



# A Portrait of the Artist as an Anthropomorphic Genius-Machine

*Peter Jalesh*

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There is no genuine affiliation between Joyce's book "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" and this book with the exception of the mock title that might suggest a "genre". Though, Joyce's portraiture genre, superimposed over a restless American landscape, becomes blurred. In reality "A Portrait of the Artist as an Anthropomorphic Genius-Machine" is an antidote to Joyce's story. In Joyce's story the characters fold inside the chronicle and become "elements of style". In "A Portrait of the Artist as an Anthropomorphic Genius-Machine" the characters appear, swell and decay as real living experiences, though mundane. As opposed to Joyce's super-esthetic and pedantic tale where even the pain is suffered as part of some metaphor, this story tends to show that an American version of it is nothing but a byproduct of a society that is wide enough to gulp down success, happiness, failures, anxiety, malaise and death without affectation.

The portrait-story is set in a small town called New Braintree and moves around three school pals – Mostly, Walter and Peter - whose lives intersect for the length of the story: Mostly, the main character, stands out as a nonconformist genius and a trouble-packed kid. He is living his anger filled childhood as if he was hurled into his own life by forces outside his control. Walter is a "prince" boy, and functions as a counterpoint to Mostly. It is as if Walter could act only as long as he is part of this double-portrait, though in essence he'd like to be Mostly. Peter is the witnessing chronicler. As opposed to Mostly and Walter, he acts always like a thin and unnoticeable shadow. In this trio, Mostly is the one who puts a fresh and original spin on teenage happenings and its growing pains. Thus, the story evolves most of the time around Mostly's rebellious personality and his spoiled life, seen him either as a problems ridden child - unable to put his life back in order after his mom dies - or as a teenager that falls prey to drugs and gambling, or, at the end, as a young-man-crusader for lost causes for which he dies. Mostly's case would prove not only that brightness and geniality could be weakened and eventually shattered by recklessness and excessive misbehavior, but also that fate and circumstance are playing sometimes an even more fatal role. Though, after all, there is something very wrong and frightening about a genius, who is nothing but an accident of nature, capable to create chaos and mayhem in his life and the life of the others due to a huge imbalance between a swamped brain and the limited degree of freedom he can use on a daily bases to participate in a life experience.

The book consists of an introduction and twelve chapters. The introduction is a kaleidoscopic view of the whole story, like a mosaic built out of stone fragments gathered at different times, inconsequential and so incoherent. The mosaic function as a photomontage of character vignettes that anticipate the story's events and encounters. Then the story itself marches on Mostly's beat, building a self-centered approach to life that eventually but unpredictably fails in death. From Mostly's early age, people see him as sort of a thinking machine. At times he displays a dual personality – intelligent and emotionally rich as opposed to genial and dry-hearted or even cruel. His school years are plagued with neglect, mischief, mental breakdown, and daring or outright dangerous acts. In the background his life seems consumed by horrific memories and feelings of guilt - over his mom's death, over his brother's early demise - and by his own incapacity to build self-esteem and live a no!

normal life. Fatefully, he evolves in contempt to any norms and gets exposed to the roughness of life. Always struggling, either battling lonely the faceless enemy surfacing on his brain or real characters that mess up his youth years, Mostly projects the strange feeling that he is living all his life inside an unresolved teenage crisis. His

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