

Modern Critical

INTERPRETATIONS

Edited and with an Introduction by HAROLD BLOOM

James Joyce's
Dubliners



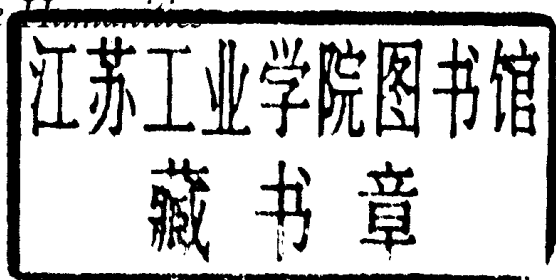
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Dubliners

Edited and with an introduction by

Harold Bloom

Sterling Professor of the Humanities
Yale University



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Editor's Note

This book gathers together a representative selection of the best modern critical interpretations of James Joyce's classic book of short stories, *Dubliners*. The critical essays are reprinted here in the chronological order of their original publications. I am grateful to Onno Oerlemans and Paul Barickman for their assistance in editing this volume.

My introduction analyzes the story "Eveline" as a negation of a Paterian "privileged moment" or "epiphany," as Joyce called it in *Stephen Hero*. Robert Adams Day begins the chronological sequence of criticism with a consideration of Lenehan in "Two Gallants," who is seen as possessing both a realistic and a mythic identity.

In a study of the imagery of virginity in "The Dead," Tilly Eggers shows us that Joyce did not fix any single role on women, while Phillip Herring's reading of "The Sisters" emphasizes the indirection of Joyce's anti-clericalism in that story. Mary T. Reynolds subtly traces a Dantesque pattern that allies *Dubliners* to the moral structure of the *Inferno*.

The contexts of *Dubliners*, cultural and historical, are illuminated by Hugh Kenner, after which John Paul Riquelme denies the supposedly Flaubertian impersonality of Joyce as a narrative presence in the book.

Writing on "A Painful Case," Lindsey Tucker rescues the story as a vision of art as integrative process. "The Dead" returns with Ross Chambers's estimate of Gabriel Conroy as an ambivalent portrait of the artist, embodying an idea of order but unable to love. Fritz Senn, noted Swiss Joycean, reads "The Boarding House" as a "love story of wrong turnings."

"Ivy Day in the Committee Room" receives a Nietzschean analysis by Thomas B. O'Grady, who reflects upon Joyce's vision of his

countrymen as being helplessly trapped in the nightmare of history. Margot Norris concludes this volume with a discussion of "Clay," which she judges to possess the ambivalent rhetorical purposes of both mocking and aggrandizing its protagonist, Maria.

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Introduction

Joyce's scholars have studied the relation of *Dubliners* to its principal precursors: the fictions of Flaubert and Chekhov. There is a more complex relation, because more negative, to the vision of Walter Pater. The Paterian epiphany, turned inside out, is transformed by Joyce into the negative moments of *Dubliners*. *Dubliners*, an admirable and unified collection of short stories, is a more mixed work aesthetically than much criticism of Joyce acknowledges. "After the Race" is a weak story, and "An Encounter" and "Araby" do not reread well. But "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is rightly and universally judged a masterpiece, and "The Dead," by common consent, inaugurates the art of the mature Joyce. I will confine myself here to the slight yet remarkable story "Eveline" in order to ponder one of Joyce's negative moments, his emptied-out version of the Paterian flare of radiance against darkening backgrounds.

"Eveline," when first read, seems a story by George Moore, who like the early Joyce was much influenced by Flaubert. Repeated readings show how subtle, and poignantly ambivalent the story becomes. If Joyce's Dublin is, as he asserted, "the centre of paralysis," then poor Eveline is presumably a victim of that paralysis, since we are to believe that she does care for Frank, her sailor lover. I would suppose that he is sincere, despite the doubts expressed by that shrewd ironist Hugh Kenner, who points out that the ship undoubtedly has Liverpool, rather than Buenos Aires, as its destination. But I do not think it much matters whether Frank is a deceiver, as Kenner believes, or whether Eveline and Frank are going to Liverpool in order to sail from there to Argentina. What seems clear is that a sailor fifty times more plausible than Frank would not budge the pathetic Eveline, who is a victim of her nation, her religion, her father, and finally of herself.

