

Irish Masterpiece

from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Novel by James Joyce



James Joyce
1882–1941



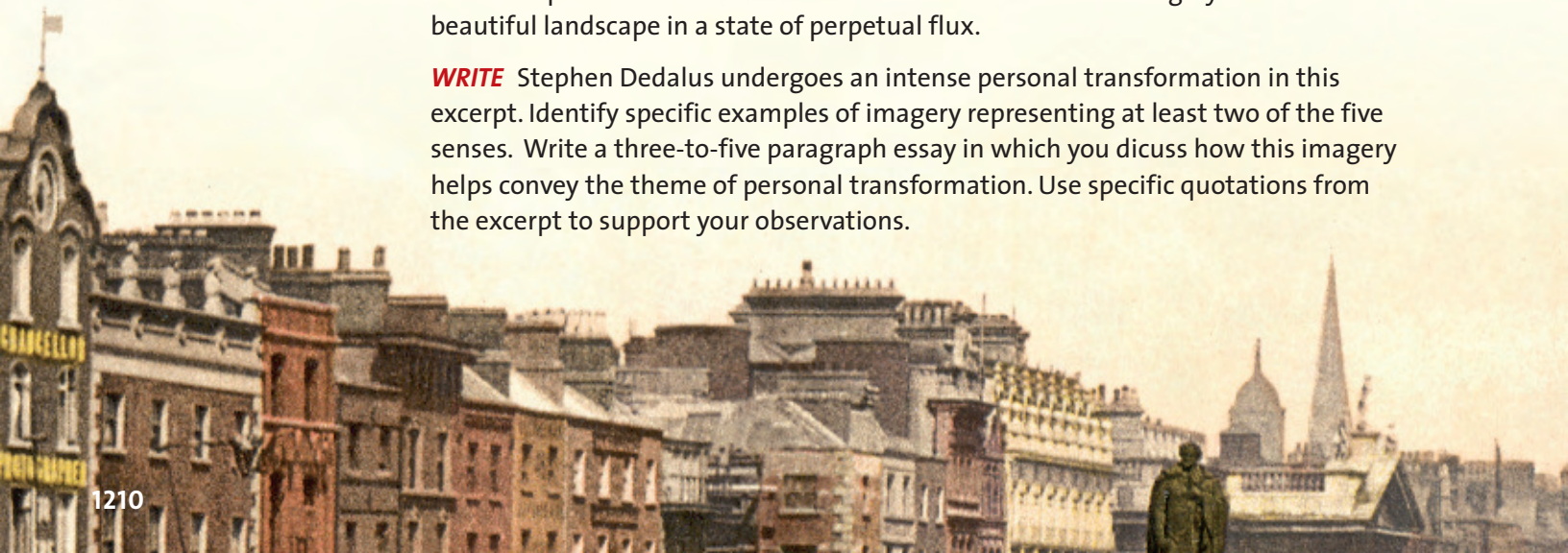
READING 7 Analyze how the author's patterns of imagery reveal theme, set tone, and create meaning in metaphors, passages, and literary works.

BACKGROUND James Joyce had something of a love-hate relationship with his native Ireland. On the one hand, he left Ireland as a young man, complaining of its provincialism. On the other hand, his greatest works are set in Ireland and vividly capture the Dublin of his boyhood. Joyce published three of his earliest stories (later collected in *Dubliners*) under the pen name of Stephen Dedalus, the same name he would use for the hero of his autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and for a main character in a later novel, *Ulysses*.

Beginning with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce revolutionized the English novel. The style of his third-person narration is remarkably fluid, reflecting the development of Stephen Dedalus's mind. Joyce also introduced the stream-of-consciousness technique that he used more extensively in his later works. The novel is divided into five chapters, each of which depicts an important phase in the protagonist's maturation. This passage is from Chapter 4, in which Stephen questions whether he should enter the priesthood. While walking along a beach, he has an epiphany—a sudden insight—as he watches a girl wade in the water. Stephen's reaction to her beauty makes him realize that he is destined to celebrate life through his writing.

LITERARY ANALYSIS Pay attention to Joyce's choice of words and phrases in the following excerpt. His use of **imagery** creates sensory experiences for the reader that convey Stephen's joyful **epiphany**, or sudden revelation, that he has found his calling as an artist. The phrases “broken the holy silence of his ecstasy,” “the earth that had borne him, that had taken him to her breast,” and “wave of light by wave of light” not only appeal to the reader's senses of hearing, touch, and sight but also mirror Stephen's ecstatic transformation into an artist with imagery that evokes a beautiful landscape in a state of perpetual flux.

WRITE Stephen Dedalus undergoes an intense personal transformation in this excerpt. Identify specific examples of imagery representing at least two of the five senses. Write a three-to-five paragraph essay in which you discuss how this imagery helps convey the theme of personal transformation. Use specific quotations from the excerpt to support your observations.



*H*er image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory. On and on and on and on!

He halted suddenly and heard his heart in the silence. How far had he walked? What hour was it?

There was no human figure near him nor any sound borne to him over the air.
10 But the tide was near the turn and already the day was on the wane. He turned landward and ran towards the shore and, running up the sloping beach, reckless of the sharp shingle, found a sandy nook amid a ring of tufted sandknolls and lay down there that the peace and silence of the evening might still the riot of his blood.

He felt above him the vast indifferent dome and the calm processes of the heavenly bodies; and the earth beneath him, the earth that had borne him, had taken him to her breast.

He closed his eyes in the languor of sleep. His eyelids trembled as if they felt the vast cyclic movement of the earth and her watchers, trembled as if they felt the
20 strange light of some new world. His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings. A world, a glimmer, or a flower? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other.

Evening had fallen when he woke and the sand and arid grasses of his bed glowed no longer. He rose slowly and, recalling the rapture of his sleep, sighed at its joy.

He climbed to the crest of the sandhill and gazed about him. Evening had fallen.
30 A rim of the young moon cleft the pale waste of sky like 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.

