
The Quotation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and the Transformation of the Catholic Church in Patrick McCabe's *The Holy City*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Chris McCool, the protagonist of *The Holy City*, addresses his homoerotic obsession through quotations taken from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and, in doing so, brings to the fore the changing position of the Irish Church with regard to sexual morality in the 1960s. Using an intertextual and socio-cultural approach, this study consists of three parts. The first part examines Chris's failing attempt to fit into either the Protestant or the Catholic community, only to find in the end that both are mired in the past. Unable to find a sense of belonging, Chris gradually becomes obsessed with Marcus Otoy, a Nigerian-Irish Catholic. The next part will explore Chris's juxtaposition of his obsession with quotes from *A Portrait*. The focus will be on the role religion plays in the face of one's erotic desire. Finally, the article will explain the transformation of the Irish Church since the 1960s as reflected in Chris's juxtaposition. While the Church in Stephen's time was a monolithic institute, the Church in Chris's time, willingly or not, withdraws into the private sphere of individual faith.

KEYWORDS Patrick McCabe, *The Holy City*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the Irish Church, sexuality, homosexuality

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The Holy City (2009) is the second of Patrick McCabe's "small town" trilogy.¹ While *Winterwood* demonstrates the widening gap between the country and the city in Ireland during the course of modernization, *The Holy City* delves into the fate of the two congregations—Protestants and Catholics—in the 1960s, the time when Irish society was opening up to increasing influences of Anglo-American popular culture and liberal movements. The protagonist Chris McCool gives an unreliable account of his upbringing as an illegitimate child in the aristocratic Thorntons in Cullymore. Caught between the declining Protestant ascendancy and the weakening Catholic rural community, Chris searches for a faith to live by, a relationship to cling to, in a prospering Ireland. Particularly, he reveals his infatuation with the Nigerian-Irish Catholic Marcus Otoyó and associates it with several quotations from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man*.

McCabe's works have shown a substantial engagement with Joyce. As Ellen McWilliams notes, McCabe interacts with Joyce "in the way that it adapts a number of Joycean frameworks, methods, and motif" (71). The most conspicuous influence of Joyce can be found in the manifestation of the "old sow that eats her farrow"² in *The Butcher Boy* (1992) and the elaboration of "gender transformations in the 'Circe' episode" in *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998) (McWilliams 71). She also points out that McCabe's another novel *The Dead School* adopts four Joycean motifs: the rewriting of "the dynamic between Bloom and Dedalus in *Ulysses*," the interplay with other works and literary styles, the "refusal of grand narratives," and the collapse of high and low culture (72). Admittedly, McCabe's fiction responds to Joyce in a variety of ways. As McCabe acknowledges Joyce's influence in his article entitled "Metempsychoswandaysinarkloan; James Joyce and Me":

I see in Joyce someone who's there and not there, . . . recording the electric kineticism of ordinary human chatter. Tunnelling deep into the souls of his sources in search of that extraordinary, ordinary polyphony, in order to comprehend the authentic nature of his race . . .

Compared with his other works, *The Holy City* receives little attention despite its extensive and direct quotation of *A Portrait*.³ Throughout the novel, the

¹ The other two are *Winterwood* (2006) and *The Stray Sod Country* (2010).

² With this phrase, Stephen responds to Davin, who asks him to devote himself to Ireland (Joyce 203).

³ In *MLA International Bibliography*, only one entry is related to McCabe's *The Holy City*. In "Blighted Past—Lost Future? Denaturalising Narratives of Rural Irishness in Lenny Abrahamson's *Garage* and Patrick McCabe's *The Holy City*," Sarah Heinz and Mark Schmitt investigate the inauthentic representation of rural Ireland in both works. Instead of "pristine" and "innocent" spaces, the Irish countryside is shown as "multivocal" and "socially produced" (77-79).

protagonist Chris McCool catches sight of Joyce's work on several occasions and becomes preoccupied with it. He constantly quotes certain passages, particularly those about Stephen's sentiments, to express his infatuation with Marcus. The interplay between Stephen's inner world and Chris's fancy for Marcus allows us to examine the transformation of Ireland in the aspects of sexuality and religion over a span of fifty years. More specifically, the contrast between Stephen and Chris illustrates the changing relationship between religion and the desire of the individual. It explores the possibility of subsuming one's desire under one's religious faith and *vice versa*, a possibility that was almost unthinkable in Stephen's time.

The juxtaposition of the two texts displays the disparity between the contexts they are situated in. In *A Portrait*, Stephen struggles to negotiate with the Catholic tradition, which holds a repressive, puritanical attitude toward physical, erotic desire. He self-censors his sexual cravings and tries to veil them with aesthetic images. Although he refuses to join the Church, Catholicism deeply influences the formation of his aesthetics. In *The Holy City*, however, Chris sanctifies his erotic desire by expressing it in sacred, religious language. Erotically incited by Marcus's hymn singing, Chris imagines himself and Marcus joined in wedlock in the holy city of Jerusalem. Chris's homoerotic fantasy in religious terms dramatizes the changing position of the Irish Church in relation to issues of sexuality. Facing waves of sexual liberalization, such as the Irish Gay Rights Movement (1974) and David Norris's Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform (1980s), the Church was forced to transform from the moral authority in Irish society toward a source of "individually principled ethics" (Inglis 244). Irish Catholicism has become more an "inner-worldly ascetic type of religion" than an institutional structure (Inglis 244).

Using an intertextual and socio-cultural approach, this article consists of three parts. The first part examines Chris's failing attempt to fit into either the Protestant or the Catholic community, only to find in the end that both are mired in the past. Unable to find a sense of belonging, Chris gradually becomes obsessed with Marcus. The next part will explore Chris's juxtaposition of his obsession with quotes from *A Portrait*. The focus will be on the role religion plays in the face of one's erotic desire. Finally, the article will explain the transformation of the Irish Church since the 1960s as reflected in Chris's juxtaposition. While the Church in Stephen's time was a monolithic institute, the Church in Chris's time, willingly or not, withdraws into the private sphere of individual faith.

