

James Joyce

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

Notes &c.

Objectives

1. To recognize *avant-garde* experimentation's changes from Wilde's "Picture" to Joyce's "Portrait."
2. To identify the political conflicts in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* between Britain and pre-independence Ireland.
3. To describe the difference between *what* the text says and *how* it goes about saying it: the relationship between content and form.
4. To distinguish between Wilde's aesthetic style and Joyce's.
5. To describe the social context of *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man* in relation to the First World War, Catholicism, and sexual repression.

Commentary

[James Joyce's](#) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has an even more complex print history than [Wilde's](#) *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Not only did it go through a variety of different draft forms in manuscript over a period of several years, it appeared in several variant forms and was followed by the posthumous publication of Joyce's first version of the novel, *Stephen Hero*, with which it has many similarities. It also appeared in a serialized form in *The Egoist* edited by [Ezra Pound](#), who did not show Joyce his own revisions to the novel – this habit from Pound will appear again with [T. S. Eliot's](#) *The Waste Land*, but it touches many modernist authors. *Portrait* has also spawned a number of responses, ranging from [Virginia Woolf's](#) *Jacob's Room* to Dylan Thomas' *Portrait of the Artist as Young Dog*. We also know that Joyce had a copy of Wilde's novel, in its 1891 form, with him while living in Trieste (within modern Italy's borders today but then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). This range of associated texts demonstrates that Joyce's novel not only varies across several different drafts and editions, but it is part of a tradition of works in which it was neither the first nor the last.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man was also the first novel in which Joyce employed "[stream of consciousness](#)," a now-famous modernist technique. The American psychologist [William James](#)

developed the particular notion that a text could narrate the internal peculiarities of human thought in its irrational and ever-changing forms. He proposed the idea in 1890 in his book *Principles of Psychology*. In it, he argued the unconscious mind relies on a continuous flow of associations, thoughts, memories, and irrational “jumps” between ideas. The concept proved important as a narrative technique for fiction and prose in general. James was famous for his own psychological research at Harvard University, where he was a professor, as well as his philosophical arguments in favor of pragmatism and of religious faith, but this was compounded by fame in several other areas – William James was the brother of the famous novelist [Henry James](#), who used a variant of the “stream of consciousness” idea that he called the “narrative consciousness,” in his novels such as *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors*. For Henry James, this occasionally meant employing the associative leaps and irrational connections theorized by his brother, but it was primarily a tool that he used to restrict the narrative voice to the perspective of a particular character. This is to say, the narrator in such a novel is no longer omniscient or God-like and does not have access to information, feelings, or facts that are outside of the “consciousness” or a particular character. That is, the narrator is not God or a god but is as fallible as any other error-prone human being, even if it is a third person narration. We cannot fully rely on our narrator to be honest or even as able to be accurate.

The American novelist and poet [Gertrude Stein](#) studied Psychology under William James at Radcliffe College (a coordinate college of Harvard) before moving to Paris to become a writer. Her experiments focused on “Normal Motor Automatism,” which hypothesized the unconscious “stream” could be expressed when people were distracted between two activities, such as writing while speaking. The consequent mistakes were assumed to be expressions of the unconscious. Stein later employed this technique to write. She went on to study embryology at the Johns Hopkins Medical School but left for Paris without completing her medical degree. While in Paris, she not only used these techniques in her own highly complex works, such as *Tender Buttons*, but influenced other modernist writers and painters. She was close friends with both [Pablo Picasso](#) and [Henri Matisse](#), and she collected the works of [Paul Cézanne](#), [Pierre-August Renoir](#), and [Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec](#). In this way, she influenced Georges Braque’s and Picasso’s theory of [Cubism](#). She was an influence on familiar modernist authors at this time as well, most notably the young Americans [Ernest Hemingway](#), Ezra Pound, and [Sherwood Anderson](#) (as well as [Stéphane Mallarmé](#)). In many respects, Stein’s notion of “Normal Motor Automatism” and [Automatic Writing](#) went on to influence the

[Surrealists](#) as well as the development from [Henry James'](#) "narrative consciousness" to the "stream of consciousness," which was intended to include the unconscious thoughts and associations of characters.



