The Cambridge Introduction to James Joyce

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Chapter 3

Works

Dubliners

Dubliners is the most widely read of Joyce's works. It is accessible, easy to read, and deceptively straightforward. Even if Joyce had never gone on to write *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*, *Dubliners* would have earned him a place in literary history as a skilled prose technician. But since we know that *Dubliners* was just one step in a career that spanned more than three productive decades, it also needs to be seen as a starting point, a place where Joyce was in his workshop discovering his powers as a writer of fiction. Although he would go on to reinvent the form of the novel, he first had to figure out how to tell a story, put a plot together, develop characters, and craft a conversation.

Dublin was the setting for virtually all his works. As early as *Dubliners* he had big plans for his native city and the desire to make it the literary capital of the twentieth century:

> I do not think that any writer has yet presented Dublin to the world. It has been a capital of Europe for thousands of years, it is supposed to be the second city of the British Empire and it is nearly three times as big as Venice. Moreover . . . the expression "Dubliner" seems to me to have some meaning and I doubt whether the same can be said for such words as "Londoner" and "Parisian" both of which have been used by writers as titles. (*LII*, 122)

Although Ireland became an independent nation in 1922 after the Anglo-Irish War, Joyce's works are restricted to the first decade of the twentieth century when

it was still a colony of the British Empire, and when the Roman Catholic Church still had an enormous impact on religious, social, and political life. Joyce blamed these two forces for Dublin's backwardness and inferiority. If the Catholic Church had the souls of Dublin in its grip, then the British Empire had forced these same souls into political and economic submission. There were psychological repercussions as well. After centuries of foreign invasion, the Irish learned to oppress themselves. It was precisely this self-oppression that frustrated Joyce most, and he believed that his writing could in some modest way change the way the Irish saw themselves. Before any political or religious revolution could take place, serious self-reflection was required. At an early age and with a dozen short stories, he believed that he was just the man for the job. "I seriously believe," he told the eventual publisher of *Dubliners*, "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" (*LI*, 63–64).

In *Dubliners,* we find a number of lower-middle-class types and a remarkable absence of upper-class or blue-collar Dubliners. There are also perverts, alcoholics, gadabouts, scammers, and good-for-nothings intent on destroying themselves or those around them. Everyone in Dublin seems to be caught up in an endless web of despair. Even when they want to escape, Joyce's Dubliners are unable to. The young woman in "Eveline" is a perfect example. Instead of choosing a new life in Buenos Aires (where many have suspected that her beau Frank will turn her into a prostitute), she stays put in Dublin: "She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal" (*D*, 31, 34). In "A Little Cloud," Ignatius Gallaher has escaped to London and made it as a journalist, but he returns to Dublin as jaded as ever. Even Little Chandler gets disillusioned by Gallaher's worldliness and begins to feel like he "was patronizing Ireland by his visit" (76).

It was precisely the grittiness of Joyce's realism that made it difficult for him to land a publisher. In February 1906 he reached an agreement with a London publisher, Grant Richards, and negotiations moved along smoothly – until Joyce asked to include two more stories, "Two Gallants" and "A Little Cloud." At this point the printer objected to certain passages in "Two Gallants," "Counterparts," and "Grace" and refused to go ahead with the printing until they were revised or omitted. Infuriated by their moralistic meddling, Joyce pleaded his case: "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" (*LII*, 134). As part of his defense, Joyce asked Richards why the printer did not object to the themes of "A Boarding House" and "An Encounter." His plan backfired. Richards wrote back immediately to tell Joyce that he personally objected to these stories and

added "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" to the list. After an exchange of letters that lasted more than two years, Joyce withdrew his manuscript and he spent the next eight years looking for another publisher.

In September 1909 he signed another contract, this time with a Dublin publisher, George Roberts from Maunsel and Company. History, however, repeated itself. Like Richards, Roberts objected to offensive and potentially libelous passages, particularly the use of the word "bloody" and a reference to Edward VII. In 1912, after a series of frustrating postponements, Roberts refused to go ahead with the publication until they were omitted. As negotiations collapsed, Roberts claimed that *Dubliners* was anti-Irish. He continued to request changes and even asked Joyce to remove the Dublin place names in order to avoid lawsuits from local businesses. Negotiations stopped there. By a ruse, Joyce walked away with a complete set of proofs, hoping to publish *Dubliners* with his own money back in Trieste. To get back at Roberts, he drafted a satirical broadside called "Gas from a Burner" and had it distributed in Dublin.

