

James Joyce

Birth, childhood and family life

James Augustine Joyce, the eldest surviving son of John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane ('May') Joyce, was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 2 February 1882.

Education

He attended Clongowes Wood College, a [Jesuit](#) boys' school in County Kildare, until his father lost his job as a Rates Collector in 1891. After a brief spell at the Christian Brothers School, Joyce entered Belvedere College, a Jesuit boys' day school. In 1894, due to diminishing finances, the family moved house for the fourth time since Joyce's birth. Despite this turmoil, Joyce managed to win a prize for his outstanding exam results. In 1896 Joyce was made Prefect of the Sodality of the Blessed [Virgin Mary](#), a devotional society.

Literature or medicine?

In 1898, when he was just sixteen, Joyce began studying Modern Languages at the Royal University (now University College, Dublin). He became especially interested in the work of Norwegian playwright Henrik [Ibsen](#) and Irish writer W. B. [Yeats](#). Joyce met Yeats in 1902, whilst on a brief visit to London.

In the same year, Joyce left Dublin to start medical school in Paris (rather than studying Modern Languages). Whilst back in Dublin over Christmas, Joyce met Oliver St John Gogarty, a fellow medical student and poet who was to be reimagined as Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses* (1922). In 1903, Joyce left Paris and returned to Dublin to be with his cancer-ridden mother who died on 13 August.

Modern critics generally consider him one of the twentieth century's most influential and important authors. During his career, Joyce wrote numerous novels, poems, and short stories, including what are generally believed to be two of the greatest works in

English since Shakespeare: *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. In these two novels, Joyce pioneered the use of "stream of consciousness," a revolutionary technique that freed words from the restrictions placed on them by grammar, syntax, and diction. Despite, or possibly because of his style and subject matter, Joyce's contemporaries ignored his contributions, and *Ulysses* was banned outright or heavily censored. In his later years, he grew blind and had to depend on memory and friends to be able to produce any literature at all. Joyce died in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1941.

1 - Dubliners:

Introduction

Dubliners contains many references to the history of Ireland and to its political situation, past and present. The historical and political issues that run through the stories often determine both their **structure** and **tone** and the ways in which the **characters** are

presented. Furthermore, the characters' reactions to Ireland's past and to contemporary politics contribute to the **themes** of the book.

Ireland and the English problem

Much of the history of Ireland concerns its troubled relationship with England. From the twelfth century onwards, Ireland suffered invasion, repression, settlement, plantation and colonisation from the powerful state across the Irish Sea, and in various ways throughout these years the Irish people struggled to maintain their integrity as a nation and to win independence and the right to self-government.

The impact of Irish history on *Dubliners*

What do distant historical events have to do with *Dubliners*? There are several ways of answering this question.

The Irish people have a **long historical memory**. They are very conscious of the period before the arrival of Christianity, when the Celtic chiefs ruled independently without interference from invaders. It is from this period that the great Irish myths and

legends developed, which became the focus of the Irish literary and cultural revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

- In *Dubliners*, we see this influence on Katherine Kearney in *A Mother* and Miss Ivors in *The Dead*.

The Irish are justly proud of the **cultural achievements** of the fifth to ninth centuries, when their monasteries exerted an powerful influence throughout Europe. However, Ireland's geographical situation as an offshore island of mainland Britain has meant that, from the twelfth century onwards, the English have seen it as a natural addition to their territory and power. With each invasion, from Henry II in 1171 to William III over six hundred years later, the native Irish have been dispossessed of land and political control, whilst successive 'plantations', from the sixteenth century onwards, have been attempts to anglicise Ireland and erase its native culture.

- In *Dubliners*, Joyce aimed to celebrate the rich reality of Irish life.

As time went on, Irish **political identity** became increasingly embroiled with their **religious identity** - the conflict between the predominantly Catholic South and the increasingly Protestant North (Ulster).

This distinction is to be found at every level in *Dubliners*. For example, anti-English feeling is seen in *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* and *The Dead*, and although the immediate reasons for these views are related to recent events, their roots lie deep in Irish history.

Dubliners is not merely a group of short stories structured according to stages of human development. Joyce meant *Dubliners* to be read as a novel of a city's development, with its inhabitants growing from innocence to experience. In a letter to a prospective editor, Joyce wrote:

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. I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard.

(from Herbert Gorman, *James Joyce*, New York, 1940, V-iv.)

The Use of Epiphany:

Joyce often ironically exposes his characters to moments of self-awareness or awareness of the true nature of their environment. Joyce called these moments "epiphanies," adapting the religious term referring to the revelation of the infant Jesus to the Magi. In *Stephen Hero* Joyce writes, "by an epiphany he (Stephen Daedalus) meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself " (188). It is the flash in which the essential nature of a

person, an object, or a moment is perceived, all at once. Joyce says, "its soul, its whatness leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance." Joyce often recorded his own epiphanies, then later used the idea of epiphany in *Dubliners* as a symbolic literary technique to reveal the paralysis of the city as well as the faults and shortcomings of its inhabitants. Joyce also used the epiphany as a structural device; rather than employing a traditional resolution, Joyce ends his stories with the epiphany in the form of a speech (as in "The Sisters" and "Grace"), a gesture ("Two Gallants"), or a "memorable phase of the mind itself" ("Araby" and "The Dead"), because the reader's revelation about the character's condition satisfies Joyce's purpose in writing the story.