Picasso's "The Guitar Player" Braque's "Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantelpiece"

Joyce adopted Henry James' "narrative consciousness" in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The reader will quickly notice that the narrator appears to speak from a position in time ahead of Stephen Dedalus, our protagonist, but without knowing things Stephen could not know at his moment in the past. In the opening pages of the novel, the reader is confined to the "perspectival frame" of Stephen's childish mind, even though our narrator does not appear to be a child. This is to say, we read and see this fictional world through the perspective of Joyce's infant protagonist. When Stephen is a child, we see the world through his childish eyes. When he is a young man, we again see the world through his youthful perspective.

Joyce, however, introduced a major innovation in this technique. While Henry James pioneered the concept of limiting the narrative to a particular consciousness or perspective, [Dorothy Richardson](#) used the technique first among the modernists (while rejecting the term itself), and while Stein developed a form of writing that might express the unconscious, Joyce attempted to develop a stream of consciousness in narrative that would do both. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* limits the reader's awareness to Stephen's consciousness at any point in time, and it simultaneously uses associations, jumps in thought, and language to indirectly convey Stephen's state of mind. In this way, even though the novel is written in the third-person (Stephen is "he" not "I"), it still gives the impression of being a first-person narrative and gives the reader some degree of access to Stephen's consciousness. Many scholars

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have debated the degree to which Stephen is based on Joyce himself or how much Joyce invented a narrative persona other than himself, such as the narrator being Stephen at a later stage in his life. The problem is how Stephen, Joyce, and the narrator are distinct and different personalities yet overlap to a high degree.

The stream of consciousness technique was particularly important to Virginia Woolf, who read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* when it was first published and reacted to it strongly. Woolf developed the stream of consciousness technique perhaps more than any other author, but she first strikingly encountered it in Joyce. Likewise, Eliot's poetry is often regarded as employing this technique, especially "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

Publication History

As has been mentioned, the publication history of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is complex, which is true of nearly everything Joyce wrote, almost to the point of bibliographical complexity being a Joycean trait. Most notably, the time setting and the thematic concerns of *A Portrait* overlap with Joyce's famous collection of short stories, *Dubliners*. Moreover, *A Portrait* developed from another draft novel that was only published after Joyce's death: *Stephen Hero*. The general outline of the publication is as follows:

- 1903 – Joyce first begins the autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero*.
- 1904 – Joyce writes the essay about aesthetic theory "A Portrait of the Artist" and attempts to publish it in the periodical *Dana* but is rejected.
- 1907 – revises *Stephen Hero* and "A Portrait of the Artist" with a new vision for the novel.
- 1911 – Joyce tries to burn the revised book. This version of the novel is often erroneously confused with the manuscript for *Stephen Hero*, but it was actually an early draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
- 1914 – "fair copy" of *A Portrait* is finished in manuscript, but Joyce dates it as 1913. [World War I](#) begins (Joyce is in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time).
- 1914 – the novel is first serialized by Ezra Pound in the magazine *The Egoist* from 2 February 1914 to 1 September 1915. This version was expurgated for censors under Pound's editorship *not* Joyce's. You can access this version of the novel

- from the **Modernist Journals Project** materials, which includes the full print run of *The Egoist*.
- 1915 – Joyce abandons the manuscript in Trieste when he flees to Zürich, Switzerland, during World War I (after which the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell). He retrieves the manuscript in 1919 after the war.
 - 1916 – Grant Richards, the publisher of Joyce’s *Dubliners* brings *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to the attention of B.W. Huebsch (publisher).
 - 1917 – the first Huebsch edition goes to press. As is characteristic of Joyce, after correcting the proofs (and after Huebsch having waited for Joyce’s corrections), Joyce finds need for further revisions after the first edition, which leads to several different editions:
 - 1st Edition – Huebsch
 - 2nd Edition – Huebsch (technically 1st edition, 2nd impression)
 - 2nd Edition – This is the first English edition, published by The Egoist Press with 400 new corrections by Joyce
 - 3rd Edition – returns to the Huebsch state of the text
 - 4th Edition – Jonathan Cape edition, for which Joyce went through three further sets of revised proofs in 1924 after having written his novel *Ulysses*, which includes Stephen Dedalus as a character.

