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## **A Discourse Analysis of James Joyce's Construction of Identity in Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man**

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The present paper attempts to acknowledge and dig out the largely unexplored late Victorian and Edwardian ethos of subjectivity in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and to show that Joyce himself, like much of his characters was bound by the ideologies of his age namely nationalism, Catholicism as well as gender conditions. In other words, this short analysis aims to show that Joyce's collection of short stories and his novel not only give the surfaces of daily life in turn of the century Dublin, but they also expose the discursive and cultural contexts, ideologies, religiosity and gender forces that colonized Irish modern subjectivity.

To achieve our purpose, an appeal is made to the theory of Cultural Materialism of Louis Montrose, Frederick Jameson and Louis Althusser et al. Louis Montrose has argued that the self like language is "created within history, culture, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions" (Montrose, 1986: 16-17). This means that likewise language is constituted within the shifting currents of cultural and discursive paradigms, the self is constructed through language; therefore, we can say that subjectivity absorbs influence and exists in a continual process of flux. Within this context, and as far as James Joyce's conception of the shifting currents of language and culture, as well as their impacts on identity are made clear in 1907 in his essay "*Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages*" where he argued that 'Irish' civilization as well as national identity are "convenient fictions" based on immutabilities of race and language and of "blood and human world" (CW, 1989: 166). In fact, this description shows us not only the instabilities of Irish identity but it also alludes to the metaphorical link that exists between culture and identity. Moreover, in his works, Joyce transforms Irish Victorian and Edwardian culture into multifaceted, discursive narratives that constitute different varieties of rhetoric, i.e. national, religious and gender, and he gives us at the end characters whose subjectivity are surrounded and shaped by the force these discourses exert over them.

To start with, it is worthy to mention that Joyce's early letters, and essays written during his short and brief sojourn of 1902 to 1903 in Paris as a medical student reveal the acute awareness of the Irish culture as an oppressive, paralyzed, and assimilating force. Born in 1882, Joyce came of an age in late Victorian Dublin, a city not only characterized by social wretchedness and the steady tides of Catholicism and British rule, but also by the rising currents of nationalism, spiritualism, masculinism and women's right agitations. In his different letters sent either to his brother or his wife, Joyce repeatedly marks and shows that

colonial politics, religiosity and gender constraints are the dominant ideological forces of his time and acknowledges the difficulties of living and existing outside their spheres. In 1904, Joyce wrote a letter to his wife Nora Barnacle declaring in it that he is “fighting a battle with every religious and social force in Ireland” (*L*, II: 52); and that he is more specific about the components of these forces “My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity-home, the recognized virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrine [...] I cannot enter the social order except as a vagabond” (*L*, II: 48).

During his life, Joyce saw Ireland's politics to be dangerously stifling as its gender structures. In spite of his evident rejection of the British imperial system, he refused to align himself fully with the nationalist ideologies and the Revivalist organizations led by Douglas Hyde, William Butler Yeats and George W. Russell. He objected to the homogeneity these movements fomented, and he introduced throughout his different works the discourse of Irishness that they propagated, not because he opposed the ultimate political separation from Britain, but rather he believed that this discourse of national and cultural Irishness is another form or narrative of “national self betrayal” (*Letters* II, 1966: 38) of Ireland. Within this respect, in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of Modern Nation* (1995), Declan Kibred suggests that Joyce's position vis-à-vis these cultural movements is that he aligns himself both with and against the cultural Revivalists. It means that, like them, Joyce opposed colonial occupation and usurpation, but unlike them he also “proceeds to indict the native culture” (Kibred, 1995: 363). Post colonial critics such as Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) have shown that these kinds of movements and revivals can replicate the oppressive power, as they pursue their goal of cultural and racial homogenisation.

Like Stephen Dedalus and the rest of Joyce's characters in *Dubliners*, Joyce himself was a product of the late Victorian and Edwardian Ireland, of “this country and this life” (*P*:20), his writings showcase both the insurgencies of modernist thought and the indoctrinations of fin de siècle subjectivity.

However, while Joyce's earliest fiction, the *Dubliners* collection of short stories seeks to represent a relentless paralysed society, his subsequent autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* seeks to find the means by which to free both the artist and modern consciousness from all ideological, be it national, religious or gendered forces.

