

A N T A M C L A S S I C

Dubliners

James Joyce

With an Introduction by Brenda Maddox

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JAMES JOYCE, the twentieth century's most influential novelist, was born in Dublin on February 2, 1882. The oldest of ten children, he grew up in a family that went from prosperity to penury because of his father's wastrel behavior. After receiving a rigorous Jesuit education, twenty-year-old Joyce renounced his Catholicism and left Dublin in 1902 to spend most of his life as a writer in exile in Paris, Trieste, Rome, and Zurich. On one trip back to Ireland, he fell in love with the now famous Nora Barnacle on June 16, the day he later chose as "Bloomsday" in his novel *Ulysses*. Nora was an uneducated Galway girl who became his lifelong companion and the mother of his two children. In debt and drinking heavily, Joyce lived for thirty-six years on the Continent, supporting himself first by teaching jobs, then through the patronage of Mrs. Harold McCormick (Edith Rockefeller) and the English feminist and editor Harriet Shaw Weaver. His writings include *Chamber Music* (1907), *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Exiles* (1918), *Ulysses* (1922), *Pomes Penyeach* (1927), *Finnegans Wake* (1939), and an early draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Stephen Hero* (1944). *Ulysses* required seven years to complete, and his masterpiece, *Finnegans Wake*, took seventeen. Both works revolutionized the form, structure, and content of the novel. Joyce died in Zurich in 1941.

INTRODUCTION

I'M AFRAID I can't read James Joyce": a common complaint, usually delivered with a satisfied smile. There is so much else to read, why bother with word games invented by a writer who boasted that the difficulty of his work would keep scholars busy for generations?

Yet Joyce is one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century—perhaps the greatest. There is no need to avoid him. Those who have found themselves unable to finish *Ulysses* or even to begin *Finnegans Wake* should try his first book, *Dubliners*. They will find no plainer English.

Not for one page of *Dubliners* need readers feel that they are getting Joyce for Juniors. These fifteen stories, written by Joyce between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-five, stand beside those of Chekhov and Flaubert, and culminate in what may be the finest short story in the English language. Joyce's work, moreover, shows remarkable coherence from beginning to end. The main themes, symbols, even some characters, of the later books are introduced in *Dubliners*. Martin Cunningham in "Grace," for example, reappears in *Ulysses*. "Grace" itself can be taken as a kind of *Finnegans Wake* in miniature: a resurrection comedy, a tale of a corpse that will not stay dead. Like the *Wake*, "Grace" opens with the Fall of Man—Mr. Kernan tumbling down a flight of stairs into a gentlemen's lavatory—and ends with a new beginning. Mr. Power, one of the friends who plot to take Mr. Kernan to a religious retreat, says as much when he delivers the bruised and guilty sinner home to his wife:

We'll make a new man of him, he said. Goodnight, Mrs. Kernan.

The first story, "The Sisters," was published on August 13, 1904, when Joyce was twenty-two. It appeared, run around the

advertisements, in *The Irish Homestead*, an agricultural weekly that Joyce in *Ulysses* derided as "the pigs' paper." Whatever the *Homestead* editor thought about the inconclusive story of a young boy's confusion at the death of a mad priest, he paid Joyce a pound for it and commissioned more.

The summer of 1904 was a turning point in Joyce's life. Since his mother's death the previous August, he had idled around Dublin, with no plan for the future other than to become "an artist." He taught briefly, reviewed books, began an autobiographical novel and, as he had a fine tenor voice, considered taking employment as a professional singer. Far from shielding his nine younger brothers and sisters from the consequences of their father's spendthrift and drunken habits, Joyce began drinking heavily himself, frequenting Dublin's brothels, remaining absent from home for long periods. His outrageous behavior, combined with his caustic arrogance, began to erode the admiration his early work had won among Dublin's literati.