Chris's Sectarian Stereotypes

Before his attraction to Marcus, Chris tends to identify more with Protestants than with Catholics. He claims himself to be the illegitimate son of the Protestant Lady Thornton and the Catholic farmer Stan Carberry, although he is more likely to be the son of Dr. Thornton and Dympna McCool, a farm girl who names and raises him in “the Nook,” the farmhouse of the Thornton estate (11). In either case, Chris is a child of an extramarital, interreligious relationship. But he admires Lady Thornton more than the Catholic Dympna, or “Wee Dimpie,” as he calls her (12). In Chris’s childhood, Lady Thornton would visit him with her friend Ethel Baird and read him stories. In the eyes of a child, they come from “a world wholly alien, albeit quite beautiful” (11). He is attracted to their outfits and accents, embodiments of a culture foreign to the Cullymore countryside:

They wore gloves and tweed skirts and strings of pure white pearls. They spoke in accents with cut-glass vowels, which had clearly originated far from Cullymore, perhaps in London or the Home Counties of England. (11)

He appreciates their “elegance” and “ladylike poise” (11). For Chris, Lady Thornton and Ethel represent “Orthodox Protestant ladies—high-bred and discreet” (12).

If Lady Thornton’s motherly image provides an outlet for Chris’s affection, Dr. Thornton, Lady Thornton’s husband, sets an example of intellectual superiority of the Protestant Ascendancy. As the landlord of the “eighteenth-century Palladian-style mansion,” Dr. Thornton owns “many priceless works of art” and an “extensive wainscoted library” (2). Dr. Thornton is also “a commentator, historian, literary critic and essayist,” whose works are collected in his library (17). Thornton stands for the privileged Ascendancy of the Big House,⁴ possessing not only social, economic capital but also cultural capital.⁵ His artistic taste and literary knowledge distinguish him from other Catholic peasants who are “vitiating, debauched, and quite degraded” (18). Thornton embodies the elitist tendencies of the ascendancy—proud, rational, and yet alienated from the Irish rural community. Although

⁴ Starting with Maria Edgeworth, the Big House tradition in Irish literature concerns itself with memories and experiences of the Anglo-Irish landed gentry as a colonial class in Ireland. The Big House—house, mansion, castle, or demesne—serves as “the symbols of a colonizing force” (Kreilkamp 6). Themes of exploitation and injustice as well as the loss of that tradition are central to Big House novels (20-21).

⁵ According to Pierre Bourdieu, cultural capital is the capital that exists in “dispositions of the mind and body,” “cultural goods,” or “educational qualifications” (243). Different possession of cultural capital leads to different cultural competence, which then consolidates “classes and class fractions” (243).

Chris is despised as “Catholic scum” by Thornton, he cannot help revering him. Chris sees Dr. Thornton as a “sophisticated gentleman” who is “bred of the noblest, verifiably Protestant stock” (2). Peeping into Thornton’s library, Chris admires his intellectual taste and tries to win his affection by picking up some “artistic inclinations” from literary works (3). Chris’s admiration for the Thorntons is testimony to the privileged position of Irish Protestantism, the roots of which can be traced back to the Penal Laws in the eighteenth century. As Declan Kiberd quotes from Bernard Shaw’s *Autobiography*, Irish Protestantism is not “a religion but a side in a political faction; actuated less by theological principle than by *class prejudice*” (420; emphasis added). The Protestant faith in Ireland often connotes the political dominance and economic privilege of the landed Anglo-Irish ascendancy. Thus what the Thorntons stand for is a difference more in social status than in religion. As Chris and Dympna admit, Lady Thornton and her people “had access to the mystery of ‘class’” and “they’re up there so far and you can’t get them” (75).

In Dr. Thornton’s writings, Chris finds the doctor’s negative stereotype of the Catholics: “Catholics were by far the weaker species and the Protestants were innately superior. Always remaining impartial and neutral, self-controlled, dignified at all times” (18). Admiring Thornton and looking for an identity, Chris internalizes Thornton’s stereotypes. While Catholics are “unreasonable and quite hysterical,” he associates Dr. Thornton’s “aristocratic lineage and ascendancy heritage” with such qualities as “sovereign, autonomous, self-contained ego” and “the ethos of uncompromising, hard-headed, rational self-interest” (10-11). Replicating Dr. Thornton’s debasement of the Catholics, Chris shows disdain for his caretaker Dympna. As if trying to fulfill a mother’s duty, Dympna “tended to [Chris’s] needs” and taught him “all there was to know about rustic living” (12). However, Chris sees her as something “vulgar” when she is compared with the Protestant ladies (75). He derides her by imitating her accent: “Me auld pal Chrishty! . . . That took his name after the besht auld saint of all!” (12). For Chris, she is a “religious zealot, bestowing on [him] . . . the names of two of her favourite saints” (13).⁶ Dympna also looks down on herself and her people. She demeans Catholics as “liars” and “loved [Protestants] more than any Catholic” (75). Although Dympna is most likely Chris’s birth mother, she admits that she herself is not a role model for Chris to look up to.

⁶ Chris’s full name, Christopher John McCool, is a combination of two saints in Catholicism (St. Christopher and John of the Cross) and the mythical figure in Irish legend (Finn McCool), the latter of which is borrowed to designate the revolutionary Fenian Brotherhood in the nineteenth century (Heinz and Schmitt 92-93).

Chris's religious stereotypes resemble the sectarian view dominant in English ideology. According to Terry Eagleton, a British colonial official in the nineteenth century once recorded his observation of the Irish: "Since the Irish are 'persons without reflection, slaves to their affections and passion,' they are unsuited to the rationalist authority of Protestantism" (77). Irish people's unreserved submission to the Roman Catholic Church was considered irrational and slavish, incompatible with the Protestant ethic of reason and self-control. As Michael de Nie also indicates, the Irish Catholics were often portrayed as superstitious, ignorant, and gullible in the British press (17). Chris falls into the duality fabricated by the ruling class and hopes that he "might have ended up being one of them" (16).

