

Homo Novus: A Study of Identity and Transformation in Joyce's A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man and Coelho's The Alchemist.

الإنسان الجديد: دراسة للهوية والتحول في رواية جيمس جويس

"صورة الفنان في شبابه" ورواية باولو كويلو "الخيميائي"

م.م. مصطفى محمد علي محمد حسين

Mustafa M. Ali M. Hussein Alkhuzai

جامعة الكوفة, كلية التربية قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

Kufa University, College of Education

Mustafam.alkhuzai@uokufa.edu.iq

م.م. سعود غالب عبد

Saud Ghalib Abed

جامعة كربلاء, كلية الصيدلة

Kerbala University, College of Pharmacy

suood.gh@uokerbala.edu.iq

م.م. سعاد نزار محمد عنوز

Suad Nazar Mohammed Annooz

جامعة الكوفة/ كلية التربية للبنات قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

Suadn.annooz@uokufa.edu.iq

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية، التحول، جويس، هومو نوفوس، كويلو، التغير الروحي، الإبداع الفني

Keywords: Identity, transformation, Joyce, homo novus,, Coelho spiritual change, artistic creation

Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of homo novus as an example of self-creation and identity transformation in contemporary literature. It focuses on the protagonist in both works of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Alchemist*, both of whom experience a unique path but similar to each other toward self-realization. This paper will trace historical development of homo novus since it has its sociopolitical meaning in the Roman context to its wider literary meaning. With closer observation, it can be seen that Stephen Dedalus embodies the intellectual and artistic opposition, but Santiago embodies spiritual enlightenment and wisdom of intuition. The comparison brings out the fact that the two characters rebrand identity by denying inherited norms and forging their own identities. This paper shows that homo novus is a versatile literary phenomenon that represents cultural peculiarity and universal human desire to change.

الخلاصة

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية ظاهرة الإنسان الجديد (Homo novus) كمثال على التكوين الذاتي وتحول الهوية في الأدب المعاصر. وتركز على بطلي روايتي "صورة الفنان في شبابه" و"الخيميائي"، حيث يخوض كل منهما مسارا فريداً نحو تحقيق الذات. تتبع هذه الورقة التطور التاريخي لظاهرة الإنسان الجديد، بدءاً من دلالتها الاجتماعية والسياسية في السياق الروماني وصولاً إلى دلالتها الأدبية الأوسع. وبالتدقيق، يتضح أن ستيفن ديدالوس يجسد التناقض الفكري والفني، بينما يجسد سانتياغو التنوير الروحي وحكمة الحدس. وتُظهر المقارنة أن الشخصيتين تعيدان صياغة الهوية من خلال رفض الأعراف الموروثة وتشكيل هويتيهما الخاصتين. تُبين هذه الورقة أن الإنسان الجديد ظاهرة أدبية متعددة الأوجه، تمثل خصوصية ثقافية ورغبة إنسانية عالمية في التغيير.

1. Introduction

“What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what is lovable in man is that he is an over-going and a down-going.” (Nietzsche, 2012)

Societies and individuals are always in search for a change whether it was in their behavior or in their identity (Felski, 2020). In this sense, taking Friedrich Nietzsche’s claim into account, the human kind evolves continuously and they transcend beyond their origins to become something greater by breaking free from traditions and social norms that govern their lives. Thus, they reintroduce themselves and redefine their identity. Given what has been said, on the other hand, the concept of Homo Novus is reflected in literary works by James Joyce and Paulo Coelho. Both authors’ works, especially Joyce’s *A Portrait* and Coelho’s *The Alchemist* show character development for the protagonists.



Through the character of Stephen Dedalus, in *A Portrait*, the emergence of the new man that is “Homo Novus” will be evident through the journey of the protagonist, his artistic realization, and his self-discovery. In *The Alchemist*, Santiago will venture through the same journey of self-discovery and the making of his personal legend by leaving behind his old life.

