As for my part and share in the book I have already told all I have to tell. My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. I have tried to present it to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. The stories are arranged in this order. I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen or heard. I cannot do anymore than this. I cannot alter what I have written.


The features of infancy are not commonly reproduced in the adolescent portrait for, so capricious are we, that we cannot or will not conceive the past in any other than its iron memorial aspect. Yet the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only. Our world, again, recognizes its acquaintance chiefly by the characters of beards and inches and is, for the most part, estranged from those of its members who seek through some art, by some process of the mind as yet untabulated, to liberate from the personalized lumps of matter that which is the individuating rhythm, the first or formal relation of the parts. But for such as these a portrait is not an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion.

—James Joyce, “A Portrait of the Artist,” 1904

The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished, The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

—Stephen Dedalus, Chapter V, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

[The artist] is the priest of the eternal imagination transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life.

—Stephen Dedalus, Chapter V, A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man