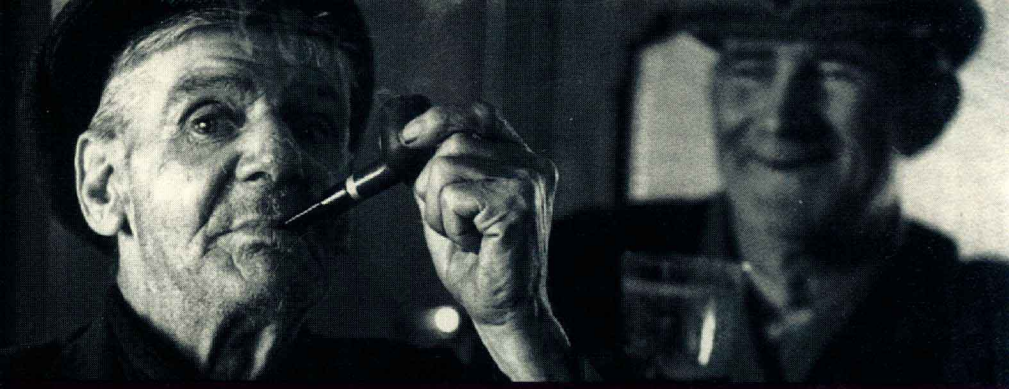

YORK NOTES ADVANCED

Dubliners

James Joyce

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James Joyce

Notes by John Brannigan

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO STUDY A SHORT STORY

Studying on your own requires self-discipline and a carefully thought-out work plan in order to be effective.

- By definition, the short story is condensed. Therefore it requires a lot of careful unpacking.
- You will need to read the short story several times. After the second or third reading, write down any features (language, images, characters, settings, ideas) you find interesting or unusual.
- Think about how the story is narrated. From whose point of view are the events described?
- Do the characters develop? Which characters do you like or dislike? Does some change to a character act as a turning point?
- Does the story have a plot? Is the arrangement of events in time significant? What is the effect of the ending? Is the action completed and closed or left incomplete and open?
- What part does setting play in the story?
- Are words, images and incidents repeated so as to give the work a pattern?
- Is there anything special about the kind of language the writer has chosen?
- What do you think the story is about? What are its central themes or ideas? Does the story present a moral and just world?
- Do not consider the story in isolation. Can you compare and contrast the story with any other work by the same author or with any other text that deals with the same theme?
- Every argument you make about the story must be backed up with details and quotations that explore its language and organisation.
- Always express your ideas in your own words.

This York Note offers an introduction to *Dubliners* and cannot substitute for close reading of the text and the study of secondary sources.

There are many reasons to enjoy and celebrate James Joyce's *Dubliners*. To begin with, there are few collections of short stories in English which are so sharply focused on developing a handful of themes in so consistent and methodical a fashion from the first story to the last. Joyce designed *Dubliners* as a collection, and for each story to be read in relation to the others. The despair of the boy at the end of 'Araby' is made more poignant with the recognition which comes with reading each subsequent story that his despair will turn to frustration, and finally to resignation. Joyce set out to represent the paralysis of the will which was besetting his home city of Dublin and all of its inhabitants, and he made this theme the focus of each of the stories in the collection. For this reason, *Dubliners*, like few other collections of short stories, has a central focus and moral, to which each story contributes in its own way. So, although each story can be read individually, and enjoyed on its own merits, there is also a great deal of pleasure and insight to be gained from reading the collection as a whole.

Dubliners is also a remarkable combination of humour and observation. The dialogue, characterisation and narration of each of the stories is frequently entertaining, poking fun at some characters for their curious expressions, and making **ironic** the serious gestures of sombre characters. While having fun, *Dubliners* is also a study of human behaviour, communication and values. It follows the lives of people who search in vain for happiness in money, or who live out their disappointments and frustrations through others, or who bolster false images of themselves, only to be further aggrieved when those images are deflated. The stories are brief encounters with a handful of characters and situations, situations which often appear trivial or meaningless, but they allow us to see a world of hopes, dreams, failures, corruption, bewilderment, anger, greed, ambition, desire and embarrassment. Joyce exhibits the whole gamut of human emotions and conceits in the space of fifteen short stories and yet, at the same time, has written those stories with the brevity and economy necessary for the short story form.

