

AN ANALYSIS OF THEMES AND LANGUAGE OF THE CHARACTERS IN JAMES JOYCE'S 'DUBLINERS'



Literature

Keywords: James Joyce, Dubliners, selected stories, themes, characters, Catholic church, Ireland, characters, etc.

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Abstract

The involvement of politics and colonization is a key element in Irish literature, and James Joyce's *Dubliners* is no exception. In his literary works, James Joyce blames British Empire and Roman Catholic Church as the main factors for Dublin's backwardness and inferiority (Bulson, 2006). This was the main reason that Joyce was frustrated and decided to write his short stories collection "Dubliners". *Dubliners* is a collection of 15 short stories written by James Joyce and published in 1914. Joyce believed that these literary works would make the Irish society reflect more about themselves. The entire collection of the stories revolves around the everyday lives of ordinary people in Dublin. In this collection, throughout each story, Joyce expresses disappointment, darkness and paralysis. Therefore, it reflects an intellectual paralysis of the modern society that came as a result of oppression, religion and politics. Joyce's goal was to present different class types from the lower-middle class to upper-class or blue-collar Dubliners. Joyce meant *Dubliners* to be read as a novel that creates an image of a city where its inhabitants grow from innocence to experience. He claims that this short stories collection can be seen as a moral history of Ireland and especially Dublin that is portrayed as a city in decline. In this collection, Joyce criticizes the Irish provinciality, the Catholic Church and the Irish politics of the time. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to make a close analysis of the themes and characters in James Joyce's unique collection of short stories *Dubliners*. One of the most important themes that will be discussed in this study is paralysis, whose centre is Dublin. All the characters in *Dubliners* are portrayed as weak and fearful people who can be considered as slaves of cultural, political and religious life. They are portrayed as narrow-minded people oppressed mostly by the Catholic Church and politics of the time. Other important themes that come as a result of paralysis in *Dubliners* are poverty and corruption and the desire to escape and adventure in other countries. However, death is also a very important theme that will be discussed in this study. Therefore, by paralysis, corruption and death, Joyce portrays a dark picture of his hometown and its inhabitants through symbolism and imagery. The aim of this study is to make a close and detailed analysis of the themes and the characters in short stories collection *Dubliners*. It will address issues such as: What are the most important themes in the collection? How does paralysis influence the characters in *Dubliners*? Why don't they leave Dublin? How can this dark state change? What are the messages that Joyce is trying to express through his stories? Which characters symbolize paralysis? How does Joyce portray Dublin inhabitants through his characters? It will also intend to demonstrate the importance of *Dubliners* as a literary work. It will provide information about the author, the Irish society, and in particular a close and detailed analytic analysis of each story in collection.

Introduction

Most of Joyce's fiction is autobiographical, that is, it is based on his own life experiences. Even though he left his native country, his work is based mainly on Ireland, family, and Roman Catholicism. Joyce's *Dubliners* is a collection of fifteen short stories. He finished writing the work in 1904, but it could not be published until ten years later because the British government thought it contained things that offended the king. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published in 1916, is a semi-autobiographical (based on the author's own life) novel of adolescence (the teenage years). It is the story of *Stephen Dedalus*, a young writer who rebels against the surroundings of his youth. He rejects his father, family, and religion, and, like Joyce, decides at the novel's close to leave Ireland. His name comes from *Greek mythology* (stories that tell of gods

or explain natural occurrences). In the myth Dedalus made a maze to hold the Minotaur (a monster that was half man and half bull). He was jailed in the labyrinth with his son, Icarus. In order to escape, he made wings of feathers and wax, but Icarus flew too near the sun, which melted the wax causing him to die when he plunged into the sea. For Joyce and others after him, Stephen Dedalus became a symbol for all artists. Stephen appears again in *Ulysses*, perhaps Joyce's most respected novel.

The involvement of politics and colonization is a key element in Irish literature, and James Joyce's *Dubliners* is no exception. In his literary works, James Joyce blames British Empire and Roman Catholic Church as the main factors for Dublin's backwardness and inferiority (Bulson, 2006). This was the main reason that Joyce was frustrated and decided to write his short stories collection "Dubliners". *Dubliners* is a collection of 15 short stories written by James Joyce and published in 1914. Joyce believed that these literary works would make the Irish society reflect more about themselves. The entire collection of the stories revolves around the everyday lives of ordinary people in Dublin. In this collection, throughout each story, Joyce expresses disappointment, darkness and paralysis. Therefore, it reflects an intellectual paralysis of the modern society that came as a result of oppression, religion and politics. Joyce's goal was to present different class types from the lower-middle class to upper-class or blue-collar Dubliners. Joyce meant *Dubliners* to be read as a novel that creates an image of a city where its inhabitants grow from innocence to experience. He claims that this short stories collection can be seen as a moral history of Ireland and especially Dublin that is portrayed as a city in decline. In this collection, Joyce criticizes the Irish provinciality, the Catholic Church and the Irish politics of the time. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to make a close analysis of the themes and characters in James Joyce's unique collection of short stories *Dubliners*. One of the most important themes that will be discussed in this paper is paralysis, whose centre is Dublin. All the characters in *Dubliners* are portrayed as weak and fearful people who can be considered as slaves of cultural, political and religious life. They are portrayed as narrow-minded people oppressed mostly by the Catholic Church and politics of the time. Other important themes that come as a result of paralysis in *Dubliners* are poverty and corruption and the desire to escape and adventure in other countries. However, death is also a very important theme that will be discussed in this paper. Therefore, by paralysis, corruption and death, Joyce portrays a dark picture of his hometown and its inhabitants through symbolism and imagery. The aim of this paper is to make a close and detailed analysis of the themes and the characters in short stories collection *Dubliners*. It will address issues such as: What are the most important themes in the collection? How does paralysis influence the characters in *Dubliners*? Why don't they leave Dublin? How can this dark state change? What are the messages that Joyce is trying to express through his stories? Which characters symbolize paralysis? How does Joyce portray Dublin inhabitants through his characters? It will also intend to demonstrate the importance of *Dubliners* as a literary work. It will provide information about the author, the Irish society, and in particular a close and detailed analytic analysis of each story in collection.

