

ŠTĚPÁN DUDEŠEK
“PERSONAE IN A PORTRAIT THROUGH THE USE OF LANGUAGE”
SUPERVISOR’S REPORT

I would begin by noting that previous to reading this thesis, I had only seen a draft “Introduction,” submitted as part of the exam in diploma work.

Comments and Questions:

Why is the word “personae” in the title of this thesis italicised?

The abstract is incoherent, both linguistically and in terms of the overall outline it attempts to present.

The introduction begins with a quote from Ovid that is sourced to a website. I find it difficult to believe that an established edition of Ovid in Latin couldn’t have been physically accessed in Prague (or elsewhere). Additionally, the purpose of such epigraphs, inserted at the head of each chapter, remains opaque.

Linguistic inadequacies can be found in almost every sentence of this thesis, beginning with the first line. In addition to which, the referencing system does not resemble the one required of our students and outlined on our website (despite earlier promptings to address this).

The key term “persona” is defined confusedly. Since the attempt to define this term underwrites the entire logic and methodology of the thesis, its failure has necessary consequences for the coherence of all that follows. 1. Persona is defined *in terms of* a psychological realism, “understood to refer to the various stages of phases of Stephen’s development and how they can be seen in the text”; 2. Persona is offered *in place of* “character” as a useful term; 3. “Character” is said to involve “intricate difficulties” arising from “*the number of vastly differing views of Stephen in A Portrait*” [???]. These “views” are elided with diverse critical *interpretations* of Stephen’s character—diverse due to “the unfulfilled expectations which *Stephen himself* [sic] helps to create”; 4. “Character” is “thus” discarded in order to focus on *language*: technique and style *in place of* a “unified subject” [quoting Cixous]; 5. Stephen’s *subjectivity* is nevertheless asserted and Joyce’s “use of language” is reduced to a device producing a psychological *verisimilitude*: “not only *what* Stephen apprehends ... but also *how* he apprehends”; 6. The definition of persona is consequently vested in the equivalence of “prose” and “*experience*” [Stephen’s so-called experience, rather than the (readerly, presumably) experience of language]; 7. The term persona is then allowed to elide with “*personality*” [Kenner’s “the personality of the artist... brooding upon itself”]; 8. So that we end with a return to the initial psychological realism from which the definition departed: “Stephen may thus be said to have become ‘a young man in control of his environment’...”.

As if to reinforce the conventionality of what is in fact being discussed in this thesis, the introduction is followed by three chapters that all address character “types” and forms of verisimilitude: 1. “Through the eyes of a child”; 2. “The Dark Catholic Avenger”; 3. “The Young Artificer.”

Which “controversy” is being referred to in the first sentence of Ch. 1?

General discussion of tropes etc. throughout Ch. 2 is more ably undertaken, particularly of ecclesiastical and literary usage, etc., and might have provided a useful basis for more soundly defining persona in terms of [Joyce’s] language (which is the purported aim of the thesis).

Ch. 3 appears to begin with a contradiction, resurrecting the assumption of a “clearly distinguished persona of Stephen Dedalus”. We are then given to understand that in the last chapter of *Portrait* “it seems that the style ... has for the first time a really confident voice...” Something potentially interesting is happening here, but it appears to have gone un-noted. In any case “Stephen Dedalus,” and not “language,” remains till the end the true subject of this thesis, despite a certain aspiration to turn SD into a type of linguistic matrix: in every instance, language is never much more than an instrument for constructing/conveying subjective effects (“the different personae the text seems to *evoke*” [41]). We understand at the end that the whole purpose of this thesis has in fact been nothing less conventional than “through such a close reading... to get a better understanding of *A Portrait* and its main protagonist.”

A generous result for this thesis would be a 3, depending upon the overall performance during the defence; although my own advice as a supervisor—were it sought—would have been to revise and resubmit at a later date.

Louis Armand, PhD
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