To this end, this research paper aims to investigate Homo Novus through Joyce’s and Coelho’s works. Although these works show different eras and societies, they still share the same aspect of self-discovery and identity. The analysis of the novels’ events, such as the transformation, reinterpretation the ideas of identity, and traditions will help us to understand how Homo Novus manifest in societies and how such individuals reject their existing conditions to be someone who truly represents themselves.

2. Historical Background of Homo Novus

To define Homo Novus correctly, one must trace back its origin. Historically, it is a Latin term that first appeared in ancient Rome and it means the first man in a family to serve in the senate or achieve a significant status or position (Frey et al., 2010, pp.1-5). It specifically refers to someone who did not come from a line of aristocrats or a wealthy family and had to depend on their own achievements and talents to make a change in their lives, and thus signifying a change in their identity and creating a new one.

In literature, Homo Novus shows a character that escapes the existing traditions and norms to create a new path that is marked by change and innovation. Based on the modern approach both Joyce and Coelho use in their aforementioned novels, Homo Novus aligns with the struggles the protagonists go through to redefine themselves against the backdrop of their societies (Silva & Leite, 2020)

2.1 Socio-Political Context of Homo Novus

The modern research on Roman nobility, founded by Matthias Gelzer in 1912, had also come to believe that this Homo novus paradigm stood less as strictly defined in antiquity. Further, the socio-historical and socio-political implications of homo novus remain subjects of academic discourse and interpretation that extend beyond classical studies. This concept does extend to studies within the domains of and beyond the Humanities, where this ideal of homo novus has increasingly come to reflect the meaning



of a novice or a fresh start. The homo novus paradigm refers broadly to the fact that a politician has risen from lower strata in society to one that is considered highly significant and highly regarded. It came into being within the social sphere of the ancient Roman Republic and was originally unrelated to politics, law, religion, or literature. At first, the term defined the limits of persons of noble descent, symbolic capital, and nobilitas membership. At its genesis, homo novus was a term opposed to nobilitas. Over time, a man who followed the cursus honorum in the Roman context could achieve "nobilization," thereby becoming a homo novus regardless of their bloodline. Cicero's usage and adaption of it, however, precisely embedded it in the politically inaugurated sphere. Indeed, he was a homo novus but is also a very self-consciously representative of the programmatic consequences of homo novus. Cicero had moved the homo novus concept into literary, rhetoric, and metaphorical spheres. The original socio-political context of the homo novus concept is first revisited to indicate its wording and original epistemic setting. The expression homo novus has very specific historical semantics, which one must keep in mind while using it. In the second stage—the central concern of this book—we trace the possible metamorphosis of the homo novus concept—metaphorically speaking—within the fields of literary scholarship and philology, where it can function as a literary and anthropological term. The majority of the pieces in this volume discuss how various literary authors from the 1st century BCE up to the 4th century CE build themselves into personae in either a narrative or argumentative environment, and whether or not, and how, they do this. They thus configure themselves as "new men" (homines novi) in a literary context, be it social, religious, or philosophical. Several contributions below examine how some ancient literary authors attempt to pose themselves as "new men" through literary self-configuration and self-fashioning either by revising traditional social roles, or by creating new forms of social conduct through which to write themselves into literary, religious or philosophical "nobility," and/or literary canon (Becker & Mortensen, 2018)

2.2 Transforming a Political Identity to A Literary Concept

Politically, the concept of Homo Novus dates back to Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC-43 BC). The term itself has no legal accuracy, but it was regularly used to refer to someone or group, and its meaning always changing according to the speaker's aims and



context. As a result, homo novus can be defined “as a political outsider, someone with no family with a prestigious past; that is, a free man with no relatives that had fulfilled high offices” (Silva & Leite, 2020).

Taking this definition into consideration, Cicero would be precisely described as homines novi. The novus homo is considered to be a positive character and therefore it is important to accept his state as such.