Eveline's mother, bullied and beaten by her dreadful father, died

in madness, constantly uttering corrupt Gaelic variously interpreted by Joyce scholars as “the end of pleasure is pain” or “the end of song is raving madness.” By her final failure of nerve, Eveline seems to forfeit pleasure and song, while continuing towards what is going to be pain and raving madness anyway. She will be vulnerable to an Irish version of the return of the repressed, which means that she will end in violence, presumably towards herself. Joyce’s lasting heritage to Western literature appears to be his suspension of the will, both in his protagonists and in the author. Authorial suspension of the will, whether in Wordsworth or in Joyce, is itself a fiction and is less interesting, in *Dubliners*, than the will-lessness of Eveline and her fellow residents of the Irish capital. The Joycean epiphany, like the Paterian privileged moment, never comes to those who desire or choose it. Suddenly it is there, and descends upon one with total authority, negating personality and hope, in Joyce’s negative version:

She stood among the swaying crowd in the station at the North Wall. He held her hand and she knew that he was speaking to her, saying something about the passage over and over again. The station was full of soldiers with brown baggages. Through the wide doors of the sheds she caught a glimpse of the black mass of the boat, lying in beside the quay wall, with illumined portholes. She answered nothing. She felt her cheek pale and cold and, out of a maze of distress, she prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty. The boat blew a long mournful whistle into the mist. If she went, to-morrow she would be on the sea with Frank, steaming toward Buenos Ayres. Their passage had been booked. Could she still draw back after all he had done for her? Her distress awoke a nausea on her body and she kept moving her lips in silent fervent prayer.

A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand:
—Come!

All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.

—Come!

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish!

—Eveline! Evvy!

He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.

You could say that Eveline Hill is shaped so as to be the antithesis of Nora Barnacle, a lady so tough that the negative moments remained external to her. Wretched Eveline *is* a perpetually negative moment, monument to Dublin repression. But that is not precise enough. What Eveline experiences, at her story's end, is more than the disabling psychic defense of isolation, in which all context is burned away, and more even than the estranging consequences of hysteria. What descends upon her is not less than a vastation: sight is reduced to mass and color, nausea and prayer become intermixed, and all affect is an ocean, in which she must drown. The story's weakest sentence allows Joyce to be too judgmental: "She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal." Eveline, as Joyce has represented her, is neither passive nor a helpless animal. Joyce makes a great recovery, worthy of him, in the final sentence: "Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition." She has no will and, in this negative moment, almost no consciousness. What paralyzes her is what Joyce called the moral history of his city and his nation, a history for which he held the Church responsible. "Silent fervent prayer" in this passage becomes a metaphor of death-in-life. Wordsworth, visionary of the positive epiphany, said of his spots of time that they gave precise knowledge of the extent to which the mind was lord and master, with outward sense the servant of the mind's creative will. "Eveline" represents the negation of Wordsworthianism and of its novelistic descendants in George Eliot and Henry James. Joyce shows us the triumph of outward sense, or the power of the universe of death over the victimized mind of the Dubliner, Eveline Hill.

Joyce's Gnomons, Lenehan, and the Persistence of an Image

Robert Adams Day

Our understanding of characters and characterization in the novel has vastly increased in sophistication since the days when it was possible to ask seriously how many children Lady Macbeth had, or to see characters as mere portraits of the author and his friends or enemies, or to view them functionally as foils or *ficelles* and not much more. Even so, human nature being what it is, we must struggle continually against the temptation to forget that novels like poems are verbal structures merely; or that, reversing our angle of vision, our knowledge of Jesus or of Napoleon is in one very important sense exactly like our knowledge of Hamlet: it is ultimately derived entirely from reading words written or printed—arbitrary symbolic data representing conceptual reductions of sense—data.

I want to discuss a few of the printed data that can be discovered and shown concerning a minor character of Joyce's, Lenehan—who has no given name like real people. The aggregate of these printed data can lead us into some unorthodox but instructive ways of examining the conception and genesis of "character" in the mind of Joyce and perhaps of other writers as well, for Lenehan bears about him traces of his creation, and achieves a very strange kind of immortality.

