



Dubliners

selected short stories

James Joyce





R A I N B O W S

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Adaptation, dossiers and activities
by Paola Della Valle



edisco

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INTRODUCTION

Dubliners, published in 1914, is made up of fifteen short stories. All of them were written before 1905 except for the last and longest one, 'The Dead', which was added in 1907. Together they offer a suggestive portrait of the lives of ordinary people in Dublin, mixing realistic descriptions with the search for deeper meanings through the use of symbols.

IBSEN'S INFLUENCE

When Joyce began to plan the collection, he was under the influence of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, who had shown that it was possible to make provincial life the subject of serious art. Ibsen also showed that art could tell the truth without sacrificing itself as art and could be a diagnostic instrument to show the evils of a diseased society. Joyce's short stories are therefore meant to reveal the truth about Ireland. They portray situations which reveal the oppressive effects of political, religious, cultural and economic forces on the lives of lower-middle-class Dubliners, leading them to moral and psychological paralysis. In Joyce's own words, he sought¹ to write "a chapter of the moral history" of Ireland and chose Dublin as its setting because "that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis".

THE NOTION OF 'PARALYSIS'

'Paralysis' is the key theme in all the short stories, illustrated first through the eyes of people in different phases of life (from childhood to maturity), then in the context of public life. A feeling of stagnation pervades Dublin and its inhabitants, whose lives are dominated by frustration, inertia, alcoholism, poverty and the conformity encouraged by the Catholic Church. The resulting picture is one of afflicted humanity, trying to escape from and change its destiny but always failing.

1. *sought*: (seek-sought-sought) tried.



Sackville Street, Dublin (1905).

THE STRUCTURE OF *DUBLINERS*

Joyce arranged the stories into four groups in the order below (the titles in bold are the ones included in this book):

Childhood	Adolescence	Maturity	Public Life
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The Sisters</i>• An Encounter• Araby	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eveline• <i>After the Race</i>• <i>Two Gallants</i>• The Boarding House	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Little Cloud• <i>Counterparts</i>• <i>Clay</i>• A Painful Case	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Ivy Day in the Committee Room</i>• A Mother• <i>Grace</i>• <i>The Dead</i>

EXPERIMENTATION IN THE SHORT STORY

Joyce’s stories are characterised by a lack of action. He adapted to his own purposes the short-story form, as theorised by E.A. Poe and applied in short stories in English at the time. At the end of the 19th century, short stories had become extremely fashionable and were published in popular magazines and periodicals. Most of them were sensational narratives filled with action, which satisfied the public’s taste for adventure, mystery and romance. By contrast, Joyce’s stories are psychological sketches where action is reduced to a minimum. Their aim is to probe² the world of subjectivity, of feeling and motivation. Joyce often uses an impressionist technique, playing on light and dark, and using elaborate sensual imagery. He provides a collection of impressions of urban life.

EPIPHANIES

Joyce’s stories are characterised by moments of particular intensity which lead their characters to a sudden revelation about themselves or about the reality surrounding them. The protagonists experience a sort of spiritual awakening, where new associations of thoughts or feelings are made, producing new awareness. The ‘epiphany’ is generally the climax of the short story and the key to understanding it. In a famous passage of his autobiographical manuscript *Stephen*

2. *probe*: ask questions in order to find things out.

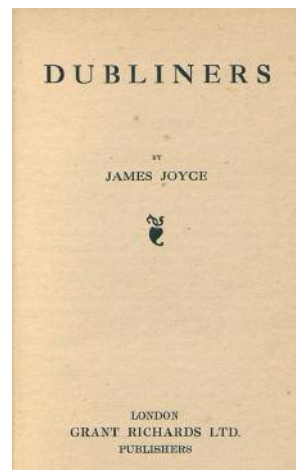
Hero, which became the basis of his first published novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Joyce explains what he meant by ‘epiphany’ using the point of view of his hero Stephen Daedalus:

“By an epiphany he [Stephen] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.”

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Though *Dubliners* may seem to follow traditionally descriptive realism, the collection contains many elements of Joyce’s more experimental later works. These can be summarised as follows:

- Absence of an omniscient narrator. Each story is narrated from the perspective of the character, using language suitable to his/her age and social class.
- Frequent use of free indirect style (whether thought or speech). This fictional technique allows the author to enter the consciousness of the individual without using a first person narrative or direct description.
- Representation of the subjective dimension of experience and, consequently, of the fragmented multi-faceted³ nature of reality.
- Linguistic resourcefulness⁴, that is, the search for a truthful rendition of the rhythm, tone, or pitch of different voices.
- Importance of details with a symbolic function. Symbols give the stories meanings the characters are unconscious of or unable to communicate.
- Choice of anti-heroes as protagonists.
- Detachment of the author from his work. The author’s voice is absent and there is no moralising or overtly⁵ didactic tone.



Dubliners first edition.

3. *multi-faceted*: with many faces or sides.

4. *resourcefulness*: the act of finding ways to deal with problems.

5. *overtly*: openly.