METHODOLOGY

Analytic method will be used as the main method of analysing different material during this research. I will express my personal views and opinions regarding this paper. I will also consult previous studies that are related to this topic. However, this paper will also be carried out using New Historicism as a literary school of criticism. This school is chosen for the fact that it gives great attention to the historical background of the time. New historicism is an approach to literary criticism based on the idea that a literary work should be analysed by relating it to the historical circumstances and ideology of the specific time. Therefore, considering the fact that *Dubliners* is a literary work that was influenced by British colonialism and Roman Catholic Church, this literary school of criticism will play a major role in analysing the historical background of the period.

According to Bressler (2011), literature should be read in relation to history, society and culture along with other factors that help to understand a text's meaning. Thus, a literary text must be produced as a result of a certain context, and as such it is a part of history. *Dubliners* demonstrates how society can affect literature and vice-versa. Hence, each story will be analysed separately and then they will be compared to each other. Different sources, books and authors will be part of this paper to help me conduct a better research. Furthermore, I will consider authors like Eric Bulson, Harold Bloom, MaudEllemann who analysed different aspects of this literary work.

AIMS

This paper aims to explore the major themes, in general and analyze, in particular the major characters and their language used in James Joyce's *Dubliners*. In addition, as mentioned above, this paper's focus is to analyze historical events that helped Joyce to develop these important themes. Therefore, it will give great attention to Catholic Church and how it affected the characters to suffer psychological and spiritual paralysis. Moreover, it will analyze the cultural and political aspects that played a huge role in stopping the characters in *Dubliners* to escape from Ireland. Additionally, a part of this paper will discuss Joyce's opinion about Irish Catholicism and British Empire in his short story collection *Dubliners*. However, the key themes and the most important characters that will be found in each story of the collection, will be the focal point of analysis.

THEMES AND CHARACTERS IN JAMES JOYCE'S SHORT STORIES COLLECTION "DUBLINERS"

Throughout the entire collection Joyce maintained that the colonization of Ireland by England resulted in making Ireland politically powerless and the Irish people psychologically paralyzed. Paralysis as mentioned above is the most important theme of the collection. Paralysis as a word is mentioned from the beginning of the work. It is seen from the first page with the narrator

looking through his window and repeating the word “paralysis” and it also ends with the Ireland portrayed as a paralyzed country. In each story of the collection we see characters that are psychologically paralyzed who cannot take chances and are also unable to take any action. Father Flynn in the first story, “The Sisters” is portrayed as physically paralyzed and as a man who cannot even talk. In the story “A Painful Case”, the emotional paralysis of Mr. Duffy forces him into loneliness. Eveline as the protagonist of the story “Eveline” is also portrayed as physically and mentally paralyzed. According to Joyce, all the people of Ireland are paralyzed, apart from the people who are lying dead in their graves, the living people of Dublin are paralyzed as well. Therefore, in “The Dead” the snow does not fall upon the dead only but it falls upon “all the living and the dead”(192). Joyce’s second great theme of the collection is corruption. This theme is closely related to the theme of paralysis and is illustrate through different characters. Corruption is seen in the first paragraph of “The Sisters”, where the narrator mentions simony. Corruption returns in different guises throughout the collection. In “The Boarding House”, Mrs. Mooney tries to earn money from the young girl that lives under her roof. In addition, poverty is also an important theme of the short stories collection. Lenehan in the story “Two Gallants” is portrayed as a man who lives a miserable life and all he has for dinner is peas and ginger beer. Moreover, Farrington a character of the story “Counterparts”, is seen as a man who spends more than he can afford on booze. Dublin’s poverty is the reason why the characters in *Dubliners* worked even miserable jobs. Therefore, throughout his short stories collection, Joyce explores how poverty and corruption affects the characters. Furthermore, as mentioned above death is also a very important theme of the collection. Death is mentioned in the first story of the collection “The Sisters”. The collection begins with the theme of death and ends with it. Therefore, with paralysis, poverty, corruption and death, and through his characters Joyce pictures, paints and criticizes a dark picture of his hometown and its inhabitants.

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