

Odsjek za anglistiku  
Filozofski fakultet  
Sveučilište u Zagrebu

DIPLOMSKI RAD

Paralizirani poviješću: irski društveni i politički život u djelima  
Jamesa Joyce-a

(Smjer: Književno-kulturološki, s posebnim naglaskom na englesku književnost i kulturu)

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Ak. godina: 2017/18

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MASTER'S THESIS

**Paralysed by history: Irish social and political life as depicted by  
James Joyce**

(Graduate study – English literature and culture)

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Academic year: 2017/18

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## Introduction

The importance of the social context for the aesthetic theory of James Joyce is one of the crucial factors to be taken into account when interpreting his works. The collection of short stories, *Dubliners* (published in 1914, the year when Irish Nationalism reached its pinnacle), perhaps Joyce's most famous and most analysed piece, is in fact based on the individual fates of people the author knew or noticed during his youth, who serve as a metonymy for the Irish society as a whole. Their lives are permeated by a series of recurring motifs: poverty, nationalism (or lack of it), the English colonial presence, sin and corruption, betrayal and death; but above all, paralysis. Every single of his *Dubliners* is paralysed in his own way, be it inability to escape the grip of Dublin or to free oneself from the shackles of mourning. *The Sisters*, as the opening story, introduces the topic of paralysis, through the corpse of a dead priest that beclouds every single character. A shadow from the past reappears in *The Dead*, the last short story that encompasses all the paralysing factors depicted in the previous ones, and focalises them in the figure of Gabriel, torn between his Irish ancestry and the prestige of his English education that gives him an air of superiority. Emigration is a prominent topic in *Eveline*, as well, to demonstrate the effects of paralysis on a woman who struggles to be an active participant in her own life. *Two Gallants* and *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* deal with the sense of political betrayal and the helplessness of the Irish people when confronted with the foreign coloniser.

The problems of subjugation, linguistic paralysis, religion and exile re-emerge in Joyce's autobiographical novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). The novel depicts the ramifications of historical, political and social paralysis on young Stephen Dedalus (Joyce himself) and on his artistic development. His disillusionment with his compatriots and the inability to create in such a hostile environment culminate in his resolute decision to cut all ties with his country and his religion. Joyce's own equivocal relationship with patriotism and

Irish nationalism is reflected in the character of Stephen, who criticises many aspects of the society, from its false piety to the political inconsistency and treachery.

The aforementioned social and historical context is indeed at the crux of both of these works that overflow with implicit and obvious references to the nation's public and political life of the period, as well as to the Irish Question. At the time Joyce was publishing his novel and the collection of short stories, the vision that Parnell had for Ireland, the primarily peaceful one (achieving Home Rule through diplomacy), was well behind. Of course, the Irish continued to strive for independence, but the trenches that Parnell's death had left behind (and the shame that it had brought on Ireland) resulted in a lack of political consensus. Parnellism suffered a sharp decline in the number of parliamentary seats. However, many were troubled by the clerical intervention that led to Parnell's untimely demise in 1891, due to which the movement gained some new sympathisers. The fenians (members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood) built a cult around the persona of their dead leader. In the meantime, the conflict between the Nationalists and the Unionists was growing ever more violent. The sabre-rattling, which was threatening to culminate into a Civil War, was held off only by the start of the Great War in 1914. This, however, also postponed the implementation of the Home Rule.

The inability to eradicate the English dominance gave rise to a new kind of nationalism: the Gaelic Revival of the late nineteenth century. The members of the so-called Gaelic League sought to restore the Irish language and culture (the polemic on language will be present both in *Dubliners* and in *A Portrait*). The movement consisted mostly of scholars whose intention was to exterminate the English influence not only on the political, but also on the cultural level. The growing general dissatisfaction with the British rule and its failing war effort culminated in the Easter Rising (1916) and the proclamation of the "Irish Republic". The unsuccessful

attempt to liberate Ireland resulted in a number of civilian victims, as well as in the intensification of the English repression.<sup>1</sup>

This essay will deal with the influence of historical paralysis on the Irish politics and its social life and the way the author experienced it, as well as the importance of Dublin in Joyce's opus, which was marked by the complex historical events happening at the time. Many of those will be interwoven in his works and will influence the lives of his characters. It will also demonstrate that the individual fates mirror the life of the nation, which is an artistic technique that Joyce used to denounce a plethora of problematic aspects of the Irish society, as well as the mentality of its people.

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<sup>1</sup> see Fitzpatrick, David. „Ireland Since 1870“. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland. Edited by R.F. Foster.* Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2000, pp. 213-275.

## Joyce's social and political activism and the notion of paralysis

James Joyce has always had a very critical attitude towards the Irish society. The best proof may, in fact, be his self-imposed exile described at the end of his autobiographic novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which offered him the possibility to observe his compatriots from the outside, objectively and realistically. The non-conformist way in which he describes Dublin in his famous collection of short stories, named precisely after the Irish capital, demonstrates that he truly is a modernist. In one of his letters to Italo Svevo (written precisely in exile), Joyce claims that “it is dangerous to abandon one’s own country but it is more dangerous still to return to it, for then your fellow countrymen, if they can, will drive a knife into your heart” (qtd. in Bowker, chapter 16). This only goes to show that the reasons behind Joyce’s auto-exile were not only artistic and aesthetic in nature, but were also very much driven by the social and political situation in Ireland, as well as the mentality of its people.

