

# Dubliners - James Joyce

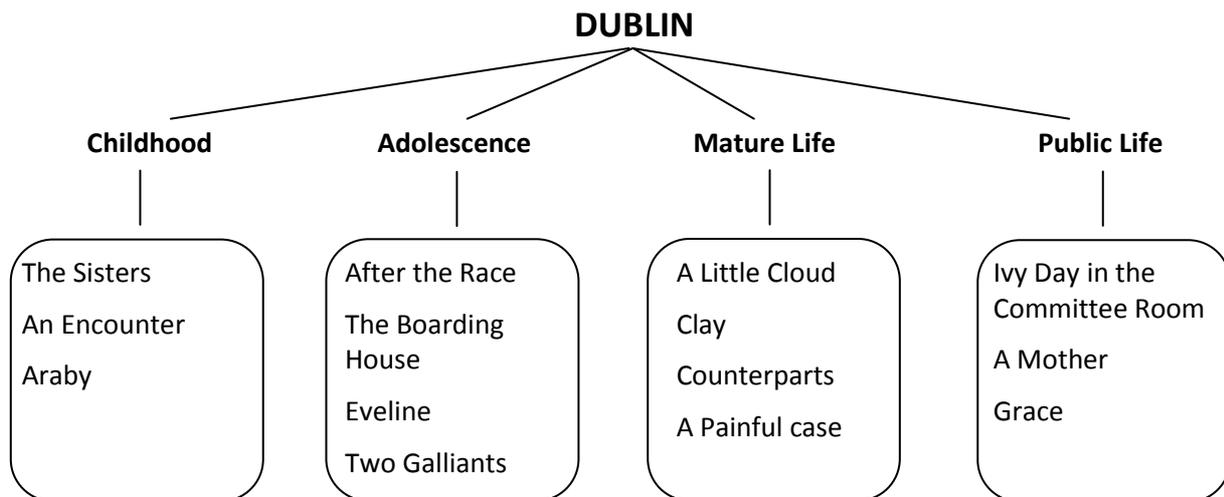
## The origin of the collection

It was the oppressive effects of religious, cultural, and economic forces on the lives of lower-middle-class Dubliners that provided Joyce with the raw material for a psychologically realistic picture of Dubliners as afflicted people.

Dubliners consist of fifteen short stories; they all lack obvious actions, but they disclose human situation, moments of intensity and lead to a moral, social, or spiritual revelation, the opening stories deal with childhood and youth in Dublin, the others, advancing in time and expanding in scope, concern the middle years of characters and their social, political, or religious affairs.

The stories are arranged into four groups, as Joyce explained:

*"My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. I have tried to present it to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life. The stories are arranged in this order."*



The last story, The Dead can be considered Joyce's first masterpiece. It stands out from the other fourteen stories in the collection because, however similar the theme, it is denser, more elaborate, and more remarkable; it is at once the summary and climax of Dubliners.

What holds all these stories together is a particular structure and the presence of the same themes, symbols and narrative techniques.

## The use of epiphany

The description in each story is realistic and extremely concise with an abundance of external details, even the most unpleasant and depressing ones.

The use of realism is mixed with symbolism, since external details generally have a deeper meaning. In fact, Joyce thought his function was to take the reader beyond the usual aspects of life and he employed a peculiar technique to achieve his purpose, the 'epiphany', that is, "the sudden spiritual manifestation" caused by a trivial gesture, an external object or a banal situation, which used to lead the character to a sudden self realisation about himself/herself or about the reality surrounding him/her. So understanding the epiphany in each story is often the key to the story itself. The episode described is apparently unimportant but essential to the life of the characters who become emblems of their socio- historical context.

### **A pervasive theme: paralysis**

The paralysis of Dublin which Joyce wanted to portray is both physical, resulting from external forces, and moral, linked to religion, politics and culture.

Joyce's Dubliners either accept their condition because they are not aware of it or because they lack the courage to break the chains that bind them. All the Dubliners are spiritually weak and afraid people, they are to some extent slaves of their familiar, moral, cultural, religious and political life. However, the moral centre of Dubliners is not paralysis alone but its revelation to its victims.

Coming to awareness or self-realisation marks the climax of these stories; for knowing oneself is a basis of morality if not the morality itself. However, Joyce is far from being didactic and appears to be detached. The main theme is the failure to find a way out of 'paralysis'. The opposite of paralysis is 'escape' and its consequent failure. It originates from an impulse caused by a sense of enclosure that many characters experience, but none of them succeeds in overcoming: they live as exiles at home, unable to cut the bonds that tie them to their own world.

### **Narrative technique**

The omniscient narrator and the single point of view are rejected: each story is told from the perspective of a character.

Narrated monologue, in the form of free direct speech and often of free direct thought, is widely used: it consists of the direct presentation of the protagonist's thoughts through limited mediation on the part of the narrator, and allows the reader to acquire direct knowledge of the character. The linguistic register is varied, since the language used in all the stories suits the age, the social class and the role of the characters.