

TWO CONNECTING ASPECTS BETWEEN JAMES JOYCE'S *A LITTLE CLOUD*, *CLAY*, *A PAINFUL CASE* AND *THE DEAD*.

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The first of these four short stories deals with characters who are experiencing the maturest point in their lives. This trio plus the tale entitled "Counterparts" are dedicated to adulthood -as the four preceding stories are devoted to adolescence, and the three following are concerned with public life. Nevertheless "The Dead" has never been classified within one of these groups and has always been considered as separate from the rest of the short stories which make up *Dubliners*. This is due to the fact that "The Dead" is in several ways an epitome of all the preceding themes. Accordingly, it includes and fully develops all the structural devices and thematic aspects suggested or employed throughout the collection. And this is what the present paper sets out to demonstrate, how the short story that closes *Dubliners* -especially through its main character, Gabriel, is a compendium of the human features and dilemmas depicted in the preceding characters and stories. The connections between "The Dead" and the short stories "A Little Cloud," "Clay" and "A Painful Case" will be therefore analysed both from a structural and a thematic point of view. The linking aspects we found relevant to such a purpose were two. First of all, a thematic and structural device: what we will call the *centripetal character*, an egocentric figure who appears in each of the stories and whose role is to attract the attention of the rest of the characters towards him or herself. And then an aspect which closes the collection, death, which not only appears in the title of the main story in *Dubliners* but is also present as a topic in "A Little Cloud," "Clay" and "A Painful Case."

As far as the *centripetal character* is concerned, we can distinguish between main and secondary figures. Both types of characters will aspire to be the centre of the situations in which they are involved. They reveal by this attitude a deep frustration and loneliness, feelings they will try to overcome through alcohol. The influence of these self-centred figures will always be negative. Whenever a character tries to educate or impose his or her own ideas on another, the results will be, in varying degrees, ill-fated.

"The Dead," according to its agglutinative role, shows the two aforesaid variants of the *centripetal character*. A celebration, which, according to Octavio Paz, is the human activity which best shows man's hermetism, is the occasion chosen by Joyce to present his characters' egocentricity.¹ The secondary figures, Freddy Malins and

1.- Octavio Paz. *El Laberinto de la Soledad*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980, pp.47-48.

Mr. Browne attract others' attention just as Gabriel, the protagonist, does. Besides, these two characters display Gabriel's defects, his reliance on alcohol for assurance and his histrionic nature. Thus, on page 175, Mr. Browne appears as a "showman" and, on page 185, we are told that Freddy Malins is "acting as an officer."² Both are unconsciously trying to emulate Gabriel's achievement of page 187. There Mr. Conroy manages to constitute the centre of the circle he paces in, in order to make other people laugh. He not only takes possession of this circle -which is ironically, at one and the same time, a symbol of entrapment, but also tries to take possession of the "stage" mentioned by Aunt Kate on page 177, when she points out that everyone is waiting for him. These manifestations of self-centred natures have their corresponding results. On the one hand, Mr. Browne is publicly patronizing and "taking care" of Freddy Malins, preventing the latter's drinking while he pours whisky into his own glass very often. We, the readers, realize that Mr. Browne is incapable of seeing in himself the defects he so notoriously observes in others. On the other hand, the relationship between Gabriel and his wife is also egotistical. Their feelings perfectly suit Octavio Paz's words concerning love and narcissism: "al descubrir sus llagas de amor el enamorado transforma su ser en una imagen, un objeto que entrega a la contemplación de la mujer -y de sí mismo-."³ Thus Gabriel tries to impose his ideas about himself and his wife on the latter ("he must see some ardour in her eyes..." p.195) and this attempt at self-satisfaction only helps to elicit Gretta's sad remembrance of a dead person, Michael Furey. We see in this scene that there is no real communication between Gretta and Gabriel. Their emotions in this climatic moment are completely different ("While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire she had been comparing him in her mind with another", p.197) and Gabriel feels "as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife." (p.199). The protagonist of "The Dead" is totally isolated. He realizes he knows very little about his wife's affections, despises people around him as "vulgarians" (p.198) and tries to overcome his loneliness and frustration by taking a chief role. But his greatness lies in the fact that he is able to see his errors and thinks he is a "ludicrous figure" (p.197) capable of going through a "humiliating process" as Manuel Barbeito points out in his article "*Dubliners: A Style of Scrupulous Meanness*".⁴ A secondary figure, Gretta, can also be compared to another *centripetal character*, Mr. Duffy ("A Painful Case"), because she behaves nearly as narcissistically as him, taking a perverse delight in remembering a young man who supposedly died for her.⁵ Gretta's egotism is less apparent because her case -she is not the protagonist of the story, is dealt with more briefly. To use Antonio Ballesteros' words: "no en vano 'The Dead' es un escenario de seres incompletos, Narcisos en busca de su identidad y que no comprenden totalmente al otro..."⁶

