[25] It is to this world that Lousteau's remark about newspapers is apposite: it "accepts as truth [*vrai*] anything that is plausible [*probable*]."

With social knowledge of this sort, there is no possibility of absolute, mathematical certainty; there can be only a knowledge of the highly probable, that which is generally accepted. No *a priori* judgments apply; only *a posteriori* judgments, based on experience, are possible, and those judgments are problematic because one can never know for certain that things are what they seem. One condition of the novel form is that human understanding (of external reality and of other humans) be imagined as radically limited. Despite the common understanding of realism as accepting uncritically the transparent referentiality of language, Balzac does not treat knowledge of external reality and of society as unproblematic.[26] If knowledge of the world around us were immediate and unproblematic, it would not be possible to maintain illusions. It is the fact that knowledge must be gained through experience that constitutes the possibility of the disillusionment plot, and it is the fact that the knowledge so gained is not of eternal truths or of things in themselves but only of phenomena or appearances that makes a novel interesting. (The "omniscient" narrator does not in general make claims about things in themselves or about anything in what Kant called the "supersensible" realm.) However, the realist novel does admit the possibility of achieving at least a relatively adequate understanding of phenomena or appearances, and it is the narrator who embodies this relatively adequate knowledge.

The conflict between the objective account of events offered by the

narrator and the subjective impressions of individual characters creates irony, the sense that the reader understands the character's position better than the character does. In Balzac's novel, these two perspectives are effectively isolated from one another. The narrator offers the external, objective account, while each character relies on his or her own limited, subjective perceptions, which the narrator conveys primarily through direct quotation. Most sentences record either a purely objective happening or a purely subjective impression. Even when the narrator is relating Lucien's impressions through a form of free indirect discourse, without the use of quotation marks, Balzac "labels" the subjective sentences by using such phrases as "*Lucien trouva*" ("Lucien thought" or "it seemed to Lucien that"). He thus tends to establish a distance between the narrator's account of events and Lucien's, as in the following sentence: "The queenly lady did not get up, but she very graciously twisted round in her seat, smiling at the poet, who was much impressed by this serpentine contortion, which he thought distinguished" ["La reine ne se leva point, elle se tortilla fort agréablement sur son siège, en souriant au poète, que ce trémoussement serpentin émut beaucoup, il le trouva distingué."].[27] In a sentence such as this, one of the relatively few in which the perspective of the narrator and that of the character are intermingled, the narrator clearly suggests that Madame de Bargeton's gesture is not as distinguished as Lucien believes. The words "*reine*" and "*agréablement*" suggest a confusion of the two perspectives, since it is not immediately evident whether the narrator feels, as Lucien obviously does, that these words are appropriate in a description of Madame de Bargeton. Yet, the introduction of Lucien's impressions through the clauses beginning "who was much impressed" ["*que ce trémoussement serpentin . . .*"] and "which he thought" ["*il le trouva*"] leads the way to a resolution of the potential ambiguity of the sentence. The narrator has ironically presented the lady as a queen, and it is only Lucien who finds distinction in her serpentine contortions. Such moments of potential ambiguity, while they are frequent and in fact create much of the pleasure of reading the novel, usually resolve themselves fairly quickly. Balzac often uses the technique of the rhetorical question to call attention to potential ambiguity, but he usually answers the rhetorical question almost immediately. The narrator continually informs the reader of social conventions that Lucien does not understand, thus ensuring that the reader will understand them: "*Lucien n'avait pas encore deviné que . . .*" ("Lucien had not yet divined that . . ").[28] Unlike *Père Goriot* or "Sarrasine," *Lost Illusions* depends for its plot structure on no crucial

hidden fact awaiting discovery. The "mystery" of the novel is how Lucien's career will develop over time, but the general outlines are clear enough in advance to any given reader. Secondary characters, such as David Séchard or the Baron Sixte du Châtelet, predict Lucien's fate with considerable accuracy in "asides" or "interior monologues" right from the beginning of the novel, thus giving even a reader totally unfamiliar with novelistic conventions and Parisian society a good sense of what to expect.