In 1913 Grant Richards agreed to reconsider. Almost a decade after writing it, *Dubliners* was published as Joyce originally intended on June 15, 1914 on the condition that he bought 120 copies and received no royalties until 500 copies had been sold. It hardly created the controversy that Richards or Joyce had imagined. Favorable notices appeared in many of the leading literary magazines and journals, and no one cared to really mention the "offensive passages." Realizing that his book had produced more of a whimper than a bang, Joyce sheepishly acknowledged to Richards, "I regret to see that my book has turned out *un fiasco solenne* . . ." (*LII*, 368).

As difficult as it was for Joyce to get *Dubliners* in print, it was also a testament to his amazing resilience. He would often trumpet the fact that he managed to succeed even when it seemed as if the entire world was out to get him. When he first tried to entice Carlo Linati to translate *Exiles* into Italian, he introduced himself as an international man of mystery surrounded by all kinds of cabalistic plots:

> The story of my books is very strange. I had to fight 10 years in order to publish *Dubliners*. The whole edition of 1000 copies was burnt by arson in Dublin: some said it was the work of the priests, some of my enemies, some of the Viceroy or of his wife the Countess of Aberdeen. It is in short a mystery.[1]

This "curious history," as Joyce called it, behind the publication of *Dubliners* reveals just how determined he was to keep his stories exactly as he wrote them. Every word had its proper place and could not be moved or removed without affecting the overall "style": "I have written it [*Dubliners*] 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. I cannot do more than this. I cannot alter what I have written" (*LII*, 134).

Joyce wrote the fifteen stories that make up *Dubliners* between 1904 and 1907.[2] He organized them around the themes of childhood ("The Sisters," "An Encounter," "Araby"), adolescence ("Eveline," "After the Race," "Two Gallants," "The Boarding-House"), maturity ("A Little Cloud," "Counterparts," "Clay," "A Painful Case"), and public life ("Ivy Day in the Committee Room," "A Mother," "Grace"). "The Dead," written in 1907, was a late addition and long enough to be a novella. It recapitulates and synthesizes themes and motifs from these original four categories but functions more as an epilogue. With its broad scope and complexity, "The Dead" also anticipates Joyce's move away from the short story and toward the novel.

Joyce did not conceive of *Dubliners* as a unified collection of short stories from the start. In fact, he wrote "The Sisters," the very first story, in July 1904 after George Russell asked him to conjure up something "simple, rural?" for the *Irish Homestead* (*LII*, 43). Although Joyce would later deride his early experience writing for a "pig's paper" (this is Stephen's phrase in *Ulysses*), he used this opportunity to begin exploring the paralysis of Dublin life. In the process, he ignored Russell's simple request to avoid "shock[ing]" readers and wrote his first story about a nameless little boy's relationship with an aged and dying priest. The relationship between the two leaves a lot to be explained, as does the priest's strange behavior, which we learn about from his sisters once he has died. Did he break the chalice or was it the altar boy? What is he laughing about in the confession-box? When one publisher suspected that there was something else going on in "The Sisters," he asked Joyce pointedly if there was sodomy in the story and whether or not the priest was suspended *only* for breaking the chalice (*LII*, 305–06). Joyce followed up his debut in the *Irish Homestead* with "Eveline" (September 1904) and "After the Race" (December 1904). Russell received so many letters of complaint that he finally asked Joyce to stop submitting his stories.

Every story in *Dubliners* contains some kind of ambiguity or absence that makes it difficult for us to figure out exactly what is happening. Take the opening lines of the version of "The Sisters" that Joyce first published in the *Irish Homestead*:

> Three nights in succession I had found myself in Great-Britain Street at the hour, as if by Providence. Three nights also I had raised my eyes to that lighted square of window and speculated. I seemed to understand

> that it would occur at night. But in spite of the Providence that had led my feet, and in spite of the reverent curiosity of my eyes, I had discovered nothing. Each night the square was lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. It was not the light of candles, so far as I could see. Therefore, it had not yet occurred.[3]

Coming to this story for the first time, readers then and now will ask themselves *what* "had not yet occurred"? What is the little boy looking for up in "that lighted square of window"? From "The Sisters" onward, we are in a predicament not unlike the little boy: we come across situations, conversations, and events that we cannot easily understand.