The more specialized criticism dealing with Joyce's characters and characterization has developed in lines parallel with those followed by criticism in general. Thus his characters have been seen as though they were real persons now living, therefore possessing a theoretically infinite

store of recoverable data: how many lovers had Molly Bloom, and should we like to be married to her? Stephen Dedalus in the *Portrait* is the young Joyce, perhaps painted by Picasso or Braque; Molly Bloom is an amalgam of Nora Joyce and the Virgin Mary. But we have also had ingenious and elaborate psychoanalytic studies of Joyce's figures; semiotic and structural purifications of them into patterns that permit comparative analysis; and other approaches, less easy to label, such as that in a recent volume which takes the position that Joyce's characterization "is predicated upon the coexistence (not the resolution) of opposites," and that the Joycean character is constituted, having an unknowable "soul," by surrounding it with collocations of details, stylistic and other, which as it were give the shape of the invisible entity within. The characters have also been seen as in a sense projections of Joyce himself, but in a mode far more subtle and therefore perhaps more truly Joycean than those envisaged by earlier scholars. I propose to follow a method which is writer- rather than reader-oriented; which in various ways resembles some of the last-mentioned approaches; but which, rather than dwelling on the great triad of Stephen, Bloom, and Molly, as nearly all critics have done, considers how Lenehan, a very minor character indeed, grew in Joyce's mind. If his ingredients on examination turn out to be bizarre, perhaps the greater figures past whom he flits may get additional illumination from him.

If we follow the simpler, older, or less sophisticated approaches, Lenehan is a character in the *Dubliners* story "Two Gallants" and a minor character in *Ulysses*. Parasite, toady, sponger, jackal, he is vivid, pathetic, believable; most of us have known him in real life, and so we are tempted in discussing him to add data that are not on Joyce's pages. Second, like the *Dubliners* character Little Chandler, Lenehan is a projection of a part of Joyce, a person whom Joyce might have become had he not met Nora, left Dublin, and become a dedicated artist; Joyce used traits of Mick Hart and Matthew Kane, *Dubliners* he knew, to create him, and took his name from a reporter on the *Irish Times*; if he has a literary ancestry at all, he may be a degenerate modern version of Chaucer's hospitable Franklin. Lastly, Lenehan acts as confidant to the repulsive character Corley in "Two Gallants," and in his flittings in and out of *Ulysses* he enriches the cast of characters. He replays his part of jackal with Blazes Boylan, he is seen in the newspaper office, on the streets, in the Ormonde Hotel, in the pub, at the maternity hospital; he gives Boylan the worthless tip on the horse Sceptre for the Ascot Gold Cup, and derides Bantam Lyons, who was about to bet on the winning

horse Throwaway; and there are hints that he may have been one of Molly's lovers in the past. In sort, a perfectly respectable (in the artistic sense) minor character, and what more is there to say of him?

There is a good deal. Lenehan gives us a new and very basic insight into what "character" really means to Joyce; he can lead us to a cosmology of Joyce's imaginative universe as recreated in art, and to an astonishing view of how important apparently trivial objects and gestures can be in that universe. Lenehan tells us that Joyce's cosmos is more nearly like that of William Blake than anything else, and that among its most important inhabitants are gnomons. "Lenehan" is nothing more than a name bestowed in deference to conventional realism on an agglomeration of gnomons at two points in their mythical history. (Parenthetically one might point out that that any eminent name that one likes to consider is but a label given to an agglomeration of atoms at a point in *their* history.)

"Blakean universe" and "gnomon" require definition. Blake, like Joyce, spent his life writing the book of himself, as Joyce clearly recognized. Both thought in archetypes, for which I shall use Carl Jung's definition, "a kind of readiness to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas" (*Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R. F. C. Hull). The total work of each is a whole, in which each part reflects and therefore in a sense *is* the whole, and is in transformed terms a version or retelling of each and every other part. The life of Blake or Joyce is also the history of the human mind and of each mind, the history of the universe, the life of God or Christ or Satan or John Smith, the history of human kind and the life of any or Everyman, and of the processes of psychology according to any school of analysis. This cosmos, however, operates in space as well as time, so that geographical location corresponds with existence at a date in history; movement is the same as growing old or young. But while it is easy for us to say that everything is everything else and at the same time and everywhere, and think that we grasp the concept, it leads to paradoxes which Joyce and Blake easily handled, but which make our imaginations boggle unless we can be at ease, say, with the mystery of the Trinity; and it quite destroys any conventional notion of "character." The relevant paradox for our purpose is this: each self is at once itself and a part of itself and all the other parts of itself; in Joyce's own words, "Each . . . is so to say one person although it is composed of persons—as Aquinas relates of the heavenly hosts." To dramatize all this is something of a problem; and this is why Blake pretends to be

writing about Los and Urthona and Bowlahoola and Golgonooza and why Joyce finally wrote *Finnegans Wake*. Mythical personages and ideas are free from the petty trammels of space, time, and identity; they can live at once in them and out of them.