In June, however, he fell in love. He wooed (or was wooed by) Nora Barnacle, a tall, auburn-haired Galway girl of twenty, a chambermaid at Finn's Hotel on Kildare Street. His younger brother Stanislaus and Joyce's friends thought Nora a companion unworthy of "the Bard," but Joyce had met the woman of his life, the model for all his principal female characters. He was captivated by Nora's directness, confident sensuality, west-of-Ireland air, and sharp wit. His artistic prospects also brightened. The London magazine *Speaker* published one of his love poems at the end of July. In August he received excellent press notices for a concert in which he appeared on the program with the celebrated John McCormack. In September the *Homestead* carried a second of his stories, "Eveline" (now fourth in *Dubliners*).

By late summer Joyce had committed himself to Nora. He did not ask her to marry him. Having rejected the Roman Catholic Church, he had rejected the institution of marriage as well. Instead he promised her loyalty and a share in any happiness or fame that might come to him. "No human being," he wrote her in one of many self-analytical love letters that sum-

mer, "has ever stood so close to my soul as you stand." They determined to leave Ireland for the Continent. The artist, Joyce believed, could only work outside the established social order.

On the Saturday evening of October 8 Joyce and Nora stood, like Eveline in his story, among "the swaying crowd" at the North Wall, the Dublin quay for boats to London. Unlike Eveline, who takes fright and refuses to go on board, Joyce, with Nora, embarked and sailed into a life of exile.

Pursuing an elusive post teaching English in a Berlitz School, Joyce ended up in the Austro-Hungarian port of Pola—"on the Adriatic coast down near Turkey," Joyce wrote Stanislaus. In their small suitcase (a trunk was sent on ahead) his manuscripts traveled with them: a book of poems, his novel, and his growing collection of stories.

Dubliners mirrors the poverty-stricken years of early exile, first in Pola, then in Trieste, the cosmopolitan city to which Berlitz transferred Joyce in the spring of 1905. It bristles with the irritations of marriage (Joyce considered himself "married" to Nora) in cramped quarters. "Surely living with a woman is one of the most difficult things a man has to do," Joyce was later to say. "A Little Cloud," written some months after the birth of their son, Giorgio, in July 1905, manifests the frustrations of new parenthood as the husband, blighted in his ambitions, surrenders first place in his wife's affection to his son.

Into the stories Joyce also wove images from his adolescence and Nora's. "An Encounter" derives from a day when Joyce and Stanislaus skipped school. "Clay" turns on the games of marriage divination that Nora and her Galway girlfriends played on Hallow Eve (a name Joyce once considered for the story).

Dubliners, however, is no exercise in nostalgia. It is a look back in anger. Joyce portrays his countrymen as drunks, cheats, child batterers, boasters, gossips, and schemers: failures all, people who cannot take the chances life offers them and who, as in "Araby," prevent the young from taking theirs. His summary judgment of Ireland appears as a word on the very first page of *Dubliners*: paralysis.

From Trieste Joyce poured out his thoughts in a constant stream of letters to his brother. He vowed that if he just had "a pen and an ink-bottle and some peace of mind" he would write "tiny little sentences about the people who betrayed me [and sent] me to hell."

The circumstances of Joyce's boyhood in Dublin present little evidence of the betrayal of which he complained. In spite of his father's squandering of a modest inheritance and pension, Joyce had enjoyed, in Stanislaus's phrase, "the best education that his country had to offer a boy of his class and religion": Clongowes Wood College (a boarding school where Joyce was sent at the age of six), followed by Belvedere College, and University College in Dublin.

The great names of Ireland's literary renaissance had acknowledged his promise. When he left Ireland in October 1904, the poet W. B. Yeats had given him introductions in London and Paris, and Lady Gregory had donated five pounds for the journey. But there was nothing imaginary about Joyce's perception of the complacency and hypocrisy of the city he had left behind.

Ireland in 1904 was in a state of stagnation, its population drained by the famines and emigrations of the mid-nineteenth century, its hopes for Home Rule dashed by the death of Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891. It remained as it had been since the Act of Union in 1801, part of the United Kingdom, represented by Irish members in the British Parliament in London, without a legislature of its own.

