

An Analysis on the Paralysis and Epiphany in “A Little Cloud”

Wei Huang*

Chengdu University of Information Technology 10 Xingfu Road, Longquanyi District, Chengdu city,
Sichuan Province, China

*Corresponding author: Huangwei@cuit.edu.cn

Abstract: James Joyce, Dubliners, Paralysis, Epiphany

Keywords: “Dubliners”, James Joyce's acclaimed collection of short stories, is arguably the most famous collection of short fiction in the whole of the West in the 20th century. The 15 short stories in "Dubliners" are a realistic and satirical portrayal of life in early twentieth-century Dublin, with "paralysis" and "epiphanies" occurring throughout. This essay analyses the "epiphany" and "paralysis" of little Chandler in "A Little Cloud", giving a glimpse of James Joyce's sympathy and despair for the Irish people under the persecution of imperial colonialism in the early twentieth century.

1. Introduction

"Dubliners" is a collection of short stories written by James Joyce who is best known for "Ulysses", the most famous stream of consciousness work. Because of its unique narrative style, rich artistic connotation and profound practical significance, "Dubliners" is also regarded as one of the most famous short story collections in the 20th century. The genre of the short story combined with Joyce's poetic soul gave birth to this great work.

This collection of short stories carries James Joyce's complex feelings of sadness and anger towards the Irish, which are expressed in the “paralysis” and “epiphanies” in each of the short stories in “Dubliners”. Among these short story, “A Little Cloud” is a distillation of this complex emotion.

2. Short story and "Dubliners"

2.1 Features of the short story

As "*one of the most natural and fundamental ways of human expression*" (O'Connor, 1970), a short story is a piece of fictional prose which can generally be read in one sitting. In terms of presentation, short story is "*a hybrid form combining both the metaphoric mode of the old romance and the metonymic mode of the new realism*" (May, C.E., 2002). There are no heroes or so-called happy endings in short stories, short story writers always aim at expressing the "*sense awareness of human loneliness*" through the portrayal of "*a submerged population group*" (O'Connor, 1962). This persistence eventually allowed the short story to transcend its form limitations, to become an extreme form of artistic expression and a way to carry the deepest human feelings.

2.2 Joyce's "Dubliners"

"Dubliners", one of the greatest collections of short stories of the 20th century, perfectly blends the unique virtues of the short story in its concentration of emotion and images. "Dubliners" comprises a depiction of middle and lower classes Irish life in the beginning of the 20th century. The intention of James Joyce for writing "Dubliners", according to himself, was to "*write a chapter of the moral history*" (Richard Ellmann, 1966) of his country, and he chose Dublin as the setting for these stories because it was, in his view, "*the centre of paralysis*". The unique artistic means of presentation and the concise genre of short story give James Joyce a wide and free range of expressions in "Dubliners", he

wrote in short chapters (except "*The Dead*") about these unpleasant encounters in Dublin, the mental paralysis of these distinctive Dubliners is brought to life in these stories.

Unlike most short story collections, which are generally a collection of stories on a variety of subjects, "*Dubliners*" was conceived from the outset as an organic whole in which the stories are interconnected by subject matter, style, technique and theme. There are 15 short stories in "*Dubliners*", which collects 15 pieces of vignettes of Dubliners' lives. "*Dubliners*" follows a narrative pattern of childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life: "*The Sisters*", "*An Encounter*" and "*Araby*" are stories about childhood, "*Eveline*", "*After the Race*", "*Two Gallants*" and "*The Boarding House*" deal with adolescence, "*A Little Cloud*", "*Counterparts*", "*Clay*", and "*A Painful Case*" are stories of mature life. "*Ivy Day in the Committee Room*", "*A Mother*" and "*Grace*" belong to the section of public life. Finally, "*Dubliners*" ends up with "*The Dead*". "*The Dead*", which is the longest and is frequently regarded as the greatest one, is concerned with death. By combining these short stories, James Joyce has managed to condense Dubliners' life into the different vignettes in "*Dubliners*". This unique writing skills and short story's genre features make the reader acutely aware that this state of mental paralysis is not an isolated case, but is relevant to every Irish.

On the other hand, in "*Dubliners*", Joyce not only deeply analyzed the spiritual paralysis of Dubliners through group portrait description, but also elaborated on their spiritual Epiphany which is "*a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself*" (Burgess, 1973).

In this essay, I chose "*A Little Cloud*" in "*Dubliners*" to analyze the process of main character's paralysis and epiphany of "*Dubliners*", and analyse James Joyce's complex expressions of emotion towards the Irish.

3. "A Little Cloud" under Colonialism

3.1 Ireland under Colonialism

Ireland has long been called an internal colony of Britain (Hechter, M., 1997). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Ireland had just endured a series of severe economic recessions and famines which led to millions of deaths and millions of people emigrating to other countries. When the Irish people were suffering from poverty and hunger, Britain exercised a greater degree of economic, social and political control over this country. This made Ireland become a complete vassal of Britain. At the same time, the Irish National Independence Movement was in full swing across Ireland, the search for a national identity was raging. The Irish national autonomous movement, led by Parnell, has won a great victory which marks the peak of Irish nationalism. However, The sudden death of Parnell in 1891 led to a split-up in the Irish political parties and has also become a turning point from light to dark for the Irish national movement, and the whole of Ireland was plunged into an atmosphere of sadness and despair. Ireland at the beginning of the 20th century faced a huge national identity crisis, the society was sinking in a pessimistic and gloomy mood.