Though not recognized as the heir to the Thornton's estate, Chris is allowed to stay in the Nook after Dr. and Lady Thornton's death. To make a living, he has no choice but to go into "dairy business" after he enters adulthood (14-15). Although he is reluctant to "[disgrace himself] in the world of rustic authenticity," he proves to be as "competent a yokel" as his fellow countrymen (15). Nonetheless, because of his distaste for the Catholics, Chris distances himself from the Irish peasants:

Deep in my heart I knew that even if I wanted it to be the case I could never be like them. Knew instinctively from the furtive nocturnal visits I had received of old and from Dimpie's veiled intimations and general behaviour towards me that I was 'different.' And that part of me would always be Protestant. (16)

Instead of a "Fenian bastard," as others might see him, Chris would rather be affiliated with the Protestant heritage (90). The duality between Protestants and Catholics offers Chris a sense of security and belonging, something crucial for an illegitimate half Protestant/half Catholic child. In this light, Chris's full name Christopher John McCool gives a hint of irony in two aspects. On the one hand, the name points to the Catholic, Gaelic-Irish heritage that Chris reluctantly inherits. Yet the fact that he duplicates the English stereotype of Irish Catholics reinforces the implication that Chris is destined to engage in a lifelong struggle with his identity or even get caught up in a constant state of self-denial. On the other hand, the close association of his name with two Christian saints and one mythical hero appears out of step with the modernizing Ireland. Similar to Cullymore's social and economic stagnation, the name sounds obsolete, burdened with the past. Hence, Chris attempts to modernize his name as "C. J. Pops" to cleanse the name of any trace of biblical and mythical allusions (9). However, as the following will show, the process for Ireland to cope with social changes is not as easy as what Chris does with his name.

Chris's polarization between Protestants and Catholics is soon called into question when he finds that both sides are losing luster over the course of time. The Thornton Manor remains a building of the past, left with "crumbling towers" and "grim Gothic dourness" (16). Witnessing the drastic transformation in the 1960s, Chris laments over Dr. Thornton's "fading, disappearing, and antediluvian world" (41). "It's the sixties, I guess, and the old world is dying! It's goodbye to the cold and formal Protestant ancient world" (43). Like other Big Houses, the Thornton estate dilapidates over time.⁷ Similarly, the Catholic community is not immune to social changes. Chris describes his hometown as "poor old sleepy Cullymore" (25). Villagers "[carry] on with their lives like their fathers and mothers before them" (16). Chris's view resembles the revivalist version of "a more distant and idealised Celtic peasantry" (Kreilkamp 16). The life in Cullymore seems to be timeless, indifferent to the outer world. However, the world that Chris situates himself in is changed, "utterly transformed" (28).⁸ For him, Cullymore has turned into an "urbanised country," where "things were so completely different—almost exotic" (30, 41). Protestant and Catholic worlds, the two axes on which Chris positions himself, can no longer remain intact as they are imagined to be. That leads to a void in Chris's self-identification. As Chris himself is aware, his identity will no longer remain intact: "Identities were frivolously encouraged to fracture in those days, to turn themselves upside down and inside out" (58).

Chris, Marcus Otoyó, and the Quotation of *A Portrait*

With nowhere else to belong to, Chris becomes obsessed with Marcus Otoyó. In the village, he gets to know Marcus, a Catholic Nigerian teenager who stays with Dolores McCausland, a Protestant woman from Northern Ireland. Known as a "promising, potentially brilliant scholar" in Cullymore, Marcus has worked with another girl Evelyn to convert a deserted greenhouse to a "retreat" (20, 22).⁹ In

⁷ In fact, the Anglo-Irish ascendancy had fallen into decline since the heyday of Irish independence in the 1920s. The fall of the Big House is vividly represented in Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The Last September* (1929). The anachronism in *The Holy City* is to dramatize the void that Chris is situated in after the collapse of the two worlds. Moreover, readers may get the sense that neither community is immune to the devastating impact of modernization and urbanization.

⁸ Seeing the phrase "utterly transformed," readers will be reminded of Yeats's line from "Easter, 1916": "Transformed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born." While Yeats and his Protestant community felt restless about the approaching Irish independence, Chris is about to witness a substantial challenge to his identity due to drastic social changes in the 1960s.

⁹ In the 1960s, it was very rare to see Nigerian immigrants in Ireland. According to *Census of Population of Ireland, 1961*, Vol. 7, there were 47 Nigerian immigrants (36 male, 11 female) in 1960, and 6 (4 male, 2 female) in 1961 (115). As Julius Komolafe notes, early Nigerian immigrants came to Ireland for two main reasons: religious mission and business (231). Some Nigerians were sent to Ireland to be trained as clergies,

the beginning Chris believes he and Dolores have a mutual fondness for each other, but as time goes by, he finds himself attracted to Marcus, and with good reason. Before knowing Marcus, Chris discriminated against the blacks. He wrote the slur “fuck all niggers” on the wall of the cathedral and was taught to believe that blacks are “lower than the dog” (19, 26). Ironically, he was denigrated as “the black Protestant cunt” by his Catholic countrymen because of his connection with the Thorntons (19). Accordingly, Chris’s discrimination against the blacks is more than anti-black prejudice; it also stems from his self-disdain as well as his complex relationship with the Catholic community. Calling the blacks “niggers,” Chris allies himself with the bigoted Catholics, but in the meantime he accepts the smear cast on him, the smear that differentiates him from people around him. Blackness symbolizes Chris’s otherness in relation to Catholic and Protestant communities, for he is neither Catholic nor Protestant and belongs to neither side. Chris’s contempt for blackness changes when he sees Marcus. At first, he is “fascinated by Marcus’s *blackness*” and the Protestantness that he adores in the Thorntons—“calm,” “composed,” “self-reliant,” and “self-assured” (25-26). In Chris’s eyes, Marcus is “*extraordinary*” and “acting like he was Prince of the Town” (25-26). Even though he is a black boy, Marcus displays the Protestant qualities that Chris has admired in Dr. Thornton. But Chris’s fascination with Marcus takes on a mystical coloring the moment he hears him praying. It is an inscrutable experience for Chris: “This had begun to seem a far greater mystery. I could have listened all to the hum of [Marcus’s and Evelyn’s] young voices: I was hypnotized” (26). Chris is so moved by the mystical power of Marcus’s praying that he no longer admires the Protestant qualities he aspires to possess, stereotypical as they may be. “Whenever I listened to the two of them praying, the last thing I found myself wanting to be now was a Protestant,” he remarks (26). Instead of dismissing their prayers as irrational superstition, Chris is deeply touched by the mystical power in Marcus’s piety.¹⁰ Chris’s sectarian stereotypes are shattered by Marcus, who blurs the ethnic and religious boundaries that mark the Anglo-Irish/Gaelic-Irish and Protestant/Catholic divide of the Irish society. Marcus is neither Anglo-Irish nor Gaelic-Irish, and yet in him are found both Protestant and Catholic qualities, qualities which Chris has intended to divide into opposites. Admittedly, Marcus serves as compensation for what Chris finds lacking in himself. Chris is