Before submitting the original twelve stories of *Dubliners* to Grant Richards, Joyce went back to revise "The Sisters," doubling it in length and increasing its complexity. It was now intended to introduce the entire collection. In the revised opening line, Joyce added a literary allusion and a deliberately open-ended word: "There was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke" (*D*, 1). The "no hope," if you have been reading your Dante, alludes to the inscription on the gates of Hell in the *Inferno*: "Abandon every hope, who enter here." Following the colon, the phrase "third stroke" can refer either to the chiming of a clock, since he mentions "time" in the preceding clause, or a heart attack. On a first reading, both meanings seem equally plausible since the little boy, we find out immediately after, is anxiously waiting to find out whether or not the priest is dead. This one line anticipates the allusive method that Joyce would use in all his subsequent works. By alluding to another author, something he will do even more boldly by using the title *Ulysses*, he is not only placing himself within a literary tradition, he is also rewriting it.

In this revised opening Joyce provides three keywords that help us to interpret what follows: "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 the Euclid and the word *simony* in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being" (*D*, 1). "Paralysis," "gnomon," and "simony" are heavily weighted words whose relevance extends well beyond any single story. "Paralysis" is the inability of physical movement, but it is also a spiritual, social, cultural, political, and historical malaise. "Simony" is the selling of material goods for spiritual benefit, but it is also the vulgarization of religion, romance, and the intellect. "Gnomon" is the stylus of a sundial that marks off time with shade and the remainder of a parallelogram after a similar parallelogram containing one of its corners has been removed, but it can also be streched to refer to the missing detail of a story (of which I will say more).

One can readily find motifs of "paralysis" in each of these stories: for example, the priest in "The Sisters" is literally paralyzed by a stroke, Eveline Hill in "Eveline" is a "creature" paralyzed by the fear of leaving home, Little Chandler in "A Little Cloud" is paralyzed by responsibilities of adulthood, Farrington in "Counterparts" is paralyzed by alcoholism, and Mr. Tierney's crew in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is paralyzed by a nostalgia for the good old days when their "Chief" Parnell was still alive. A similar pattern can be found with the term "simony": the little boy in "Araby" confuses romance and commerce, Mrs. Mooney in "The Boarding-House" traps Mr. Doran into marrying the daughter she has dangled like a piece of bait, Corley in "Two Gallants" feigns a love interest for a gold coin, and Mrs. Kearney in "A Mother" ruins her daughter's music career (at least in Dublin) by demanding the payment before the performance.

"Gnomons" can be found all over *Dubliners*: they are the missing bits of information or gaps in the plot that make it impossible for us to arrive at stable interpretations.[4] They challenge us to fill in the gaps, but we have to be content with readings that invite speculation and resist definite conclusions. Not only are we unsure what really "went wrong" with Father Flynn in "The Sisters," we never know, for instance, what the "queer old josser" does in "An Encounter" (urinate? masturbate? expose himself?), how and from whom Corley gets the coin in "Two Gallants," what Mrs. Mooney says to Mr. Doran before calling Polly to the room in "The Boarding House," or what poor Maria touches in "Clay." "Gnomons" like these can be found in all Joyce's later works as well. Does Bertha fool around with Robert in *Exiles*? What does Stephen actually say when he refuses the calling of the priesthood in *Portrait*? Does Bloom ask Molly for breakfast in bed between the "Ithaca" and "Penelope" episodes of *Ulysses*? Where does Stephen plan on spending the night at the novel's end? What did HCE do in Phoenix Park in *Finnegans Wake*?

In addition to gaps in the plot, we find ellipses in conversations. Joyce often drops us in the middle of a conversation and leaves us to piece things together ourselves. When the nameless boy comes into the kitchen in "The Sisters," he listens to the suspicious ramblings of his neighbor, Old Cotter: "No, I wouldn't say he was exactly . . . but there was something queer . . . there was something uncanny about him. I'll tell you my opinion . . ." (*D*, 1). Old Cotter stops there. Father Flynn was *exactly* what? What was "queer" or "uncanny" about him? Old Cotter fails to elaborate, but the ellipses between his unfinished sentences are one way for him to talk to the parents without letting the little boy (and us) in on it. When he resumes later on in the story, Old Cotter argues that children in general should not hang around adults:

"When children see things like that, you know, it has an effect . . ." (*D*, 3). Just as we never find out what that uncanny "something" might be, so, too, do we never find out to what "things like that" refers.

