Commentary on the Film Adaptation of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

It has often been that within my studies as an English major that viewing a film after reading the text aids me and provides certain insights. Typically, I feel better informed, or perhaps clued in on certain aspects that I had overlooked, or am presented a scene in a different light. However, I cannot say the same is true in the most recent instance for the film and text versions of *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The film has fallen short of the expectations I set for it, and speak to this in the coming paragraphs.

Most broadly, I can say that the film lacks the strong emotions that the book offers. It seems far too shallow for the incredible depth and insight that the character of Stephen Dedalus presents. For instance, in the film we do not get to experience the tense moments when Stephen is trying to decide if he should to speak to the rector about the ill-treatment Stephen receives at the hands of Father Dolan. For me, this is a very compelling moment. I can empathize with him so distinctly here. The intensity with which his mind vacillates between going to speak to him is so tangible, I cannot imagine anyone not empathizing with him. The doorway leading to the Rector looms ahead, and it seems with each step his course of action changes. However, in the movie, we do not have this. We just see Stephen stepping down the hall way and enter. There is so much more that can be done here! I understand that there are limitations with film, but there are also so many other advantages, which simply were not called upon. There are other areas that lack emotion. In the film, we do not experience Stephen’s extreme discomfort at being at school. We do
not see him fantasizing about returning home. We do not see him struggle with whether it
is wrong to kiss his mother good night. I find it ironic that the characters of the text, who
can only be viewed in the mind carry more verisimilitude than the characters of the film
who can actually observe with our eyes and ears.

A lack of emotion is not the only way in which the film suffers. What are some of
the most important scenes in the book are glossed over. They simply are not given the
attention that they deserve. Here are a handful that I can name: the scene on the steps as
Stephen comes down for Christmas dinner, the infirmary, the scene in the hallway where
Stephen tries to decide where to go, and the scene on the playground where the boys
entertain the possible reasons why their comrades were to be flogged or dismissed.

I believe that were I better analyst of film, I could find more flaws. Perhaps as a
kind gesture, I am more a scholar of words than I am moving pictures, and cannot think of
much more to say. Regardless, I must maintain and hold true to the belief that the film
paints a pretty poor portrait of the artist as a young man.