According to Gordon Bowker, “Joyce grew up an Irish nationalist but rejected the Ireland that nationalism created; he loved the English language yet attempted to reshape and reinvent it; he grew up hostile to Britain but had a lingering attachment to it” (preface). All of those problems that could almost be referred to as splits in Joyce’s personality are visible both in *A Portrait* and in *Dubliners*. It is obvious that, even though Joyce abandoned Ireland, his country never abandoned him and that it served as a never ending well of inspiration. He felt the necessity to offer Ireland to its people from his own point of view, to show them what it looked like to someone who spent his childhood there, but felt the overwhelming urge to escape. One of the reasons he does it is undoubtedly to explain his motives, to exonerate himself from the blame and guilt of his expatriation. Due to this, his works today serve as testimony of the complex political and social developments that took place in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century Ireland, as well as of the intricate relationship between an individual and his surroundings.

Certainly, Dublin is much more than just a city that Joyce had to abandon at all cost. For some reason, the writer keeps coming back to it, depicting it in all his canonical works. It is obvious that this city has a monumental significance for Joyce, both in the sense of being his home and a metonymy for the whole society. Painting a picture of Dublin, the author demonstrates what the entire country is like. He seems almost obsessed with the city he grew up in, its people and their (miserable) lives. In his introduction to the centennial edition of *Dubliners*, Terence Brown claims that

this collection of short stories achieves a complex pattern of repetitions, parallels and restatements of theme in which detail, incident and image combine to establish a vision of life in the capital which serves as a kind of metaphor for the spiritual condition of the Irish nation as a whole (xlii).

Therefore, Joyce perceives Dublin not only as his hometown, but also as a representative of the Irish society. The intricacies of relationships, events and personas depicted in *Dubliners* are not based solely on the particular, but have a higher purpose – to denounce a way of life characteristic for Ireland as a nation. Joyce, therefore, uses the individual to represent the national. This serves as proof of a particular type of nationalism that the author employs when reminiscing about his country, one that is capable both of love and of reproof. Better yet, one that is able to criticise precisely because of said love.

The extraordinary amount of detail with which Joyce describes both his childhood and family in *A Portrait*, as well as the city of his youth, show not only the meticulousness of the author, but also his astonishing commitment and dedication to his country, even though he perceived it as a toxic environment for his artistic and personal development. There is beauty

to be found amidst all the ugliness he portrays, because it offers a glimpse into the minds of the Irish, into their subjectivity and into the way they perceive themselves as a nation. The squalor of Dublin that dominates the collection also gives an insight into the way the author experienced it as a young man and continued to experience it from afar. In Declan Kiberd's opinion, "Joyce finds poetry in the commonplace" (*The Irish Writer and the World*, 8). To represent Ireland, he chooses ordinary people and their everyday lives, and transforms them into something universal that could be applied to the whole nation. Yet, those individual circumstances all somehow merge in the figure of Stephen Dedalus. They cast a new light on his motivation to abandon Ireland, adding further detail to the way Stephen (who is, in fact, Joyce's alter ego) experiences the world around him. According to William York Tindall, "this artist as a young man is more or less Joyce's image of himself when young" (52).

At the very crux of his vision is paralysis, a notion that keeps resurfacing both in the short stories and in the novel. According to Brown, "the detail in *Dubliners* is disposed like brush-strokes in a complex canvas to compose a settled impression of a society in the grip of paralytic forces" (xliii). If Joyce, as he claimed, wanted to offer the Irish a mirror so that they could take a good look at themselves, the reflection he intended to show was of a society paralysed in mourning and lamenting. This image also depicts a nation burdened both by its past and its present, in which nationalism at the same time clashes and coincides with the submission to the English expansionism. The dreary, almost suffocating atmosphere of the capital metaphorically delineates historical, political and social oppression and self-pity of the Irish. It is a society whose history is its deadweight, keeping it paralysed within a vicious circle of both incapacity and unwillingness to move forward, to exit. What Ireland lacks is the capacity to forgive and exculpate its betrayers, to resolve historical grievances, both among themselves and between the English, all of which Joyce decried in his works. In a letter to his publisher Grant Richards (1906), Joyce states the following: "My intention was to write a chapter of the

moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to be the centre of paralysis” (qtd. in Ryf 59). It is obvious that the notion of paralysis is at the very heart of the author’s perception of his country and that it has an extraordinary importance for him. He notices it in every aspect of the city life (as well as in the life of the country as a whole), from the inability of its inhabitants to liberate themselves from the hold that paralysis has on them (*Eveline*), to the problematic of nationalism, patriotism and being unable to come to terms with your own Irishness (Gabriel, the protagonist of *The Dead*, may as well be another Joyce’s alter ego).