THE STORIES

- *The Sisters* – The priest Father Flynn dies and a young boy and his family deal with it only superficially.
- *An Encounter* – Two schoolboys play truant⁶ and are confronted by an elderly man.
- *Araby* – A boy falls in love with his friend's sister, but fails to buy her a present from the Araby bazaar.
- *Eveline* – A young woman abandons her plans to leave Ireland with a sailor.
- *After the Race* – College student Jimmy Doyle tries to fit in⁷ with his wealthy friends.
- *Two Gallants* – Two con men⁸, Lenahan and Corley, trick a maid into stealing from her employer.
- *The Boarding House* – Mrs Mooney successfully manoeuvres her daughter Polly into an upwardly-mobile⁹ marriage with Mr Doran.
- *A Little Cloud* – Little Chandler's dinner with his old friend Ignatius Gallaher casts a light on his own failed literary dreams. The story also reflects Chandler's mood upon realising that his baby son has replaced him as the centre of his wife's affections.
- *Counterparts* – Farrington, an alcoholic Irish employee, takes out his frustration in pubs and on his son Tom.
- *Clay* – A maid, Maria, celebrates Halloween with her friend Joe Donnelly and his family.
- *A Painful Case* – Mr Duffy rebuffs¹⁰ Mrs Sinico, then four years later realises he lost the only chance for love in his life.
- *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* – Minor Irish politicians fail to live up to the memory of Charles Stewart Parnell.
- *A Mother* – Mrs Kearney tries to create a perfect piano recital for her daughter Kathleen but fails miserably because she manages to lose the support of the others.
- *Grace* – Mr Kernan falls and injures himself in a bar. His friends try to get him to go on a Catholic retreat to convert him.
- *The Dead* – Gabriel Conroy, a self-conscious literary journalist, attends his aunts' annual party. Later on, while his wife remembers a boy who died of love for her, he realises in an epiphany that passionless people like himself are already dead. At 15–16,000 words, this story has also been classified a novella.

6. *play truant*: are absent from school without permission.

7. *to fit in*: to feel that you belong to a particular group and are accepted by them.

8. *con men*: people who trick or deceive

other people in order to get money from them.

9. *upwardly-mobile*: moving or able to move to a higher social class.

10. *rebuffs*: rejects.

The author

James Joyce



James Joyce was born in Dublin on 2nd February 1882, into a lower-middle-class Catholic family, the eldest of ten children. After a brief period of prosperity, his family fell into poverty. Nevertheless, on account of his extraordinary potential, he was sent to prestigious Jesuit schools before going on to University College, Dublin, where he studied French, Italian and German language and literature, as well as English literature. In 1902, he graduated in modern

languages and went to Paris with the intention of studying medicine, but a few months later he was called back to Dublin because of his mother's terminal illness. After her death in August 1903, he remained in Ireland for a year. During this period he wrote book reviews and took his first steps as a writer. The following year he met and fell in love with Nora Barnacle, a twenty-year-old chambermaid¹ in a city hotel. Their first date was on 16th June 1904, a day which was to become famous thanks to Joyce's masterpiece *Ulysses*.

In October 1904, the couple moved to the Continent and settled first in the Austro-Hungarian naval station of Pola, then in Trieste, also part of Austria-Hungary. They had two children – Giorgio and Lucia – but did not get married until 1931. The ten years spent in Trieste were difficult, filled with disappointment and financial problems. To support his family, Joyce taught English at the Berlitz School of Languages, gave private lessons and depended on gifts from friends. His most famous 'pupil' in Trieste was the writer Italo Svevo, whose novels he greatly admired. Joyce's first published work, the volume of verse *Chamber Music*, appeared in 1907 and, after many delays and difficulties, *Dubliners* was published in 1914. Actually, this collection of short stories had been completed by 1907, but Joyce was soon in trouble with publishers on account of supposedly obscene elements in his prose.

1. *chambermaid*: a female worker whose job is to clean and tidy rooms.

In 1915, after the outbreak² of World War I, Joyce and his family fled³ to Zürich, in neutral Switzerland, where they remained until 1919. The war years were extremely fruitful for Joyce, who published his semi-autobiographical first novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), along with an Ibsenesque play *Exiles* (1918), while episodes of *Ulysses* began to appear serially⁴ in New York and later in Britain. The only cloud in this happy period was the deterioration of his eyesight, which forced him to have several operations.

By this time, Joyce had established himself as a writer and influential intellectuals such, as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, admired and supported his work. It was at Pound's suggestion that he decided to move to Paris in 1920. His masterpiece *Ulysses*, which had been declared obscene and banned in America and Britain, was published in Paris in 1922. The complete novel came out in America only in 1934 and two years later in Britain, after having been cleared of the charge⁵ of pornography. This work, which makes extensive use of the technique of stream of consciousness, revolutionised the form and structure of the novel and pushed language experiment to extreme limits of communication. In 1923, he began writing what was later published as *Finnegans Wake* (1939), his last work, written in a highly innovative 'dream language' combining multilingual puns with the stream of consciousness technique developed in *Ulysses*. The outbreak of World War II caused Joyce to leave Paris. He moved back with his family to neutral Switzerland, where he died in 1941 of a perforated ulcer. His body lies in Fluntern cemetery in Zürich.



41, Brighton Square,
James Joyce's birthplace.

2. *outbreak*: beginning.
3. *fled* (*flee-fled-fled*): leave quickly in order to escape danger.
4. *serially*: printed in several separate parts in magazines.
5. *charge*: official statement saying you are guilty of a crime.

Photo Gallery

James Joyce



1. James Joyce, his mother, father and grandfather (September 1888).
2. Nassau Street, where James Joyce met Nora Barnacle for the first time.
3. Joyce's statue in Trieste.
4. Joyce's statue in Dublin.
5. Joyce's statue in Szombathely.
6. Nora Barnacle, Joyce's wife.
7. Joyce in 1904.