Joyce, in his disgust with his countrymen, did not foresee rebellion, nor much admire it when it came about (because, say his detractors, it changed the Ireland he had meticulously reconstructed in his books).

At the turn of the century, Ireland's nationalism largely took the form of what Joyce saw as a sterile romantic interest in its language and its past. The Gaelic Athletic Association banned "foreign" sports such as polo and cricket (a troop of urchins in "An Encounter" thinks that Mahony is a Protestant because of the cricket badge on his cap). The Gaelic League, founded in

1893, aimed at de-Anglicizing Ireland, chiefly by reviving the Irish language. Joyce vented his contempt for the language militants in the character of the intellectual Molly Ivors in "The Dead."

But Joyce was as guilty as any of his characters of one of the sins of which he accuses them. A theme running through *Dubliners* is that the best men are gone, that Ireland's golden age is past. The worship of lost leaders was later taken up by Yeats, with incalculable consequences for Irish history: "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone, It's with O'Leary in the grave."

Joyce had been brought up a Parnellite by his father. His own favorite story in *Dubliners* (or so he said before writing "The Dead") was "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." Ivy Day was the anniversary of Parnell's death on October 6, 1891. Parnell, an Anglo-Irish Protestant landowner who had led the fight for Home Rule in Ireland, lost popular support in Ireland after a scandalous divorce case brought by the husband of his mistress, Mrs. Kitty O'Shea. Parnell fell ill and died not long after. Joyce, Yeats, and many others considered that he had been hounded to death by the mob, urged on by Ireland's Catholic bishops. The sacrifice of Parnell, to Joyce, was Ireland's Fall, from which he foresaw no redemption.

Joyce doubly rejected the Catholic Church, as much for interfering in Irish national politics as for burdening him with unnecessary guilt for what he called "the impulses of my nature." He despised his countrymen's blind servitude to this institution. In "Grace" the men describe admiringly (but inaccurately) what Joyce does not admire: the proclamation of the doctrine of papal infallibility at the Vatican Council of 1870.

With these stories Joyce held that he was writing the moral history of his country. He had set them in Dublin, he said, because the city seemed to him the center of Ireland's paralysis. Seeing themselves in "the polished looking-glass of my art," he believed, would be the first step in his countrymen's liberation. Yet it was a long time before they had the opportunity to look into his mirror.

The publication history of *Dubliners* is one of the sorrier episodes in twentieth-century censorship. On October 15, 1905, Joyce offered his manuscript to Grant Richards, a London publisher, with a letter restating an argument he had already rehearsed with his brother: "I do not think that any writer has yet presented Dublin to the world. It has been a capital of Europe for thousands of years, it is supposed to be the 'second city' of the British Empire and it is nearly three times as big as Venice."

Publishers often brought out books on Irish subjects, Joyce added. He thought, therefore, that "people might be willing to pay for the special odour of corruption which, I hope, floats over my stories."

Richards did not reply until Joyce had written again, but in February 1906 came an enthusiastic reply, admiring the book and accepting it for publication—with one reservation: "It is about Ireland and it is always said that books about Ireland do not sell." Joyce was confident all the same that royalties would soon start flowing in and invited Stanislaus to join him in Trieste. Once his book was published, Joyce assured his brother, there would be money for them both.

Stanislaus arrived. The awaited proofs of *Dubliners* did not. At last came the reason for the delay. Richards's printer in London had refused to set into print the sixth story, "Two Gallants," in which two young layabouts conspire to trick a serving girl. The printer had also asked for the modification of three very mildly suggestive passages in "Counterparts," one of which then read:

She continued to cast bold glances at him and changed the position of her legs often; and when she was going out she brushed against his chair and said 'Pardon!' in a Cockney accent.

Richards added a request of his own: the substitution of a different word for *bloody*. The changes were all for Joyce's own

good, he said, so that the critics would not come down on him “like a cart load of bricks.”