3.2 Image of little Chandler and Gallaher

"*A Little Cloud*" is the story of Ireland in the stormy early 20th century. In "*A Little Cloud*", Joyce invites us to imagine a little man, deeply ashamed and bitter about his situation, who wants to achieve his dream (to be a poet), but is forever stuck in reality and unable to make a little difference. This was in fact an epitome of the educated men of Dublin at that time, who were completely lost in the face of the strong cultural impact of the British colonialists. They attributed their lack of ambition, poverty and hardship to the shackles of their environment, to their "inferior" national identity, to the old, dreary, gloomy Dublin.

In this story, the portrayal of Little Chandler and Gallaher provide a striking contrast. Little Chandler is a little man.

In the depiction of little Chandler's physical appearance, the reader can easily find feminine even childish qualities such as "*fragile*" body, "*childish teeth*", "*silken hair*", "*refined*" manner, "*quiet voice*"

and "*used perfume discreetly on his handkerchief*". Women and children, in traditional society, often represent a powerlessness and weakness. These appearance features of little Chandler indicate his resignation to the fate and powerlessness to change it, just like Ireland, which was defenceless in the face of colonialist aggression.

On the other hand, Gallaher, who works for the Londer press, has close relationship with colonizers. When little Chandler first saw him in the bar, he was "*leaning with his back against the counter and his feet planted far apart*", showing a carefree attitude.

Gallaher's "*bald head*", "*heavy, pale and cleanshaven*" face and "*shapeless and colourless*" lip make him seem worldly, cold and even cruel. He wears an orange tie of English style which is inharmonious with his appearance, calling Chandler "*old chap*", commenting on his country as "*old, dear dirty Dublin*" and using "*blooming*" as an adjective, just like British. These features give Gallaher a distorted, incongruous image. He was so proud of his experience of working and travelling in London, and turned down little Chandler's invitation to his home. These acts symbolized Gallaher's refusal to identify with his Irish identity. Gallaher represents an Irishman who has completely lost his sense of national identity and is trying his best to assimilate into British culture. In spite of his efforts to approach the British by working hard, changing his accent and dressing, he still comes across as incredibly artificial and out of place. Nevertheless, meeting Gallaher, the fake Englishman, also made little Chandler sink into the feelings of jealousy and remorse.

In the eyes of little Chandler, Gallaher, who worked for a British newspaper and travelled to every major European city, actually represented superior British power, and meeting Gallaher even made little Chandler "*feel himself superior to the people he passed*". Under the gaze of Gallaher, who aligns with the British colonizers, little Chandler feels ashamed, inferior, and disillusioned, just like Irish people in front of the British rulers.

3.3 The Paralysis and Epiphany of little Chandler

Before the meeting with Gallaher, little Chandler turned often from his tiresome writing to gaze out of the office window.

Dublin, in little Chandler's eye at that time, is a fragile ancient city carrying centuries of colonial history. The "*late autumn sunset*", "*untidy nurses*", "*screaming children*" and "*decrepit old men*" formed a fragile, gentle and old city, Dublin. He laments his inability to fight back against his fate, just as Dublin is unable to fight back against

centuries of colonial history. He had a strong sense of belonging to his country, and sympathized with the sufferings of his country.

However, after this meeting, little Chandler began to grow weary and bitter of everything around him, believing that he could only truly realize his ambitions by leaving his wife, his son, and his homeland, Dublin. He was then utterly disgusted with Irish culture and people, and dreamed of writing poems that the British national poet Byron wrote, and dreamed of expressing the feelings of depression in the English psyche. From this moment on, little Chandler had completely lost his confidence and identity in his own country's culture and voluntarily placed himself in the position of the "other" in front of the British colonial culture, surrendering to the colonizers.

This change in little Chandler's psyche is a microcosm of the whole process of the Irish people's missing national identity and sinking into mental paralysis under the economic and cultural invasion of the colonial powers. The reality of being unable to make the child stop crying gave little Chandler the epiphany: no matter how much he hates his Irish identity, he cannot abandon it. The shame at having abandoned his homeland and the despair at never being able to escape the reality of it finally brought tears to his eyes.

4. Conclusion

Joyce, the master of stream of consciousness fiction, didn't use many stream of consciousness writing techniques in "*Dubliners*", which is not an obscure work, very easy to understand. In fact, there

isn't even a dramatic conflict or wild plot twist in this collection of short stories, as if Joyce were recalling the daily routines of her former neighbours.

However, Joyce has long since embedded Dubliner's mental paralysis into every corner and every detail of the story, so that you can't help but deeply appreciate the desperation after reading carefully and finally experiencing this mental numbness and paralysis. Even the "epiphany" is not a panacea for "paralysis". On the contrary, the "epiphany" is the starting point and escalation of "paralysis".

Under the hegemony of the colonisers, little Chandler is paralysed by a loss of national identity and self-confidence. The epiphany of him at the end of the story was a deeper realization of his inability to abandon his identity and his family to fulfil his dreams and escape the shackles of fate that had been placed upon him.

Joyce has achieved his goal of writing a chapter of the moral history of Ireland with "*Dubliners*" which captures the mental paralysis of Irish, and this collection of short story serves as a rousing warning to the Irish people of the early 20th century, just as he said, "*I believe that in composing my chapter of moral history in exactly the way I have composed it I have taken the first step towards the spiritual liberation of my country*" (Faber 1975).

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