From this initial print history, we should first notice the problems with establishing a “definitive” edition as well as the initial serial publication of the novel in several installments, which tell us a good deal about its “pace” and sequential form. Like Wilde, the commercial demands of a professional print production and distribution business shape and alter the artistic aims of the novel.

Joyce’s Portrait & Wilde’s Picture

As has been noted, Joyce kept a copy of Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (the 1891 version) in his library in Trieste. We also know that he first read the novel in an Italian translation as *Doriano Gray dipinto* (the 1890 version), he recognized its suppressed sexual references (which in his letters he says he wishes Wilde has developed), and he then acquired the English edition published by Tauchnitz in 1908, which was the 1891 version (Corballis 160). Joyce’s personal library is now held in The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and it has been catalogued by Michael Gillespie in *James Joyce’s*

Trieste Library. Moreover, Joyce held Wilde in high regard and felt a kinship through their Irishness in the English publishing world. Joyce was involved in a production of Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1918 in Zürich, and several critics have discussed Wilde's influence on Joyce's *Portrait* (Manganiello 89–98; Mahaffey 189–206; and Corballis 159–166). Both novels privilege discussions of aesthetics and aesthetic theory, and both were regarded as prurient or immoral by critics when first released. Both also allude to Irish nationalism and the struggle for independence from British colonial rule, and while writing what became *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce also wrote "Oscar Wilde: The Poet of Salomé" in 1909. This permits several possibilities for comparison.

Joyce makes the specifically aesthetic comparisons of his work to Wilde's the most overt. Apart from the titular similarities, Joyce directly quotes Wilde several times in his later novel *Ulysses* in 1922. Stephen Dedalus and his friend Malachi Mulligan trade quotations from *Dorian Gray* and Wilde's essay "The Decay of Lying" while wishing they could share their discussion with Wilde.

In general, Joyce's vision of stasis and kinetic art in his discussion of Thomas of Aquinas (186–188 & 193–195) across Chapter V in *A Portrait* merits comparison to Wilde's aesthetic vision in *Dorian Gray*, including his later "Preface" to the novel. Both openly disparage titillating or "kinetic" art, yet both seem to engage in it. Both also describe "Beauty" as an ideal and suggest that the artist creates Beauty while remaining hidden in the final product, yet both writers depict artists who are revealed in their art. Extensive scholarship presents a variety of opinions in these matters, and some consensus has been achieved, yet the reader's individual interpretive decisions and responses remain necessary. Hence, students will ultimately need to make their own decisions as readers rather than relying on academic consensus in these matters, in particular the irony or sincerity of both writers' aesthetic visions: whether they were meant to be taken seriously or not.

Epiphanies & Imagination

Joyce's core concept of stasis in aesthetic experience, or what Stephen describes as "arrest," is termed "epiphany." Epiphany is, literally from Greek, a sudden manifestation or a striking appearance, which typically indicates a realization of something not previously known, or colloquially a "eureka" moment. In Christianity, the Epiphany is the moment at which Jesus was recognized as the Son of God, which is the most common use of the term Epiphany (and the Epiphany Day

celebration). This religious sense would have been the most immediately recognized by Joyce and his readers, and hence, Joyce's secular and aesthetic use of "epiphany" is striking and unusual. In *A Portrait of the Artist*, Stephen describes an epiphany as

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure. (194–195)