The idea of paralysis is introduced in the opening story, *The Sisters*, which serves as an ideal prelude for the short stories to follow, as it touches upon several problems that emerge in *Dubliners*, as well as in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

## The paralysing silence in *The Sisters*

The importance of the very first short story in the collection cannot be overstated: it sets not only the atmosphere, but also opens up with a very interesting quote:

Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word *paralysis*. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word *gnomon* in the Euclid and the word *simony* in Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work (Joyce, *Dubliners* 1).

It introduces, therefore, two crucial concepts: paralysis and simony. It is interesting that the word simony should appear at the opening of the collection, for two reasons: the first is that the story deals with the death of a Catholic priest and leaves a great deal unsaid and open to interpretation. The second has to do with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the Catholic Church has a very prominent, highly disputable role, and seems to be interpreted by Joyce as one of the sources of paralysis, both on the social and the political level.

When it comes to the paralysis in *The Sisters*, it can be interpreted in several ways. The narrator perceives the word paralysis as something otherworldly, the very word puzzles him. He sees it as something transcendental, metaphysical, even though it was, so to say, almost palpable. It was literally in the room with him, its omnipresence dwelling like a shadow over him. For it was a corporeal paralysis, one that resulted from a stroke and eventually led to the priest's death. Still, the narrator seems to be haunted by this palsy: "In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralytic" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 3). Assigning almost dream-like qualities to what is essentially a health problem, may indicate the gradual realisation by the narrator that he is constantly being surrounded by paralysis, both on the spiritual and the social level. In the spiritual sense, both the priest and the young narrator are

paralysed, and that is visible from the silence, which is a central motif of the short story. Not only is the house silent because of mourning, but the reader is also left with the impression that the author purposely leaves some things open to interpretation, with certain conversations ending abruptly or having certain dubious undertones. While it is clear that there was something mentally wrong with the priest (“...when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him... (Joyce, *Dubliners* 9)), the relationship between him and the boy (narrator) remains ambiguous. Due to that, it could be interpreted as something impure and sinful, which might explain the narrator’s meek reaction to his mentor’s death: “I found it strange that neither I nor the day seemed in a mourning mood and I felt even annoyed at the discovering in myself a sensation of freedom as if I had been freed from something by its death” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 4). Instead of grieving, he is obsessed not only with paralysis, but also with the significance and impact of the word itself, even though there is nothing particularly odd about it. Putting such a strong emphasis on it from the very beginning, the author is denouncing the moral paralysis, which is deeply enrooted in the Irish society and will be present in other short stories, as well as in the autobiographic novel.

The fact that Joyce uses a young narrator is one of the most significant techniques in the story. The decision to represent the “events” through the vision of a child further demonstrates the author’s intention to make his narrative elliptical. Obviously, the boy is perplexed by what he does not understand and by what is being kept from him. He senses that there is something more to the story, which is however out of his grasp (and understanding) precisely because he is a child. In Garry Leonard’s opinion, “something (...) is disturbing the boy: how much of what he does not know is nonetheless affecting him? The adults seem anxious about Father Flynn, although they are not able to give their reason, and don't even finish their sentences” (88). If the adults are anxious about the priest, the boy is anxious about gaps and omissions in his perception. Young and innocent as he is, he cannot comprehend the ramifications of the

priest's behaviour, as well as the reason why the adults are keeping secrets from him. He notices many details subconsciously, yet is unable to fit the pieces together and consciously interpret them.

One of such examples is the fact that the narrator recognises paralysis as something perilous, yet it is drawing him in, he feels the urge to be close to it, without understanding why. This indicates the deconstruction of his childhood innocence. The eerie atmosphere revolving around the concept of paralysis, in combination with the potentially transgressive relationship between the boy and the priest, leave a great amount of doubt and confusion, be it in the narrator or the reader. The boy seems to be picking up pieces of information about something that he obviously cannot comprehend, or has most likely even repressed. However, the silence in the story is simply too overwhelming, which makes any interpretation debatable. According to Garry Leonard, this ambiguity is precisely what the author had in mind while writing *Dubliners*. He claims that "what remains unsaid is often what we fear to say, or even think, and yet, at the same time, might wish to hear shouted aloud – the longing and the fear that accompanies genuine insight unadulterated by self-delusion or wishful thinking" (89-90). In this case, silence has words, it shouts and screams, even louder than what is actually being said. The essence of this story is in its empty spaces, unfinished thoughts and unpronounced utterances hanging in the air and creating an unbearably oppressive aura.