Dubliners describes and brings to life the city of Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century, and each of the stories is set against a background of real streets, shops and icons which make up the architecture of the city. The collection is, for this reason, an intriguing mix of social **realism** and the literary imagination. It rewards the reader on many levels, whether in a cursory reading or after lengthy, careful research. Perhaps the

most noteworthy achievement of *Dubliners*, as Colin MacCabe has suggested (Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*, Macmillan, 1979, pp. 28–37), is its openness to very different readers. People with little or no knowledge of Dublin, literature or **symbolism** may find stories which are captivating and rewarding, just as much as scholars may gain pleasure from tracing the dense literary and theological allusions, or the map of Dublin which Joyce draws through his stories.

As a text to be studied and analysed, *Dubliners* presents the student with some challenging and tantalising questions. If *Dubliners* has a central focus and moral, why did Joyce write it as a collection of stories, each with different characters and situations, and not as a novel? What is Joyce's attitude to Dublin and Ireland? Is he sick of it, like Gabriel Conroy? Or is he obsessed with and enchanted by it? Is Joyce the impartial observer and narrator of these incidents and characters, or does he intervene, offering his own views and solutions? What are the **epiphanies**, or revelations of truth, in *Dubliners* and what roles do they play? Are Joyce's stories offering political views? Or ethical views? Do the stories present the reader with psychological case studies – a woman incapable of escaping, a man consumed by jealous rage, and so on? How does Joyce use **symbols** and images in the stories, and to what purpose? How does Joyce use language, style, characterisation, viewpoint or time pattern in the stories? These questions are discussed and sometimes partly answered in the notes and summaries below, but ultimately many of the most challenging questions and the most rewarding answers will only come with your own close reading and attentive study of the stories of *Dubliners*.

There are other questions which we might ask in relation to Joyce's other works. Was *Dubliners* the text which Joyce used to experiment with the styles and techniques which he would go on to develop and perfect in his later writings? Why did Joyce abandon the short story form after he had completed *Dubliners*? What was the relationship between Joyce's writings and the writings of the Irish Revivalists, such as W.B. Yeats, George Moore and Lady Gregory? But these other questions can only be answered when we have studied the works of Joyce in full and in much detail, which for many scholars, including myself, is always a daunting but very fulfilling task.

PART TWO

SUMMARIES

The date and place of the first publication of each story are indicated in the summaries below. The stories were first published as the Dubliners *collection by Grant Richards in London, 1914. Since 1914,* Dubliners *has been in print almost continuously by various different publishers. The edition used for these Notes is the corrected text with an explanatory note by Robert Scholes, published by Jonathan Cape in 1967.*

THE SISTERS

Publication: *The Irish Homestead*, 13th August 1904. Pseudonym: Stephen Daedalus.

The first half of this story is set in the home of the boy-narrator, who lives with his aunt and uncle. The story is chiefly about the relationship between the boy and an old priest, James Flynn, who dies from a stroke. It also concerns the boy's aunt and uncle, the priest's two sisters, Eliza and Nannie, in whose house Father Flynn dies, and old Cotter, a friend of the boy's uncle.

The story begins with the boy pondering the impending death of the priest. When he arrives home he is told that the priest has died, and the boy's uncle tells old Cotter of the relationship between Father Flynn and the boy. This conversation contains some veiled criticisms and suspicions of the priest, and of his influence on the boy, such as Old Cotter telling the boy's uncle: 'I wouldn't like children of mine ... to have too much to say to a man like that' (p. 8).