When the term homo novus first appeared in ancient Rome, it was not directly linked to such domains like literature, politics, or law. Once introduced in literature, the notion defined the boundaries of individuals who had aristocratic forebears, symbolic wealth, and belonged to the nobility. The homo novus originally served as a contrasting phrase to nobilitas. Over time, an individual who progressed through the Roman hierarchy of positions, known as the cursus honorum, may gradually attain a position of high social status and therefore become a homo novus, regardless of their birth into aristocracy. Significantly, with Cicero's utilization and introduction of the notion, it got integrated into the realm of politics. Given his own status as a homo novus, Cicero serves as a self-aware exemplar of the concept of homo novus in a programming context. Ultimately, he was the reason behind the use of the term in different scopes such as literature (Becker & Mortensen, 2018)

2.3 Social Meaning

In social contexts, the concept of homo novus goes back to the Roman Republic. One can rule out the possibility that the term was set in any official manner. Direct it relates to the social context not the legal structures of the state. Societal terminology is easier to adjust and may be interpreted in many ways more easily than legal terminology. However, it is quite logical to suppose, and this has happened in this instance, that there is a certain logic governing the use of terminology in society. In more details, homo novus might be referred to as the concept that classifies the modern social references (24).

3. Literature Review: The Self-Made individual

The self-made individual or 'Homo Novus' appears in different literature traditions, stemming from the rise of capitalism within each of these cultures. Through a general survey of these novellas and novels, the scope of the trend in literature is shown. These



novels offer readers a reflection, sometimes a distinctly distorted one, of how each culture views and reacts to the driving, acquisitive, powerful individual who has, through his or her own labors and ambition, risen to the top of a commercial society. The subject of this novel and character, the *novus homo*, is not just simply the new man being the first in the long line of a family to rise to fortune and influence in the commercial sector. Frequently, he or she is from the lower reaches of the upper classes or even the commercial sector, and makes his or her way by singular hard work, bold initiatives, risk-taking, intelligence, and acquisitiveness (Khadem, 2013). The *homines novi* in literature are valuable creations to note because these portrayals are at times ironically the opposite of the way the cultures in question would like to present them or certain aspects of their cultures. The *homines novi* in the novels are figures created so that virtues and faults or shortfalls of societies can be observed and questioned. How else do we understand our own societies, national or sub-national, except that we have reflection from other societies? The new man, part personified allegory, part biographic narrative, demonstrates the paths from humble origins to giddy commercial and sometimes political power. In doing that, he provides a narrative vehicle for illustrating and implicitly questioning a culture or salient parts of it (Macmullen, 2000).

3.1 Identity and Transformation

Moreover, themes of identity and transformations typically play a crucial role in the shaping of the story and the philosophical aspects of the protagonists' journeys within the broad field of literary study and investigation. The complex ways in which these ideas are interwind in these novels James Joyce's *A Portrait* and Coelho's *The Alchemist* are examined in this literature review. The narrative style for both authors is characterized by the free associations of ideas (Al-Shammari, 2022). While all the characters concern themselves with reinforcing different aspects of culture and advance through the respective narrative in different ways, their process of becoming, growing into oneself, and, therefore, the process of *Homo Novus*' creation is similar in both novels. Having analyzed the materials provided by critics and scholars, I will explain the nature of similarity and difference in Santiago's and Stephen Dedalus's quests for meaning and how both protagonists' journeys are a way of addressing existential and artistic concerns. I will argue in this paper that the concept of *Homo Novus* can be applied socially through the



aforementioned works by the changes that the characters go through to achieve their new status and thus their transformation and new identity.

4. Methodology

A comparative literary analysis of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Coelho's *The Alchemist* has been used in this paper. The thematic analysis of identity formation and transformation in the two works is a part of the methodology, as the protagonists in both works were on the way to self-realization. The idea of Homo Novus is applied as a prism in the way of how these characters are able to find their way in the societal restrictions and invent new identities. This paper compares the attempts of the main characters to find their sense of meaning and inner development, which reveals the universality of the Homo Novus concept in the context of various cultures and philosophies.