Such a statement is, obviously, highly ambiguous. Ambiguity, however, is not all. This is not Joyce's only description of the concept of epiphany or how it works in his writings. Joyce employs epiphanies in all of his major works, most famously in the stories collected in *Dubliners*, but he describes the concept most clearly in *Stephen Hero*, which was not published until after his death. It is clear that Joyce never intended for the novel *Stephen Hero* to be published, yet we have it. The scene in which Stephen describes epiphanies in *Stephen Hero* is an early draft of the same scene in *A Portrait*, and the similarities between the two stand out clearly when they are compared in full:

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.... "Claritas is quidditas. After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany." (*Stephen Hero* 213)

These suspended moments, during which some fusion of images and understanding occurs, are often the defining moments in Joyce's texts. There are several in his earlier short story collection *Dubliners*, and the most prominent in *A Portrait* is the bird-girl scene at the very end of Chapter IV (155–157). Stephen is walking alone when he sees a young girl wading in the estuary waters. This scene allows Stephen to combine previous materials and to reconcile his imagination to the world through art, much as his opening poem "Pull out his eyes, / Apologise" allows the child Stephen to reconcile his frustrations and the world through art (poetry). Vincent Heron, his rival, is the first "bird" and generates the kinetic emotion of anger in the third section of Chapter II

(66–67). In the novel, “Vincent Heron had a bird’s face as well as a bird’s name” with his face “beaked like a bird’s” and “A shock of pale hair... like a ruffled crest” (66). He is in every sense bird-like. The bird-girl, in contrast, creates stasis and aesthetic pleasure but is symbolically linked with the Heron since “She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane’s [, and] the white fringes of her drawers were like the featherings of soft white down” (155). As birds, he sets the two in contrast to each other, implicitly, which means we should notice their differences. Joyce makes this even more overt with her skirts “dovetailed” and “Her bosom was as a bird’s, soft and slight” (155). This moment allows Stephen to reconcile his previously conflicted state through imagination and his moment of unification in epiphany. Whereas Vincent Heron’s bird images lead Stephen, within a few pages, to the fears of Hellfire and terror of the body, this new bird image in the bird-girl leads him to tranquility and acceptance of the body. In effect, art creates aesthetic pleasure by transforming the base world through pure spirit or mental apprehension.

Moreover, the bird-girl epiphany follows immediately after the discussion of Stephen’s namesake, “Daedalus,” for his surname Dedalus and the epigram to the novel as a whole. When his friends call to him as “The Dedalus!” (152), Stephen retreats to his imagination and a parallel to the Greek myth of Daedalus who fashions wings to fly from his prison on Crete (Daedalus created the labyrinth and was a valued inventor, hence he and his son Icarus were imprisoned to keep them on Crete, but he created wings for them both to fly back to Greece – Icarus flew too close to the sun, the wax in his wings melted, the feathers then fell out, and he fell to his death in the sea). For Stephen, “at the name of the fabulous *artificer*, he seemed to hear the noise of waves and to see a winged form flying.... His soul was in flight. His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world” (153; emphasis mine). This anticipates, by only a few pages, the rapturous epiphany of the bird-girl and provides a vision of Stephen’s art, and by proxy Joyce’s ambitions. It also anticipates the final words of the novel, in which Stephen’s notebooks ask “Old father, old *artificer*, stand me now and ever in good stead” (232; emphasis mine). Of course, if Stephen is Daedalus’ son, then he is Icarus, the boy who flew too near to the sun (Apollo), melted his wings, and plunged to his death. It is as if to say Stephen is about to take flight at the end of the novel, fleeing Ireland as Daedalus and Icarus fled Crete, on wings and through the sky, but the success of his flight remains in doubt since he is both “Stephen Dedalus” and the doomed child. His writing the novel shows the reader that he lived.

