

James Joyce (1882 – 1941)

Joyce was born in Dublin into a Catholic family and studied in a college run by Jesuits. Then he entered University College and in 1902 went to study in Paris. The next year his mother died and he returned to Ireland. In 1904 he left Dublin with Nora Barnacle and settled in Trieste where he worked as a teacher of English at the Berlitz school (Italo Svevo was then one of his students).

- In 1914 he published ***The Dubliners***. He then moved to Zurich because of the war.
- After the publication of ***A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*** he moved to Paris in 1920.
- ***Ulysses*** was published in Paris in 1922 and ***Finnegans Wake*** came out in 1939.

Joyce went back to Zurich in 1940 and died there the next year after an operation.

The Dubliners is a collection of 15 stories divided into four groups: **childhood, adolescence, mature life** and **public life**. The common elements in the stories are:

- *the setting*, **Dublin**, which becomes a symbol of the modern metropolis where life is losing its natural quality;
- *the main theme* - the failure to find a way out of **paralysis**, which is the condition of modern man;
- the use of **epiphany**, which is a sudden revelation of a truth or of the inner reality of things. The stories are epiphanies of Dublin.
- the narrator's attitude of **friendly irony** or pity to the protagonists of the stories.

Some of the stories, like *Eveline* and *The Dead*, are also Joyce's first experiments in **interior monologue** (a technique which tries to reproduce the mental process in a character's mind).

- Extract 'She was fast asleep'.

These are the last paragraphs of Joyce's story *The Dead* from *The Dubliners*.

After a traditional Christmas party, the protagonist Gabriel and his wife Gretta are in their hotel room in Dublin. Gretta has just told her husband about a young man called Michael Furey who used to be in love with her many years ago and died of cold while waiting for her in the rain.

Now Gretta is sleeping and Gabriel is looking at her and thinking. He reflects on his life with her and suddenly realises he has never really known her (*epiphany*). He also recalls the evening's events: his aunt's speech, the speech he gave, the music and dancing, a walk along the river.

Then he looks out of the window, where it has started snowing again. The last paragraph develops an evocative image of the snow, which is covering everything and everybody, both 'the living and the dead'. This image may be a metaphor of the moral and cultural paralysis of Irish society and modern civilisation.

Gabriel's mental process is reported as indirect interior monologue, that is, through the voice of an anonymous third-person narrator.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

This is a sort of autobiography and 'novel of formation' which is based on Joyce's own experience. In fact the protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, is Joyce's fictional double. The story is set in Dublin and follows Stephen's life from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Like Joyce, Stephen is the son of a poor father and a Catholic mother and studies at schools run by Jesuits. When he grows up, he starts to rebel against his family, his religion and the provincial life in Ireland, so he decides to leave his country and move to Paris.

- Extract 'Where was his Boyhood now?' This passage contains an important 'epiphany': Stephen realises his boyhood is over and, at the same time, he feels attracted by the sight of a girl. He has gone to the beach with some friends, but suddenly he finds himself alone and starts thinking about himself and his future. While he is wandering along the beach, and thinking about the prospect of a new, independent life, a girl appears in front of him like a magic sight. He watches her legs, her body, her long fair hair. And the girl realises Stephen is looking at her. When he moves away, he thinks about the girl as 'a wild angel of mortal youth and beauty.'