and some came to export Irish mackerel to Nigeria (231). As the few details of Marcus suggest, it is likely that Marcus is connected with some Catholic network of Ireland and Nigeria at that time.

¹⁰ Catholicism has often been associated with mysticism, the belief in “an intimate union with the Divinity” through prayers or contemplation (Sauvage). Just like two sides of the same coin, this abstruse experience is easily distained as irrational or superstitious, as what Chris deemed earlier.

denied by Catholic and Protestant communities and is therefore, in a sense, “black”; so when he sees Marcus, a black boy who incorporates the Protestant and Catholic qualities he longs for, he identifies with him and sees Marcus as a solution to his own identity crisis.

As the novel unfolds, Chris often associates his desire for Marcus with quotes from Joyce’s *A Portrait*, particularly those about Stephen’s sentiments. It is no accident that Chris falls for Joyce’s *A Portrait*. He first sees the novel in Dr. Thornton’s mansion and considers it as proof of his “artistic inclinations” that might earn respect from Dr. Thornton (3). Chris’s attraction to the novel is reinforced when he sees it carried by Marcus “on his way home from school” (35). Since then “the prose . . . of *A Portrait* continued obstinately to swirl before [Chris’s] eyes, defying all comprehension, defeating each and every renewed assault” (35). For instance, Chris once notices that Marcus is staring at “a lady’s nightdress” in the window of a shop (45). As Chris wonders why he himself is so interested in Marcus’s conduct, a passage from *A Portrait* occurs to him: “*A trembling seized him and his eyes grew dim, for there appeared no respite from his inconsolable ardour*” (45). The first half of the sentence comes from the end of Chapter II of *A Portrait*. In this scene, Stephen is wandering in a red-light district:

A trembling seized him and his eyes grew dim. The yellow gasflames arose before his troubled vision against the vapoury sky, burning as if before an *altar*. Before the doors and in the lighted halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some *rite*. (100; emphasis added)

The sentence in *A Portrait* reveals the fusion of Stephen’s shock, excitement, and confusion. While he is amazed at the bizarre sight of women “in long vivid gowns travers[ing] the streets,” he compares the view to the scenes that he is familiar with—the altar and the rite in the church (100). Given the fact that Stephen has his first sexual experience with a prostitute afterward, it is fair to suggest that the passage foreshadows the conflict between Stephen’s sexual desire and Catholic doctrine in the following chapters. Incorporated into *The Holy City*, the quote can carry two implications. On the one hand, Marcus’s attraction to women’s nightdress corresponds to Stephen’s experience in the red-light district. Their sexual desire is constantly under the surveillance of Catholic teaching. On the other hand, the quote may reflect Chris’s uncertainty of his fancy for Marcus. While he is dimly aware of his desire for Marcus, he is also mindful of the conservative society in the 1960s. His attraction to Marcus is as bizarre as Stephen’s amazement at the red-light district. Homosexual desire can be perturbing for the “old world” even

though that world is dying (43). Chris shares Stephen's inner conflict, but different from Stephen, he is facing his homosexuality, a rising but controversial issue at the time.

As the above instance shows, the quote of *A Portrait* reflects Chris's desire and the changing social milieu in the time lapse between the two texts. It is even more evident in the quotation of the bird girl scene. The bird girl passage overlaps with Chris's obsession with Marcus when Chris sees Marcus reading *A Portrait* in a café and peeps into the page Marcus is on during his absence:

My heart was beating furiously as I lifted the volume, my eyes drawn immediately to the underlined passages:

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea: and when she felt his presence and the worship of his eyes her eyes turned to him in quiet sufferance of his gaze, without shame or wantonness. Long, long she suffered his gaze and then quietly withdrew her eyes from his and bent them towards the stream.

I continued down the page, my heart still racing:

He climbed to the crest of the sandhill and gazed about him. Evening had fallen. A rim of the young moon cleft the pale waste of skyline, the rim of a silver hoop embedded in grey sand; and the tide was flowing in fast to the land with a low whisper of her waves, islanding a few last figures in distant pools.

It would have been so much better if I had never in my life gone near that booth. For that night in the Nook I dreamt the whole thing so vividly—as we lay there together, islanded on the strand:

—She's beautiful, isn't she, Marcus? I said, casting a pebble across the blue canopy of the night. (54)

As Stephen gazes at the girl at the beach and projects his passion onto the natural landscape, so does Chris peep at Marcus and dream of lying with Marcus on the strand. In the dream, Marcus invites Chris to a trip to San Francisco, the center of hippies and gay rights movement in the 60s and 70s. "This time next week we'll both be in San Francisco," says Marcus (55). Hearing this, Chris is "flushed and out of sorts" (55). However, as Chris wakes up from the dream, Marcus's "promise"

also recedes. The promise fades away just like the bird girl who “had waded so breathtakingly into the water” (55).

