The poetical collection, Chamber Music (1907), is probably a minor work, but a minor work by a great author, and the poems prove, by closer inspection, to be less simple than first presumed. The juvenile and self-centred verses give an excellent illustration of the melancholic narcissism, which Joyce later castigated intensely in the works of his prime. The masturbatory auto-affection of the narcissist makes the poetical ego incapable of engaging in any interaction with the other, i.e. the beloved (who is revealed as a simulacrum of the poet pure and simple), which is why he characterises himself as "unconsortable" (XXI.5). Since love primarily is
James Joyce's 'Chamber Music' was published in 1907, a tightly organised collection of very singable little love songs published three years after he met his future wife, Nora Barnacle. She was a chambermaid from Galway, and their first outing together—a walk through the Dublin suburb of Ringsend—was sufficiently memorable (she masturbated him) that the date of 16 June 1904 was made the day of the events of Joyce's novel 'Ulysses', and is now celebrated in various fashions around the world as B James. The first poem of 'Chamber Music' sets the tone, not necessarily what you would expect from Joyce, but definitely related to his very fine singing voice: Strings in the earth and air Make music sweet; Strings by the river where The willows meet.