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INTRODUCTION

John Banville

The story is told, although it is probably apocryphal, of Joyce towards the end of his life meeting in Paris an old friend from Dublin who is visiting the French capital. Over a glass of wine the two men swap reminiscences of their youthful days and ways, and then move on, tentatively, no doubt, to talk of Joyce's writing. The Dublin friend, a plain man, speaks highly of *A Portrait of the Artist*, of *Ulysses*, and even of *Finnegans Wake*, but then, after a pause, ventures that in his opinion the stories collected in *Dubliners*, written when Joyce was a very young man, still represent his best work. Joyce ponders for a long moment and then, glancing this way and that to make sure he is not overheard, says, 'Do you know what?—I think you're right.'

When speaking of an artist's work, 'best' is always an invidious term, for who can lay claim to that Olympian eminence from which so lofty and definitive a pronouncement may be delivered? Yet *Dubliners* is certainly Joyce's most coherently fashioned book. He prided himself on his organizational skills as a writer—*Ulysses*, he boasted, was among many other things a triumph of engineering; and so it is—and already, in his early twenties, when he came to assemble these stories into a single volume, this most assiduous student of Aristotle and Aquinas showed himself to be a meticulous systematizer.

The bulk of the stories, excluding 'The Dead,' were written in 1905, when Joyce was twenty-three. The discipline, discretion, and patience that he displays in these pieces are remarkable in one so young. He had already accumulated 'nearly a thousand pages' (*Letters*, p. 60) of *Stephen Hero*, the sprawling ur-novel that would later be engineered into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In a letter to his friend Con Curran in 1904 he announced that he was planning a series of 'epiclets,' or little epics: 'I shall call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia [Joyce was studying medicine at the time] or paralysis which many consider a city.' (*Letters*, p. 55) The following year, between May and October, in an extraordinary burst of creativity, he wrote or rewrote a clutch of stories, most of them masterpieces of the form, including 'An Encounter,' 'The Boarding House,' and that bitter threnody for post-Parnellite Ireland, 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room.'

In *Dubliners*, in his anthropomorphic fashion, the young Joyce conceived of the city of his birth as a living being, and accordingly grouped his stories to represent four stages of a human lifetime: childhood, adolescence, maturity, and 'public life.' As yet he had not envisaged 'The Dead,' the long story that he completed in 1907 and that would make a magnificent conclusion to the volume. He had planned to follow up *Dubliners* with a companion volume, which alas was never written. *Provincials*, the title he had settled on, perhaps reflects his reading at the time of Russian authors such as Turgenev, Lermontov, Korolenko, and Gorky, although in a letter of September 1905 he rejected his brother Stanislaus's suggestion that one of the stories in the collection, 'Counterparts,' shows a tendency towards what Joyce considered 'a certain scrupulous brute force' (*Letters*, p. 209) that marked Russian writing of the nineteenth century. Like all young writers, Joyce was touchy when it came to comparisons between his work and that of others. His chief influence at the time was, of course, Ibsen—Joyce taught himself Norwegian in order to read his hero's plays in the original, while the reply Ibsen

had sent to him in response to a fan letter was among his most prized possessions.

In these early years Joyce was, or at least represented himself as being, an exceedingly angry young man, and *Dubliners* was to be his revenge upon a city and a people he considered to have betrayed him in a multiplicity of ways. The stories were written, he told his publisher Grant Richards, 'for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness,' and he gloried in 'the special odour of corruption,' (*James Joyce*, by Richard Ellmann, p. 210) which he hoped pervaded the book. In another letter to Richards, in June 1906, he indulged in a typically vituperative outburst. 'It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories,' he wrote, and went on to disperse any wisp of false modesty that his publisher might imagine floating about the brow of a young man living confidently in the expectation of the imminent descent upon it of a laurel wreath: 'I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.' (*Letters*, pp. 63-64)