Before we juxtapose the two texts, first we need to investigate into the significance of the bird girl scene in *A Portrait*. Several critics have noted the inter-relationship of the sacred and the profane in this scene. Bernard Benstock, for instance, suggests that the scene displays “the full spectrum from sacred to profane ecstasy” (209). Echoing Benstock’s view, Erwin R. Steinberg argues that the bird girl scene is a “synthesis” of the previous two chapters (151). As Steinberg suggests, while Chapter II ends with “a profane encounter with a prostitute,” Chapter III with “a sacred encounter with a priest,” at the end of Chapter IV “the sacred is assimilated to the worldly” (158). However, Benstock’s and Steinberg’s readings fail to account for Stephen’s abrupt withdrawal and overwhelming excitement after the episode at the strand. “He turned away from her suddenly and set off across the strand. His cheeks were aflame; his body was aglow; his limbs were trembling” (Joyce 172). Benstock’s idea of “profane ecstasy” downplays the ambiguity that Stephen’s response is as much sexually aroused as spiritually ecstatic. Additionally, in both readings the bird girl merely stands for one of the “worldly references,” a slice of the profane world from which Stephen’s aesthetics derives (Steinberg 158). The tension between the girl’s physical attraction and Stephen’s asexual, aesthetic imagination is largely overlooked.

Joseph Valente’s essay “Thrilled by His Touch: Homosexual Panic and the Will to Artistry in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” offers insights into this gap in Benstock’s and Steinberg’s interpretation. Valente studies Stephen’s “homosexual panic” in the patriarchal society that is consolidated by “male homosocial desires,” or the “interdependence and solidarity among men” (224). He argues that Stephen displays “phobic denial” in the face of his own “homoerotic energies” among the male homosocial network (225). As regard to Stephen’s encounter with the bird girl, Valente suggests that the bird girl serves as a “point of mediation,” shielding Stephen from the homosexual desire that arises from the view of his naked peers (237). The bird girl in Stephen’s gaze is “heterosexual investment” aestheticised in order to veil and repress such “homosocial affect” (238).

Following this line of thought, this article argues that, aside from homosexual panic, Stephen, wittingly or not, also self-censors his heterosexual desire at the sight of the bird girl. Before heading to the strand, Stephen has a meeting with the director of Belvedere, who idly mentions “the capuchin dress” of the Capuchins, “a branch of the Franciscan order” (154; Gifford 208). The director hints that the capuchin priestly robe should be abolished since the robe resembles women’s skirts and is called “[l]es jupes,” meaning skirts or petticoats in French (155).

Stephen is discreet in his response to the director, who might be testing him with the subject of women's clothing. "The phrase [*les jupes*] had been spoken lightly with design and he felt that his face was being searched by the eyes in the shadow" (155). What is inside Stephen's mind, nonetheless, are "the brittle texture of a woman's stocking" and "the soul or body of a woman moving with tender life" (155). Aware of the Church's censorship of sexuality, Stephen has to conceal his erotic desire toward women. Accordingly, he is glad that the waning evening light "hid the tiny flame kindling upon his cheek" (155).

After the meeting, Stephen walks down the strand and sees a girl at the beach:

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. 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 pure save where an *emerald* trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as *ivory*, were bared almost to the hips, where the white fringes of her drawers were like feathering of soft white down. Her *slateblue* skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some darkplumaged *dove*. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (171; emphasis added)

The tension between bareness and concealment lurks underneath Stephen's view of the girl. As Stephen observes the girl's "bare legs," "thighs," "hips," and "waist," these parts of the girl's body are meanwhile covered in "emerald trail of seaweed," "slateblue skirts," and the aesthetic imagery of "seabird," "crane," and "dove." His erotic desire toward the girl is simultaneously veiled in the symbolic language of art. As James F. Carens notes, the color "emerald" implies Stephen's self-appointed mission as an "Irish writer of Irish experience," and the color "slateblue" is associated with the Blessed Virgin (309). The fact that Stephen merges the bird girl with Virgin Mary is both offensive and compliant. It is profane to compare Virgin Mary, a motherly-figure covered in robe, with a girl who bares her legs when bathing at the beach.¹¹ Nonetheless, this provocative comparison is soon moderated by the emphasis on the girl's "girlish" disposition. The seductive image of the girl is turned into one of innocence and purity, attributes analogous to Virgin Mary.

¹¹ As Don Gifford notes of the etiquette in the 1890s, women bathing should put on "skirts to mid-calf and black or opaque stockings" without baring their legs. Moreover, women showing their ankles in public would be considered "shocking" (222).

Stephen's ambivalent vision of the bird girl, in fact, may not be too distinct from his attitude toward the director in the meeting. With "quiet obedience," Stephen responds to the director's mention of "*les jupe*" although he feels "tiny flame" thinking of women's dress (155, 156). Seeing the bird girl, Stephen cannot help but appreciate her physical beauty, which is immediately concealed in the language of aesthetics and the virginal image of the Blessed Mary. Just as he remains quiet in the meeting, albeit in doubt, he eludes the Church's censorship of sexuality with the asexual, aesthetic, and religious rhetoric at the beach. As Valente notes, the bird girl "delivers him from the embarrassments of censored and ambivalent sexual impulses" (237). Though Stephen's envisioning of the bird girl is generally agreed to be a "climatic moment" in which he asserts his artistic career, it is marked with traces of the Church's control of sexuality (Steinberg 149).