5. Art and Self-Creation in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

The previously defined concept of homo novus is well illustrated in Joyce's portraiture of the main character Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait* as modernist work written in the early twentieth century Ireland. In *A Portrait*, Joyce works his way through how his protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, forms his identity from young boy to self-assured grown adult. Joyce utilizes a multitude of symbols to build through artistic resistance a new identity to represent the various processes and roadblocks Stephen faces in development (Attridge, 2015). For Stephen, identity formation is not merely an internal process; rather, it is a dialectic between his social identity and his internal sense of self. Particularly in the last quarter of the novel, Joyce portrays Stephen deliberately constructing his sense of self in opposition to established beliefs, and by manipulating the symbols and processes of his culture. Joyce portrays Stephen not just as an unusual boy, but more specifically as an example of a particular kind of psychological state. In a conversation between Stephen and his friend Davin, the former states:

“The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.” (Joyce, 1916, p. 252)



This conversation shows that Joyce works out the tension between the traditional Irish society and the arriving modernist movement through the interactions and reflections of Stephen Dedalus. It also shows how Stephen is torn between two things. "Nets" stand for the social forces that limit people's freedom, such as their nationality, language, or religion. This passage sums up Stephen's fight against the things that try to control who he is. It shows how much he wants to go beyond these limits and create a new, independent self. Joyce uses the image of "nets" to represent the oppressive cultural forces of his time.

Furthermore, *A Portrait* is not simply a tracing of the life of a young man but a study of his growth into the power of expression. Chronologically, the novel surveys the life of a young man from infancy to the point where he feels that he can attempt to express his own unique thoughts in verse. The people encountered by Stephen Dedalus shape his character and phrase his outlook on life, but the changes within Stephen have to come through his own efforts. In effect, he has to create the man himself. This self-creation is the narrative task of this richly packed Bildungsroman in which a boy becomes a man and the origins of a famous literary figure can be discovered. At the same time, the novel can be called a Socratic Bildungsroman since the Socratic figure of influence and inspirational guidance is felt most of the time. The novel shows a community torn between the forces of upbringing in the Catholic faith of Irish Republicanism and the forces of art. (Attridge, 2015)

The novel narrates the process of spiritual and psychological formation of the protagonist Dedalus beginning with his childhood and up to his university period. By the use of stream of consciousness, the evolution of Stephen's personality and the growth of his ambition to be an artist are described. Stephen's changing character is revealed by his growing rebellion against the social norms and church that ultimately leads to his decision of emigration out of Ireland to become an artist. Stephen's story, in *A Portrait*, shows his early childhood, adolescence years at school, and his college stage. Through the use of stream of consciousness technique (A.w. Hamid & Mehdy Jassim, 2008). Joyce shows the protagonist's development, introspection, and his desire to become an artist. Stephen reflects the meaning of "Homo Novus" because he struggles to reject all traditional values of his society in order to become a new man. In *A Portrait*, Stephen declares:



“I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning.” (Joyce, 1916, p. 309)

Moreover, through the novel, Stephen articulates his disquiet towards the English language and contemplates the path he would pursue, particularly in light of the Gaelic Revival in Ireland during the early 1900s (Joyce, 1916).

6. The Spiritual Transformation in *The Alchemist*

The journey which Santiago goes on in Paulo Coelho’s novel *The Alchemist* is a profound search for one’s self and personal transformation, elegantly tied to the motifs of nature, dreams, and legends of a single person (Bose et al., 2019)

Santiago’s culminating transformation into the wind is, therefore, the climax which also underscores the fact that only those who find the answers to the questions that negatively affect them and can match the incline to establish a communication with the language of the universe and the patterns of skies can ever be capable of a significant transformation. Not only this correspondence leads Santiago to his monetary capital, but to the superior understanding of his place in the universe and divinity as well. (Coelho, 1988).

On this basis, discusses the work that reveals the processes of the transformation which, according to the author, echoes the process of philosophical stone transformation that reflects Santiago’s journey of the voyage to self-realization and to the state of adulthood (Subramanian & Bhatnagar, 2024). This fusion of the two worlds, allows Santiago to read signs in events hence improving on his awareness and understanding of the surrounding world. This dynamic captures the theme that the extraordinary lives covertly, a catchy theme that permeates Santiago’s adventures.