Yet he had his doubts, the chief one being that these tales would be seen as cartoonish travesties. 'The stories in *Dubliners*,' he wrote to Stanislaus, with his usual candour and disarming self-regard, 'seem to be indisputably well done but, after all, perhaps many people could do them as well. . . . The Dublin papers will object to my stories as to a caricature of Dublin life. Do you think there is any truth in this? At times the spirit directing my pen seems to me so plainly mischievous that I am almost prepared to let the Dublin critics have their way.' (Ellmann, p. 208-9) The fact is that in *Dubliners* he was as anxious to present as complete and accurate a portrait of his native city as he would be again, and far more comprehensively, in *Ulysses*—he was famously and rather grandiosely to declare that in the event that Dublin in some future time should be destroyed, it would be possible to reconstruct it brick by brick from what he described in *Finnegans*

Wake as his 'usylesly unreadable Blue Book of Eccles.' (*Finnegans Wake*, p. 179)

In that letter to Stanislaus in September 1905 he asked, 'Is it not possible for a few persons of character and culture to make Dublin a capital such as Christiania has become?' (Ellmann, p. 208) while he had followed up the outline of his scheme for *Dubliners* with the observation that 'when you remember that Dublin has been a capital for thousands of years, that it is the "second" city of the British Empire, that it is nearly three times as big as Venice it seems strange that no artist has given it to the world.' (Ellmann, p. 208) The unmistakable note of civic pride here is not very far removed from the tendentious boasts of the nameless 'citizen' in *Ulysses*. Young Jimmy Joyce took himself very seriously indeed.

Joyce's attitude to Ireland in general and to Dublin in particular was always ambiguous. At the beginning of December 1902 he had gone to Paris with the intention of furthering his medical studies there, but after two weeks lost his nerve and made a rather ignominious return. He had loved the City of Light, of course—'Paris rawly waking, crude sunlight on her lemon streets,' Stephen Dedalus remembers in *Ulysses* (*Ulysses*, 3. 209)—but felt keenly his youth and friendlessness. 'I am afraid I shall not easily settle down,' he told his mother in a letter. 'Write again if you like and say if I should go home for Christmas.' (Ellmann, p. 114) This was hardly the heroic flying by the nets of family and fatherland that he had Stephen Dedalus manage with such panache at the close of *A Portrait*. It would be another two years before Joyce himself would succeed in leaving Ireland for good, emboldened by the company of Nora Barnacle, the servant girl from Galway who was to be his life partner.

The stories in *Dubliners* gain much of their quality from the uncertainties besetting their creator—uncertainties as to identity, homeland, and belonging. In the years when he was writing the book he had already a strong urge towards exile; in *Finnegans Wake* the character Shem the Penman, a comically mocking self-

portrait of the author, is a convinced 'farsoonerite,' meaning he 'would far sooner muddle through the hash of lentils in Europe than meddle with Ireland's split little pea.' (*Finnegans Wake*, p. 171) Yet Joyce was well aware of the perils of deracination, especially for a writer so thoroughly steeped in the language and lore of 'Dear Dirty Dumpling.' (*Finnegans Wake*, p. 215) If he were to abandon Ireland for the hash of Europe would he not be in danger of becoming a stateless drifter, everywhere a stranger and nowhere at home?

Throughout *Dubliners* we sense the shiver of fear of being trapped in soulless domesticity and the equally strong fear of making a break for freedom. The protagonist, if that is the word, in 'A Little Cloud', longs for the great world and at the same time cowers from the possibility of embracing it. Little Chandler, as he is called, thinks with aching envy of his friend Ignatius Gallaher, who has made a great name for himself as a journalist in London. 'Eight years before he had seen his friend off at the North Wall and wished him godspeed. Gallaher had got on. You could tell that at once by his travelled air, his well-cut tweed suit and fearless accent. Few fellows had talents like his and fewer still could remain unspoiled by such success.' (8.1-5) Could Little Chandler be such a fellow, too, he wonders? 'Could he not escape from his little house? Was it too late for him to try to live bravely like Gallaher? Could he go to London? There was the furniture still to be paid for. If he could only write a book and get it published, that might open the way for him.' (8.437-41)

Similarly, in 'Eveline' a young woman hovers on the brink of escape from crushing domesticity and the drudgery of her job as a shop assistant by entering upon 'another life' with her boyfriend Frank. 'Frank was very kind, manly, open-hearted. She was to go away with him by the night-boat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Ayres where he had a home waiting for her.' (4.79-82) At the last minute, however, her nerve fails her before the prospect of that other life she is being offered: 'All the seas of

the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her.’ (4.158-9)

For Joyce’s Dubliners, nothing is more terrifying than the prospect of freedom.