The novel's epigram draws these scenes together further. Taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, VIII 188, it reads in Latin "Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes" (and he set his mind to unknown arts). A.S. Kline's translation of the passage from Ovid is as follows:

Meanwhile Daedalus, hating Crete, and his long exile, and filled with a desire to stand on his native soil, was imprisoned by the waves. "He may thwart our escape by land or sea" he said "but the sky is surely open to us: we will go that way: Minos rules everything but he does not rule the heavens." *So saying he applied his thought to new invention* and altered the natural order of things. He laid down lines of feathers, beginning with the smallest, following the shorter with longer ones, so that you might think they had grown like that, on a slant. In that way, long ago, the rustic pan-pipes were graduated, with lengthening reeds. Then he fastened them together with thread at the middle, and bees'-wax at the base, and, when he had arranged them, he flexed each one into a gentle curve, so that they imitated real bird's wings. His son, Icarus, stood next to him, and, not realising that he was handling things that would endanger him, caught laughingly at the down that blew in the passing breeze, and softened the yellow bees'-wax with his thumb, and, in his play, hindered his father's marvellous work. (n.pag)

As a whole, Joyce's vision of taking flight and of birds unifies the entire novel, not simply the bird girl and Vincent Heron. Like Daedalus's wings, which lead him to freedom but destroy his son, the aesthetic practice of art grants freedom from the restrictions of Irish society and Joyce's position within it. Moreover, the art dreamed of by Stephen and articulated as "epiphany" in the novel is achieved by Joyce through writing the novel itself, which suggests an older Stephen is also the narrator or else (as Wilde argues is true of any good portrait), the novel is a picture of the artist himself: Joyce.

The Irish Famine & Irish Politics

Although Joyce does not write about the Irish Famine, it informs the political commentary of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and is a part of the material and political conditions that led to Joyce's work. The Irish Potato Famine occurred in the mid-Nineteenth Century, but its effects lingered for a very long time. The Great Famine (1845–1852) was caused by a combination of a potato blight and British colonial rule that continued to export food to England during the famine. Moreover, the

famine was compounded by massive emigration from Ireland by the young, educated, wealthy, and healthy, which led to a long-term population decline that worsened the mortality of the famine and effected a nearly exclusively Irish and Catholic population while largely sparing the Protestant and Anglo-Irish. In context, the poor needed potatoes to live off of due to the farm tenancy regulations – they farmed on land owned by the Anglo-Irish colonizers, hence their cash crops and livestock were not their own property, and they lived off the simple potato. Hence, they continued to export a large amount of food, grains, and livestock while starving due to the potato famine. Because of this economic and humanitarian catastrophe, many young, educated, and healthy Irish citizens fled the country to emigrate overseas or the Britain. This caused a delayed population decline in addition to the deaths by starvation and emigration since the older population that remained in Ireland could not have as many children or were past childbearing age, and those who could reproduce were economically disinclined to marry or bear children due to poverty. A simple timeline demonstrates the desperate situation of Ireland when Joyce was writing of it:

- 1649 – Oliver Cromwell’s conquest of Ireland, in which approximately 600,000 of the 1,500,000 population die (these figures face much debate to be both higher and lower). Cromwell displaced Catholic landowners with Protestant colonizers from England.
- 1662 – after the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 (following Cromwell’s interregnum), Charles II restored a third of the confiscated land to Irish Catholics, but this was reversed when the Catholic James II ceded the throne to William III and Mary II in 1689.
- 1800 – the “Act of Union” formally unified Ireland with Britain
- 1841 – census reports a population in Ireland of nearly 8.5 million
- 1845 – the potato blight begins the Great Famine (1845–1852) but does not affect crops or livestock other than potatoes.
- 1851 – census reports a population of 6.5 million
- 1861 – census reports a population of 5.7 million
- 1911 – population of 4.3 million
- 1916 – Easter Uprising against English rule, which is defeated by the British and the leaders are publicly executed.
- 1922 – [Irish Independence](#) from British rule and the partitioning of Northern Ireland, which remains British.
- 1926 – census of Ireland reports a population of 4.2 million (often seen as the lowest point of the population)

- 1961 – census of Ireland reports a population of 2.8 million with approximately 1.1 million additional people in Northern Ireland.
- 2008 – census reports a population of 6.2 million (4.4 million in the Republic of Ireland and 1.7 million in Northern Ireland).