The social paralysis is best represented by the sisters, who are spinsters dedicated to caring for their brother. Being "their brother's keepers" (as was Stanislaus Joyce), they were unable to leave their social circle, even move up on the social ladder. It is apparent that their origins were humble, since they were born in Irishtown, a poor area of Dublin, and they continued to lead a modest life, on the brinks of poverty. Having been completely consumed by the needs of their brother, the two women never managed to start their own families. Even in death, the priest seems to be a burden to them: "All the work we had, she and me, getting in

the woman to wash him and then laying him out and then the coffin and then arranging about the Mass in the chapel” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 7). Therefore, the priest may be interpreted as the source of paralysis both for the narrator and for the sisters, which leads to the conclusion that each protagonist of the story is troubled and downtrodden. Another example of the social paralysis is the priest himself, unable to comply with the norms of the Catholic Church and its functioning within the society.

What is also intriguing is the fact that the collection of short stories opens with a representation of mourning, which represents another form of paralysis. This type will be present above all in *The Dead* and in the figure of Parnell (*Ivy Day in the Committee Room, A Portrait*). However, it is significant that this appears in both the opening and the closing story, which suggests that the author considers mourning, as well as the deceased, another important feature of the Irish society. If in *The Dead* the long gone reappear as a shadow from the past, shaping the present and determining the subjectivity of the main character, in *The Sisters* we encounter a paralysed corpse, whose passing away has, in a certain sense, liberated his friends and family, lifting a dark veil of doubt and confusion from their existence. The mourning, in this case, has come as a certain relief. However, this is only superficial, because the dead priest keeps materialising as a vision, as well as in the narrator’s dreams. The haunting images of paralysis continue to scare and taunt the boy, even beyond death: “But then I remembered that it had died of paralysis and I felt that I too was smiling feebly as if to absolve the simoniac of his sin” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 3). Even so, it is not within the boy’s capacity to liberate the priest from his sins, primarily because the young altar boy has no understanding of the sin committed. This constitutes another example of the inconclusiveness of the story, since the reader never gets to find out what the actual sin was (precisely because of the focalisation). It is worth noting the re-emergence of the word simony, which might point to the fact that the narrator was aware

at least of one of the priest's faults. It may also be indicative of Joyce's intention to reprobate the corruption of the Church of Ireland, which he so often does in his work.

John William Corrington offers an interesting interpretation of the sibling's relationship: "...if one accepts Father Flynn as the Irish church and the sisters as the Irish people, (...) the extent and profundity of paralysis and decay is the product, to a degree, of interaction between them" (22). It is clear that at least one of the sisters, if not both of them, was conscious of the priest's mental problems, as well as his questionable relationship with the boy, conceivably also with a number of other altar boys. She claims that what worsened her brother's psychical condition was "...that chalice that he broke... That was the beginning of it. Of course, they say that it was all right, that it contained nothing, I mean. But still... They say it was the boys fault. But poor James was so nervous, God be merciful to him" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 8). Even though the woman does not seem to be convinced by the explanation she offers (that the altar boy was to blame), she still, in a certain sense, defends her brother. The symbolic of the chalice is explained by Thomas Dilworth:

(...) chalices were considered sacred. They partook imaginatively of the supreme value of what they held during Mass. Only the priest was ever allowed even to touch a chalice (...). As the priest lies in the coffin, a chalice stands on his chest, as if triumphant over its supine victim (104-105).

The fact that the priest broke what is a sacred object for the Catholics, because it contains the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, could have undoubtedly produced the priest's neurosis. Even though the chalice was empty, this did not exonerate him from his own guilt. According to Thomas E. Connolly, the sister's "very hesitancy in speech and her conscious effort to make excuses for her brother argue that the chalice in all likelihood was not empty" (193). This would indicate that he indeed did spill what symbolically constitutes the most venerated Catholic relic. This "accident", therefore, not only represents the end of Father Flynn's career as a minister,

but also functions as the very embodiment of sin. In this sense, the breaking of the chalice can be read as metaphor for the sin that the priest committed against the boy (particularly with the sister trying to transfer the blame from the brother onto him). Just as the chalice was broken, so was the childhood innocence and the subjectivity of the victim. What shattered the priest's mental health truly was the most controversial sin: the spilling of the Precious Blood is thus compared to (implicit) pederasty.

The inability of the sisters to act against their brother, although they noticed that something likely ignominious was happening between the priest and the altar boys is precisely the source of paralysis. They have purposefully chosen to turn a blind eye to the behaviour of their brother, thus denying help to the possible victims and more or less inadvertently inciting such conduct. This could be applied to the Irish society in general: albeit their awareness of both moral and financial corruption in the Church of Ireland, the people still loyally adhere to it, which is indicative of a historical paralysis. The Catholic Church has always been perceived as something that distinguished the Irish from England, something that stood as a cornerstone of the society and shielded it from the "turpitude" of Protestantism. However, the example of Father Flynn shows that there is depravity also among the Catholics (even though some of his sins are only implied, it is openly expressed that he was a simoniac). The society, just as it is case with the sisters, perceives those faults, but prefers to discard them.