The fourteen stories that make up the first part of the book are brief, beautifully crafted, skillfully modulated, and set out in their various aspects the abiding themes of paralysis and decay on one side and, on the other, the tantalizing possibility of escape into the fullness and richness that life can offer. In the long, concluding story, ‘The Dead,’ these themes are blended into a kind of fugue—Joyce must be the most musical of all the major European writers—as they interweave and overlap and repeat themselves in ever more subtle variations. It is indicative of the greatness of this story that after nearly a century of critical commentary and scholarly dissection it remains an enigma. Indeed, the more deeply one penetrates into its intricately woven textures the more elusive it becomes.

Only a couple of years separate it from the earlier stories, but the contrast, and the continuity, between it and its predecessors are remarkable. In July 1907 Joyce suffered an attack of rheumatic fever which he did not fully recover from until well into the following September. Since these were the months of composition of ‘The Dead,’ it is surely not fanciful to detect throughout the story the enervating effects of the author’s illness. A word that recurs throughout Joyce’s work in these early years is *swoon*, and in the famous last paragraph here it achieves a kind of languishing apotheosis, as the protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, shocked by his wife’s revelation of a former, lost love, sets out on his imaginary ‘journey westward’ across a snowbound Ireland: ‘His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.’ (15.162-15)

It is this passage which prompts many readers to assume that the snow is meant as a symbol for death, or at least that death-in-life which in all the stories leading up to ‘The Dead’ had been identified

as the prevailing condition of late-nineteenth-century Ireland. It should be noted, however, that the snow is falling upon living and dead alike. Richard Ellmann, Joyce's biographer and one of his most commonsensical and perceptive critics, suggests that the snow represents 'mutuality,' an indication of the interconnectedness of the characters in the story, 'a sense that none has his being alone.' (Ellmann, p. 251) Although nothing in a great work of art is ever merely one thing, Ellmann's interpretation is convincing. Joyce's unease over his portrayal of his native city had deepened since he had left Ireland and settled in Trieste. Writing to his brother in September 1906 he expressed his doubts directly: 'Sometimes thinking of Ireland it seems to me that I have been unnecessarily harsh. I have reproduced (in *Dubliners* at least) none of the attraction of the city for I have never felt at my ease in any city since I left it except Paris. I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality. . . . I have not been just to its beauty. . . .' (Ellmann, p. 231) These are striking admissions from a young man who only a few months before had savoured the 'odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal' that rose from his portrayal of the city of his birth.

It was not merely distance from Dublin that had made the exile's heart grow fonder. The boastful, even blustering, letters to his publisher at this time tend to gloss over the fact that despite the rigours of life in Trieste—'And trieste, ah trieste ate I my liver!' is the exile's cry in *Finnegans Wake* (*Finnegans Wake*, p. 301)—Joyce had undergone a rapid process of maturing in the two years since that momentous day, June 16, 1904, when he and Nora Barnacle met in Dublin for their first romantic encounter. The influence of Nora on Joyce both as man and artist cannot be over-estimated. An ill-educated Galway girl, she claimed never to have read a word of his writings and would speak of his artistic daring in form and content as being 'just Jim,' yet she was the rock upon which his life was to be founded. And she is, too, undoubtedly, the source of his newfound warmth of feeling towards the Ireland they had both abandoned.