The second half of the story is set in the home of Flynn's two sisters in Great Britain Street, where the corpse is laid out awaiting the burial ceremony. The boy and his aunt go to the house to pay their respects to the two sisters and to pray over the corpse. There follows a conversation between the boy's aunt and Eliza, in which Eliza is portrayed in a somewhat comic role. Her language is often made up of **malapropism** and puns. It could be argued that her role in the story is the most important since it allows us to see the story **parodying** religious attitudes and beliefs.

'The Sisters' sets up a number of recurring themes for the *Dubliners* collection. It begins with the concept of paralysis (see Paralysis in Themes), which was an important feature of all the stories in *Dubliners*, and a central facet of Joyce's view of Dublin as a city. It is narrated from the perspective of a child, and dwells on the formative experience of childhood, a theme which is continued in the three stories following 'The Sisters'. It introduces us to the religious beliefs and debates of late nineteenth century Irish Catholicism, a theme which will form the background of a number of the stories, and which becomes a key theme in 'Grace'. And it is also the first setting of the theme of death, which is the key focus of the final story in the collection, 'The Dead'. We might also note the occasional similarities in language and style between 'The Sisters' and 'The Dead': for instance, 'I felt my soul receding into some pleasant and vicious region' ('The Sisters', p. 9) and 'His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead' ('The Dead', p. 255).

The boy experiences a degree of ambiguity in his feelings for the priest's death. He admits to feeling 'freed from something by his death' (p. 11), even though he is saddened it. Father Flynn is considered to be a fallen, failed priest, yet he has educated the boy widely in religious matters. These ambiguities suggest complex emotions. They also suggest multiple perspectives in that the priest means different things to different characters. To the church, Flynn might be a failure, but to the boy he represents a world of knowledge and authority. Note also how the priest's character and history are revealed through various perspectives – from the boy, from his uncle and Cotter in conversation, from dreams, from the death notice, and from Eliza and the boy's aunt. This is the beginning of what we will see in all of the stories as the multiple perspectives of Dubliners.

paralysis the narrator is referring here to the condition of the priest after his third stroke, but paralysis is also a recurring theme throughout *Dubliners*. The first sentence of the story sets up the atmosphere of paralysis which Joyce thought pervaded the city of Dublin

gnomon a geometric term for the part of a parallelogram which remains after a similar parallelogram is taken away from one of its corners (from

Euclid, a Greek geometrist of the third century BC). Also, the rod or pin of a sundial

simony the buying and selling of sacred privileges, pardons and absolutions, from Simon Magnus who attempted to buy the power of conferring the Holy Ghost from the Apostles (Acts 8:18–20)

catechism a book containing a summary of the principles of the Christian religion, usually in the form of questions and answers

stirabout porridge or gruel

Rosicrucian the boy's uncle is referring to the boy as a dreamer, but the term derives from the fifteenth century secret order founded by Christian Rosenkreuz. The Rosicrucians were a cultic and mystic order, believing in magical powers

simoniac a priest who practises simony

crape or crêpe: a kind of imitation silk used in black for mourning ribbons, bands and bouquets

R.I.P. Requiescat in Pace. Latin for 'Rest in Peace'. English is used more commonly now, but before 1965 all Catholic ceremonies were in Latin

High Toast a brand of snuff, which is a pulverised tobacco taken by sniffing up the nostrils

mortal or venial Joyce's characters are frequently aware, as would be the case in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland, of the theological debates and doctrines of the Catholic church. Here the narrator is referring to the gradation of sins, some of which are serious wrongs (mortal), which would cast them into eternal damnation if they failed to confess to, and have their sins absolved by, a priest. Less serious sins (venial) might be punished by a stay in purgatory, and could be more easily pardoned in any case

Eucharist the re-enactment in the Christian faith of the ceremony of the last supper, with the priest sharing the bread and wine with his congregation

confessional referring to both the box or compartment in which the priest hears the confessions of sinners, and to the act of the confession itself

Post Office Directory annual publication of the post office giving the names and addresses of residents. It is comparable to current telephone books