2.-James Joyce, *Dubliners*. London: Grafton, 1986.

3.-*op. cit.*, p.37.

4.- Manuel Barbeito, "*Dubliners: A Style of Scrupulous Meanness*." *Segundos Encuentros James Joyce*. Universidad de Sevilla, Junio, 1991, p.8.

5.- See John Bayley, *The Short Story. Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, p.159.

6.-Antonio Ballesteros González, "El espejo y la lámpara: simbología mítica en 'The Dead'." *Segundos Encuentros James Joyce*. Universidad de Sevilla, Junio, 1991, p.2.

In "A Little Cloud," Gallaher, a secondary character, attracts Little Chandler, the protagonist, with his stories about London and Paris. Here the *centripetal character* represents an appealing but false evasion achieved both through travelling to unknown places and drinking. Though Gallaher has already tried these two ways of escapism, he seems nevertheless as trapped and frustrated as Tommy Chandler. The former's influence on the latter is compared to something so negative for Chandler as the British dominance over Ireland: "He saw behind Gallaher's refusal of his invitation: Gallaher was only patronizing him by his friendliness just as he was patronizing Ireland by his visit." (p.73). A few lines further down, Gallaher is identified with the protestant Britain through "his orange tie." In this frustrating encounter the lack of communication between both friends is obvious: they meet at Corless, a place "with no heart" if we remember the Latin meaning of the word "cor". The protagonist, Little Chandler, evinces this disappointment and solitude at home where the cold eyes of his wife's photograph seem to repel and defy him (p.75). He begins to feel "a dull resentment against his life" and tries to escape his frustration and isolation occupying his mind with poetry, as corresponds to the "delicate and abstinent person" (p.73) he thinks he is. The violence with which he reacts towards his wailing child evidences, once again, that he is not so educated and delicate as he thinks and that there are impulses in him which cannot be avoided. The harmony he tries to impose through the sound of the verses is disturbed by the cries of the baby and Chandler cannot stand this irruption of reality into his fantasy. The significance of this scene is heightened by the lines Little Chandler is reading: "*Within this narrow cell reclines her clay, / That clay where once...*" (p.76).

Both in this story and in the next, clay will stand for the most instinctive aspects of human existence -violence in Little Chandler's case, and repressed sexuality in Maria's, elements which, according to the verses, imprison human existence.

In "Clay", Maria, the protagonist, despises her comrades ("But wasn't Maria glad when the women had finished their tea...", p.92) and directs all her affections to her own being ("she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body.", p.93) and to the two men she has nursed. She considers she is an irreplaceable person in her work (p.90), in the "Drumcondra tram" (p.93) and at Joe's house. But this is only a delusion. In fact all she receives from the people involved in these three segments of her life is disappointment. In parallel scenes, we see Maria's sexual frustration: in the kitchen, the others mockingly say she should get the ring (p.92). In the tram, "the elderly gentleman," whose attentions she so heartily appreciates, probably steals her plumcake. And finally, while she is with Joe and his family, she receives first clay, a reminder of her human nature, and then the Bible. The Bible here is a representative of the character's religious attitude, through which she is unconsciously trying to sublimate her instincts. These events underline "the pathetic constriction and isolation of her existence, and others' lack of sensitivity towards her."⁷ Through the use of "free indirect style" we are told that the protagonist is sure that everybody is very fond of her (p.90).⁸ But her solitude

7.- Ian Reid. *The Short Story*. London: Methuen, 1977, pp.56-7.

