

James Joyce

James Joyce (1882-1941) didn't like the nationalist movement in Ireland. The decline in the fortunes of Charles Parnell affected him and led him to realise that Irish society was paralysed.

He thought Ireland had a stunted mentality, and didn't share the enthusiasm for the Gaelic revival flourished thanks to Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory.

So he went on a self-imposed exile. He lived in Trieste, Rome, Zurich and Paris.

Dubliners

While he was in Italy he wrote "Dubliners" (between 1905 and 1909) and published this collection of short stories in 1914.

In this work he begins to show his convictions about the role of the artist: he has neither to teach nor to convince, but to make people aware of reality.

In fact the short stories of the collection analyse the paralytic of the Irish society through different characters who represents the different steps of human life, from the childhood to the old age. Youth, adolescence, adulthood and maturity are the main themes of Joyce's literary production. "Dubliners" is the collection in which he succeeded in representing a fragmented reality (the Irish society) thanks to the use of different points of view and narrative techniques (third-person narration and stream of consciousness).

Since reality is fragmented he used different styles and languages appropriate to different characters and situations.

"A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" and "Ulysses"

Parody is another important aspect of Joyce's literary production. "Ulysses" is a sort of parody of Homer's "Odyssey".

Stephen Dedalus, one of the characters, had already appeared in "The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man", which began to appear in a magazine in 1914.

Stephen lives on intellectual growth that makes him reject family, religion and country. He looks for identity as an artist.

In "Ulysses" Leopold Bloom, a disillusioned version of the writer (while Stephen was still an illusioned one) lives a lot of different situations during a working day in Dublin. He visits a lot of places just like Ulysses travelled a lot. Leopold meets Stephen (who needs a new paternal figure since he has rejected his own) and welcomes him to his house. Even if it's night Stephen doesn't accept the invitation and goes away to face his uncertain future.

Leopold, who seemed to be the hero who

could save Stephen, fails in his "mission" and appears to be an anti-hero.

The thoughts of the characters and the stream of consciousness are dominant in the novel since acting is completely irrelevant in a paralysed society.

"Dubliners" by James Joyce

Luca Palazzo class 5th B

Dubliners is a collection of short stories by James Joyce. They are all set in Dublin and they analyze the paralysis of Irish society and its problems in Joyce's time. Besides, each story portrays one particular period in man's life, from childhood to old age. Almost all the characters in the stories are paralyzed, but in the first part of the stories they aren't aware of that and they believed to be able to change the condition in which they are. Only in the second part of the stories they realized their paralysis. They understand to be unable to change their condition and decide to keep living as they have always lived. They suddenly see the impossibility to reach their aim. This revelation about themselves is called "epiphany".

We can notice the epiphany in the first three stories. They concern childhood, early adolescence and the last part of adolescence.

"An Encounter"

It's the story of three ten-year-old children who decide to skip school, or to "play truant", as Joyce says, for one day. One of them doesn't come on the fixed day and the other two decide to go anyway to the "Pigeon House", which is the Dublin electricity plant. They don't reach the plant because the journey is very long. They walk a lot crossing some poor quarters of Dublin in which Catholic people lived. Finally they cross the Liffey on a ferryboat and lie on the bank for some time. While they are there, an old man sits next to them and starts speaking. The old man's speech is repetitive and inconsistent. He begins with general arguments like books and school, then he gets the point he wanted to reach asking the two children about their sweethearts. It's a revelation for them because they are only young boys who have never thought about girls: they like pretending to be Indians and cow boys fighting in the Wild West. They are surprised by the detailed and obsessive way in which the old man described girls and by his excitement while speaking with them. One of the children gets more and more worried and is terrified by the old man's behavior. What he revealed shocked him and Joyce shakes the reader with the crudity of what he describes. Realizing the old man is a pervert one of the boys called the other and they finally run away.

“Araby”

This story presents the discovery of sexual attraction by a boy in his adolescence. He is about fourteen years old. He still likes playing with his friends, but he is interested in one of his friends' sister. At the beginning he waits for her every morning to come out, but he doesn't speak to her. Finally she asks him if he is going to visit “Araby”, an exotic shop centre. Since the girl cannot go that Saturday because of a retreat in a convent (Catholic element in this story), the boy promises he'll go and bring her something. But on Saturday evening his uncle forgets he wants to go to “Araby” and gives him some money only very late when he comes home. Both his aunt and another woman visiting their house tell him he should give up his proposal. But once got the money, he decides to go even if it's already nine o'clock. He gets to the shop centre when it's going to close and he can't buy anything. He finds a woman who is a shop assistant, but is more interested in two young gentlemen's courting than in selling anything to the protagonist. Here is his “epiphany”: just like the woman who uses the two gentlemen's court to be pleased by them, his friend's sister has used him as an instrument to get something from “Araby”. He is very angry and says: “I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity, and my eyes burned with anguish and anger”.

“Eveline”

The title of the story is the name of the protagonist. She is a young woman whose mother has died and who has to take care of her family. Her father is a drunkard and is very violent. She is in love with a young sailor and they have planned to leave Ireland to establish in Argentina where he has a house. She is very undecided either to go or to stay at home. Some days she hated the quarrels with his father and she wished to go away. But that is her home in which she has grown up. Now it's time to go and she leaves her home to reach the quay. “All the stormy seas of the world are raging in her heart” while she is firmly gripping to the iron railing. Now there is her “epiphany”: “No! No! It's impossible”. She runs away, she doesn't show signs of love, farewell or recognition to Frank, her lover. The family prevails on her love and she understands she is paralyzed and bound to the place where she lives. The safety of the place of birth is stronger than the uncertainty of the future in a far country.