

THE

DUBLINERS

Book Report

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by

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THE DUBLINERS

all of them must have
been written in his time.

The rather remarkable stories that make up the series called The Dubliners, show James Joyce to be far ahead of his time, when most of them were written in 1905, at Trieste.

Their structure is loose, and the action never artificially dramatic. They are photographs of Dublin life minus the trickery seen in the works of so many average picture makers.

The author has attained a professional detachment, an objectivity, which few realize when writing of their homeland, or home town. Dublin is clearly his city, though he is never her subject.

The reader who is entranced by the jacks-in-the-box technique of Mr. O. Henry may not take to these tales with relish, for Joyce is no juggler. These stories are written for the heart rather than for the eye.

A generation brought up on pap guns, who-done-its and "beat-me-daddy-eight-to-the-bar" might also miss much of the subtlety, suggestion and pathos in these moving tales. Neither have they much appeal for the pseudo intellectual or crossword puzzle artist.

who satisfy themselves with elements found in Joyce's later productions.

The stories hold a fair share of that wistful melancholy felt in much Irish music and verse. They run the gamut of sad song to morbid despair.

The author depends for much effect, as is typical of all his succeeding works, on symbol. Some of the story titles serve this purpose, such as Araby, A Little Cloud, Clay, and The Dead. At times the force and the meaning of the symbol are heightened by an alliterative relation between the title and the chief character's name, such as A Little Cloud and Little Chandler.

At other times as in Clay the title stands alone on its metaphorical value and other symbols are used repetitively throughout the story. Some symbols, like falling stars, serve as momentary illuminators, while others stud his pattern with fixity and precision.

A few remarks about the stories in their natural ~~order~~ order follow this introduction.

The Sisters.

The "special odour of corruption" which Joyce wished to rise from his stories, is quickly sensed in this one. The story has an almost narcotic effect upon the reader. He uses the incantatory technique to much advantage in the first paragraph, "Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word gnomon in Euclid and the word simony in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work."

The story concerns itself with the death of a priest who had been steadily failing as a paralytic, and was cared for by two elderly sisters. It is written in the first person and is told by a young boy, a friend and informal pupil. The action revolves ^{chiefly} around the viewing of the body and the scene downstairs where the two sisters, the boy and his aunt, drink sherry, and munch cream crackers.

Conversation centers around the dead priest and the climax of the story is the account of the old man's being found laughing to himself in his confession-box. The atmosphere of decay and futility is very heavy. Whether he intended it so would be hard to say of course, but Joyce makes a rather odd pun with Eliza's saying, "Ah, there's no friends here the old friends no friends that a body can trust."

An Encounter

This story is not up to the standard of his others. The same boy is still speaking as in The Sisters. It is the story of two boys, one of whom is the speaker, who play truant and encounter an old man, lascivious and abberated. The "stream of consciousness" technique is struggling for expression here as the narrator unfolds his impressions of the old man's talk. There is much less of Dublin in this story, than in any of the rest, in spite of the use of geographic name places. The incident might occur in any of a dozen other places in just the same way.

Araby

Joyce gives expression to great introspection in this account of a young lad's love and exotic fancies. The young boy is still speaking in the first person and is a little older than in the first two stories. He is probably about thirteen or fourteen. Araby is symbolic of the vague and sometimes excruciating yearnings of the early adolescent; his infatuation with a young girl, his enchantment with the sensuousness of the East. Again the incantatory element arises, "The syllables of the word Araby were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated, and cast an Eastern enchantment over me". Araby is the name of a bazaar which he attended and which proved a disappointment.

Eveline

A simple narrative of a young woman's frustration. Her love for a sailor and the ^{sense of duty} ~~duty~~ which prevented her from eloping with him as she wished, make for one of the most stirring stories in the series. She is trapped by circumstance into the care of her father and

the core of two young children. The motive of writer is to bring out clearly the treadmill of Dublin and this story is closely related in theme to A Little Cloud and the Boarding House.