Immediately following this second ellipsis is a dream sequence of what the little boy *might have seen*:

> In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralytic. I drew the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. It murmured; and I understood that it desired to confess something . . . It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist with spittle. (*D*, 3)

Because the troubling image of a priest with moist lips and a murmuring mouth is presented as a dream sequence, it is impossible to know whether Father Flynn really tried to "confess something" or not. The little boy might be dreaming about an event that took place in the past or the unfinished sentences of Old Cotter that day could have been fodder enough to trigger his imagination. In either case, readers will never know exactly what went wrong with Father Flynn and why little boys should not hang around with the likes of him.

But even when we seem to have all the information, these stories still resist closure. In "Araby," for instance, the events leading up to the little boy's visit to the Araby bazaar are easy enough to follow: he has a crush on "Mangan's sister" and since she is unable to go, he promises to bring her back "something" (*D*, 24). When he finally arrives at the bazaar, late because his uncle forgot to give him money, he comes across a group of British merchants hocking their wares and flirting with each other. He feigns interest in the wares but walks away disappointed. As the lights in the tent, the little boy has a self-realization: "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (*D*, 28). What is the little boy so anguished and angry about? Is it that his plan to bring something special back to Mangan's sister has been foiled? Does he believe, in watching the adults' flirting, that he has imagined the sincere interest of Mangan's sister where none existed? Or does he realize that he has confused his own chivalric dreams with the real world? The possibility for multiple interpretations is precisely what lends these stories their enduring power. Joyce does not give us easy answers. Instead, he challenges us to search for them ourselves.

The interpretation of *Dubliners* is further complicated by narrative point of view. It is the narrator, after all, who sets the scene and tells us what the

characters say and do. As we move from story to story, it is not always easy to identify who is speaking and what relationship the narrator has with the characters. In the three stories that comprise the "childhood" section, we have a first-person narrator, who remains nameless. It may be the same little boy for each of them, but we can never be certain. In each story a child tries to make sense of events as they happen in a grown-up world: the death of a priest, an encounter with an old pervert, and a visit to a rundown bazaar. The narrator, we presume from the sophistication of the language, has already had these experiences, but the stories are retold as if they have only just happened, without the wisdom of hindsight.

"An Encounter" provides an interesting example of the kinds of narrative blindspots that occur throughout *Dubliners*. In this story, a little boy and his friend, Mahoney, meet an old man on the outskirts of Dublin. He talks to them about school, girls, and books, but it is not until the old man gets up, walks away, and does "something" that the perspective of our narrator becomes problematic: Why doesn't the little boy look up when Mahoney tells him to? Does he already have some vague notion of what the "queer old josser" is up to? Why does the narrator, who is older and presumably wiser than the little boy, choose to keep it a mystery? The narrator's refusal to tell us what the little boy sees could be a matter of perspective: he might not have seen anything, so there is nothing to report. But even if he did not see what the queer old josser was doing, it is difficult to imagine that Mahoney would not tell him on the way home. For whatever reason, the older narrator, who obviously knows what the old man did, represses it.

For the other twelve stories in *Dubliners*, a third-person narrator steps in. Traditionally speaking, a third-person narrator is a detached observer, a fly on the wall who listens and watches what the characters are up to. Third-person narrators are not always omniscient, but they often have a perspective on events, conversations, and characters that it would be impossible for any single character to have. In *Dubliners*, we also find that the third-person narrator often shares a particular character's perspective and speaks in a way that a character might.

In "Clay" we have a perfect example of how this "narrative mimicry" works. In the first half or so of the story, the narrator describes Maria, an older woman, who works at the Dublin by Lamplight laundry for reformed prostitutes. That night she is planning to go to the Donnelly house for a Halloween party. Along the way she stops to pick up plumcake for the children and the parents. She never speaks directly, but the narrator tells us what she is thinking at various points: "What a nice evening they would have, all the children singing!" (*D*, 96). Who says this? Why is there an exclamation

mark? We assume that this is Maria thinking about the night ahead, but it could also be the narrator imagining what Maria might be thinking. When she meets the "elderly gentleman" on the tram, we are told: "and while she was going up along the terrace, bending her tiny head under the rain, she thought how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he has a drop taken" (*D*, 99). Unlike the previous example, the "she thought" indicates that the narrator is reporting Maria's thoughts. As readers, we never believe that we have unmediated access to Maria's head, but we buy into the fact that there is a narrator who does.