This polemic on the role of religion in Ireland is present in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as well. Simon Dedalus (the head of the Dedalus family and therefore the alter ego of John Stanislaus Joyce) criticises the Irish for being "a priest-ridden Godforsaken race" (Joyce, *A Portrait* 34). Despite the fact that he partly blames the bishops for the Irish submission to England, Simon does everything in his power to give his son Stephen a Catholic upbringing and ultimately sends him to a Jesuit school. The father is not particularly devout, since he agrees with his friend, Mr Casey, who claims that "we have had too much God in Ireland. Away with

God!” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 35). The reason he sends his son to a school led by priests (Conglows College) is merely a matter of tradition and prestige. The fact that he is a fierce critic of the bishop’s political involvement does not stop Simon from entrusting them with his son’s education. In this sense, he is no better than the sisters, or the rest of Ireland paralysed by the historical role of the clergy. This problematic relationship between religion and the Irish mindset suggests an overwhelming attachment to history, the grip of which is powerful enough to keep the society fixed in place. That is precisely the case with Simon Dedalus: he remains inert, albeit being hyperaware of the problem. His words may be harsh, but are not backed by action. However, the notion of being motionless, lethargic, almost comatose cannot be ascribed solely to Mr Dedalus. It could almost be argued that the Irish mindset is an important, if not the key factor of paralysis, since it presents itself as reluctant to change, obstinately embracing the values of its ancestors, which is something that young Joyce could not tolerate.

At the end of the novel, Stephen proclaims the following:

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 and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning (Joyce, *A Portrait* 255).

This passage is undoubtedly one of the most significant in the novel, since it marks Stephen’s (Joyce’s by proxy) renouncing of everything that constituted his life up to that moment – his father, his country and his religion. Taking into account the fact that, for a certain amount of time, he contemplated becoming a priest, the decision has even a stronger impact. Stephen obviously equates expatriation with attaining freedom, which demonstrates the disillusionment with his country, its mentality and both cultural and religious heritage. Using the verb “to serve”, Stephen implicates that he finds himself in a secondary position, obedient and fixed in his role of a son, of a patriot and of a believer. Metaphorically, this could be applied to the

country as a whole, with the difference that the protagonist consciously and adamantly refuses to serve, to be paralysed. Ireland, however, will continue to tolerate oppression, be it from the foreign influences or coming from within the country, in the shape of a particular mindset.

What is also interesting is the fact that Stephen uses the word silence, which was omnipresent in *The Sisters*. Yet, here the silence is referred to as a weapon, not as a paralytic force. The protagonist considers it something that could be used in his defence or to fight the weight of history pressing on his compatriots. It is fascinating that Joyce should use silence in such different contexts, because in *The Sisters*, it is something to be fought against, not with. But that is only a superficial understanding of the problem. In fact, absence in the short story becomes the most crucial presence (as it is often case with *Dubliners*), simply because what was left unsaid speaks much more than what was pronounced. Even though the silence presents itself as paralysing for the young narrator, Joyce uses it to denounce and to rebuke. He does the very opposite of Simon Dedalus, who practically screams against religion, but fails to do anything about it. Joyce, on the other hand, introduces this topic almost clandestinely, but manages to express it much more precisely due to the way he deals with it. Silence is, therefore, used to reprobate the very silence with which the Irish society treats what is going on behind the scenes, of course, in silence.

## **Eveline entrapped**

Having seen Stephen Dedalus' determination to free himself from the paralytic grip of Dublin, it is intriguing to compare him to the protagonist of a short story that tackles immigration as well. Eveline, both in the context of the short story and as its main character, offers a different perspective on attaining freedom by fleeing Ireland. Even though she was given the possibility to escape her (miserable) life, marked by a violent father and the burden of taking care of her family, she lacked determination and courage to leave her comfort zone. According to Brewster Ghiselin, "(...) Eveline, lacking the strength of faith, hope and love, wavers in an effort to find a new life and, failing in the cardinal virtue of fortitude, remains in Dublin, short of her goal and weakened in her spiritual power and defences against evil" (107). The biggest evil in Eveline's life is undoubtedly the paralysis that encompasses her, both on the social and on the personal level. Even though she is conscious of it, at least to a certain degree, the young woman discovers herself unwilling to get out of her cage, in which she is entrapped by two paralytic influences: Dublin and her duty. Unlike Stephen Dedalus, who was unwavering in his decision not to serve, Eveline's position as a woman and a surrogate mother to her younger siblings, made it impossible for her to turn her back on Ireland. Furthermore, her social condition, the fact that she comes from a poor family and had to take over the duties of her deceased mother very early on, indicates that she lacks the empowerment of education Stephen had, which is noticeable from the fact that Eveline merely observes without criticising. She is, therefore, stuck in a passive role within her own life: Eveline is almost a bystander who, when given a chance to seize control of her fate, fails to grasp it.