Joyce refused to change anything. “I have written my book,” he replied, “with considerable care, in spite of a hundred difficulties and in accordance with what I understand to be the classical tradition of my art. You must therefore allow me to say that your printer’s opinion of it does not interest me in the least.”²

In his anger, Joyce misinterpreted the printer’s motives. Not prudishness, but caution. English law held printers as well as publishers and authors liable for obscenity or libel. The difficulty in Joyce’s work grew out of his belief that a writer should write, without alteration, what he has seen or heard. But the English public and English publishers, while accustomed to reading lurid accounts of divorce proceedings in the press (and even, Joyce noted sarcastically, to seeing *by God* and *damn* in print) were not prepared to accept the realism of everyday coarse language in fiction or drama. Not until 1914, with *Pygmalion*, did George Bernard Shaw, another Dubliner who had rejected Ireland, force *bloody* onto the London stage.

Joyce, up to a point, was a realist too. As the prospect of publication receded—by midsummer 1906 Richards was demanding the total omission of “Two Gallants” and “An Encounter”—Joyce conceded some changes, including the deletion of some *bloodys*. But he refused to take the offending word out of a line in “The Boarding House”:

If any fellow tried that sort of game on with his sister, he’d bloody well put his teeth down his throat, so he would.

“The word, the exact expression I have used,” Joyce icily explained to his publisher, “is the one expression in the English language which can create on the reader the effect which I wish to create.” He had come to the conclusion, he said, that he could not write without offending people. Near despair, he answered an advertisement in a Roman newspaper for a bank

clerk, and being accepted, abandoned the newly arrived Stanislaus in Trieste and took his wife and child to Rome.

There followed the loneliest and hungriest time of his exile. Joyce hated his job. The long hours at the bank did not give them enough to live on, especially as both he and Nora were spend-thrift. Once again Joyce had to supplement his earnings by teaching English. Just before Christmas they were evicted and were so short of money that they would have dined on pasta on Christmas Day, had not a Welsh schoolteacher invited them to his table. By then Joyce was so homesick for Ireland that he wished that there were an Irish club in Rome, and daydreamed of being dropped from the sky for an hour into Dublin.

He began to feel that he had been too harsh in his still-unpublished stories. "I have reproduced none of the attraction of the city. . . . I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality—a virtue nonexistent elsewhere in Europe. I have not been just to its beauty."

In March 1907 he returned penniless with pregnant Nora and Giorgio to Trieste. That summer in a charity ward of the Ospedale Civico their daughter Lucia was born. Joyce was a patient there too, suffering from rheumatic fever. By the end of 1907, out of this accretion of misery, new responsibility, and introspection, he had completed "The Dead."

The addition of a masterpiece made no difference. By 1909 his book still had not appeared. Taking matters into his own hands, Joyce went back to Dublin and persuaded an Irish publisher—Maunsel and Co.—to take over the book from Grant Richards. In June 1910, after suffering one of the first severe attacks of the eye illnesses that were to leave him half blind much of his life, he confidently wrote a friend in Paris: "I am all right again now and am very busy correcting the proofs of my new book *Dubliners* which is to come out in a few weeks."

He was wrong again, by four years. His ordeal was to start anew, entirely different objections being raised. George Roberts, managing director of Maunsel, asked for the removal of an irreverent passage in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" about the late King Edward VII. As the months dragged by, Roberts's anxiety then spread to other stories. Was there

sodomy in "The Sisters"? he wanted to know. (Well he might have asked. The full meaning has not yet been wrung from this remarkable story. The priest, it has been suggested, may have been suffering general paralysis of the insane—the madness of tertiary syphilis.) Roberts also thought there might be more in "The Dead" than at first met the eye. He had begun to grasp what Joycean scholarship was also slow to recognize: that the apparent simplicity of *Dubliners* is deceptive.