So far, we assume that the third-person narrator identifies with Maria, but the narrator also has a perspective that Maria does not. When she arrives at the party and agrees to play the Halloween game, the relationship between the narrator and Maria becomes more complicated. Once the children put a blindfold on her, here is what follows:

> She moved her hand about here and there in the air and descended on one of the saucers. She felt a soft wet substance with her fingers and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage. There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering. Somebody said something about the garden, and at last Mrs Donnelly said something very cross to one of the next-door girls and told her to throw it out at once: that was no play. Maria understood that it was wrong that time and so she had to do it all over again: and this time she got the prayer-book. (*D*, 101)

Where is our narrator in this passage? At this moment we can only hear what is happening. We do not get to see what the children and the girls next door have done. Because of the "scuffling and whispering" and the "cross" words of Mrs Donnelly, we might surmise that they have played a trick on Maria. Although we might expect the narrator to show us what is happening, we are instead given the perspective from behind the blindfold.[5] Like Maria, we are left in the dark and never find out what all the commotion is about.

Another missing link can be found in the closing paragraph of "Clay." When singing "I Dreamt that I Dwelt", a song in which a kidnapped woman recalls her formerly lavish life, Maria repeats the first verse and forgets the second one entirely. The narrator, who informs us that everyone recognized her mistake, represses the missing verse like Maria. For readers who do not know the song, its relationship to the rest of the story appears inconsequential. But if one already knows or cares to track down the second verse, the meaning of her "mistake" and Joe Donnelly's subsequent emotional response ("Joe was very much moved") becomes more difficult to untangle:

> I dreamt that suitors sought my hand,
> That knights on bended knee,
> And with vows no maiden heart could withstand,
> They pledged their faith to me.
> And I dreamt that one of that noble band,
> Came forth my heart to claim,
> But I also dreamt, which charmed me most
> That you loved me all the same. (*D*, "Appendix III," 234)

From what we know of Maria's lonely and austere life at the laundry, we can safely assume that there are no suitors on bended knee waiting for her back home.

Whatever the relationship might be between this missing stanza and Maria's unconscious fears and desires, it does come to bear on the way that we understand Joe's subsequent emotional response. From the story we know that Maria is Joe's surrogate mother ("Mama is mama but Maria is my proper mother"), and he acts as her stand-in, if not her real, brother (one can never be certain). After she omits the second verse, it is unclear whether Joe is really touched by the romantic song or whether he is struck by the contrast between the missing verse and Maria's celibate life:

> But no one tried to show her her mistake; and when she ended her song Joe was very much moved. He said that there was no time like the long ago and no music for him like poor old Balfe, whatever other people might say; and his eyes filled up so much with tears that he could not find what he was looking for and in the end he had to ask his wife to tell him where the corkscrew was. (*D*, 102)

At this moment the narrator describes the situation as the drunken Joe might. Even though Joe attributes his tears to the nostalgic song and "the long ago," we might also venture a guess that he is hiding something: he, like Maria, is repressing something that bothers him.

To unravel what this something might be, we should stop and consider that Joe has been blinded by tears in much the same way that Maria was blindfolded and duped by the little children and their "soft, wet, substance" earlier in the evening. Although we never know what Maria put her hand in, she does eventually get the prayer-book, which means, as far as the holiday game is concerned, that she will enter a convent before the year is out. Joe, on the other hand, gets the corkscrew, an object that can be read on one level as another escape to the drink or a sign that he can get what Maria cannot: a screw.