The proof of this can be found already in the opening of the short story, while she is looking through the window: "One time there used to be a field there in which they used to play every evening with other people's children. Then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses in it – not like their little brown houses but bright brick houses with shining roofs"

(Joyce, *Dubliners* 25). It is fascinating how much information Joyce can offer in a dozen words. Firstly, Eveline's vision is obstructed by a window, which not only indicates that she indeed is an observer, but also metaphorically extends to her experience of the world, which is constantly being limited by her city and her duty. She always seems to have that window in front of her, as an obstacle to both her perception and her opening up to the world, which means that this glass constitutes a symbol of paralysis par excellence. What is also significant is the fact that the window of opportunity was offered to her in the figure of her beau Frank, but she failed to break the glass: the only thing she was capable of doing was watching Frank leave for Buenos Aires, through her window. In Leonard's opinion, "she has been put in a situation where potential insight is systematically reconfigured into panic and paralysis" (100). Eveline is not only incapable to see clearly, she is also unwilling, because facing the reality puts her in too much distress. She caught a glimpse of something out of the ordinary for her and was unable to bear it, retreating into the relative safety of her home. Overall, the motives of sight and vision are crucial for the short story and keep re-emerging: Eveline looking around the room, wondering if she would ever see it again; her reminiscing of the first time she saw Frank; her vision further obstructed by the nightfall; the vision of her mother on her deathbed; her catching the glimpse of the boat that was supposed to take her to a new life. The very last sentence of the short story constitutes a culmination of this. After a series of vision-related motifs, a window into Eveline's soul is given by representing her eyes, the emptiness of which reflects the true paralysis: "Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29).

Going back to her observation of the field, what should also be taken into account is the mention of a man from Belfast. Since Belfast is city with a significant Protestant population, the political implication of the British influence cannot simply be disregarded. This man has come to change the panorama of the predominantly Catholic Dublin (it is obvious that Eveline is Catholic, as well, since a print of Blessed Margret Mary Alacoque is hanging on her wall).

He is constructing houses that are completely unlike theirs, which further demonstrates his divergence from a typical Dubliner. He is a symbol of the British (protestant) dominance violently imposing itself upon the Irish. It is not clear whether Eveline is aware of these subtleties, or she merely noticed and registered the change. This could also denote the Irish compliance with the coloniser, because their own lack of reaction makes it easier for the English to, in this case, “refurbish” their cities. In any case, just as Eveline seems to accept this intrusion as a fact of life, the society has waived all its right to protest against it. This is precisely another example of paralysis that Joyce incorporates practically in the same line, in order to criticise Dublin in his characteristic, indirect way. According to Clive Hart,

Eveline lives in a paralysed and paralysing city in which the last vestiges of happiness crumble away as oppressive houses are built where once there were open fields. There have been changes in Dublin, but they all have led towards a state of immobility and death (...) (48).

Eveline truly identifies the field with her happiness, because that is where she used to play with other children during her childhood. Those blissful memories have somehow turned into isolation, since she does not seem to have any friends, apart from Frank and some colleagues at work. The field is also connected with the last happy memory she has of her family, while her mother was still alive and her father not as abusive. She is bitterly aware of the fact that everything changes, and it is precisely because she perceives change as negative that she refuses to radically transform her life. Anyhow, the arrival of the man from Belfast is somehow associated with Eveline’s miserable predicament, which could, again, be a metonymy for the society as a whole.

What is also noticeable from the very beginning of the story is the heterodiegetic narration, which was not the case in *The Sisters*. Eveline is always referred to as “she” and someone else is transmitting her thoughts. This most likely points to the fact that she is, in some

way, alienated from her own life. She appears as someone who finds herself outside, looking in at everything that is happening to her. The young woman is emotionally detached from both her family (she dislikes her violent father and states that she preferred her late brother) and her beau, whom she resents for trying to break her routine. As he was trying to convince her to get on the boat she felt like “all the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them: he would drown her” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29).

Although she had at first perceived Frank as a salvation, at the end of the short story Eveline seems to sense the potential danger. Firstly, she really does not know Frank well enough to go into the unknown with him. Not only is Buenos Aires half the world away, but it may also constitute a threat for the young woman. According to Katherine Mullin, after 1889, Argentina “became notorious throughout Ireland as the home of Frank’s kind of misleading and exploitative emigration propaganda” (177). It was a place where women like Eveline were often cheated out of their own freedom and sold into sexual slavery. In Mullin’s opinion, “shop-girls like Eveline were perceived to be particularly vulnerable, as their positions on the margins of moneyed society combined with their poor wages to render them easy prey to the blandishments of disreputable men” (184). In this sense, Frank can be interpreted as a predator intent to use and abuse the young girl; and her choice to return home as wise. She obviously did not trust Frank enough not to doubt his intentions and to be certain that what was expecting her in Buenos Aires truly was a better life. Her home, therefore, represents a place of relative safety and comfort, whereas the overseas (as well as Frank himself) uncertainty and peril. Even though she feels trapped and oppressed by Dublin and her family, Eveline was not willing to waive it all for a life with the duplicitous figure that is Frank and in a city that may entrap her for life. The fact that she did believe him at first (even though her father opposed the match) suggests Eveline’s naiveté and her desperate urge to escape the paralysis. However, Frank proves himself to be another paralysing factor for her, as he is forcing her to do something that would ultimately

ruin her. By liberating herself from his grip, Eveline takes hold of her life, she finally makes a decision of her own – not to flee Ireland simply to enter another ‘prison’. Through this short story, Joyce criticises emigration and many of his compatriots who naively departed in search of a better life, only to find themselves in a hostile place and regretting their decision.