7. Comparative Analysis: Stephen Dedalus and Santiago.

The way that Stephen Dedalus passes through in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is an illustration of the inner and outer conflicts of Homo Novus. The stream of consciousness that Joyce has employed gives us the insight into the psychological development of Stephen and his opposition to the Irish Catholicism and nationalism



restrictions. The struggles enable Stephen to become a self-made man who defies the cultural standards and rules of the society in order to pursue the freedom of art. The critical point of this change is reached when Stephen states that he will not serve that, in which he has ceased to believe, and attempts to express himself in some form of life or art as freely as he is able (Joyce, 309). Such feeling sums up his wish to build a new identity without the impacts of his upbringing. The rejection of traditional values and the rediscovery of silence, exile, and cunning as the means of defense by Stephen reflect the ideals of Homo Novus. His change to an active agent of own artist fate as opposed to a passive subject of the society is the turning point of his change into a new man, who creates his identity with self-realization and resistance. On the same note, Santiago in *The Alchemist* is on a quest of self-discovery, which is mediated by the quest of his Personal Legend. The story by Coelho is very spiritual with the transformation of Santiago being very metaphysical in terms of identity. There is not only physical traveling as Santiago makes his way through the world but also internal journey of one trying to figure out what exactly he is doing on this world. His epic transformation, as he turns into the wind, is the final accomplishment of his potential and the integration of the inner wants and the external elements of the universe (Coelho, 1988). The trip is the demonstration of the Homo Novus in the spiritual and philosophical awakening since Santiago comes to know how to read the signs of the universe and put his actions in harmony with the higher intention. The changes that both Stephen and Santiago are going through are rather similar: both shun the conventional standards, redefine themselves, and attain the self-realization. Nevertheless, they are influenced by different cultural and philosophical backgrounds in terms of their transformations. Stephen's rebellion is not only a personal repudiation of national and religious identity; it also critiques the constraining impact of societal norms on individual liberty. His desire to break free from the limits of Irish Catholicism and nationalism is a modernist challenge to the very structure of society that keeps people from being themselves. This change can be seen as a larger comment on how intellectual and artistic freedom were stifled in Ireland in the early 20th century.

Santiago's journey, on the other hand, is less about going against social norms and more about finding a universal truth within himself. This fits with the metaphysical idea of Homo Novus as someone who is meant to find his place in the larger cosmic order. This



difference shows how the secular, intellectual search for identity and the metaphysical, spiritual journey of self-realization are at odds with each other. However, both characters embody the universal struggle for self-definition in societies that demand conformity. Stephen in a political and cultural context, and Santiago in a cosmic and philosophical framework (Subramanian & Bhatnagar, 2024).

Santiago's culminating transformation into the wind is, therefore, the climax which also underscores the fact that only those who find the answers to the questions that negatively affect them and can match the incline to establish a communication with the language of the universe and the patterns of skies can ever be capable of a significant transformation. Not only this correspondence leads Santiago to his monetary capital, but to the superior understanding of his place in the universe and divinity as well. (Coelho, 1988).

Providing a socio psychological analysis to further dissect Santiago's journey on the sea, use psychoanalysis to elaborate the ethical lessons that can be learned in the novel. Some argue that it is a journey in search of one's own myth as seen in the dreams as well as the interaction with the key characters. In the authors' point of view, instances of both the protagonist Santiago can be explained in terms of his identity, ego and superego, which then lead him to make ethical and rational choices for self-actualization (Sandbæk, 2022)

Conclusions

This research examines the concept of Homo novus, the self-made, transformative individual, by comparing James Joyce's *A Portrait* and Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. Through the journeys of Stephen Dedalus and Santiago, the study explores how identity and transformation are shaped by cultural and philosophical contexts, offering new insights into these protagonists' self-realization. Stephen Dedalus and Santiago both undergo changes with desire for self-realization and formation of identity based on their journeys but this is seen to happen in a cultural and especially religious difference which defines their transformations.

