James Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Although it is extremely difficult for a novel to accurately translate to film, the film *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* contains some elements that remain true to the novel, such as some of the original dialogue. For instance, the Christmas dinner scene is presented with most of the original dialogue, faithfully preserving the atmosphere of the scene. However, there are also a few crucial scenes that seem to lack Joyce’s original and emotive stream of consciousness narration, ultimately minimizing their importance in the film’s plot. One moment that stood out as a dramatic turning point in the novel is when Stephen sees the girl on the beach and as a result recognizes his calling as an artist. The inner struggle that Stephen grapples with in the novel is not apparent in the film; the moment of his realization for his calling is almost diminished in the film. The novel presents the magnitude of this discovery for Stephen whereas in the film Stephen simply glances at the girl and rips up the paper with his prayers. The scene in the film seems too short and does not emote the same climax and personal epiphany that the novel describes in detail.

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is also a particularly difficult novel to translate to film in that much of Joyce’s writing is stream of consciousness narration. This technique is used throughout the novel to narrate Stephen’s thoughts and his intellectual as well as personal development from his early childhood through his university schooling. Joyce increases the sophistication of the language throughout the novel, mirroring his protagonist’s growth in intellect. These thoughts become increasingly more complex and random, mirroring the way the mind works as it jumps from thought to thought without any apparent logical connection. This unique style of writing could not be fully converted from the novel to the film, though it was important that the film include Stephen’s thoughts as he gradually contemplates his autonomy and sorts through his thoughts dealing with issues in Ireland at the time concerning politics and the role of the Catholic Church.

Therefore, the filming of Stephen’s internal thoughts was an essential part in translating the novel to film. Stephen’s voiceover during certain scenes recreates this stream of consciousness writing for the film. These scenes include Stephen talking with his former girlfriend and observing the man speaking Gaelic in the pub. Even then, however, it was more difficult to feel Stephen’s struggle in determining what he believed was right versus wrong in the film since film cannot convey these emotions in the same way that writing can, especially stream of consciousness writing.

Overall, both the novel and the film depict a coming of age story for a young artist and his realization of his true calling. The lasting effect of the stream of consciousness narration as well as the inner workings of Stephen’s mind could not fully be translated to film. However, the film scenes in which Stephen’s voice provides the backdrop for the scene serve as a tribute to Joyce’s stream of consciousness narration.