In a very simplistic sense, this conveys the desperation experienced by the Irish during Joyce's life in Dublin and the period in which *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is set and written. Both emigration and death from the Famine influenced the continued decline in the population, and it is important to recall that the portion of the population able to procreate also made up the majority of emigrants, and the same group (the lower classes who also had the highest rate of reproduction) faced the highest mortality from famine. The deaths and departures were concentrated among those who could or would soon be able to bear children, which doomed the surviving population to a long and slow population decline.

In this climate, [Charles Stewart Parnell](#), an Irish politician who was adept at playing the British Parliament to Ireland's favor, was a beacon of hope for Irish Catholics. However, he was eventually discredited by the Catholic Church for his relationship with a married (though separated) woman. Parnell was forced to resign and died ostracized shortly thereafter, ending the Irish parliamentary successes he had initiated. Joyce refers to Parnell repeatedly in his works and set all of his major prose works in Ireland during one of the periods of Ireland's greatest population decline and greatest economic stagnation. Joyce also represents the moral voice of the Catholic Church as an oppressing force operating in tandem with British colonialism, almost certainly due to the effect of the Parnell affair on his vision of Irish politics while young. That is, the Irish condemned Parnell for his personal life (which ran contrary to Catholicism) even though Parnell was the best hope for Irish security and independence at the time.

The most common way to approach the Irish-English conflict in the novel is Stephen's discussions of the "tundish" with his Dean (the word for a "funnel" used by the Irish). The conflict over Irish and English languages makes the colonial position and Joyce's rejection of it clear, yet Stephen ultimately cannot distinguish between word origins, nor can his master. Like so many colonized peoples, the Irish had been made to acquire the English language, and Joyce wrote in it even while recognizing it as the colonizer's tongue:

—How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master,
on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words

without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (Joyce, *Portrait* 172)

This scene is discussed extensively in Joyce scholarship, and as Jessica Berman points out, this is not even the first or even most famous disagreement over language in the scene:

the passage immediately preceding that, where Stephen discusses Newman's use of the word "detain" and confuses the dean... Stephen here is the one in control of multiple levels of language... Stephen highlights John Henry Newman's particular use of the word "detain," which Newman takes from the version of Ecclesiasticus used as an antiphon in Catholic services.... The dean misses Stephen's point on two levels, answering according to the "marketplace" use of the word ("not at all") when Stephen quotes the use of detain in the phrase "I hope I am not detaining you," and ignoring the "literary" reference to Newman (P, 164). In this short passage we can thus see Stephen not only lay claim to the literary tradition for himself but also demonstrate that the dean is completely outside it in the common world of the marketplace. (Berman 471)

Stephen 'twists the knife' in this joke on the Dean by demonstrating that the colonized have their own tongue and manner of speaking English, despite the dean's attempt to control it. The same example can be seen today in Indian English and other colonial inheritances of the English language around the world. Moreover, for Berman's examples, John Henry Newman (1801–1890) was a Catholic Cardinal who famously left the Anglican Church while at the University of Oxford and became rector of the Catholic University of Ireland, which is now University College Dublin (FDU's Newman Catholic Association on the Metropolitan campus is named for him). Joyce attended University College, Dublin, from 1898 to 1903, forty years after Newman has retired, but he was still a familiar figure.

Given the historical context of British colonization of Ireland, this scene has become the focus of most postcolonial interpretations of Joyce's works as a whole.

Questions for Self-Review

1. Is there a social critique or a moral implicit in Joyce's *A Picture of the Artist as a Young Man*?
2. Does the form of the novel, its structure, support or conflict with its social function and its critique of Irish society?
3. How do social class, wealth, and power function in the novel?
4. Does the novel critique British Imperialism or the aristocracy, or is it apolitical by virtue of its aesthetic aims?
5. Does the ending of the novel imply a moral or aesthetic lesson that is not explicitly stated?

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