"Two Gallants" was a late addition to the original twelve stories. It was Joyce's second favorite story next to "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" and caused him the greatest deal of trouble in getting *Dubliners* published. Richards's printer found the story obscene. To defend himself, Joyce asked Richards:

> Is it the small gold coin in the former story or the code of honour which the two gallants live by which shocks him? I see nothing which should shock him in either of these things. His idea of gallantry has grown up in him (probably) during the reading of the novels of the elder Dumas and during the performance of romantic plays which presented to him cavaliers and ladies in full dress. (*LII*, 132–33)

As part of his strategy, Joyce attempted to beat the censors by claiming that the shock of his story could not be easily named. At this stage he had obviously begun to realize how effective his "gnomonic" technique could be.[6]

"Two Gallants" also provides a synthesis of and elaboration on the narrative techniques and themes that I have been discussing so far. Here we find a restricted time frame, hopeless characters, themes of paralysis and simony, symbols, and "gnomonic" conversations and situations. In many ways "Two Gallants" offers something of a late style in Joyce. We find the theme of Irish self-betrayal that occupies Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait* and the geographical precision of *Ulysses*. Lenehan and Corley are representative of the kind of Irishman that Joyce despises most of all because they actively contribute to Ireland's political and psychological submission to the British Empire. When Joyce wrote "Two Gallants," he was feeling even more frustrated than ever with his fellow countrymen and women:

> For the love of the Lord Christ change my curse-o'-God state of affairs. Give me for Christ' sake a pen and an ink-bottle and some peace of mind and then, by the crucified Jaysus, if I don't sharpen that little pen and dip it into fermented ink and write tiny little sentences about the people who betrayed me send me to hell. After all, there are many ways of betraying people. (*LII*, 110)

In "Two Gallants" we are thrown abruptly into a conversation between two men whose names are temporarily withheld ("the one" and "the other"). Lenehan's emphatic retort at the very beginning, "That takes the biscuit," fails to explain what story Corley has been telling him as they walk down Rutland Street (*D*, 44). When Corley picks up where he left off, we discover that he has been recounting his exploits with a young girl, who works in a house on Baggot Street (the street where we will find the two gallants at the end).

Although it would seem at first that Corley's encounter with the "slavey" might be the main focus of the story, the narrator instead trails Lenehan, who does little else but wander around the streets, eat a plate of peas, meditate on his lonely life, and wait for the return of his friend. When Corley finally arrives, we witness the final encounter from Lenehan's perspective, one unfortunately eclipsed by Corley's broad back:

> Corley remained standing at the edge of the path, a little distance from the front steps. Some minutes passed. Then the hall-door was opened slowly and cautiously. A woman came running down the front steps and coughed. Corley turned and went towards her. His broad figure hid hers from view for a few seconds and then she reappeared running up the steps. (*D*, 54)

Despite the fact that Corley shows Lenehan a "gold coin" as they walk away, it is not clear how he acquired it. With Corley's "broad figure" in the way, there is no direct view of the exchange, only the evidence that Corley has a gold coin in his hand when he walks away.

Where did the coin come from? Did the woman steal it from the proprietor of the house, or has she given Corley money that she has earned? Regardless of what has happened, the unnamed woman is presented as a thief or a victim and the "gallant" Corley as a swindler. What does Lenehan get out of it? We know from the story that he is an notorious leech, but it is difficult to ascertain why he is so invested in Corley's exploits. His anxiety about the whole affair would seem to suggest that he might get a share of the booty or has plans to borrow from his friend. The possibility that they are in cahoots might help to explain why the story is titled "Two Gallants" and not "A Gallant." As with the other stories, however, we can only guess (the pair will pop up again in *Ulysses* still as desperate as ever).

The "small gold coin" in Corley's hand is significant as much for its monetary as its symbolic value. As many readers at the time would have known, the "small gold coin" was a sovereign, a unit of currency in the United Kingdom worth a pound. Considering that the average salary for a domestic servant was four to eight pounds a year, this was a significant sum.[7] Although unnamed, the sovereign also signifies more indirectly the British imperial authority over Ireland. Whether or not the coin was stolen from the proprietor of the house, the implied exchange between Corley and the woman represents the complicity with which the Irish contribute to their own colonial condition.

But the coin is also a circle that many readers have seen as a symbol of Irish paralysis and self-betrayal. "Two Gallants" is a story filled with such

circles. The solitary Lenehan walks in circles around Dublin if you trace his route on a map, the moon pops up as a "circle with a double halo" and a "pale disc," Lenehan's waist is rotund, and Corley's head "globular" (*P*, 46, 45) These circles are there to remind us that no one can escape from Ireland.[8] They do not give us the "open sesame" for any final interpretation but do contribute to the rich texture of each story and demonstrate the degree to which Joyce's realism was shaped by the evocative power of signs and symbols.

