

Joyce's Perceptive Analysis of the Paralysed City

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Abstract

Joyce once bragged that if Dublin were to be destroyed by some catastrophe, it could be rebuilt brick by brick, using his works. Without a doubt, the city's streets, landmarks and denizens inhabit Joyce's mammoth works, in such a scrupulous, honest approach that Dublin appears transformed into a living personality. He also remarked that his sole intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of his country and he chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to him the centre of paralysis. His other expressive quote goes: "When I die Dublin will be written in my heart". Thus, he did not attempt to describe the beauty of his own city like any other writer but eyed on the spiritual liberation of his country citizens. This essay critically examines Joyce's knack of creating and inspecting the panorama of city Dublin in all the aforementioned aspects.

Keywords: Paralysis, Dublin, City, Streets, Nativity.

When the description of the Dublin city is taken into account, there are many types of writers who come in the picture. While writers like Samuel A. Ossory Fitzpatrick, in the early 20th century, tried to give the historical and topographical account of the city, the other type of writers like Joyce attempted to portray the repugnant smell of corruption and other bad civic conditions. In their efforts to bring out the 'real picture' of the city, they underwent innumerable hardships; their matter of fact depiction of the city was misconstrued by some publishers as upsetting the rhythm and life of Dublin. The publisher of Joyce was emphatic, that he revised and rewrote his story collection *Dubliners*. Relating to his spat with the publisher, he mentions:

"It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having a one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass" (Letters of James Joyce, Vol II, 1966).

But Joyce explicitly revealed his plan even earlier in his letter to Constantine Curran in 1904: "I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" (Letters of James Joyce, Vol I, 1957).

For seven years, he continued to fight with Irish expurgation for his ideas and eventually delivered *Dubliners* in 1914 in full print form. Though Joyce, after the publication of his monumental works, became a familiar figure in the literary circle, it took decades to grab the attention of the writers for their discussion on the subject of paralysis. The characters greatly echoed Joyce's thoughts i.e., the life in Dublin was a grimy, impoverished, tedious that everyday existence lost its sheen long time ago. Though Joyce in many ways tried to realistically carve out the city atmosphere, at times he was not content with himself admitting that he had not perfectly depicted the actuality; "I have reproduced none of the attractions of the city" (Letters of James Joyce, Vol II, 1966).

Many a time he realised the feeling that he was not home. He called his city a lovely place to live and did not fail to admire the city for its vigour, intrinsic beauty and its everyday conversation of changes in arts, culture and politics.

In a letter to his mistress Nora Barnacle, Joyce said: 'How sick, sick, sick I am of Dublin! It is the city of failure, of rancour and unhappiness. I long to be out of it' (Letters of James Joyce, Vol II, 1966). Nevertheless, he went on to write of his home city and its inhabitants employing the most glorious prose and portraying them with instilled humanity.

Many reasons were deemed for the motive of Joyce calling Dublin a paralysed city; some critics argued that it was for that reason that his family moved to the northern part of the city which was not so good in physical shape as the southern part of the city. Others thought that his family's fall from Catholic upper-middle class to a Catholic lower-class might have evoked in him an aversion for the urban society.

But his understanding about the city could be rationally based on the political scenario that prevailed in his time – Dublin during his time was actively engaged in the confrontation of Irish nationalist movement with English Imperialism. Political pressure had been increasing since 1801 when Ireland became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. From 1870 to 1914 was a time of expansion of both national autonomy and countervailing imperialist movements that frequently caused collision among cultural groups. These events and approaches laid a foundation in understanding Joyce's works better, especially, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The Irish National League was led by Charles Stewart Parnell with the principle aims of supporting the farmers for the ownership of the land and establishing the independent rule of Ireland. But those radical thinkers were soon put behind the bars and the faith on the movement was lost. Though from the prison, Parnell continued to make progressions towards the talks for a home rule of Ireland, it was in vain. Adding fuel to the fire, his extramarital relationship and divorce cost Parnell severe uproar among the other leaders and the Catholic Church resulting in

his removal from the position of the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. This is very evident even when Dante in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a devout religious Catholic, supported Parnell before the disgrace. After his death, many people thought that Joyce considered Parnell to have been betrayed by his fellow Irishmen and by Catholics in particular. Proof of Joyce's support of this idea can be found in the *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* when Parnell's death is announced. Joyce reveals, "a wail of sorrow came up from the people" (Joyce, 2003). Joyce could have modestly mentioned about the obviously grief-stricken people who heard the news of their defeated hero.

Or his disassociation with Irish literary movement, which was mostly dominated by Anglo-Irish writers in his time, could have also been one of the reasons for his discontent. As nationalism was on the rise, the literary scholars, artists were vigorously involved with the notions of Irish identity and experience in what was known as the Irish Literary Renaissance. Joyce was the product of this ambiance, but he had an intricate bond with his equals and his state. Joyce totally discarded his current artistic styles and Anglo-Irish literary movement for its hidebound nationalist attitudes. Joyce was always at the forefront with his reformist ideas of persuading his fellow citizens to have a close observation of the past. For him, past did not bring any fruit; it did not free men from religion, servility and false nationalist beliefs.

A great deal of Dublin's urban life has been detained in the pages of *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* and the writer in many ways, has tried to give a glimpse of what life in the city was like. The Barney Kiernan's bar in the 'Cyclops' episode of *Ulysses*, in fact has a history. It was often visited by lawyers and a place where many cases were settled. The bar was inundated with memorabilia and ephemera connected with the past and felony. The set of the letters which are recited in the chapter, were probably used as decorative items to embellish the pub. The 15th chapter Circe of *Ulysses* is set in 'Night Town' - the episode starts at midnight by the entrance to the red light district of Dublin. The place was known in the vicinity as Monto; rumour has it that it was supposedly the largest red light area district in Europe. The Circe episode sees Stephen and Lynch there in Monto with Bloom in pursuit of them.

All through the works, the characters of Joyce walk through different streets because Joyce himself was a passionate walker of Dublin streets. The Mountjoy Square, Gardiner Street, Rutland Square, Buckingham Street, Hardwicke Street and many other areas repeatedly appear throughout his descriptions. They provide a vivid picture of the topography of the city.

"If Joyce chose to be European and international he did so by also being true to his local origins, to the area in which he lived throughout his Belvedere years from 1893 to 1898, mostly at the heart of the Gardiner estate in the vicinity of Mountjoy Square. This is the 'Joyce Country', a district that was undergoing commercial and social change at an accelerating rate which continued into the 1920s and even beyond" (James Joyce in Context, 2009).

The depictions also hint that the city was quite complex and small that it had to have room for all important buildings. In 1904, a huge part of middle-class population had to make way by leaving the city to a segment of badly-housed lower class community.

The collection *Dubliners* when presented to the Dublin city dwellers, it was a beautiful feeling- presenting their own world to them. The streets and buildings in the portrayal were enthralling, if not always attractive, and the people were expressive and often pleasing. The stories did not just give an account of what the author had gone through, but also provided a detailed view of how he remained in the atmosphere. Many of the events and characters are possible Joyces.

Joyce wanted his works to be read as a story of the city of growth, a city of a personality, with its residents budding from innocence to maturity. Dublin, according to Joyce, was the capital of literary cities, a microcosm of the world, and an authentic city of cities, in which Joyce was able to bring life. He says, "For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if 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"

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