Introduction by John Banville

For all that ‘The Dead’ is a lovingly detailed portrait of the turn-of-the-century bourgeois Dublin of Joyce’s youth, the story throughout has a palpable westward tendency. Gretta Conroy, Gabriel’s wife, is from Galway, in the far ‘wild west’ of Ireland, and the force of her passionate remembrances of her lost sweetheart Michael Furey—‘I think he died for me’ (15.1498)—is an unintended yet harsh rebuke to Gabriel’s complacency and sententiousness, his nice sense of himself as a figure of significance, which is based on little more than a few carefully judged book reviews and a capacity to turn a fine phrase or two in an after-dinner speech. Against Michael Furey’s fierce determination to die for love, Gabriel’s world is a spectral place. ‘One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dimly with age.’ In that insight Joyce’s artistry found itself, and became a thing of passion and of glory.

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INTRODUCTION

Scarlett Baron

‘Freedom from sloppiness’; ‘clear hard prose’; ‘exact presentation’ – it was in such terms, amounting to the greatest possible endorsement, that Ezra Pound greeted the publication of *Dubliners* in 1914. Hailing Joyce as ‘a follower of Flaubert’ and a new exponent of the European prose tradition, Pound averred with satisfaction that ‘He is a realist. [...] He gives the thing as it is.’ (*Dubliners and Mr James Joyce*, *Pound/Joyce*, pp. 27–8)

It is still for these qualities of style and vision that *Dubliners* is most famous today. The collection is admired and studied for its dour, diagnostic realism: for that mode of ‘scrupulous meanness’ – to use Joyce’s own evocative phrase – which so defines these impressions of early twentieth-century Dublin life (5 May 1906, *Selected Letters*, p. 83). The stories’ maniacally accurate rendition of the geographical and social realities of the city (‘I suppose I am becoming something of a maniac’, noted Joyce – 6 November 1906, *Selected Letters*, p. 124), astringent verbal economy, and impeccably impersonal narration, have justly earned *Dubliners* recognition as a masterpiece of the genre.

These realistic techniques were mobilized to particular ends. In these stories, composed between 1904 and 1907 (begun, that is to say, when the author was just twenty-two years old), Joyce aspired to do no less than to change Dublin. He himself had left

Ireland at the end of 1904 (with three of the fifteen stories already written), taking flight from its ‘poverty of purse and spirit’ (‘Two Gallants’, 6.283) to embark on a new life in Europe (a place of fantasized escape in several of the *Dubliners* stories). In leaving Ireland and its capital – in realizing that escape which many of the stories’ protagonists crave without achieving – Joyce was determined, like Stephen Dedalus at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, to use art to ‘forge [...] the uncreated consciousness of [his] race’ (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, V.2789–90).

In *Stephen Hero* (the long, unfinished novel whose reworking eventually led to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), the protagonist, Stephen Daedalus, described as a ‘fiery-hearted revolutionary’, refers to a paper he has written about art as ‘the first of my explosives’ (*Stephen Hero*, pp. 80–81). Joyce himself had delivered such a paper before his university’s Literary and Historical Society in January 1900. ‘Art is true to itself when it deals with truth’, he claimed. ‘The drama of the future’, he asserted, would be ‘at war with convention’ (‘Drama and Life’, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, pp. 27 and 25). From these statements it is clear that Joyce was an angry young man, and one who ardently believed that his art might be a truly revolutionary force for change. His first artistic instincts were to proclaim difficult truths and oppose the status quo. There is some irony, given this, in George Russell (the Irish man of letters later known as Æ) having provided the initial spark for the project by approaching Joyce for a story which would not ‘shock the readers’ of *The Irish Homestead* (the self-dubbed ‘Organ of Agricultural and Industrial Development in Ireland’, referred to as ‘the pig’s paper’ in *Ulysses* – U 9: 321). But Joyce, whose early literary passions were for Ibsen and Flaubert, was interested in nothing so much as in shocking his readers. The aim was not to write sensationally (‘he does not sensationalize’, as Pound enthused – ‘*Dubliners* and Mr James Joyce’, *Pound/Joyce*, p. 28), but to jolt the reader into a new state of awareness by forcing

a confrontation with the truth about Dublin's endemic problems. *Dubliners* (far more than Joyce's or Stephen's student papers), fulfilled this aim, metaphorically exploding in the hands of prospective printers and publishers time after time over the long decade of negotiation which preceded publication.