By the time Joyce came to write "The Dead" in the spring of 1907, he had had a change of heart about Dublin. He had been intent on wafting the "special odour of corruption" under the noses of his fellow Dubliners with his earlier stories, but after living away from Ireland for three years, he decided to end his collection on a more forgiving note (*LIII*, 123).[9] In a generous mood he wrote to Stanislaus, "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 hospitality. The latter 'virtue' so far as I can see does not exist elsewhere in Europe" (*LII*, 166). Although *Dubliners* originally concluded with a moment of spiritual emptiness in "Grace," "The Dead" offered a glimpse of some good old-fashioned Irish hospitality.

"The Dead" deals as much with "the living and the dead" as it does with the living dead. The guests arrive at Julia Morkan's house to celebrate the annual Christmas party. Tradition is not necessarily a bad thing, but in this instance there is the feeling that these characters are merely caught up in the seasonal routine. Although they gather together to celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, which marks the visit of the Magi to the newly born Christ, there is a conspicuous absence of any religious rituals. In fact, no one ever mentions exactly what it is they are there to celebrate. In his speech, Gabriel Conroy talks instead about Irish hospitality and camaraderie, and he lapses for a moment into more nostalgic "thoughts of the past, of youth, of changes, or absent faces" (*D*, 205). Every character, it seems, has one foot anchored firmly in the past: for the aged Aunt Julia, there is no greater tenor than Parkinson (unknown even to the pompous tenor Bartell D'Arcy), Miss Ivors has rallied behind Irish nationalist causes obsessed with recovering a lost history and language, Gretta Conroy is consumed by the memory of a dead boy, Freddy Malins cannot escape the drink, and Mr. Browne needs to find another joke ("I'm all brown," he keeps saying, for a laugh). The language of the story is heavy with allusions to death and dying. When Gretta first appears at the party after three "mortal hours" of dressing, the Morkan sisters remark, "she must be perished alive" (*D*, 176–77). When the conversation at the dinner

table turns to the monks who sleep in their coffins, the narrator notes, "As the subject had grown lugubrious it was buried in a silence of the table . . ." (*D*, 202).

Gabriel represents what Joyce might have become had he stayed in Ireland. In his lecture on Ireland, which Joyce delivered in Trieste around the time he was writing "The Dead," he told his Triestine audience, "No one who has any self-respect stays in Ireland, but flees afar as though from a country that has undergone the visitation of an angered Jove" (*CW*, 171). Although Gabriel does not seem to think so, he is as trapped as his fellow Dubliners. He goes on annual cycling tours of the Continent, but they are only temporary. He claims not to get involved in politics or nationalist movements, but he writes book reviews for a pro-British newspaper, *the Daily Express*, and refuses to sign them with his full name (he prefers to use initials). In reality, he has not spent enough time reflecting on just who he is and what he has become. When Miss Ivors confronts him about his book reviews, he loses his cool and blurts out, "I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!" (190). When she asks him why, he does not respond. This entire story, however, is organized around this very question: Why is Gabriel so sick of Ireland? And if he is, why doesn't he leave?

"The Dead" is set during a single evening in which Gabriel will have to come up with an answer. We get a broad sweep of the evening's festivities, but the narrator spends most of the time concentrating on Gabriel. His social interactions are not very successful. In the course of a few hours, he accidentally offends Lily, the caretaker's daughter, by inquiring about her marriage prospects, his wife Gretta pokes fun at his affected cosmopolitan taste for galoshes, and Miss Ivors derides his lack of interest in all things Irish. These disappointments prepare him for the final blow when Gretta tells him that a seventeen-year-old consumptive boy called Michael Furey may have died for her, having visited her in the rain when he heard that she was leaving.

Gabriel is physically present at the party, but his mind is elsewhere. Because the third-person narrator tracks his thoughts so assiduously, we get an intimate look into his deepest fears, desires, and insecurities. He seems to think that he is intellectually superior to everyone else and worries that his speech is too sophisticated for those in attendance: "The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his. He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand" (*D*, 179). He wants to run away, but he must content himself with imagining what it must be like outside: "Gabriel's warm trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window. How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out

alone, first along the river and then through the park! . . . How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper table!" (*D*, 192).