Persia Now Iran. It was characteristic in the Victorian period in England to think of the middle east, or the Orient as it was then called, as a place of mystery and the exotic. Because Ireland was a close colony of England, the same cultural assumptions were present in Ireland's attitudes to Persia

altar the table on which the mass, and the Eucharist in particular, is celebrated. It is placed on a stone which has been blessed by a bishop

chalice the cup used for the wine in the Eucharist

did he ... peacefully? the missing word in the narrator's aunt's question is, of course, 'die'. The omission, or **ellipsis**, of the word here is designed to soften the effect of what she is asking. This is known as euphemism, the substitution of a mild or more polite word for something which is shocking or harsh. Death is a word often omitted or substituted – usually replaced with 'passed away', 'gone to rest', or something similarly mild

anointed a sacrament for the dying in which the priest anoints the person with blessed oil, and reads prayers for her/his soul

a beautiful corpse Joyce is parodying attitudes to death in Ireland with this phrase. This occurs with some frequency in his writings. Another renowned example is in his *Ulysses*: 'The Irishman's house is his coffin'

we done all we could the phrase is incorrect grammatically, substituting 'done' for 'did', but Joyce is mimicking the speech patterns and popular syntax of the Irish urban poor in much of the dialogue in *Dubliners*

Freeman's General this refers to the *Freeman's Journal and National Press*, a nationalist paper published in Dublin, particularly noted for its commentaries on religious matters and for its funeral notices

breviary this book briefed the priests on the 'Divine Office' which they were to recite for each day

Irishtown in the east of Dublin and south of the river Liffey, between Sandymount and Ringsend, and next to Dublin bay. A poor quarter of the city which got is name as a ghetto for the Irish during colonial times

new-fangled modern, or new technology

rheumatic Eliza is referring here to 'pneumatic' tyres. The replacement of 'rheumatic' for 'pneumatic' is an example of a **malapropism**. **Malapropism** derives from Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's play *The Rivals* (1775), and is the device of having a character misconceive or mispronounce a word for comic effect

crossed Eliza means that the priest had bad luck, but the term also puns on Father Flynn's profession. There is **irony** in the story here, for Eliza is seen to be superstitious rather than religious

it contained nothing according to Catholic beliefs, the wine and bread of the Eucharist are transformed into the blood and body of Christ. The spilling of the contents of the chalice is therefore a serious misdemeanour. Eliza

THE SISTERS continued

attempts to excuse the priest from blame here by first explaining that the chalice might have contained nothing when the priest dropped it, and then suggesting that it was the boy's fault

laughing-like another example of popular syntax, suggesting that the priest was almost laughing, or looked as if he was laughing

AN ENCOUNTER

Publication: Written in 1905. First publication in the first edition of *Dubliners*, 1914.

The story has three parts. In the first part the boy-narrator and his friends, the Dillon brothers and Mahony, are excited by stories of the Wild West, and are inspired to play out and dream of their own adventures and expeditions as a result of reading tales of cowboys and Indians. These adventures are contrasted with the air of proscription and disapproval evident in the attitude of the boys' teacher, Father Butler. The boys dream up a plan to escape school for the following day, but the Dillons do not show up, one because he has a vocation for the priesthood, the other because he is too frightened to play truant.

The second part of the story follows the adventure of the narrator and Mahony, who meet on a bridge over the Royal Canal in the north of the city. They walk along the North Strand Road, then down the Wharf Road, built on a sea wall on Dublin bay, past the Smoothing Iron, a bathing place, and to the quays. Their route takes them along the coast on the north-east side of Dublin. They stop for lunch on the quays, and then cross the mouth of the river Liffey by ferry to south-east Dublin, this takes them across the river Dodder, a tributary of the Liffey, and they stop to lie on the bank of a field.