These negotiations and deferrals, which exasperatingly prevented *Dubliners* from reaching its intended audience, gave Joyce numerous occasions to articulate his purpose in the collection. His mission, as he explained to the timorous and outraged professional readers of his manuscript, was to liberate Dublin – to draw it out from the shadows in which it languished ('we hid in the shadow', recalls the narrator of 'Araby' – 3.33–4) and into the modern world. Joyce's project was didactic in its conception (however uncomfortably that attitude may sit with most understandings of modernism) if not in the manner of its execution. His view of Dublin when he embarked upon the composition of the first version of 'The Sisters' for *The Irish Homestead* (the story was later substantially revised) was scathing: 'I call the series *Dubliners*', he told his friend Constantine Curran, 'to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city.' (early July 1904, *Selected Letters*, p. 22) The allegation of paralysis is indirectly spelt out on the collection's opening page when that very word appears in italics (along with 'gnomon' and 'simony', two other troubling terms), as though the author were proffering it as a key to his enigmatic assemblage of stories. The young narrator of 'The Sisters', whose elderly friend has succumbed to a paralysing condition, is mesmerized by the word, and finds himself 'long[ing] to be nearer to it and look on its deadly work' (1.14–15). Life in Dublin, as the rest of Joyce's collection implies, will give the boy ample opportunity to study the workings of paralysis.

It was in his correspondence with the English publisher Grant Richards, amid wrangling about the unacceptability of specific words as well as of entire stories, that Joyce most frankly set out his ambitions. Echoing Flaubert's aspiration to write 'the moral history of the men of [his] generation' in *L'Éducation sentimentale* (6

October 1864, *Selected Letters*, p. 304), Joyce repeatedly referred to *Dubliners* as ‘a chapter of the moral history of my country’ (5 May 1906, *Selected Letters*, p. 83). Resisting Richards’ lengthening list of demands for amendments to his text, Joyce pleaded for the unalterable integrity of his art:

you really cannot expect me to mutilate my work! [...] I believe that in composing my chapter of moral history in exactly the way I have composed it I have taken the first step towards the spiritual liberation of my country. (20 May 1906, *Selected Letters*, p. 88)

His subject, he insisted, insuperably dictated the form and content of his writing. The reality of Dublin, he maintained, could only be depicted in this way:

it is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass. (23 June 1906, *Selected Letters*, pp. 89-90)

Joyce may indeed have felt that the creation of a faultlessly honest looking-glass was the only form of representation that would be true, and therefore worthwhile. But to render the lives of everyday *Dubliners* – struggling against poverty, alcoholism, violence, and exploitation – strictly as he saw them, was a considered choice (one which pitted him starkly against the mythologizing of the Irish Literary Revival), and the source of his stories’ abiding originality.

The uncompromising documentary realism which went into the fashioning of Joyce’s ‘nicely polished looking-glass’ relied heavily on information provided to the author in exile by his brother (Stanislaus) and aunt (Josephine). The accuracy of minute details (‘Can a priest

be buried in a habit?', 'Can a municipal election take place in October?', 'Are the police at Sydney Parade of the D division?', he asked – about 24 September 1905, *Selected Letters*, p. 75) and the fidelity of his imagined geography to the physical and social characteristics of Dublin, came for Joyce to act as guarantors of the truth of the stories' overall vision. Pound under-estimated the importance of such facts to Joyce's fiction: 'Erase the local names and a few specifically local allusions and a few historic events of the past, and substitute a few different local names, allusions, and events', he claimed, 'and these stories could be retold of any town.' ('*Dubliners* and Mr James Joyce', *Pound/Joyce*, p. 29) It was Joyce's principled refusals to make such changes (though he was over time obliged to make some such corrections) which delayed the publication of his explosive text for ten long years.

