

16 set 2020 - Joyce & Dubliners

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.

First story: 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 coppers the child should play with other children, The child hates all the coppers because they intrude 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.