

## 14 ott 2020 - Interrogazione 15 ott [studio]

### James Joyce

James Joyce is one of the most eminent personalities in English literature.

He was born in a suburb of Dublin in 1882, and his father was a lower class Irishman with a weakness for alcohol, so he was quite addicted.

The father was also interested in religion and politics.

The family was a big family, since they were **ten children**, and James was the eldest child.

The mother was a fervent Roman Catholic, and when James decided to leave the Catholic Church the situation with his mother became difficult.

As they were very poor, he was able to get an education thanks to a series of scholarships and school prizes.

He was educated at two Jesuit Schools, so he had an excellent traditional education. He was very much interested in philosophy and literature, modern languages, and he was especially interested in Italian, French and Norwegian, but through his life he acquired a knowledge of *18 languages*.

He wanted to study Norwegian because he wanted to read **Ibsen**.

While he was a university student he decided to abandon Catholic religion, and he developed the qualities of intellectual arrogance and intellectual **isolation** and pride. He was gifted with an exceptional memory, and a subtle intelligence, but he was physically weak, with weak eyes.

In October 1902 he graduated from university and he went to Paris to study medicine. He soon gave up and he returned to Dublin because his mother was dying. In that occasion he met Nora Barnacle who would later become his wife.

They married on the 16 of June 1904 (The day Ulysses is set).

The choice of leaving Dublin was the symbol of his rebellion to Ireland, and to being Irish.

1. He rebelled against the Catholic Church, whose influence he saw as a limitation of his intellectual freedom.
2. He rebelled against Irish politics which he considered as a narrow [ristretto, angusto] provincial nationalism, while he believed in **cosmopolitan** ideal (or European).
3. He rebelled against Irish culture, which was according to him narrow and confining.
4. He rebelled against family ties, which were restrictive and inhibiting to his freedom.

After short stays in London, Paris and Zurich, in 1905 he settled in **Trieste** and he stayed there for 10 years.

Here he suffered extreme poverty, and 2 children were born there.

He always had great difficulties in publishing his books, but in the end, in 1914 he was able to publish *Dubliners*.

He then move to Zurich, and also in Zurich he suffered extreme poverty, and he had several operation at the eyes.

In 1916 he succeeded in publish *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and finally in 1922 his masterpiece *Ulysses* got published, and finally achieved financial security.

From 1922 to 1941 (when he died), he dedicated to *Finnegan wake*, that is too difficult to go through, because it is written in different languages, and also dream languages

## Dubliners

Dubliners is a collection of 15 short stories and the subject is the **decay and banality** of Dublin life.

They are **psychologically realistic sketches of urban life**, describing its atmosphere of disintegration with casual details, with charity and sympathy.

Very little happens in this stories, and Dublin is the **center of a paralysis**.

**Paralysis** is an important word, and this is the thematic word of the first story: *The syster*, and it indicates and intellectual, moral and spiritual paralysis, that derives from the accumulated failures of the disappointed lives of the frustrated people in Dublin.

The main themes of Joyces work are:

- Theme of the **city**
- Theme of the **artist**

### Theme of the city

Dublin is a special city, the only one in which Joyce is a citizen, because al the others are only places of exile.

It's a city particular appropriate to him, and it is metropolitan and provincial at the same time.

### Theme of the artist

The modern artist is isolated from the community, and he rejects his environment.

### The language

Joyce uses the language that each character would have used, so he tries to adhere to the characters, and he describes the precise quality of their lives, using a style that is impersonal in

appearance and economic and synthetic in its use of description.

Sensations, emotions and ironical observations are rarely described at length [not in details], and language is mainly evocative.

James's prose is extremely varied; for example the first story begins with a long passage written in simple language of a child, and then develops with an alternation of passages written in a style which is appropriate to the child's aunt or the child himself, or the priest sister.

Joyce's ability lies in writing lifelike dialogues and in reproducing the rhythm of Irish speech.

## Common elements

There are some common elements in Dubliners:

1. The setting is **the city of Dublin**, which is both realistically individualised, with its streets, places, people, and made universal as the symbol of the modern metropolis, where human life is losing its natural quality.
  2. The main theme of all the stories is the same, which is the **failure to find a way out of paralysis**, which is the mental condition of people living in metropolis.
  3. There is always an **epiphany**, which is the sudden revelation of an emblematic truth through a dialogue or through the description of an usual situation or a common object. [sorta di illuminazione]
  4. **Narrator's attitude** of compassionate irony and of friendly pity, through words of the protagonists of the story, who are never judged from a superior position. James Joyce abandons both the omniscience of the 19th century narrator and also the single point of view. So the story are told in the words of a character and from the perspective of a character.
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## The sisters

The story starts *in medias res*. The child is speaking, and he is relating the death of priest, but as he is a child he is not sure that he priest has really died.

He will get sure when a visitor on his house came and announces the death of the priest.

But the child tries to hide his feeling and his sensations to his relatives. According to all the cotters the child should play with other children, The child hates all the cotters because they intrudes with comments in his life.

The child hates Old Cotter because he is a drunkard and because he spit in the fireplace. He feels hatred for Old Cotter.