### **The paralytic influence of colonialism in *Two Gallants***

If in *Eveline* Joyce hints at the British colonial presence through the figure of the man from Belfast, in *Two Gallants* he expands the topic by making some very controversial accusations. Once again, using silence and omissions as a weapon, the writer creates a “crude allegory of Ireland’s colonial degradation figured as a complicitous surrender to sexual predation (...)” (Norris 80). The central topic of this short story is the moral paralysis, both in the strong sense of betrayal and in the implicit sexual escapades of Corley and the young slavey. As it was case in *The Sisters*, what is not explicitly stated becomes crucial for understanding the story, through the re-emergence of the moral corruption denounced at the very opening of the collection. Silence is present not only as a series of elisions and empty spaces, but also in the physical sense.

That Joyce is treating his characters with a great deal of irony becomes evident from the title of the short story: the two gallants are indeed everything but gallant. Lenehan gambles for a living (without success, since he is poor), while Corley’s profession is even less honourable – he is an informant for the English: “He was often to be seen walking with the policeman in plain clothes, talking earnestly. He knew the inner side of all affairs and was fond of delivering final judgements” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 38). The fact that he is a spy produces a deep sense of betrayal in the story, something that Joyce denounced throughout *Dubliners*, as well as in the autobiographic novel. What makes the two protagonists not at all chivalrous is the way they treat women, in this case, the slavey: “She’s all right, said Corley. I know the way to get around her, man. She’s a bit gone on me” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 38). Their intentions are far from pure, precisely because Corley is a predator who exploited and manipulated the girl to serve his purpose, to steal the golden coin from her employers.

Paul Delaney has an interesting reading of the relationship between Corley and the maid: “Since Corley (...) is an informer for Dublin Castle (the seat of English administration), and the girl is a symbol of Ireland itself, their relationship sums up the political relation between the two countries: England robs Ireland of her virtue and reputation, while making her pay for the privilege” (260). This goes to show that the source of paralysis is twofold: the corruptive English influence finds fertile ground in the Irish weakness and gullibility. If the girl indeed is “a bit gone” on Corley, this indicates that England is in some way alluring for the Irish. On the other hand, it is questionable what Corley had to do in order to get that gold coin. At one point, he asserts the following: “There were others at her before me (...)” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 39). The implication of prostitution accentuates the immorality and makes it impossible to characterise only Corley as a predator. There are no victims in the story; both the slavey and Corley are equally culpable, which would insinuate that Ireland is partly to blame for her condition. The colonial paralysis is not generated only by the coloniser, but is a result of a specific interaction between the oppressor and the oppressed. Ireland seems to welcome the intruder into her bosom and, as morally paralysed as it is, consents to being manipulated. In Jason Howard Mezey’s opinion, “instead of casting Ireland as historically passive, Joyce’s schema (...) accords the Irish a role in their own colonisation (...)” (339). The short story serves as the deconstruction of the Ireland’s innocence through the representation of lust and greed and the accusation of lethargy and complaisance of Ireland, whose own morality is violated by the English colonial presence.

Declan Kiberd confirms the tradition of representing Ireland as a woman and England as masculine:

Victorian imperialists attributed to the Irish all those emotions and impulses which a hard mercantile code had led them to suppress in themselves. Thus, if John Bull was industrious and reliable, Paddy was held to be indolent and contrary: if the former was

mature and rational, the latter must be unstable and emotional; if the English were adult and manly, the Irish must be childish and feminine (*Inventing Ireland*, 30).

He sees Ireland as the England's unconscious, as everything that the English have repressed. Going back to Delaney's argument that England "robs Ireland of her virtue", the coloniser in a certain sense "creates Ireland" in its image, translating onto it all the negative features that the English society is trying so hard to exclude from its consciousness. In this particular example, Ireland is represented not only as a prostitute, but also as naïve, since she easily falls under the corruptive influence of England. By depicting the relationship between Ireland and England as sexual, and putting the latter in the position of a predator, Joyce paints a rather peculiar picture of the intricate balance of power within the Empire. In Kiberd's opinion, "either as a woman or as a child, the Irishman was incapable of self-government" (*Inventing Ireland*, 30). This indicates that the English indeed did create the image of Ireland as a woman, in order to justify their own colonial presence. Joyce amplifies this by adding the sexual overtones, as well as the fact that the slavey ultimately paid Corley for "his services", hinting at the fact that both nations share the blame for Ireland's submission. Said submission may in fact be another reason for representing Ireland as a woman: if England is masculine and powerful, Ireland is expected to placidly succumb to its dominance.