In *The Holy City*, however, the bird girl passage is appropriated to express Chris's homosexual desire. The juxtaposition of the two texts manifests the contrast between Stephen and Chris. Instead of taking an equivocal attitude toward his own desire, Chris is quite bold and blunt in expressing his love for Marcus. In addition to the dream about Marcus, he writes a letter to himself, celebrating his fantasized affection for the teenager:

[A]t last, I gained the walls of the holiest city: the one that is called love and is sacred above all others. . . . Only to find, as my soul was about to commit itself to despair, that the massive wooden gates swung effortlessly open and I was almost blinded as I stood there in a shaft of desert sun. Only for the sight to be returned to my eyes as I beheld him before me, Marcus Otoyoy, attired in a fine tunic after the manner of a prince, with a crown of olives upon his head . . . (87)

The scene in his vision corresponds to the moment when earlier in the cathedral Chris saw Marcus play Martin de Porres, the patron saint of interracial relationships, and recite the litany "*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*" (82). For one thing, Marcus's role as Martin de Porres marks his hybrid identity as the Irish citizen of Nigerian descent.¹² For another, the passage from *The Book of Revelation* not only celebrates the coming of new Jerusalem but also stages the scene of a wedding, implicating the image of Marcus and Chris joined in wedlock. Recalling the litany, Chris elevates his love to such an extent that he likens it to the love of a saint.

¹² According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, St. Martin de Porres is the patron saint of "social justice, racial harmony, and mixed-race people" ("St. Martin de Porres").

In biblical tradition, it is not unusual to find the analogy between divine unity and marital unity. The relationship between God and his followers is compared to the husband-wife relationship. Nuns often claim that they are the brides of God. The image of God as husband can also be seen in the Bible. For instance, in *Book of Isaiah* 54:5, it is said that “For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.” Or in *Book of Jeremiah* 3:14, the Lord declares, “Return, faithless people, . . . ‘for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion.’”¹³ Followers’ loyalty and submission to God parallel the wife’s loyalty and submission to the husband in conventional marriage. Nonetheless, Chris reverses such analogy. Instead of comparing the unity of God and followers to marriage, he praises and sanctifies the unity of Marcus and him with the image of divine unity. The sacred language is used to glorify Chris’s love for Marcus.

Another phrase in *A Portrait* occurs to Chris when he recollects his feeling for Marcus: “The emotions I experienced best described by its author within those very pages: *Wounded pride and fallen hope and baffled desire*” (139). The same phrase returns to him when Chris laments over his fancy for Marcus. “[A]mid the tumult of wounded pride and fallen hope and baffled desire, a film of sorrow veiled his eyes” (156). In *A Portrait*, the phrase illustrates Stephen’s mixed emotions for family, religion, and his own desire after the school performance: “He strode down the hill amid the tumult of suddenrisen vapours of wounded pride and fallen hope and baffled desire” (86). Before going on the stage, Stephen thinks of his father’s expectations for him: to be a “gentleman” and a “good catholic,” neither of which is to be fulfilled (83). He will be the fallen hope of his father. After the performance, he feels “humiliated” playing the role of “farcical pedagogue” in the play (85, 73). He feels even more frustrated when thinking of the fact that the girl he admires is watching him. In *The Holy City*, however, the phrase is an expression of Chris’s thoughts about Marcus. With this phrase, Chris grieves for the loss of his love, and as he soon realizes, his pride will be wounded after he reads Marcus’s love letter for another woman.

Although *A Portrait* and *The Holy City* share some common ground, there are some significant differences too. Both Stephen and Chris are engaged in contemplation of their interpersonal relationships. Nonetheless, while Stephen’s thoughts are greatly influenced by the Church and the Catholic society, Chris focuses on his unrequited, homosexual love, the love that cannot even be named in Stephen’s

¹³ The two biblical references are accessed through *Bible Gateway*.

time. Chris explains why *A Portrait* has resonance for him:

I embraced every word that I found in *A Portrait*, surrendering to their “passionate euphony.” And became convinced that Marcus Otoyó was a kindred spirit in this regard, that he had been thinking along those lines too. You could tell, I persuaded myself, by the way he carried himself: mysteriously detached, at one remove from the world in which he lived. (66)

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Obviously, Chris's idea about Marcus is all his wishful thinking, a projection of his own self onto that Catholic Nigerian teenager—different, detached, and sentimental. Stephen in *A Portrait* therefore becomes the tie that connects them, or the “euphony” that harmoniously joins Chris and Marcus. When the two texts are juxtaposed, the two protagonists' (i.e., Stephen and Chris) desire and inner struggle are brought to the fore. However, such a juxtaposition also manifests the difference in the cause of their struggle. Stephen faces the overwhelming presence of the moral monopoly of the Catholic Church. All of his family, school, and nation are under Catholic influence. Chris, in contrast, witnesses the decline of religion and the drastic change in social norms. Standing between the disappearing tradition and the modernizing society, he is eager, or more than eager, to challenge the old world and assert his homosexual fancy for Marcus.

Chris and the Transformation of the Irish Church

Chris's boldness in expressing and sanctifying his love for Marcus in religious terms forebodes the Roman Catholic Church's difficult but continuous process of adjusting itself to the modern world in the 1960s. It started with the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965. As Geert Lernout suggests, the Council was an attempt to “[come] to terms with modernity” (“Religion” 332).¹⁴ The Catholic Church in Irish society encounters a similar struggle. After the economic growth in the late 1960s, de Valera's “idyllic Catholic pastoral landscape” envisioned in the 1943 St. Patrick's Day broadcast was no longer compatible with the modernizing Ireland (Nolan xv). Emer Nolan remarks, “it was not emancipation for but emancipation from Catholicism that would mark the beginnings of modernity in Ireland” (x). Moreover, the increase of Anglo-American influence

¹⁴ After this Council, in addition to Latin, vernacular languages are allowed in the Mass. Catholics are also encouraged to be friendly with other faiths, including Protestants, Jews, and Muslims. Admittedly, the Church is more tolerant of the multiplicity of modern societies. For a brief review of the Council, see John O'Malley's “Opening the Church to the World,” *The New York Times*, 10 Oct. 2012.

through new communications media of television and radio sped the loosening of sexual morality.¹⁵ For instance, *The Late Late Show*, a talk show broadcast on RTÉ in 1962, featured controversial issues and greatly influenced the social norms in Ireland (Hug 219).¹⁶ As Tom Inglis notes, “the practice and discourse of imported programmes [on television] was at variance with traditional Catholic principles” (92). The Church was no longer the “moral monopoly,” as Inglis terms it, of Irish society.