By August 1912 Joyce was back in Dublin for a last stand only to find that Roberts, on his solicitor's advice, was withdrawing altogether his decision to publish. It was a crushing blow. From Dublin Joyce wrote to Nora, who was visiting her family in Galway, and compared his book to a stillborn child. He had, he told her, "carried [it] in the womb of the imagination as you carried in your womb the children you love." What had frightened Roberts and his solicitor was Joyce's insistence on using the real names of Dublin public houses, pawnbrokers, and other commercial establishments. Any of these, they feared, might sue for libel. Joyce, as if on a sinking ship, threw out "An Encounter" and the offending passages about Edward VII; he changed the name of Davy Byrne's pub to Andy Kehoe's. To no avail. Roberts first demanded that *every* proper name be changed, then refused to publish on any terms and demanded reimbursement for the costs already incurred.

Joyce is often accused of paranoia, but in 1912 he had much to be paranoid about. His next decision was to publish the book himself, under the Liffey Press imprint, borrowing the money wherever he could, but when he went to collect the unbound pages, the printer refused to hand them over. On the order of Roberts, the pages were destroyed and the type broken up. That very night Joyce took his family and returned to Trieste, never to set foot in Ireland again.

Two years later Joyce had his revenge. *Dubliners* was published at last, in London in June 1914, by Grant Richards, who had regained his nerve. This was four months after the first installment of Joyce's autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, had appeared in an English review. By 1916 Joyce, then living in Zurich because of the outbreak of

World War I, had established a sufficiently international reputation as a writer to be listed in *Who's Who*. By then, too, he was deep into the novel he once had considered making the sixteenth story of *Dubliners*. In *Ulysses* Joyce once again held a mirror up to the daily life of the inhabitants of his native city and this time he did not move his mirror even when they were moving their bowels.

The result so offended the censors that *Ulysses*, which came out in Paris in 1922, could not be legally published in the United States until 1934 and in Britain until 1936. The victory in the end was Joyce's. By his long, solitary, and unswerving insistence on writing what he heard and saw, Joyce burst the bonds on verbal expression for all who write in his language.

The style of *Dubliners*, Joyce told Grant Richards, is one of "scrupulous meanness." There can be few works of literature so reliant on words of one syllable, from the first line of "The Sisters": "There was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke"; to the last paragraph of "The Dead": "A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window." Every word in these stories is aimed like a small missile, set to explode on impact.

At first glance, the book is a fine example of late nineteenth-century naturalism. Joyce takes as great care to give meticulous details of furniture and food as he does with place names (all now restored). The scene in "A Painful Case," in which Mr. Duffy reads of the death of the woman he has spurned, is almost photographic in its rendering of the solitary diner with his dreary food:

as he was about to put a morsel of corned beef and cabbage into his mouth his hand stopped. His eyes fixed themselves on a paragraph in the evening paper which he had propped against the water-carafe.

Yet beneath the naturalistic surface lies a revolutionary modernist text. One clue lies in the absence of quotation marks.

Joyce, defying the typographic as well as the verbal conventions of his time, refused to permit his dialogue to be enclosed in "inverted commas"—an eyesore, he said. In consequence, while the voices of *Dubliners* fill this book, it is left to the reader to separate them from the comments of the unseen narrator, who sometimes uses the first person, sometimes the third.

Its experiments in narration make *Dubliners* a rich field for today's deconstructive critics. In "The Sisters," L. J. Morrissey points out, Joyce the narrator leads the reader on "with heavy judgment and intimate confidences" and then, just at the moment the reader needs most help, withdraws. "Thus the method of telling itself forces us to judge, to interpret, to participate in the text."³

If *Dubliners* presents Joyce at his most accessible, it also draws the reader into a conspiracy with him. Joyce orchestrated each story to reach an epiphany—a moment of revelation. But, with the exception of Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead," the characters do not share it. They do not know how hopeless they are. They cannot read the ironic titles that their author has fixed over their heads as the Romans did to Christ. The "Two Gallants" are anything but gallant. Mr. Duffy is, far more than the dead Mrs. Sinico, "A Painful Case." Farrington, in "Counterparts," bullied by his boss, goes home and takes a stick to his son. He does not see any parallel. Nor can the boy as he pleads, "I'll say a *Hail Mary* for you, pa, if you don't beat me." These stories have no clear ends because they reach their conclusions only in the mind of the reader.

