

***A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*** is Joyce's second publication. The indefinite article at the beginning of the title is meaningful: Joyce wants to tell one among the infinite interpretations of the development of a personality. The novel is composed of five chapters, it is autobiographical and contains Joyce's points of view about politics and religion: reading this book, we can follow the writer's evolution from when he accepts the authority around him to when he rebels and, consequently, chooses exile. The passage below shows the protagonist Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's alter-ego, expressing his position to Davin, a friend of his, about the Irish question:



*-This race and this country and this life produced me, he said. I shall express myself as I am.*

*-Try to be one of us, repeated Davin. In your heart you are an Irishman but your pride is too powerful.*

*-My ancestors threw off their language and took another, Stephen said. They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made? What for?*

*-For our freedom, said Davin.*

*-No honourable and sincere man, said Stephen, has given up to you his life and his youth and his affections from the days of Tone to those of Parnell, but you sold him to the enemy or failed him in need or reviled him and left him for another. And you invite me to be one of you. I'd see you damned first.*

*-They died for their ideals, Stevie, said Davin. Our day will come yet, believe me.*

*Stephen, following his own thought, was silent for an instant.*

*-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.*

*Davin knocked the ashes from his pipe.*

*-Too deep for me, Stevie, he said. But a man's country come first. Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or mystic after.*

*-Do you know what Ireland is? asked Stephen with cold violence. Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow.*



Whose side are you on: Stephen's or Davin's?



For Joyce every word has a rigorous meaning: for example, the protagonist of *A Portrait*, Stephen, is so called after St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr who had conflicts with the established religion of his time. It's an element in common with Joyce's Stephen: «*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 defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning.*», said Stephen in *A Portrait*. Do you know why Stephen was called Dedalus? Do a websearch in no more than 15 minutes and tell the class.