After the Race

As in An Encounter this tale loses the reader's interest midway. The pace is ~~too~~ slow and too much is made of the differences between the characters. An automobile race is the chief action of the story and Joyce tries to achieve the sense of flight in phrases like "Rapid motion through space elates one; The journey laid a magical finger on the genuine pulse of life, and gallantly the machinery of human nerves strove to answer the bounding courses of the swift blue animal." Joyce likes the word covering. He uses it once in Araby as "the coverer of our play" and twice in this story. The word is more related to the action of a bird in swift erratic flight than to mere speed upon the ground. It becomes an excellent symbol subconscious activity.

Two Gallants

This scores another success in that it portrays the putrescence the male animal is capable of. It is the simple account of a policeman's son and his companion who plot to obtain some ready cash from a houseservant of the most ignorant type. The officer's son represents himself as being short of money and after a fair amount of fornication succeeds in getting a considerable sum out of the poor wretch. The story is disgusting and provocative.

The Boarding House

The theme here is one of the recurring theme of entrapment. One of the boarders is discovered to be living with the landlady's daughter, and the mother permits this to go on long enough for the case to become flagrant, in the hope that she can force the young man to marry her daughter. She succeeds. Dublin's seamy conventions win out again. Both daughter and mother win over a weak bachelor. Joyce is inclined to take a dim view of females in *The Dubliners*.

A Little Cloud

This is much related to the preceding story in message, though unrelated in incident. An introverted little man, perhaps immature, longs for the freedom of his fellows. He would like to be a known writer, to make his appearance as a self-sufficient character before the world.

"He felt how useless it was to struggle against fortune, this being the burden of wisdom which the ages had bequeathed to him."

(The latter part of this sentence sounds almost Hindu in its philosophy.) A very dramatic conclusion binds off this story and shows the futility of Little Chandler's life.

Counterparts

Here is related carefully the frustrations of an alcoholic, his defiance of his boss. Joyce is careful to show the boss in an unattractive light with his mistress a Miss Delacour.

There is irony in the choice of her name.

Finally the alcoholic father makes his son the victim of his own frustrations.

Clay
 Joyce treats this incident with great delicacy. It is the story of a decent laundress who wishes she might marry but knows she never will. Clay is the symbol of substance without life. Her existence is cold as clay, infertile as clay, and comfortless as clay. She always draws the book instead of the ring in blindfold games, and is doomed to chill spinsterhood. She visits her affection upon her lovely ferns and wax plants. Joyce uses an idiomatic expression recurrently here. "He was very nice with her." It is perhaps the most pathetic story of the group. Her encounter on the train with a gentleman a little under the influence is painfully sad.

A Painful Case

A saturnine bachelor shares the company of another man's wife at musicals and their friendship wakes in her a love for him that had long since died for her sea-roving husband. The events which lead to her death, among which are his

(the bachelors) quitting her company and her subsequent addiction to alcohol, press upon his mind with such force that he is almost driven beside himself. He realizes that she was the only worthwhile incident in his whole barren career. "He felt that he was alone."

Joy Day in the Committee Room

Here is the scene of a group of Irish patriots whose patriotism peters out into inaction, with the reading of the poem, at their little meeting, The Death of Parnell. Symbol is skillfully employed here. The pop! of the cork recurs with a futile sound and indicates the pant up energies of the men fizzling out to nothing. The use of indirect speech to conclude is somewhat similar to Swift.

A Mother

Joyce was a good musician and at one time contemplated serious singing as a career. This story centers about

an atmosphere that he was more than a little familiar with.

A mother manages her daughter's musical career in such fashion that the daughter is the loser of what professional reputation she had stowed for. It is a typical account of the pettiness of musical groups, and the over-solicitous ambition of a neurotic female for her daughter's rights. In protecting her daughter she succeeds in smothering her career. The title A Mother is satiric.

Grace

The author takes a powerful jab at the Church and the devout. Some businessmen induce one of their number to accompany them to a service for businessmen, only conducted by a priest who prides himself on the fact that he is "a man of the world speaking to his fellow men." His text is mutilated and as is usually the case with clerics suited to his own remarks.

The Dead

This is the longest of the stories and comes closest to an account of what Joyce might have become had he remained in Ireland. Gabriel, a literary critic attends a party at Christmas which his well to do aunts give annually. The purpose of the story is to show how hedged about and provincial is the life of a writer who, had he the opportunity, might attain some stature. He is dissatisfied by his wife at the end of this story and this note seals his moral defeat.