

The beauty of the book lies in the delicate harmony achieved between the subjective stuff and the objective frame of presentation. It is an achievement that makes the personal appear as impersonal, the autobiography as a 'portrait'. The bird image that occurs in the opening:

- O, Stephen will apologise
Dante said:

- O, if not, the eagle will come
and pull out his eyes

The 'eagle' is associated in Stephen's memory with fear and punishment. It finds culmination in the symbol of Dedalus, the hawk-like man. Later Stephen records one of his epiphanic experiences in terms of bird imagery.

A girl stood before him in midstream alone and stiff, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful sea bird. Towards the end of the book, Stephen pictures himself as a bird circling between the sea and the sky. In the dialogue with Davin he uses the bird-and-net image to project himself as an artist, "I shall try to fly by those nets."

The intensity of the hero's predicament is conveyed through such expressions as 'fierce longing', 'secret riots', 'pines of lust' and 'wail of despair'. This fierce churning results in the tidal imagery. He had tried to build a break water of order and elegance against the sordid tide of life without him." This ambivalence lends a unique complexity to the portrait of the hero as an artist.

As the hero becomes more and more self-centred, imagery acquires a solemn tone. The metaphors of 'blast', 'hurricane' and 'simoon' push the solemnity of tone to the limit of violence. They create a context in which a certain significance of the protagonist's name - Stephen Dedalus - is at once justified and criticized. The sombre imagery is directed towards the climatic scene that registers Stephen's spiritual rebirth. This scene involves the symbolic death of the body in the process of a spiritual life, "He felt the death-chill touch the extremities and creep onward towards the heart, the film of death veiling the eyes."