Such a moment of social change is witnessed by Chris. He is amazed by “how far we have come in this newly urbanised country—having at last left behind the quite unnecessary and infuriating self-defeating ingrown complexities that were so much a part of rural life in Cullymore” (30). For him, the 60s are “a magical, almost fairy-tale period of history” that makes things in Cullymore “exotic” (41). Chris becomes sufficiently familiar with the foreign cultures that have permeated into the rural, traditional Irish community. He is acquainted with Teddy ‘the Hippy’ Maher, who used to live in America and experienced the hippie gathering “the Summer of Love” (7). Fascinated by American and British popular music, such as *The Ronettes*, *Ray Charles*, or *Lulu*, Chris considers the 60s an “escape route” for him (41). At a time of transition, he considers himself a “groovy cat . . . ‘in crowd’ of old,” wearing the “[rosary] beads ‘n’ blue jeans” at the same time (6). The beads used for prayers become accessories for Chris’s hippie style.

Within such a milieu Chris reveals how the Catholic Church becomes unfit for the changing society through the priestly figure Canon Burgess and Mossie Phelan, his inmate in the hospital. Once Chris wrote racial slurs “Fuck Jerusalem and fuck all niggers” on the wall of the cathedral to mark his “individual transgression” (19). After this, Canon Burgess and other countrymen come to Chris’s house and forcibly perform exorcism on him. With Canon Burgess as “the requisite moral authority,” “they had assumed I had been ‘influenced,’ that there were demons within me, or some such nonsense” (23). When later confessing to Dr. Mukti in St. Catherine’s Hospital, Chris explains that it is his days in a “small repressed Irish country town” that prompted his acts of blasphemy (61). In the hospital, Chris gets to know Mossie Phelan, a former Catholic priest accused of paedophilia (116-17). However, in Mossie, Chris sees more a victim of a powerful institution than a

¹⁵ RTÉ Television started to broadcast on 31 December, 1961.

¹⁶ Joni Crone, an Irish gay rights activist and playwright, is the first lesbian who came out in the television show in Ireland. She was interviewed by the host of the show Gay Byrne in 1980 and received diverse reactions. However, as Crone admits, “overall the response was positive” although she also got such slurs as “pervert” or “filthy person” (Crone). It was not until 1989 that Byrne invited both the lesbian and gay community and right-wing groups to engage in a debate in the program (Rose 30).

perpetrator of appalling crimes:

What a wonderful man Mossie Phelan was—and to think of how his intuition and cleverness had been wasted for so long on so much superstitious Catholic mumbo-jumbo, really: ascensions, miracles, transubstantiation, the mystical body, the communion of saints and all the rest of it. (122)

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The two cases of Canon Burgess and Mossie Phelan illustrate that individuals (i.e., Chris and Mossie) can be repressed and victimized by the Church to such an extent that they have to find an outlet, illicit or not, for their emotions. Even so, the Catholic Church can no longer remain as the dominant institution in the social and spiritual life of Irish people as it used to be. Canon Burgess condemns the sale of nightdresses and “their potential evils,” but the priest’s warning is proved futile since “the Cullymore Summer Lingerie Extravaganza” is organized soon afterwards (106). This incident suggests how useless it is for the Church to resist the wave of social liberation in the 1960s.

Similar to other quotes of *A Portrait*, as discussed in the second part, Canon Burgess and Mossie Phelan can be seen as a significant Joycean element rewritten in *The Holy City*. In *A Portrait*, priests often serve as the authority of the Church, instructing Stephen in morality as well as in academic subjects. In the retreat after his encounter with a prostitute, Stephen is ashamed of his sin and feels intimidated by death, the last judgement, and hell—all those common themes addressed in sermons:

Every word of it was for him. Against his sin, foul and secret, the whole wrath of God was aimed. The preacher’s knife had probed deeply into his diseased conscience and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin. (115)

God and the preacher are portrayed as potent, absolute, ruthless forces, whose litanies severely strike Stephen’s conscience. Once Stephen is also attracted to the “secret knowledge and secret power” of priests when he is invited by the director to join the order of the Church (159). With such power, he would be able to possess a “sinless and innocent” soul to redeem laymen from their sins (159). Nevertheless, instead of accepting the invitation, Stephen decides to stay in “the stagnation of vegetable life” and be “a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life” (162, 221). Although Stephen does not enter priesthood, the influence of the Church is so profound that he cannot completely separate himself from it and has to use the

metaphor of the sacrament, an important rite in Catholicism, for his art.¹⁷ In contrast to the formidable presence of the Church in *A Portrait*, the two clergymen in *The Holy City* are represented as abnormal and obsolete, incongruous with the Irish society in the 1960s.

The decline of the Catholic Church does not necessarily mean the end of it in Irish society. As Chris's fancy for Marcus implies, a new connection is to be formed between the Church and the individual. In the latter part of the novel, Chris analyzes his obsession with Marcus:

What I came, more than anything, to conclude was that, in fact, what had been taking place with that seventeen-year-old boy was that I had been projecting my own needs and desires on to him. And was using both him and the textures and colours and beliefs of Catholicism to try and find a place, I suppose, a home for my own particular 'excitable passions.' (120)

Although Chris criticizes the malign impact of the Church on him, he admires Marcus not just for his Catholic quality of mysteriousness but also for the sense of belonging and inner comfort. The Church may no longer have social and moral monopoly in Irish society, but it still provides spiritual support for individuals. As Inglis suggests, Irish Catholicism is moving from "a more legalist-orthodox way of being religious" toward "individually principled ethics" (244). Moreover, Chris pushes the line of the Church a little forward. His obsession with Marcus opens up the possibility of reconciling one's desire with religious faith. In Joyce and Stephen's time, lust and lechery were considered sinful in Catholic doctrine. Hence Stephen commits the "violent sin" of prostitution as "a transgression of His law," an essential step to establish his individuality (Joyce 103, 133). Chris, contrarily, questions whether it is possible to be faithful to one's religion and erotic desire at the same time and whether homosexual love can coexist with religious faith. These questions can be answered with the transformation of the Irish Church in the 1960s, when its moral power was losing to the liberalizing trend.