The fundamental importance of Blake's vision in forming Joyce's has been well documented, and few will quarrel with the notion of *Finnegans Wake*, at least, as a Blakean universe. But Joyce was thinking mythically, in images and archetypes, from the beginning, and in all his books before the *Wake* a ghost of the Blakean cosmos lurks, very faint at first, but materializing ever more thickly. Lenihan inhabits it. Like Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat (the best simile that presents itself) he is at first a grin without a cat, then a cat without a grin (in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, where he has a name as well as a local habitation), and then, in the *Wake*, gathered into the artifice of eternity, he is again a grin without a cat. The grin consists of objects and gestures at once veristic and emblematic, and these are Lenihan's gnomons.

"Gnomons," with "simony" and "paralysis," is one of the three words that fascinate the little boy in the first story of *Dubliners*, and like them it has been subjected to some very fantastic manipulations in an effort to see it as a key to Joyce's art. It is true that "in the Euclid," as the boy says, a gnomon is that part of a parallelogram which remains after a similar parallelogram has been taken from one of its corners—a sort of drunken letter L; but that information does not take us very far. If instead we have recourse, as Joyce so often did, to Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary*, where "gnomon" lives close to the very Joycean word "gorbellied," we find that a gnomon is the index of a dial, that is, a pointer, from the Greek word meaning an interpreter, one who knows. If we suppose that Joyce thought simultaneously of a gnomon as an indicator and as an interpreter who knows, we may connect this notion with two favorite doctrines of his: first, the doctrine of signatures, telling us that the appearances of things are hieroglyphics of their nature and that heavenly things are reflected in the things of earth, and second, the tradition of emblems of efficacy, which also tells of heavenly truths. In the early ages of the Church such emblems told the illiterate who a saint was and what he was good for; thus the patron of pedagogues might well be St. Cassian, whose pagan pupils pierced him with styluses and beat in his skull with tablets. Joyce had good fun with such emblems in "Cyclops," but they also had a serious purpose for him, as with Bloom's symbolic potato, Molly's roses, Stephen's ashplant, Mulligan's gold teeth (like a saint he is called

“Chrysostomos,” Cranly’s “iron crown” of hair and eating of figs (he is equated with John the Baptist). Perhaps every character in Joyce is not equipped with gnomons, but Lenehan certainly is. Indeed, under the aspect of eternity or of Blake he is an immortal icon—a collection of symbolic objects, a name, certain mythic functions—who becomes the literary equivalent of incarnate only in the more realistic fictions, but who repeats the same functions eternally on the mythic level.

If this theory is valid we can always detect the presence of “Lenehan” if we see even one of the objects or gestures that are his pointers, emblems, or gnomons, and we can be sure that the idea or process he represents is going on; he is at once a fictional character, a *figura* in Joycean typology, and a state, condition, or activity in the informing myth. He is always a betrayer or rather an assistant at a betrayal—a Judas who helps the evil conqueror to vanquish the defenceless hero. But in Joycean myth this process is inevitable and, though painful, necessary; to explain by analogy, the Romans could not have crucified Christ and thus enabled him to perform the necessary redemption of mankind without the cooperation of Judas. This paradox of the evil-yet-good betrayer is always very clear to Joyce, for in his Blakean universe the hero always invites and even arranges his own betrayal, and the betrayer is always in some way a part of the hero’s being.

In its most purified form and relevant archetype in the Joycean universe is this. A male figure generates and forms a female figure for his possession, enjoyment, comfort, and fulfillment. But she necessarily leans toward infidelity, and a male figure of evil from outside seduces her, defiles her, abducts her, or somehow renders her helpless and useless. But just as a vampire cannot first enter a house without an invitation, a catalyst is needed; and a minor male figure, also generated by the hero-figure, opens the gates to the invader. Thus the hero betrays himself.

Blake’s “Mental Traveller,” which Joyce knew well from the Yeats-Ellis edition, offers in its vision of the way life goes in the fallen world perhaps the most striking and concrete analogue to this archetype, and may elucidate it for the reader. Perceived through the eyes of a traveller from Eternity, a male Babe is fed upon and tortured by a “Woman Old” while “she grows young as he grows old.” The situation of vampirism is then reversed as he has become strong and she helpless; she is reborn from fire as a sort of Muse, and he in feeble age turns to an earthly Maiden who supportively leads him astray. The cycle endlessly repeats itself, even though the appearance and behavior of the two