8.- Clare Hanson. *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980*. Houndmills: McMillan, 1985, p.56.

proves that nobody actually loves her and she is mistaken in her dreams of "hope", "pride" and "love" as her erroneous singing evinces at the end of the story. She is equally mistaken when she assumes the label "veritable peacemaker", conferred by the others. Her nursing of Alphy and Joe (p.92) has only led to the enmity of the two brothers and Joe's failure (failure is, as usual, shown in the character's use of alcohol as a way to forget his or her situation in life). Maria has transmitted her frustration, pride and wrong conceptions to both men, proving once again that to shape someone else's mind is a perilous task.

In "A Painful Case", the dominant attitude of one character over another is so dangerous that it apparently ends with death. At the beginning of this short story, the protagonist, Mr. Duffy, tries to shape Mrs. Sinico's mind: "Little by little he entangled his thoughts with hers. He lent her books, provided her with ideas, shared his intellectual life with hers. She listened to all." (p.91). Just like Little Chandler, this character suppresses his natural impulses (sexual tendencies, in this case) with intellectual activity (order, music, philosophy), which also helps him to forget about loneliness and frustration. That is why, when Mrs. Sinico shows herself to be physically attracted to this man, demonstrating also that she is not a mere receptacle of the latter's ideas, he decides to leave her. In a scene parallel to the one that closes the volume, the man and the woman involved do not share either feelings or intentions, thus showing the lack of communication between them. Mr. Duffy proudly thinks that "in her eyes he would ascend to an angelical stature" (p.102) while he impersonally talks about "the soul's incurable loneliness". Ironically, Mrs. Sinico receives these words as a call for love and sympathy and consequently takes her companion's hand and presses it "passionately" against her cheek. Like the lover described by Octavio Paz, Mr. Duffy expects only admiration without having to be at all involved.⁹ After being thwarted, he decides to go back to his former isolation: "he had neither companions nor friends, church nor creed. He lived his spiritual life without any communion with others", p.99. His self-centredness is made even more apparent through his reaction when he finds out about Mrs. Sinico's death or suicide. She revealingly dies of "shock and sudden failure of the heart's action" (p.104) and the distant, cold, matter-of-fact language used in the newspaper revolts Mr. Duffy. This first impression is followed by the character's thinking that he is responsible for "his soul's companion"'s death without realizing that this took place four years after he left her. He also does not realize that she tried to escape loneliness (she is constantly being left alone by both her husband and her daughter) through alcohol only two years after they had come apart. Thus, Mr. Duffy's pride and arrogance are evidenced again. He cannot realize that he was not so important, that his stature was not so "angelical" as to commit suicide for him.

The conclusion of all these frustrations, this solitude and this lack of communication is the epitome of paralysis and isolation: death. Though this commonplace seems to gain utmost importance only towards the end of *Dubliners*, it is actually present and

9.-*Ibid.*: El enamorado, "al presentarse como espectáculo y pretender que se le mire con los mismos ojos con que él se ve, se evade del juego erótico, pone a salvo su verdadero ser, lo sustituye por una imagen."

significant all along. Thus, death appears and plays a distinctive role in "A Little Cloud", "Clay", "A Painful Case" and, obviously, in "The Dead".

In the latter short story, we find all kinds of manifestations of this theme. First of all we are told about dead relatives (p.160), dead princes (p.169) and dead opera singers (pp.179-180). With such a background, we can begin to suspect what is awaiting us. Then, on p.181, the guests of the Misses Morkans' party talk about a certain monastic order whose members "never spoke, got up at two in the morning and slept in their coffins." There is a very important point in this passage: the association between religion and death in life or paralysis. It is exemplified by the story of these monks who are said to live imprisoned in the small space of their compulsory rules and norms (their real coffin). The same as happened with Mr. Duffy, who lived like a hermit in *Chapelizod* (italics mine), it is not at all clear why these people prefer to abide by the limits of repression or why they submit to these apparently absurd sacrifices. Maybe they are trying to escape the emptiness of their existence through equally bare and sterile rigidity. This image evidences one of the main ideas in *Dubliners*: that a seemingly alive person can be dead when his existence, both in a physical and psychological sense, is limited to the narrow space of his own self. That is the case both with these monks and Mr. Duffy, who lead a life of entombment.