This story, which has its roots in the revolt against traditional social and religious restraints typical for a post-Victorian man, demonstrates a more erudite, artistic facet of Homo novus evolution. It means his voyage represents an intellectual liberation and



rejection of inherited values which makes him an archetypal representative of a modern person's attempt to shaping personal identity in the middle of a complex world. In the mysterious novel of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, the hero – Santiago's transformation is based on the spiritual and mystical approach to the discovery of himself and the purpose on the journey to transforming into Homo novus by following the legend and the will of the world. While in Santiago's journey the principle in focus is faith, intuition, and belief in the existence of a higher individual purpose in the life as well as the transformation of skin, this is a higher form of a transformation of identity.

Although this research was conducted to fill a gap in the current literary analysis, the comparison with Homo novus suggests that both characters are similar in that they both represent the transition through otherwise unique ordinary conditions. Stephen regains his agency, enlightenment and creativity, and Santiago finds a spirituality to his existence, both (void) thereby resisting and transforming the construction of identity. In this respect, this study has presented fresh pointers to the existence of a new narrative as depicted in contemporary and postmodern literature, where constructing a new self is a never-ending process that is as culturally and philosophically based as it is psychologically.

The comparison thereby shows that Homo novus transcends the specific cultural or philosophical context; to the contrary, one may consider him as a European version of a universal hero, who represents the promise that man holds to become more than he is and to search for the truth and a better self. Stephen and Santiago's travels show that becoming Homo novus is not easy and is a part of a complex human experience that speaks about how people change regardless of time and space and stresses on the significance of the concept of transformation.



References

- A.w. Hamid, B., & Mehdy Jassim, M. (2008). The Use of Stream of Consciousness in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. *AL- Fatih Journal* , 35(35), 7–13.
- Attridge, D. (2015). *The work of literature* (pp. 1–12). Oxford Oxford University Press.
- Becker, E.-M., & Mortensen, J. (2018). *Paul as Homo Novus* (pp. 6–17). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Bose, B., Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2019). The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. *World Literature Today*, 70(2), 483. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40152289>
- Coelho, P. (2006). *The Alchemist*. Harper Collins Publishers. (Original work published 1988)
- Felski, R. (2022). *Hooked*. University of Chicago Press.
<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/H/bo58870481.html>
- Frey, U. J., Störmer, C., & Willführ, K. P. (2010). *Homo Novus - A Human Without Illusions* (pp. 4–11). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Adrian Del Caro, & Pippin, R. B. (2012). *Thus spoke Zarathustra : a book for all and none*. Cambridge University Press.
- Harman, S. (2016). Stuart Hall: Re-reading Cultural Identity, Diaspora, and Film. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 27(2), 112–129.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2016.1148651>
- Joyce, J. (1992). *A portrait of the artist as a young man*. Wordsworth Editions.
- Khadem, A. (2013). Franco Moretti, Distant Reading (London: Verso, 2013). 244 pp., ISBN (paperback) 9781781680841, ISBN (hardcover) 9781781681121, £60.
Comparative Critical Studies, 10(3), 409–412.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/ccs.2013.0105>
- Ramsay Macmullen. (2000). *Roman social relations : 50BC to AD284*. Yale U.P.
- Sandbæk, L. (2021). The relationship between literature and psychoanalysis: reflections on object relations theory, researcher's subjectivity, and transference in psychoanalytic literary criticism. *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 44(1–2), 27–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01062301.2022.2047490>



Silva, C. F. P. da, & Leite, L. R. (2020). Reinventing the concept of homo novus in Rome: Cicero as Horace's role model. *Topoi (Rio de Janeiro)*, 21(45), 602–619.

<https://doi.org/10.1590/2237-101x02104503>

Subramanian, L., & Bhatnagar, G. (2024). Spiritual Journey of Santiago in Coelho's "The Alchemist." *International Journal of Religion*, 5(10), 3906–3910.

<https://doi.org/10.61707/xv6wj830>