Are the stories really so shocking? With the passage of time, contemporary quarrels about the offensiveness of certain words (like 'bloody', which Joyce insisted had to be allowed to stand in 'The Boarding House' – 7.238), worries about the risk of libel action by those caught in Joyce's looking-glass, and concerns about blasphemy and affronts to other prevailing orthodoxies, can seem bafflingly insignificant. And yet the stories are still distressing, sometimes more by virtue of what is withheld than what is clearly stated. 'An Encounter', for example, is so inexplicit about the particulars of what the 'queer old jossler' is up to that even Richards' fretful printer failed to recognize its 'enormity' until Joyce unwisely drew his attention to it (5 May 1906, *Selected Letters*, p. 83). But even where the stories' plot is more readily discernible, the misery of the lives Joyce depicts – in all their poverty, confusion, and loneliness – makes for upsetting reading.

If the stories are realistic in their attention to the ascertainable facts of Dublin life, they are also realistic by virtue of their psychological penetration. Joyce uses free indirect discourse (a technique whereby a third-person narrative adopts a first-person point of view) to enter into his characters' minds. By adopting their

vocabulary and espousing their world-view, if only for the length of a sentence or paragraph, Joyce allows their perspectives to impinge on the stories. It is Little Chandler's voice, for instance, which we are given to hear through the use of words like 'soul' and 'melancholy', which encapsulate an idealized self-image. Little Chandler, that is, likes to think of himself as soulful and melancholic – a natural poet of the Irish Literary Revival: 'A gentle melancholy took possession him', 'Melancholy was the dominant note of his temperament', 'He tried to weigh his soul to see if it was a poet's soul.' (8.113–14) The technical experimentation deployed in service of Joyce's exploration of individual psychologies would later be taken much further through the more daring and extended innovations of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*.

For all the author's dedication to what he rather cryptically termed 'a style of scrupulous meanness' (perhaps adumbrating a stylish economy so draconian as to verge on unkindness), *Dubliners* is more than a panorama of wrecked lives, damaged psyches, and dirty streets. The stories feature moments of arresting beauty (though these tellingly arise in the description of objects and scenes rather than of people). 'Two Gallants', in which some of the collection's most devastatingly sordid events unfold, begins on a note of urban harmony. The opening vignette reads (almost cruelly) like the intimation of a city idyll:

The grey warm evening of August had descended upon the city and a mild warm air, a memory of summer, circulated in the streets. The streets, shuttered for the repose of Sunday, swarmed with a gaily coloured crowd. Like illumined pearls the lamps shone from the summits of their tall poles upon the living texture below which, changing shape and hue unceasingly, sent up into the warm grey evening air an unchanging unceasing murmur. (6.1–8)

In these stories of darkness, these ‘illuminated pearls’ of lamplight pierce the penumbra with a special poignancy. There are other flashes of lyricism. Amid the ‘dark muddy lanes’, ‘dark dripping cottages’, and ‘dark odorous stables’ of ‘Araby’, a coachman ‘sh[akes] music from the buckled harness’ (3.31). On the next page, rain ‘impinge[s] upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds.’ (3.76-7) At the end of ‘Eveline’, we read that at the moment of crisis ‘All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart.’ (4.158) Gabriel’s desire for his wife in ‘The Dead’ erupts in images of fire and light: ‘Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory. [...] Like the tender fires of stars moments of their life together [...] broke upon and illuminated his memory.’ (15.1263-4; 1279-80) Even if they are partly ironic, these sudden admixtures of stylised language rupture the denotative surface of the text, acting as reminders that the collection is an aesthetic offering as well as a wake-up call.

