Dublinés
Author:
Alfonso Zapico

James Joyce is rightly considered to be one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. His work has also acquired a reputation for being enigmatic and obscure. As Joyce transformed his own life into literature, knowing something of his life can only enrich any reading of his work. While there are many worthy biographies of Joyce in existence, some of these can also be off-putting in terms of accessibility and weight. Alfonso Zapico's graphic novel *Dublinés* provides a witty and intuitive guide to the life and times of James Augustine Aloysius Joyce. Readers will hopefully be inspired by the insight they gain to tackle *Ulysses* or *Finnegan's Wake*, undaunted by their notoriety.

The comic book format provides*Dublinés* with the visual benefits of a cinematic biopic, but with the added advantage of being able to include more background information in the form of captions, as well as allowing the reader to pause where and when they choose. The seven chapters are devoted to Joyce's family and upbringing, his rebellious youth and his meeting with Nora Barnacle, his move abroad, his self-imposed exile, his friends and associates, the progress of his work, and his final days. *Dublinés*is also a portrait of an era, taking in two world wars and the development of modernism. The frontispiece contains a gallery of personalities who played a part in Joyce's life, with further mini biographies interspersed within the narrative, as well as cameo roles played by such figures asIbsen, Yeats, Pound, Wells, Shaw, Eliot, Woolf, Valéry, Proust, Hemingway, Beckett, Eisenstein, Matisse, Gide, Le Corbusier and Lenin.

Zapico's drawings are reminiscent of vintage newspaper cartoons, and show evidence of the study of black and white photographs and film footage of the era. His style varies from minutely detailed and comprehensively captioned to stark simplicity, in accordance with the context and situation. He succeeds in giving form to his protagonist through consistent characterisation, so that the reader feels an intimacy with the subject. Zapico's travels and research have also paid off in the form of evocative depictions of locations in Dublin, Trieste, Paris and Zurich. In books such as *Dublinés,* the comic can be seen not as a compromise, but a complement to 'proper' literature. *Dublinés* uses its advantage as both a visual and literary medium, by breathing life into the character of Joyce, and graphically portraying both his genius and his folly. Zapico's simple, unpretentious style allows Joyce's character to shine through, providing a portrait of the artist as a self-centred, arrogant and opinionated man who was also brilliant, generous and full of life, and inspired faith in others, even as he drove them to distraction. Above all, Zapico manages to capture Joyce's humour: one of the abiding images from *Dublinés* is where Joyce affirms that *Ulysses* is intended to make people laugh, and that he wrote it to keep critics occupied for the next three hundred years. Required reading for anyone who believes that Joyce is too serious for them.