

## Review

**José María Tejedor Cabrera. *Guía a “Dublineses” de James Joyce*. Sevilla: Editorial Kronos, 2002, 424 pp.**

**G**uía a “Dublineses” de James Joyce, in its author’s own words, was not conceived as an ambitious book. José María Tejedor states on the very first page of his study that “Los capítulos que siguen aspiran a ayudar, o al menos acompañar, al lector o lectora en su aproximación a la primera obra narrativa del que sin duda es considerado por todos el escritor más afamado y más atrevido del mundo” (1). And in the following lines Tejedor acknowledges that there are many Joyceans who would rather discard reading guides, since they “ofrecen una interpretación y la imponen al lector” (1). Despite these initial statements and its title, *Guía a “Dublineses” de James Joyce* is, in fact, much more than a useful reading guide. The book can be considered as an early twenty-first century timely compilation and revision of previous criticism on Joyce’s first work, and it also manages to offer further insight into the short stories, especially in relation to the importance of silence(s) in them, a topic on which Tejedor successfully and consistently concentrates throughout his analysis of each of the stories.

The book is classically though conveniently divided into fifteen chapters, devoting thus a chapter to each of the stories in Joyce’s *Dubliners*. What the reader appreciates first of all in the analysis of each story is the author’s knowledge and sensible use of former criticism, something that is not always demonstrated by the mere inclusion of a complete and comprehensive bibliography. Tejedor offers us both the bibliography and, throughout his own study, demonstrates a dexterous use of it, establishing enlightening dialogues with previous works of criticism, as is the case in his analysis of “Clay.”

A pedagogical close reading of each of the stories, which from a narratological perspective are meticulously analysed, is successfully combined with psychological, deconstructive, feminist, and other critical approaches that do justice to Joyce’s artistry as a writer of modern short stories. Therefore, classic readings of some of the stories are updated—“Araby,” for instance, is mainly interpreted as a playful revision of courtly love literature—and new historical insights are offered into stories traditionally avoided by critics of *Dubliners*, as is the case of

"After the Race"; and special justice is done to "The Dead," Joyce's masterpiece.

In the Prologue, Tejedor points to the ambiguities, mysteries, information gaps, gnomonic structures, etc., that urge the reader to participate actively as interpreter of the stories. I found especially convincing his emphasis on the relevance of silence and on the ethical possibilities that those silences open for the reader, since they could imply, as Tejedor acknowledges, that Joyce "[n]o limita, ni juzga, sino que más bien sugiere una comunicación directa de la experiencia y abre las puertas a la participación del lector en las mismas" (10).

Tejedor emphasizes frequently the evaluative task that awaits the reader of *Dubliners* and, especially in the "Epilogue," points to feasible reader verdicts on many of the protagonists and incidents of the stories. Joyce dexterously presented us with an ascetic narrative in which "Las acciones son simplemente acciones; la moralidad, amoralidad o inmoralidad se la impone cada lector" (337-38); "Joyce no es escéptico, ni anula la posibilidad de juzgar, sino que suspende el juicio" (339). Therefore, the reader has to fill in the blanks, listen to the silences, and evaluate what the texts have told and what they have left out. This is certainly true, but Joyce's stories demand from their readers that they go further than that, and see in those words as well as in the silences that crowd *Dubliners* not only the possibility of judging the other but the necessity of assessing our own selves. Not in vain Joyce had said that he always wrote about Dublin since "[I]f I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal" (*JIII* 505). I would add that Joyce was well aware that if he could get to the heart of *Dubliners*, he could get as well to the heart of the modern reader.

In this sense, although Tejedor comments profusely on the condition of the protagonists at the end of the stories, and accurately signals the meagre circumstances in which many of them are left ("El momento final no es de revelación y el protagonista no gana nada" ["Una nubecilla" 183]; "Aun así, es difícil determinar si tal experiencia es suficiente para abrir una puerta que lo saque de su solipsismo egoísta" ["Un caso doloroso" 237]), hinting only at the possibility of change and regeneration in the case of Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead" (324-325), we must not lose sight of the fact that both Stephen Daedalus in *Stephen Hero* (188) and Stanislaus Joyce in *My Brother's Keeper* (134) signalled that the meaning and relevance of the revelatory moment had been grasped by the author that noted it down, and can and should also be apprehended either by the character and/or by the reader that interprets it.

*Dubliners*, we must not forget, is a collection of stories that tell us many things about the physical, psychological, cultural and sociological condition of the inhabitants of Dublin at the turn of the century, but they certainly also tell us a lot about our own selves.

Tejedor does not lose sight at any moment of the relationships among the different stories, and intelligently signals points in common, contrasts, and equivalences that should be taken into account in favour of a comprehensive appraisal of Joyce's *Dubliners*. The author includes many final notes, and the interest and relevance of the information offered in most of them might make some readers prefer their inclusion as footnotes, something that always facilitates our reading, although it must be said that the length of some of the notes makes it formally and visually more appropriate to locate them at the end of the book.

This is, then, a “guide” that will certainly appeal to students and teachers of English literature, but the Joycean scholar should not be misled by the title of a book that could probably have included a reference—a subtitle, for instance—to one of its most important contributions: the analysis of the recurrence, the importance and the function of silence in the stories.

We can agree or disagree more or less with some of the interpretations that appear in this well-documented and profusely detailed analysis of each of the stories—some readers could consider, for instance, Tejedor's judgments of the female characters in “The Boarding House” and “A Mother” too acrid—but we will not remain indifferent to a work that begins with its author encouraging the reader to interact with his work: “desde aquí invito a la oferta y contraoferta, e incluso a la polémica, si es que las reflexiones que a continuación se presentan la merecen” (2). What we read in *Guía a “Dublineses” de James Joyce* is certainly worth commenting on, discussing and even dissenting from. However, this will not always be an easy task, since the author has proven not only to be an expert Joycean but to have an impressive knowledge of literature (both classic and modern), music, painting, etc., which makes him a counterpart in encyclopaedic knowledge to the Irish genius, and which makes his book an impressive piece of scholarship.

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