Such bursts of imagery are not ‘epiphanies’, to use a term which Joyce himself is responsible for providing to literary discourse. Epiphanies, according to the Stephen of *Stephen Hero*, involve seeing and depicting things as they really are: ‘By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself.’ (*Stephen Hero*, p. 211) *Dubliners* is full of vulgarities of speech (the words attributed to Jack Mooney in ‘The Boarding House’: ‘if any fellow tried that sort of game on with *his* sister he’d bloody well put his teeth down his throat, so he would’ – 7.237-9) and vulgarities of gesture (Corley reveals the fruits of his ‘gallantry’ in ‘Two Gallants’ ‘with a grave gesture’: ‘A small gold coin shone in the hand.’ – 6.380-1) It also registers memorable phases of the mind, as at the end of ‘Araby’: ‘Gazing into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.’ (3.218-20) Spiritual manifestations, however, are rarer. Although some of the characters in *Dubliners* – the boy in ‘Araby’, James Duffy in ‘A Painful Case’, Gabriel Conroy in ‘The Dead’ –

seem to achieve (or come close to achieving), a degree of clear-sightedness about their situation, such realizations are the exception rather than the rule. The stories themselves were more likely intended as occasions for readerly epiphanies. Conceived as weapons of 'spiritual liberation', they are Joyce's attempt to show Dubliners – without overtly telling them – the truth about their city and their own involvement in its paralysis: to make them, in Stephen's words, 'adjust [their] vision to an exact focus.' (*Stephen Hero*, p. 211)

The stories are bound together by a tight lexical, thematic, and stylistic unity. Joyce emphasized the collection's internal progression ('I have tried to present it [Dublin] to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life.' – 5 May 1906, *Selected Letters*, p. 83), but they are more significantly tied by symbolic motifs (brown streets, dilapidated houses, dusty interiors, dead priests, sordid smiles, inscrutable windows, fantasies of escape, the movement of single coins from hand to hand). While such repetitions are formally effective, fostering a strong impression of coherence and integration, they are also unsettling (or 'uncanny', to use a word that appears on the collection's opening page – 'The Sisters', 1.20), subliminally reinforcing the sense of entrapment which suffuses the collection. The stories themselves teach us to regard repetition with suspicion. When Mangan's sister no doubt innocently 'turned her silver bracelet round and round her wrist' in 'Araby', the repetition recalls the circularity of the 'queer old josses's' speech in 'An Encounter' (the immediately preceding story): 'magnetized by some words of his own speech, his mind was slowly circling round and round in the same orbit', '[h]e repeated his phrases over and over again, varying them and surrounding them with his monotonous voice.' (2.230-1; 235-7)

If Joyce's stories cultivate the reader's sensitivity to repetition, that sensitivity produces a substantially different effect at the end

of the collection, in the haunting rhythmical conclusion to 'The Dead'. Critics often relate 'The Dead' (a story composed in 1907, having not formed part of Joyce's original plan for the collection) to a mellowing of Joyce's anger towards Ireland:

Sometimes thinking of Ireland it seems to me that I have been unnecessarily harsh. I have reproduced (in *Dubliners* at least) none of the attraction of the city [...] I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality. (25 September 1906, *Selected Letters*, pp. 109-110)

There is hospitality in 'The Dead', and all the vitality of singing and dancing and eating and desire. There is also a tenderness of emotion (in the memories of Michael Furey and of earlier periods of the Conroys' married life, and in Gabriel's thoughts about his aunts' approaching deaths) which is absent from the earlier stories. And there is, perhaps, an epiphany for Gabriel. Having caught sight of himself in a looking-glass (that symbol for Joyce of the entire collection), he accepts the uncomfortable truths that he sees in its unflattering reflection:

He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealizing his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. (15.1482-60)

But he realizes more than this. His wife's confession, and his mental image of the dying man who stood out in the snow for love, precipitate an existential reckoning. As he gazes through the window of the Gresham Hotel (achieving more by this simple act of sight than could the boy in 'The Sisters', who gazed up at Father Flynn's window, night after night, without being able to see through it), the snow, falling like balm over his raw emotions

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and the landscape of ravaged lives *Dubliners* has painted, conjures a sense of universal belonging:

It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly [...]. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. [...] His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. (15.1606-7; 1609-15)

In these final lines, with their many shadowed deaths and eerie lyrical beauty, a measure of peace, perhaps even of hope, is allowed at last to settle on the polished looking-glass.

Scarlett Baron, January 2012

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