Gabriel's detachment is not reserved only for the guests at the party. In one revealing scene as the party is winding down, he lapses into a moment of artistic reverie when he sees "a woman" on the staircase listening to music. The woman, he will later realize, is his wife, Gretta. This scene sets the stage for what will happen at the story's close. Instead of seeing his wife at the top of the stairs, Gabriel attempts to turn her into an idealized abstraction: "He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter, he would paint her in that attitude . . . *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter" (*D*, 211). What Gabriel fails to realize at this moment is the fact that Gretta is not listening to distant music. She is completely enthralled by Bartell D'Arcy's rendition of the "Lass of Aughrim", a song that Michael Furey once sang to her shortly before he died.

The full effects of this distance are played out once Gretta and Gabriel arrive back at the hotel after the party. Although Gabriel has hopes of an amorous evening together, he soon realizes that Gretta is "abstracted" from him. It is here that she tells him about Michael Furey. The memory of the young boy forces Gabriel to take a good hard look at himself: "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" (*D*, 221). He never loved Gretta with the same intensity as the young boy, and she is no longer "the face for which Michael Furey braved death" (223). Although he is firmly anchored in the past, his thoughts turn to the future.

As Gretta falls asleep on the bed, he reflects on "his own people" and "his own country," the Irish things he has rejected. This much-celebrated final paragraph, however, does little to resolve the uncertainty of Gabriel's future: Will this sudden discovery of a lost love bring him and Gretta closer together? Or has he accepted the possibility that they will live together in middle age as pleasant, passionless companions? The symbolism of the "snow" and his acknowledgment that "the time had come for him to set out on his journey westward" are often read as Gabriel's acceptance of oblivion and forgetfulness (*D*, 225).

Such a reading of Gabriel's acquiescence to death, forgetting, and Ireland does little to explain the life-affirming note a few paragraphs earlier as he lays down next to Gretta: "Better pass boldly into that other world than fade and wither dismally with age" (*D*, 224). Gabriel learns from the memory of a dead

boy that a brief passionate life can be more meaningful than a long passionless one. Such a revelation does not imply that he wants to end up buried "on the hill" next to Michael Furey, nor does it suggest that Gabriel is ready to embrace an Irish cultural revival. Instead, this lyrical final paragraph with its trance-inducing alliteration ("*s*oul *s*wooned *s*lowly . . . *s*now . . . univer*s*e . . . de*s*cent") and chiastic structure ("falling faintly . . . faintly falling") reveals that Gabriel has begun to see himself not just in terms of the larger cycle of life and death but in his relationship to Ireland and its place in the wider universe. To appease Gretta, he may decide to join the tour with Miss Ivors around the west of Ireland, but it is also possible that he will board another ferry for his annual bicycle trip around the Continent. As with all Joyce's endings, we can only guess what the morning after will bring.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

When Joyce first arrived in Trieste in 1905, he was carrying along an autobiographical novel entitled *Stephen Hero*. Like *Dubliners*, it, too, had "the defect," he once joked, "of being about Ireland" (*LII*, 132). He continued to draft sections on and off for two years as he was writing stories for *Dubliners*. But when negotiations with Grant Richards over *Dubliners* finally collapsed, so did his desire to finish what he had started. He planned sixty-three chapters, but only got to twenty-five. In 1907 he threw much of the original manuscript away and began revising and refining a new book called *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.[10] In 1909 he gave the new chapters to one of his students, Ettore Schmitz, as a language exercise. Schmitz was impressed by what he read, and his kind words encouraged Joyce to forge ahead. By 1911 *Dubliners* had still not been published and Joyce threw what he had written of *Portrait* into the fire. Thanks to the timely intervention of his sister Eileen, however, the manuscript was rescued. Through the good graces of Harriet Shaw Weaver and Ezra Pound, *Portrait* was serialized in *The Egoist* between 1914 and 1915 and published as a complete book in 1916. If *Dubliners*, as Joyce once said, represents his "last look at Dublin," *Portrait* is a "picture of [his] spiritual self."[11] As the final words in *Portrait* attest, the "picture" took ten years and two countries to complete: "Dublin 1904, Trieste 1914."

The idea for what would become *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* came to Joyce after he wrote an essay for the Irish periodical *Dana* in 1904.[12] Following his brother's suggestion, he called his essay "A Portrait of the Artist," adapting the title from Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* and Oscar