All of Joyce carries the stamp of the rigorous Jesuit education which, Joyce said, taught him to classify. As *Dubliners* took shape in the summer of 1905, he explained to Stanislaus:

The order of the stories is as follows. "The Sisters," "An Encounter" and another story ["Araby"] which are stories of my childhood: "The Boarding House," "After the Race" and "Eveline," which are stories of adolescence: "Clay," "Counterparts" and "A Painful Case" which are stories of mature life: "Ivy Day in the Committee Room,"

"A Mother" and the last story in the book [then "Grace"] which are stories of public life.

The Jesuitical stamp also reveals itself in symbols as clear as the Cross, in colors as significant as those of the priest's vestments in different seasons of the ecclesiastical year. There are many greens, Ireland's sacred color, but used to convey corruption. (In "An Encounter" the two schoolboys dream of meeting a green-eyed sailor. Instead they meet a green-eyed pervert.) There is much brown, too, for stagnation and putrefaction: excremental undertones are never far away in Joyce.

Joyce has his Dubliners fail through unintentionally revealing acts. In "Clay," a tiny, aging Maria, manager in a laundry kitchen, gropes blindfolded at a party for the ring (marriage). Instead she gets clay (death), all that awaits her "tidy little body." Maria sings of Ireland's glorious past: "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls." But like Ireland, she inhabits the drab present; her marble halls are the halls of the laundry. In the businessmen's retreat in "Grace," Father Purdon (named for a Dublin street known for brothels), addresses the sorry group of men as if they were successful tycoons. He tells them to examine the books of their spiritual life, to say to themselves, "I will set right my accounts." But their accounts, in Joyce's view, are bankrupt.

Joyce's contempt notwithstanding, the book is a vivid and often hilarious re-creation of Dublin at the turn of the century. "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is a sardonic tale of small-time political hacks, very like the ward heelers of American city politics, men whose devotion to their candidate comes second only to their own comfort. They have a genius for back-biting. Offering a drink to the boy who delivers their much-desired bottles of stout, as soon as he is out the door they criticize him for taking it:

That's the way it begins, said the old man.

The thin edge of the wedge, said Mr. Henchy.

This story, set on the anniversary of the death of Parnell, makes useful reading for anyone interested in the troubled

state of relations between Ireland and Great Britain today. The discussion of the impending visit to Dublin of Edward VII reveals the division that caused the civil war in 1922 and has marked Irish politics since independence, between those who fiercely distrust Britain, and those who see the two islands of Great Britain and Ireland as inextricably linked.

Mr. Hynes is a Nationalist. He opposes not only an address of welcome but the visit itself of “King Eddie,” “a German monarch,” “a foreign king.” “If this man was alive,” he says, displaying Parnell’s symbol, an ivy leaf, in his lapel, “we’d have no talk of an address of welcome.” In contrast, Mr. Henchy sees himself as a pragmatist. “Parnell,” he says, “is dead.” In the passage that so worried George Roberts, he portrays the king as an ordinary man whose interest may do Ireland some good:

Here’s this chap come to the throne after his old mother keeping him out of it until the man was grey.... He just says to himself: The old one never went to see these wild Irish. By Christ, I’ll go myself and see what they’re like.

Throughout the story Joyce strives for a mock-heroic tone. The corks from the bottles of stout set by the fire explode three times with a loud “Pok!” like rifle shots fired over a hero’s grave. Yet his amused detachment veils only lightly a genuine grief. The story ends powerfully as Mr. Hynes (foreshadowing the end of the famous Christmas dinner scene in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) recites: “He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead.”

“He is dead.” Gretta Conroy’s simple statement in “The Dead” brings *Dubliners* to its climax. The repetition of the words from the earlier story, shifting the context from the political to the sexual, shows the symmetry Joyce built into his book. “‘The Dead,’” said the Anglo-Irish writer George Moore in 1916, “seemed to me perfection when I read it.”

It is Joyce’s most autobiographical story—an ironic vision