After he goes to sleep he has a dream, since he was moved by the news of the death, and so he

dreams of the priest

The reaction of the boy at the certainties (just through the note on the window) of the death is relief: he feels relieved and free.

So we get to know that there is a problem in the relationship between the child and the priest.

This is an hint that there is something morbid and strange in their relationship.

We will get to know that there is something, but it is never expressed explicitly.

There are four characters involved:

- The boy (who is the narrator)
- His aunt
- Old Cotter
- Eliza (the sister who explains)

The situation is that the young boy gets to know that his former teacher of Latin and religious has died because of his third stroke.

The problem is that the boy is no unhappy, but instead he feels relieved and free.

There is a problem of pedophilia, which is only hinted and never made explicit. It's told only his relief on priest's death.

Old Cotter tells the child and relatives that the priest is died, but the child is still uncertain: he will go to the shop, and just after seeing the note on the glass he will be finally relieved

After this relief he went to bed, and dreamed about the Priest, and talk about paralysis.

He receives a confession from the priest, and the child feel like he is moving into a pleasant but vicious region. He confess his pedophilia and while doing it he smiles, with his lips wet of saliva.

Then the child remember he is dead, and the child himself smiles, and this smile absolve the priest and his simony (sin of buying and selling religious privileges).

All this is not written explicitly.

James Joyce created a new way of writing: writer abdicates from is role and only characters are speaking. He writes in the age of anxiety with Virginia Woolf. In fact here he tells the story from child's point of view, and so he exaggerated all because of it.

The priest description (that came from the past life of the child from the priest) connotes him as shabby, sick, disgusting, sloppy, improper, filthy.

The child feels annoyed from relief he feels about the death of the priest. He feels annoyed because of the sense of guilt imposed by the church.

His relatives haven't understood what was going on, and tells the child to feel sad because the priest was a good teacher. They list what he had taught to the child.

The priest is described through disgusting details about his physical appearance that show his lust. An example of many strange priest's attitudes is

he used to smile pensively and nod his head, now and then pushing huge pinches of snuff up each nostril alternately. When he smiled he used to uncover his big discoloured teeth and let his tongue lie upon his lower lip—a habit which had made me feel uneasy in the beginning of our acquaintance before I knew him well.

The novel is divided into two parts, and between part 1 and 2 there is a **caesura**, which is when the child says what the priest had taught to him.

In the second part two characters are introduced, who are

1. **Nannie**, which is the diminutive of Anne (and also means "bambinaia"): she is the latter priest's sister
2. **Father O'Rourke**: he prepares the priest at all

Through the story we get to know that the protagonist is a child through some details:

- he enters the room on tiptoe, which is very childish
- he pretends to pray
- he tries to catch every detail, to be sure the priest is dead
- he declines food in order not to do noises

The priest was a **disappointed person**, a **failure**: he could have had a great career, but he didn't exploit the position.

From the story that Eliza makes we get to know that the priest was disappointing for the two sisters: they expected him to become rich and successful.

On the contrary they praise Father O'Rourke as perfect, because he is clever, organized and powerful: he will probably make a career within the Church

The sister then talks about the only dream the priests had (which is with the sisters): we get to know that the priest has narrow perspective, he is simple-minded, since his only dream was to go and visit the house where he and his sisters were born.

During her speech she makes mistakes; her mastery of the language is quite limited: she is simple-minded and ignorant. Joyce is very good at reproducing this incorrect language.

Then there is the **epiphany**: the break of the chalice.

After this he began to mope by himself.

The chalice is the symbol of the choice of religious life, because in the chalice there is the transubstantiation; moreover it is particularly valuable, made in gold and decorated with jewels. So breaking it is the symbol of breaking the religious choice he did.

Maybe the breaking of the chalice represents also the denial of the promise made to God concerning the abstinence from sex.

James Flynn hasn't respected his promise of chastity.

This act is the symbol of breaking the choice of his life: he realizes he is a disappointing life. The fall represents the complete failure of his life.

James Joyce was very critic against the Catholic Church. He resented the sense of guilt that the Jesuits had instilled in him.

## Eveline

The second story is the story connected to the period of adolescence. In fact Eveline is 19yo. She is an Irish girl, whose situation is quite bad for many reasons:

1. Her mother died prematurely of cancer.
2. Her father is a drunkard, he is violent, possessive, brutal and mean [avaro].
3. She is in charge of the house, so she is expected to do the cleaning and tidying.
4. She is also expected to look after her younger brother.
5. She works in a shop and the shop-owner ill treats her. She scolds her when the shop is crowded.
6. She has two elder brothers, but one is away for work and the other is dead.

All in all her life is very hard.

She has an opportunity of improving her life, by leaving Ireland with her boyfriend Frank.

## First Part

Frank has proposed to go together to Buenos Aires. She is deciding what to do. The moment is topic because she has to choose whether to go or to stay.

The story take place at sunset, which is the moment of melancholy and meditation during the day. During the narration there is a sense of melancholy.

She uses the form *used to*, to describe habits in the past that aren't so anymore.

Her father is introduced as a violent character.