The third part of the story takes place in the field when a man with a walking stick, shabbily dressed and wearing a jerry hat, approaches them. The man talks to the boys of the weather, then of school and reading, and then of girls. At this point, the narrator suspects the man of being strange, for the man talks of, 'how all girls were not so good as they seemed to be if one only knew' (p. 26). After speaking of his fondness for, 'looking at a nice young girl', the man leaves for a few minutes, and does something at the end of the field. The narrator will not look at what he is doing, even though Mahony expresses surprise and calls the old man, 'a queer old josser' (p. 26). He is presumably masturbating, although we have no way of knowing this.

When the old man returns, Mahony leaves to chase a cat, while the man talks to the narrator of his desire to give young boys, 'a nice warm whipping' (p. 27). The narrator becomes frightened at this point, and finds an excuse to leave. The narrator and Mahony begin to return home, and the narrator is grateful for Mahony's companionship in the aftermath of their encounter with the strange old man.

The story is narrated by a boy, but it is not always clear from what perspective in time it is being narrated. On the one hand, the language used by the narrator adopts the slang and the vocabulary of an adolescent boy, but there are occasional suggestions that the story might be narrated by an older man reflecting on his boyhood. For example, when the narrator describes the old man's hat, he says that the old man, 'wore what we used to call a jerry hat' (p. 24). This line suggests the perspective of an older man, not a boy.

Like 'The Sisters', 'An Encounter' deals with the passage from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to experience (see Growth and Maturity in Themes). The narrator abandons the world of scholarly knowledge for one day in order to go in search of adventure, and what he finds on this adventure is a sleazy, squalid world of adult desire and corruption. But he also finds a common bond of friendship with Mahony, and regrets having held Mahony in contempt. The narrator and Mahony are on the brink of the adult world, evident in the way that they maintain a form of polite adult conversation with the old man, but they are also removed from this world by their childhood belief in hope and virtue. One approach to the story might then be to regard it as the recognition that hope, virtue and goodness are myths, and that bonds of friendship and trust are the necessary substitutes for virtue in a world where absolute virtue is unattainable.

The story has a religious significance, therefore, in replacing religious ideals, like virtue and truth, with human bonds. Moreover, there is the suggestion in the word 'josser' that the old man is also a priest. The old man's desire to see boys whipped for being interested in girls could mirror the Jesuits' chastisement of boys in school for being interested in adventures. The significance might be that the boys discover a world of excitement and adventure, and are hungry for new forms of knowledge and achievement, only by going outside

the confines of their religious and scholarly instruction. From this approach, the story would be about the damaging effect of education on young people in closing their minds to all varieties of knowledge and experience.

Wild West the western half of the USA, the scene of the cowboy and Indian adventures as told in the genre of 'western' stories which became popular in the late nineteenth century

The Union Jack, Pluck* and *The Halfpenny Marvel popular magazines which were published first in the 1890s, and aimed to provide instructive role models for boys through stories of adventurers, explorers and travellers

Indian battles mock battles between cowboys or US troops and Native Americans

National School schools for the working classes, which were free and emphasised vocational or trade skills. In contrast, the boys in the story are pupils at Belvedere College, a school run by the Jesuit order, and very fashionable among the wealthy Catholic middle class

miching slang for truancy

pipeclayed a plastic, grey-white clay used for pipemaking, but also used for whitening canvas shoes

mall Charleville Mall, along the Royal Canal in Dublin

gas fun

Bunsen Burner a gas burner used as scientific apparatus, named after R.W. Bunsen

funk flunk, fail or panic

a bob and a tanner slang for a shilling and a sixpence, pre-metric money. Twenty shillings formed a pound, and sixpence was half a shilling

Swaddlers! a derogatory Irish Catholic term for Protestants, particularly Wesleyan Methodists, that refers to Catholic perceptions of the Protestant faiths as being restrictive, or swaddled

Smoothing Iron a bathing place on Dublin bay, so called for the shape of a rock which took the shape of a smoothing iron, and formed the diving platform for bathers

how many how many strokes of the pandybat, or cane, he would get

skit slang for adventure or fun

jerry hat stiff felt hat

Thomas Moore Irish poet and songwriter, 1779–1852, famous for his drawing room melodies and patriotic songs