As it appears in Balzac, the disillusionment plot structure suggests an almost tragic conception of the relationship between the individual and society. Society measures individuals by two ultimately interchangeable criteria: status and wealth. Because society is a realm dominated by arbitrary convention, it is impossible for the individual to find a truly meaningful fulfillment of his (or her) ambitions in it. Yet, for Balzac, the individual is preeminently human only in his interactions with others, that is, in his entrance into the very conventional society which appears so hostile and foreign to him. The result of disillusionment, for Lucien, is the sudden recognition that he has nothing inside himself that can counterbalance the judgments of society as a whole, that he cannot stand before society "stripped of his virtues or his splendour." The individual has a natural sense of freedom and independence, but he can exist only in a world of artificial conventions. The disillusionment plot structure draws attention precisely to the fact that any attempt to stand entirely outside society is futile and meaningless. The life of the individual is by nature embedded in the life of society. This recognition of the embeddedness of every individual life in the general fabric of society and history is a defining feature of the novel as a genre, and Balzac presents it as an inevitable and painful contradiction of the hero's natural sense of independence.

Balzac does, however, present an alternative to Lucien's suicidal response to the situation in the fate of David Séchard, Lucien's brother-in-law and childhood friend. In their youth, the two men are "two poets."[29] Lucien wants literally to write poetry, while David dreams of making a fortune out of the method for manufacturing paper that he has invented. While Lucien contemplates suicide and eventually sells himself into the power of the diabolical Vautrin, David accepts his fate with better grace. Forced to sell his invention to his rivals the Cointets, he tells his wife Eve that they will have to be content with a peaceful life in a village, but he observes that at least his paper-making process will profit France as a whole: "after all what do I matter in comparison with my

country? . . . I'm only one man. If everybody profits from my invention, well, I am content" (p. 664). David finds within his own household and in his relationship with his wife Eve a fulfillment that is sheltered from the conventionality and competitive dynamics of society in general. Eve gives him the recognition which Lucien had sought in society at large. On the one hand, the intimate sphere of personal relations is the site of David's fulfillment of his own individuality. On the other hand, the idea of his country, which implies here his brotherhood with other men, compensates him for his failure to realize his fantasies of greatness.

The protagonists of *Lost Illusions* have two significant options: to abandon their attempt to realize their illusions and thus to accept a humble, provincial fate, like David; or to fail repeatedly in the attempt to fulfill their imagined destinies, running up against the indifference of society until eventually society defeats them and leads them to the brink of suicide, like Lucien himself. The alternative to a continual Faustian striving is to "cultivate one's own garden," like Candide. Another literary comparison seems to have been more on Balzac's mind. The title, "*Illusions perdues*," echoes that of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (in French "*Paradis perdu*"). The disillusionment plot is a secularized form of the story of the Fall. In the fallen world, the possibilities are to try to be like God (as Lucien does) or to accept one's place in the world abandoned by God (like David). From Milton on, the married state is part of the acceptance of the fallen nature of this world. It is rejected or seen as inadequate by all the Faustian heroes of the novels of disillusionment. David Séchard resembles Adam; hand in hand with his own Eve, he takes his solitary way. David shows that he sees himself as a second Adam when he comments on Eve's first name: "Your very name has been a symbol of my love for you. Eve was once the only woman in the world, and what was literally true for Adam is a spiritual truth for me" (p. 106). For David, the social realm can be reduced essentially to the pursuit of profit. He condemns it by claiming that he and Eve are not greedy enough to succeed in it. Lucien, on the other hand, resembles the fallen Satan, and belongs entirely to the fallen social realm. His name even echoes that of Satan before his exile from Heaven, Lucifer. Lucien seeks his sexual fulfillment with great ladies or with prostitutes, both types of women who belong to the social rather than the intimate, domestic sphere.

Balzac makes one direct reference to Milton in *Lost Illusions*, when Vautrin talks about the fear of moral solitude and the possibility of writing a poem about man's primordial desire to have an accomplice or a companion ("*complice*") in his destiny. Vautrin hopes to overcome this