In *Dubliners*, for instance Joyce did not provide us with a clear-cut vision of the confining ideologies of his era, but instead he gives us a portrait of a city whose individual's minds are shaped by different nets of discourse and who after all remain unaware of the circumscription of their paralysed thoughts and that at end not even epiphanies assure their liberation. The narrator of the first short story “The Sisters” never does discover and know what has “gone wrong” with his friend, the priest Old Father Flynn, nor does he understand why he feels “free from his death” at the end of the story. The narrator of “Araby” never realizes, despite his final epiphany, how his image of Mangan's sister is shaped by the culture's vision of the ideal feminine; Mrs Kearney, the heroine of “The Mother” never does fully comprehend the patriarchal nature of colonial politics and the nationalist power that she defies. These examples remind us of Joyce's public lecture of 1907 when he said that “the economic and public conditions that prevail in (Ireland) do not permit the development of

individuality” (CW, 1989, 171). However, in a series of famous correspondence with his publisher Richard Grant in 1906, Joyce declared that his intention of writing *Dubliners* was to represent Ireland’s “paralysis” and to counter this ideological blindness by providing the Irish people with “one good look in (his) nicely polished looking glass” (*L*, I: 64, my emphasis). He viewed such exposure and the possibility of self recognition of his Irish readers as “the first step towards the spiritual liberation of (his) country” (*L*, I: 63 my emphasis). Nevertheless, in *Dubliners* mainly, all characters are unable to escape the rhetoric of colonial politics, nationalism, religion and gender conditions.

However, in his subsequent fiction, Joyce progressively renders his characters increasingly aware of their enclosure by these discursive structures. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, the novel’s protagonist, is described at the very beginning as being immersed in the discourse of politics, language, and religion. Thus, Stephen is seen as being contained with the cultural discursive narrative and by extension Irish ideologies. From his first conscious moment in the bedtime of his father’s tale, the young Stephen did not entirely free himself from the power of political and religious dogma. Furthermore, Stephens pledges only to “try to fly by those nets” of “nationality, (and) religion” (*P*, 20, my emphasis), but his friend Cranly reminds him and notes the difficulties of achieving such independence because Stephen’s mind has been filled and “supersaturated” with the very doctrines he would disbelieve, and that because he has absorbed the messages of these nets very thoroughly to ever fully reject them (*P*, 240).

Moreover, throughout the novel, Stephen Dedalus recognizes the “hollowsounding voices” of nationalism, Catholicism and even masculinism that echoes constantly throughout his consciousness. Here Dedalus perceives the ‘Irish culture’ as a polylogue, and a convergent aspect of multiple discourses that urged him simultaneously to be a “gentleman” and a “good catholic above all things”, to be “strong, manly and healthy” and “true to his country” (*P*, 83). Furthermore, Stephen Dedalus is happy only when he finds himself removed from these discursive voices, when he is “beyond their call, alone” (*P*, 84). In this case, Joyce believed that it is only the artist who might arouse the very conscious of the nation, an artist who tries to fight and combat these ideologies in order to achieve his intellectual and colonial independence, as reveals Dedalus’ declaration :

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can. (*P*: 281)

Joyce’s presentation of identity as a social construct rather than as a personal or archetypal essence goes beyond Frederic Jameson’s statement that “human consciousness is not timeless and everywhere essentially the same, but rather situation-specific and historically produced” (Jameson, 1981: 152). Thus, Joyce not only exposes the social forces at work on subjectivity, but he also questions whether modern Irish subjectivity and consciousness can effectively resist the ideological forces of the culture that produced them.

It comes no surprise, therefore, to say that Joyce habitually wrote within and around the conventions and rhetoric of colonial politics, nationalism, Irish Catholicism and gender

forces. In his writings, and through the manifestation of his characters, he openly fought to liberate the artist and modern consciousness from the domination, and the bondage of these discursive forces.

To end this paper, we may say that although he spent long times in Paris, Trieste, Rome, and Zürich, with only an occasional brief visit to Ireland, his native country remained basic to all his writings. He resolved to search for self-identity in exile, instead of dwelling in a paralyzed, restricted, and subjugated Ireland. But his absenteeism did not diminish his wry affection for his *Dubliners*, as Seamus Deane puts it "Joyce became the professional exile from a home he never, imaginatively speaking, left" (Deane, 1990: 56). Ultimately, we can say that Joyce's works, mainly *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* did not liberate the modern consciousness from the authoritarian structures of nationalism, religion, gender and even morality, but rather Joyce explored the potential for personal release and individual thought. Despite the fact that he wanted his readers to perceive the forces of influence during his era, Joyce realized that recognition alone is not enough to overcome 'paralysis' in order to achieve "the spiritual liberation" he intended in *Dubliners*. This was in fact the lesson of Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait*, who knows what ideology suffuses his self and thought, and forms his art.

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