Walter Scott Scottish poet and novelist, 1771–1832, author of many historical novels

Lord Lytton English novelist and MP, 1803–73, author of popular historical novels

totties slang for girlfriends, possibly derived from Hottentot; also a high class prostitute

a queer old josser josser is slang for man. It can also mean worshipper or priest of a god. It suggests deviating from a sexual norm, a sense which might be supported by the lack of clarity about what Mahony sees the old man doing, and the man's excessive talk about whipping young boys which follows

ARABY **Publication: Written in 1905. Published first in *Dubliners*, 1914.**

The narrator of the story is a boy infatuated with the sister of a friend, Mangan. In the opening of the story he is describing the typical play of himself and his friends, and describing their surroundings in north-east Dublin. The boy, who lives with his uncle and aunt in North Richmond Street, watches Mangan's sister from afar, and is filled with the longing and despair of infatuation. He thinks of her, follows her, and watches her movements in adoration, but never speaks to her. Then one day, she asks him if he is going to the Araby bazaar, and explains that she cannot go as she is obliged to go to a retreat run by her convent. The narrator promises to go and to bring her something as a gift from the bazaar.

Throughout the story the language of adoration and romance, with words such as 'sensation', 'my heart', 'my bosom', and allusions to the romanticism of 'Arabia' in English writing of the nineteenth century, are contrasted with the language of materialism and money, such as the words 'marketing', 'bargaining' and 'shop-boys'. Mrs Mercer, the pawnbroker's widow, represents the materialistic contrast to the narrator's spirituality in her quest to acquire used stamps which she is accumulating for 'some pious purpose' (p. 33). Conventional spirituality, through religious institutions like church charities, is a crude materialism in contrast to the sensuous spirituality of the narrator's adoration of Mangan's sister, which is described in exalted romantic terms.

The narrator waits at home for his uncle to arrive and give him money for the bazaar, but his uncle forgets and arrives late, leaving the boy very little time to go to the bazaar. He takes a train from the north-east of the city to the south-east, where the bazaar is held. There, rather than a celebration of everything exotic, sensuous and romantic which he expects to find, he finds a world of trade, commerce and vulgarity, devoid of romance. In the emptiness of the bazaar, which is almost closed and is cast into darkness, he sees his own infatuation as empty too.

In 'Araby', it might be argued, we see another ideal or myth dispelled. If virtue was found to be impossible in 'An Encounter', in 'Araby' the narrator finds that the pursuit of the ideal of love – real romance and sensuousness – is nothing but vanity. Although this may be the revelation which the narrator comes to at the end of the pursuit, the experience of adoration and love is real enough for him. He experiences leaps of the heart, bursts of tears, and feels his body as a harp, 'and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires' (p. 31). This is juxtaposed with images and signs of a shabby **realism** surrounding him, the street-singers, suggestions of sexual innuendoes and signs of materialism. Although he surrounds himself in 'Eastern enchantment', Araby turns out to be depressingly crass in its use of exotic symbolism as a way of marketing cheap and bawdy wares.

There are, then, two awakenings in this story. The first is the narrator's awakening sexuality and sense of desire. The second is the narrator's realisation that desire can be illusory, and that not everything that looks or sounds exotic and romantic proves to be the real thing. Note the use of language to evoke the feeling of emptiness, futility and waste in the story – words like 'rusty', 'useless', 'waste-room', 'littered' and 'straggling' in the opening, for instance. Language is also used to assign personality or individuality to things – the houses 'gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces' (p. 29) is an example (see Language and Style in Techniques). This suggests the significance of places and surroundings, and of the city itself as a living being, in the lives of Joyce's characters.

Araby Araby was a bazaar organised in aid of the Jervis Street Hospital in May 1894, and advertised as a 'Grand Oriental Fête'. Araby was a poetic name for