We get to know from the very beginning that she will not go with Frank, because she is already looking for alibis, that justify her to stay, although the situation is very bad: she doesn't have the strength to go.

She is looking at her house with the eyes of a person who is forced to leave: she feels desolate and she is repenting.

The reasons not to go are:

- She was surrounded by people she knew.
- In her house she had shelter and food.

She describes the fact that she has to give all her money to her father, and she feels in danger. We get to know that are the two sons to support the family.

She was overwhelmed by all his due.

Then she talks about Frank. He is

- Kind
- Manly
- Open-hearted
- Suntanned, he has a dark complexion
- Cheerful
- Involved

Her father had forbidden her to meet Frank, so they had to meet secretly.

## Second part

The second part is the part which prepares to the **epiphany**.

There is a turning point: *the evening deepened in the avenue*.

She had written 2 letters, to her brother and to her father.

So far she has been piling alibis not to go away, finding excuses.

Now she find a new excuses: her father will miss her. She remembers **two** occasions in her life when her father had been kind to her.

1. She was ill and her father had toasted [brindato] with her
2. They had been going on a trip and he had wore his wife's bonnet to entertain the children.

Then the epiphany is starting when the sound of a barrel-organ, which play a song that reminds her of her mother, and the promise she made to her to keep the family together. She remembers also the death of her mother.

The reasons not to go now are four:

1. She knows everything at home
2. She has shelter and food
3. Her father is getting old and will need and miss her
4. She had promised to her mother to keep the family together and care about the children.

## Final part

Then she gathers the strength to leave.

The final part is very sad, she has meditated and she has listed all the reasons to stay, then she has a sudden impulse to go to the docks [porto] (she hasn't decided yet), and at the docks she experiences her **epiphany**.

*The boat blew a long **mournful** whistle into the mist*

This is an anticipation.

She decides to stay, triggered by the **mournful** whistle.

She realises she is losing something vital to her, the only chance to fulfil her life.

She is paralysed by the fear of the unknown, and she realises she will always be a slave and a loser.

The story reminds us of Nora Barnacle, who was Joyce's wife, who left Ireland with him

## Clay

When in Great Britain you are christened the priest says "you are clay" [Tu sei polvere e polvere ritornerai]

The difference between **clay** and **dust** is that dust flies, while clay is wet.

Clay is the material used to make bricks, but it also mean mud and earth in general. It's a reference to the mortal body of man. So there is an anticipation of death

The protagonist's name is **Maria**, which is pronounced "Meraia".



The Black Maria was a van used to transport prisoners to the scaffold.

Maria is middle aged and horrible.

- She had a long nose, so that when she laughs her nose and chin touched.
- She is a spinster [zitella]
- she works in a laundry and she is a cook.
- She is very much appreciated because of her **nice character** and personality. Her companion say she is a peacemaker

Her problem is that she has a goal in her life, which is to **get married**. She still haven't lost hopes.

Instead there are few possibilities, because she is unattractive and she works with only women.

The story is centered on the sterility and humility of **celibacy**.

The protagonist ignore vital impulses: she is probably a **maiden** [virgin] and she is quit unaware and unskilled, but she still hopes and she thinks that her life will be fulfilled by the meeting of a men.

Her companion had understood this, and they gently mock her. She is disappointed by these mocks, she feels upset.

A woman say she wants a **ring** (*first reference to ring*). She always tells lies about this, saying she didn't need a man.

She is going to visit one of the two br other (**Joe** and **Alfie**) whom she looked after when she was young.

- The two brothers had fallen out.
- They were very close to her.
- They also helped her to find a job

While getting ready to go out she still find herself attractive.

She gets the bus and then she go to the *confectioner's*.

Here there is the second reference to the ring and marriage. The owner, in fact, since she was spending too much time in choosing a plum-cake into the confectioner's, asks whether she was going to chose her **wedding cake**. She *blushes*.

On the tram she meet a **gentleman**, who talk with her. She was so excited to have talked to a man that she forget her plum-cakes. But in reality the man had talked to her just because *he was tipsy* [brillo].

When she gets her guests house, she realizes she lost her plum-cake.

We get to know that she isn't so good as person because when she realizes of the lost of plum-cake *she accused the children* instead of taking responsibility.

The children will take **revenge** on her.

Before the epiphany there is an attempt of Maria to bring Joe and Alfie together, but there is no possibility.

She is coaxed [blandita] to play; it's a game in which you get to know what will be your future: she is blindfolded and lead to a table with saucers to chose from. They can choose from

- Ring
- Bible: you will became a nun or a priest
- Water: open destiny

The children instead **add clay**, which means death, as a revenge.

**Epiphany:** she chooses clay, but at a second attempt, made since an adult understood what was going on, she chooses the Bible. There is **no possibility** to her to get married, so either she will die or she will enter a convent.

Life tells her there is nothing for her, but **clay** and **the prayer book**. She realises her life of dream is over and it is like **Eveline**, but sadder.

However she doesn't give up.

She had to sing a song, but she changes the words of the song and in the new words she dreams to have a lot of suitors [pretendenti]. No one tried to show her her mistake.

She is even more pitiful because she doesn't accept reality and her destiny. She has just get to realise that her life is over but she can't.