

Dubliners

by **JAMES JOYCE**

introduction by **PADRAIC COLUM**

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INTRODUCTION

The stories in this collection were written by a man in his early twenties. James Joyce, at the time, had just left the University—not Dublin University, which is Protestant and with affinities with Oxford or with Harvard, but University College which had affinities with the Catholic Universities of the Continent, Louvain or Salamanca. He had been in Paris where he had studied for a short while, but at the time he was writing these stories he did little more than frequent the National Library and walk the streets of Dublin. He had written in prose and verse, but one could conceive of his becoming a scientist or a musician.

About 1905 the book was completed and it was accepted by a London publisher. And then, instead of publication according to contract, there ensued a series of attempts at having the book suppressed.

Messrs. Grant Richards, the London publishers, after having held it for a year returned the manuscript to the author with a refusal to publish it. The manuscript then went to Dublin publishers, Messrs. Maunsel. A contract binding them to

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bring the book out before September of 1910 was signed. There were postponements. Messrs. Maunsel asked Joyce to alter certain passages in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." Reluctantly he agreed to make some alterations. Still there were postponements. Joyce, who had been living in Italy, went over to Dublin to negotiate with the publishers. The sheets had been printed at the time.

This was in 1912. I saw Joyce in Dublin then and went with him to interview Messrs. Maunsel's manager. There were libellous passages in the book, the manager declared: public houses were mentioned by their owners' names. Joyce offered to take a car and drive around with the manager to Davy Byrne's and Barney Kiernan's and ask the proprietors if they objected to their names being set down in his book. The manager would not take the offer. The terms in which King Edward VII was spoken of in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" were offensive to many Dublin people, and they would take action about it in the event of publication—this was his next objection. Joyce offered to make certain alterations. The manager asked that certain stories be omitted altogether. Then he declared that he would not publish the book.

I went to a lawyer, a comrade of Joyce's in the University days, and asked him if anything could be done to hold the publishers to their contract.

He told me there was no redress for Joyce in Dublin. A jury would take the view that the book was immoral and offensive and would condone the publisher's breach of contract. Joyce wrote a letter in which he told the publishers they had his permission to publish the book in whatever shape or form pleased them. Their answer was this: they distributed the type and destroyed the books that had been printed. Joyce departed from Dublin with the single copy of "Dubliners" that was left.

What happened to make the publishers refuse to bring out a book that they had signed a contract to publish? What happened to make a printing-firm break up the type and destroy an edition of a book? Joyce may have had at the time a private enemy in Dublin who was powerful enough to have had all this done. Or some organization or interest eager to have the book suppressed might have been able to have it done. Nationalist and Catholic Dublin might have felt outraged by some of the incidents narrated and some of the characters portrayed and one of the organizations might have been able to bring influence upon the printers and publishers. Or the Masonic Order might have objected to the references to Edward VII and might have used influence upon the printers. I had reason to know that the Masonic Order was powerful enough with certain firms to prevent the printing of matter which they did not regard as favorable.

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My own opinion was that the printing firm was responsible for the suppression of the book. It was an old established firm, the books they published dated from the eighteenth century; the head of the firm still bore the founder's name. This gentleman was impenetrable to ideas and was of the utmost Dublin respectability; he was old, too, and arrogant. Probably he read proofs of the books, was shocked by the incidents and the characters, and made up his mind not to let a book of the kind out of a house that bore his and his forefather's name. It may be that he had some control over the publishing house, and was able to put such pressure on them as left them ready to make a breach of contract. Anyway, "Dubliners" was effectively suppressed in Dublin. Two years afterwards the London publishers who had accepted it before brought "Dubliners" out. The book has never been published in Dublin.

"Dubliners" followed the publication of Joyce's single book of verse, "Chamber Music." It was followed by the publication of the novel "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," after which came the play "Exiles," and then the epical satire "Ulysses." "Dubliners" is related to all of them. The first three stories in the collection, obviously out of personal memory, might be incidents that were pared away from a draft of "Portraits of the Artist;" the boy in "Araby" who, walking through flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, thinks of himself as bearing "my

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chalice safely through a crowd of foes," is surely the Stephen Dedalus of the novel. Gabriel Conroy, in the last story, "The Dead", by the way he makes a problem out of another man's influence over his wife, is like the hero of "Exiles." When we take these four stories out what remains of "Dubliners" is distinctly related to "Ulysses." Many of the characters who figure in "Ulysses" have their first appearance in "Dubliners"—Martin Cunningham, 'Hoppy' Holohan, Lineham, Mr. O'Madden Burke. It is not surprising that "Dubliners" has this relation to a book written so long afterwards, for Mr. Bloom's day was planned originally for a story in the collection.

Joyce as a young man knew Dubliners very well on two characteristic sides: he knew them on their bar-hunting side and he knew them on their political side; he knew them too on a side that is not very characteristic: on the musical side. His father was a well-known Dublin personage, and his father's sociability gave a basis for Joyce's wide and miscellaneous acquaintanceship. Mr. Joyce senior had been in affairs during the Parnell epoch; Joyce as a boy was enveloped in the anger and grief that came upon so much of Ireland on account of his followers' desertion of him and the death of the Chief. At the age of nine he gave his first writing to the world: it was a piece of political invective, "Et Tu, Healy!" and it was directed against a prominent politician who had turned upon Parnell. Old friends of his father's still maintain that this was James Joyce's finest lit-

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erary work, and they deplore the subsequent decadence.

"Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is characteristic of the largest group of stories in "Dubliners." Certain men meet more or less casually in a bleak committee-room; they talk more or less absurdly, one of them is prevailed upon to recite a poem that he had written some years before, "The Death of Parnell, 6th. October 1891." It is an amateurish and conventional piece of rhetoric, and yet, amazingly enough, a real grief and a real loyalty break through the hand-me-down verse. A few words are said to the maker of the poem, a gesture is made, and the story ends. We get a feeling of complete detachment. But it is borne in on us too that the whole happening has been understood by the author in all its implications and that it has been completely rendered for us. He must have entered into Hynes's mind before he could recreate the verses that have just the exact heat, just the exact flourishes that a passionate and semi-literate man would give to his subject writing according to the literary convention which he knew. "What do you think of that, Crofton?" cried Mr. Henchy, "Isn't that fine? What?" Mr. Crofton said it was a very fine piece of writing. And that line ends the story. Had Joyce given Mr. Crofton's words, his barest words of appreciation, he would have wronged that gentleman's fine reserve. For Mr. Crofton, former canvasser for the Conservative faction, must have felt that there was a taint of treason in the verses he had listened



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to. Still he was a man of the world, and it would not have been becoming in him to be anything but tolerant upon the occasion. "Mr. Crofton said it was a very fine piece of writing." His aloofness is felt.

In the stories of which "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is the type, James Joyce is letting us look at a happening through his eyes while making no comment. Hence the feeling of detachment that is in these stories. It would seem that he had decided to illustrate the life of Dublin through a series of reports, taking this and that incident and being as clear and as unconcerned in the reporting of it as a scientific historian might be. "The Dead," however, is not written in this way. "The Sisters," "An Encounter," and "Araby," are, as I have suggested, out of personal memory, and have not this unconcern, this detachment. But the main group of stories have detachment. There is something more to be said about the stories in this main group: In three of them there is a woman for central character—"Eveline," "Clay," "A Mother." The story that has the title "A Mother" is told as the stories about the men are told, without concern. But there is concern in the other two: Joyce, one feels, has been touched by the fate of Eveline in the story that bears her name, and by the personality of Maria in "Clay." Each girl is single-minded, conventual, and devoted.

The characters in these stories are very lonely, very unrelated people. Most of them live in little

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terraces and face the world with a certain gentility. Some are articulate, some are inarticulate. And those whose stories are the most memorable have been stirred by a look they have taken into the darkness. The book closes with "The Dead," but the dead are in the first story; the boy of "The Sisters" has been confronted with the death of his neighbour, the old priest; as he lies dead the old man becomes to the childish man a living enigma. Eveline is haunted by the memory of her dead mother. The omen that is concealed from Maria is the omen of her death. In "A Painful Case," the news of the death of a woman he had rejected haunts and makes lonelier the life of a lonely man. In "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" the story shapes itself around a dead man, Parnell. And in "The Dead" a man whom he had never known and of whom he might never have heard, recalled from the dead by a song, makes a husband realize that there is a portion of his wife's life in which he has no part. Yes, the stories in "Dubliners" that are the most memorable are about people who have been touched by death. And the words that close the last story in the book has the music of a requiem.—

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his

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journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, further westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

PADRAIC COLUM.

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THE SISTERS

THERE was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke. Night after night I had passed the house (it was vacation time) and studied the lighted square of window: and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew that two candles must be set at the head of a corpse. He had often said to me: "I am not long for this world," and I had thought his words idle. Now I knew they were true. Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word gnomon in the Euclid and the word simony in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work.

Old Cotter was sitting at the fire, smoking, when I came downstairs to supper. While my aunt was ladling out my stirabout he said, as if returning to some former remark of his:

"No, I wouldn't say he was exactly . . . but there was something queer . . . there was something uncanny about him. I'll tell you my opinion. . . ."

He began to puff at his pipe, no doubt arranging his opinion in his mind. Tiresome old fool! When we knew him first he used to be rather interesting, talking of faints and worms; but I soon grew tired of him and his endless stories about the distillery.

"I have my own theory about it," he said. "I think it was one of those . . . peculiar cases. . . . But it's hard to say. . . ."

He began to puff again at his pipe without giving us his theory. My uncle saw me staring and said to me:

"Well, so your old friend is gone, you'll be sorry to hear."

"Who?" said I.

"Father Flynn."

"Is he dead?"

"Mr. Cotter here has just told us. He was passing by the house."

I knew that I was under observation so I continued eating as if the news had not interested me. My uncle explained to old Cotter.

"The youngster and he were great friends. The old chap taught him a great deal, mind you; and they say he had a great wish for him."

"God have mercy on his soul," said my aunt piously.

Old Cotter looked at me for a while. I felt that his little beady black eyes were examining me but I would not satisfy him by looking up from my plate. He returned to his pipe and finally spat rudely into the grate.