



Dubliners

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Joyce views his native city as a center of paralysis, denying its citizens opportunities to grow in understanding of themselves and the social forces that determine their lives. Through the successive stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and public life, this theme of insufficiency of will is pursued: only the final story, "The Dead," brightens this gloomy portrait of a moribund society by the recognition of its humor and hospitality.

Each of these deceptively simple stories focuses on an epiphany (a moment of insight into character or society). The complex and brilliant handling of language and structure suggests levels of meaning beneath the dull surface of the texts. The effect of this technical virtuosity is to illuminate the historical, mythological, political, and social patterning which make all but impossible the assertion of psychological freedom in the Dublin of 1900.

The protagonists in these stories are caught in circumstances beyond their control, and they surrender pathetically to them. They are the victims of self-deception, clumsy educators, greed, laziness, colonialism, religious servility, and an excessive desire to be socially accepted. Only in "The Dead" does Joyce indicate that his native Ireland may have the spiritual resources to counter its malaise.

Bibliography

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Wachtel, Albert. *The Cracked Lookingglass: James Joyce and the Nightmare of History*. London: Associated University Presses, 1992. Analyses of the texts as "fictional histories" in which cause and chance prove equally illuminating.

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