

# First and partly autobiographical novel by irish writer james joyce

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the character of Dante Riordan can be likened to the figure of the devouring, consuming female which is seen in her outburst at the dinner table. Keane says of Dante: 'Destructive from the outset, Dante represents, like the 'old lady' of Mr. Casey's more than amusing anecdote, Ireland at her worst'. Dante attacks the memory of Irish political leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, glorying his destruction shouting 'Devil out of hell! We won! We crushed him to death! Fiend!'. Dante's first appearance and her sadistic threatening of Stephen as a child is predatory and a castrating force that allies her with the devouring female figure. There is importance in Stephen's metaphor of 'Ireland is the sow that eats her farrow'. He highlights the image of the consuming mother and devouring female especially due to the fact that Morrighu version of the Terrible Mother identifies as a bird, particularly a bird of prey. Thus, Joyce depicts the figure of the consuming and devouring female through the predatory and sadistic character of Dante Riordan and through descriptions of Ireland in sovereignty.

Tymoczko comments that 'Though there is no Celtic goddess of love, most the female figures in the early literature display a vigorous sexuality, illustrating their connection with love in its functional and ritual aspects rather than its personal aspect'. Joyce employs this thought into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, using the idea of the devouring female's tendency to destroy and cause destruction through the use of sex in his depiction of prostitutes. The prostitutes only work on the ritualistic and functional side of love that Tymoczko wrote of. The prostitutes have no personal attachment to Stephen and only consume his soul through sex. 'He closed his eyes,

surrendering himself to her, body and mind'. The narrator depicts Stephen's first kiss with a prostitute not as an act of love but an act of submission in which she engulfs him, devouring him. After several liaisons with prostitutes, Stephen feels ' a cold lucid indifference reigned in his soul'. These women have sucked his soul further away from him each time he visits. Stephen views these prostitutes as the catalysts to his souls destruction, separating his soul and set him on a path to hell. Stephen's fears about the corruption of his soul by these women is confirmed by the priest as he tells Stephen's his relationships with these prostitutes are destructive to him as ' it kills the body and it kills the soul'. Thus, little is to be said of Stephen's own active seeking out of prostitutes and his active participation in the sinful acts themselves yet it is the women or more fittingly, the devouring females that cause the draining of his soul and his moral corruption and by doing so become the all consuming and devouring female on a path to cause destruction in the novels male protagonist.