In this world described by Vincent P. Pecora, in his chapter "Social Paralysis and the Generosity of the Word: Joyce's *The Dead*," as "filled with the physically aging, the psychologically repressed, and the emotionally arrested;" Michael Furey is put forward.¹⁰ He, the dead lover of Gretta, is the one that provokes Gabriel's final moment of vision (pp.198-199) in which death plays such an important role. As Pecora says "the boy's pitiful, decidedly unromantic death, due most probably to the conditions of his labor" constitutes the image around which "Gabriel's revelation materializes."¹¹ Just like Mrs. Sinico's, this character's decease is reified in order to satisfy the engrossing narcissism of others. Thus, according to Pecora's words, "Gretta transforms Michael Furey into the one grand passion of her life by idealizing both his death and her love" and Gabriel believes her story "in a way guaranteed to emphasize Michael's legendary status;" egotistically proceeding "to weave this tragedy around himself."¹²

The last occasion in which death is dealt with in this story and in the whole volume is the concluding interior monologue of Gabriel. In it, and through the image of snow, he identifies the living with the dead. Here, the narrator seems to want us to realize that what matters is not the life or demise of the physical body but something else. According to the final words of "The Dead", there are many moving creatures whose spiritual life has deceased:

snow was general over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen

10.- Vincent P. Pecora. *Self and Form in Modern Narrative*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989, p.230.

11.- *op. cit.*, pp.251, 254.

12.- *op. cit.*, p.252.

and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. (pp.200-201)

Though from the beginning of the passage one might infer that this spiritual death applies only to Ireland, the end of this text clearly asserts that this is a universal truth; the snow is "falling faintly" and "faintly falling" "through the universe". The "lonely churchyard" where Michael Furey lies is a reference to the reason for his decease, self-isolation, one of the main themes dealt with here. And we have to bear in mind that many of the characters we have analysed tried to escape this isolation, this bareness of their existence ("barren thorns") through sterile religious attitudes ("crooked crosses and thorns") which led to nothing good and were merely a way of ignoring the truth.

This is, for instance, what happens in "A Little Cloud", where Little Chandler realizes his real nature when he shouts at his innocent child in an outburst of the frustration he feels. All through the story, the protagonist has been given childish features (he is "Little", his name sounds very much like the word "child" and now, at the end, both father and son cry). After realizing his true situation in life and exercising this unexpected violence, Little Chandler becomes afraid that the baby -with whom he has been identified, will die: "He...caught the child to his breast in fright. If it died!" (p.75). We can suppose that, when making such an assertion, this man, who has just seen himself as a "prisoner for life" is unconsciously expressing his fear of his own spiritual death, of his paralysis.

In "Clay", death is also associated with spiritual emptiness, frustration, lack of communication or paralysis. The connection between being dead and being incapable of communication and feeling is made apparent through the lack of affection between the two brothers (which is a reflection of the protagonist's cold and calculating nature): "Joe cried that God might strike him stone dead if he ever spoke a word to his brother again" (p.95).

Finally, in "A Painful Case", Mrs.Sinico's death will force the protagonist, Mr.Duffy, to a recognition of his own and others' loneliness:

Now that she was gone he understood how lonely her life must have been, sitting night after night alone in that room. His life would be lonely too until he, too, died, ceased to exist, became a memory -if anyone remembered him. (p.106)

Here, the connection between death and loneliness is quite obvious but the knowledge Mr.Duffy reaches is not so complete as that achieved by Gabriel in a similar scene. The protagonist of "The Dead" sees his image reflected in a mirror and considers himself a "pitiable fatuous fellow" with "clownish lusts" (p.198). The protagonist of "A Painful Case" also observes in Mrs.Sinico a reflection of his future, but is incapable of

ridiculing his own attitude as Gabriel does. Thus Mr. Duffy remains narcissistic and infatuated and, once again, cannot fully understand the depth of his friend's tragedy: that she has not killed herself because of him but because of the solitude in which she lives. This lack of sympathy is evidenced in Mr. Duffy's self-pity, a clearly self-centred feeling that closes the story: "No one wanted him; he was an outcast from life's feast." "He felt that he was alone." (p.107).

So, we can conclude that the death or paralysis present in *Dubliners* and studied in the latter part of this paper, is only a logical consequence of the nature of the figures we classified at the beginning as *centripetal characters*. Their egotism and self-centredness, their anxiety to play a chief role and even dominate other characters' lives, their empty evasions, such as intellectualism, religion or drinking, turn the world in which they dwell into a dead world, a graveyard, a genuine wasteland.