The trend of sexual liberation started from Ireland's Anglophone counterparts. In 1967, "consensual private homosexual activity between adults over 21" was legalized in the Sexual Offences Act in Britain (Hug 204). Following the blacks'

¹⁷ It is beyond the scope of this article to explicate Stephen's and Joyce's complex relationship with the Catholic Church. For a thorough discussion of this topic, see: Robert Boyle's *James Joyce's Pauline Vision: A Catholic Exposition* (1978), Eamonn Hughes's "Joyce and Catholicism" (1992), Gareth Joseph Downes's "A Terrible Heretic": James Joyce and Catholicism" (2001), and Geert Lernout's *Help My Unbelief: James Joyce and Religion* (2010).

and women's liberation movements since the 1960s, the Gay Liberation Front in the United States was formed in 1969 (Hug 204). Encouraged by the liberating atmosphere, the Irish Gay Rights Movement embarked on the fight for gay rights in Ireland in 1974 (Mulhall 102). Meanwhile, David Norris, a lecturer in English literature and a Protestant, founded the Irish Gay Rights Movement so as to appeal for the reform of homosexual law (Mulhall 102; Hug 208). Norris's case was dismissed in the High Court in 1980 and in the Supreme Court in 1983. In 1988, it was brought to the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled that the Irish law had infringed upon Norris's right to privacy and had to be reformed. Decriminalization of homosexuality in Ireland was finally achieved in 1993 (Mulhall 103).

Given the opening up of the discourse on sexuality since the late 1960s, the Catholic Church was forced to loosen its grip on Irish society. In the 1972 referendum, 84 percent of the Irish electorate voted to remove from the Constitution the special position of the Catholic Church "as the guardian of the faith professed by the greater majority" (Article 44:2 of the Irish Constitution quoted in Halikiopoulou 15). In 1979, a law was passed, allowing the use of contraception for married couples (Halikiopoulou 15). Issues of abortion (1983) and divorce (1986, 1995) were also placed at the center of public debate in the next two decades. Catholic ethos stopped being the sole source of guidance of Irish law.

Facing the transformation of moral politics, the Irish Church showed certain, though slow, adjustments in its perception of homosexuality. The changing stance can be found in some popular publications of the Church. In 1968, the Reverend Laurence Ryan published an article "Changing the Constitution" in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, a monthly journal authorized by the Irish Catholic Church. The article addressed the issue of sexual morality and certain changes that the society should make accordingly:

[I]n some circumstances a limited toleration of some immoral practices will contribute more to the common good than a futile attempt to eliminate them by legislation. For this reason in a modern pluralistic society a State will sometimes be justified in granting a limited toleration of practices like prostitution, homosexuality and abortion. (35)

Although still considered as one of "immoral practices," homosexuality was recognized and accepted as part of society. A similar permissive attitude can be seen in "A Dublin Discussion on the Media," an editorial of another Catholic journal *Christus Rex* in 1965. It revealed a tolerant though reserved stance toward the discussion of homosexuality on TV. It accepted programmes on issues of homosexuality, but it

called for “more reticence” when broadcasting such matters (20). There were more and more discussions on homosexuality in Catholic journals, although the number was relatively small given the massive number of religious periodicals at that time. It was not until 1979 that an article directly addressing the relationship between religion and homosexuality finally saw print. In *The Furrow*, a journal published by St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, the priest Ralph Gallagher reflected on the issue of homosexuality in an article entitled “Understanding the Homosexual.” He suggested that the homosexual community should be included in the community of Christ, and that their “sacramental needs” as well as “inter-personal relationships” should be respected (568-69). One’s sexual orientation will not change one’s need for intimacy and religious comfort. As can be seen in Catholic periodicals, while the Irish Church is forced to withdraw from the public sphere of moral politics, it tries to maintain its influence in the private, individual sphere by coming to terms with the homosexual community.

Although Chris may not be able to witness such a change in his lifetime, he prognosticates the inclusive, individualist approach of the Church in the upcoming years when he notices the compatibility of religious belief with private emotions in Marcus. For instance, when he overhears Marcus reading a line from a schoolbook, “*My soul is cast down. I feel disquieted—so helplessly alone,*” Chris imagines Marcus to be an angel “ascending into heaven” and is amazed at how someone like Marcus could “harbour such depth of emotion” (35). Another time when Chris and Dolores talk about Marcus, Dolores shares Chris’s view, suggesting that Marcus’s hymns can evoke “the colour of crimson, [and release] in one’s soul certain primitive emotions” (109). For Chris, the way Marcus delivers sermons also has the power to release one’s emotions. If Chris’s slur on the wall of the cathedral can be regarded as his distaste for the Church as a monolithic, authoritative institute, the two instances show that the Church, represented by Marcus, still offers an emotional outlet for laymen. It will continue to connect to its congregation through individual emotional needs.

The novel ends with Chris’s failed confession to Marcus, who responds scornfully by calling him “*Freak*” (203). After this humiliating experience, a more devastating blow hits when Chris discovers Marcus’s love letter to Dolores: “*I love you, Dolores—be assured of that. Yours for ever, Marcus Minor*” (211). His infatuation with Marcus ends up in disillusion. What rises in Chris’s mind instead is the hallucination of “a complete stranger, resting his chin upon a *cane*, eyeing [him] with a *chill, mute* poise: the stark orb of his head void—white and virginal—as perfectly formed as a *consecrated bread*” (212; emphasis added). Abstruse as the passage may be, it can be suggested that Chris’s illusion is associated with his early

attraction to *A Portrait*, the author and protagonist of which are noted for their ashplant cane. In the shape of “a consecrated bread,” the head of this illusory figure signals Joyce’s and Stephen’s deep entanglement with the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, its “chill, mute poise” toward Chris indicates the distance between Chris and his predecessors. What Chris has experienced with Marcus is no longer explicable with the Catholic doctrine in Joyce’s time.

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