The motif of silence appears yet again, in the figure of the slavey, who does not utter a single word. This may be an indicator of the fact that Ireland is paralysed linguistically, as well. The phenomenon is not limited only to being unable to raise its voice against the foreign oppression, but also encompasses the problem of language as representative of a nation and its culture. This polemic is present in *A Portrait*, as well, particularly in the episode where Stephen talks to the Dean of Studies, who is an Englishman. The protagonist makes an interesting observation about how he feels about the English language:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. (...) My soul frets in the shadow of his language (Joyce, *A Portrait* 195).

Stephen feels entrapped by the shadow of the English language. He grew up surrounded by that language and yet he perceives it as so strangely alienated from him. Hugh Kenner considers “the Dean’s English” to be “a conqueror’s tongue” (129). Stephen would obviously agree with that interpretation, since there is a sense of guilt in his very soul for using it. Everyday communication becomes a struggle for Stephen precisely because the language he speaks produces turmoil in him, since he has not embraced it. This reveals an identity problem, as well. Because he truly does perceive English as the language of the oppressor, Stephen refuses to accept it as his. That would clash with everything that he stands for. He was brought up in a family of Irish nationalists, and language represents a powerful instrument of national identification. His reluctance to use a foreign language, particularly the one associated with the coloniser, reveals a problematic relationship with Irishness present throughout the novel, as well as in the short stories.

However, there is no other language that he could use. English historically took over Gaelic and became the predominant language, resulting in the gradual decline of the national Irish language. Stephen, as well as Joyce, seems to be uneasy about this fact: “My ancestors threw off their language and took another Stephen said. They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 209). Not only does Stephen criticise the acceptance of the English language, but he also emphasises the fact that the Irish have only themselves to blame, just as it was case in *Two Gallants*. Joyce’s urge to criticise the linguistic submission could be one of the reasons the slavey in the short story is mute. Since she represents Ireland itself, the

young woman's silence could function as a sign of cultural subjugation of the Irish society. Rejecting their own language, the Irish have also given up on their moral superiority and have found themselves enmeshed in the foreign influences beyond their control. This degeneration is reflected in the figure of Corley, someone who has chosen to be a spy and betray his own country, as it will be present in the characters of Gabriel (*The Dead*) and Gallaher (*A Little Cloud*). Even so, the strongest sense of betrayal revolves around the persona of Charles Stewart Parnell, whose political downfall is depicted both in the novel and in the short story *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*.

### **The relationship between personal and national in *Ivy Day in the Committee Room***

One of Joyce's favourite stories in the collection, *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* deals above all with the historical paralysis, but is also full of hints at the social one. It is interesting to see how Joyce uses space to further accentuate this atmosphere. The Committee Room is dark, illuminated only by the hearth and later by candlelight; it is damp (it is raining heavily and one of the canvassers is soaked) and most likely cold (the men are trying to light the fire at the very opening of the short story). This reflects the despondency of the men, who are drinking instead of working, yet are at the same time wondering whether they will be paid for all their hard work. The very title of the story reveals that it revolves around the figure of Charles Stewart Parnell: Ivy Day (6 October) is the day when the Irish honour his memory. In Margot Norris' opinion,

The betrayal of ideals by the men in the Wicklow Street Committee Room reprises the betrayal of Parnell in the *other* "Committee Room". "Committee Room No. 15" in the House of Commons in London was the site of the bitter debate that culminated in Parnell losing the leadership of the Irish Parliamentary party (...) (175).

This story deals with the elections and the conflict between the Labourites and Nationalists only superficially, since not even the canvassers are convinced that their candidates are capable of making a difference for the Irish politics. This is what they think of the candidate they support (Mr Tierney, the Nationalist): "O, he's as tricky as they make 'em, said Mr Henchy. He hasn't got those little pigs' eyes for nothing" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 102). He is tricky not only because he might not pay their wages, but also for supporting the King of England's visit the following year. The men criticise the politicians by comparing them on one hand with the working man, who "is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 101), and on the other with Parnell, for if he were alive "we'd have no talk of and

address of welcome” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 101). The canvassers consider the ones who betrayed Parnell (priests and politicians) responsible for the Irish colonial dependence. However, they continue to support them, because they are paralysed by their own poverty, lack of conviction and bravado to change anything. Even the elegy that laments the death of Parnell is accompanied by the sound of corks flying out of their bottles, which would indicate that they are only brave when they are drunk and that the elections are, for them, just another occasion to get intoxicated and squabble. According to Trevor L. Williams, the corks constitute “a reminder that for all the fine sentiment evoked by the poem, most of the characters’ conversation leading up to this moment has been shallow and venal, fixated upon a past they scarcely believe any longer” (425).

Betrayal is one of the central motifs in the story and is particularly present in the notion of selling your own country. The men denounce both the nobles and the Fenians, claiming that “some of these hillsiders and fenians are too clever if you ask me (...) Do you want to know what my private and candid opinion is about some of those little jokers? I believe half of them are in the pay of the Castle” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 104). They continue by asserting that a certain nobleman would “sell his country for a fourpence (...) and go down on his bended knees and thank the Almighty God he had a country to sell” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 104). This is a tad inconsistent, since they first praised the working man who would never betray Ireland, as opposed to the gentry. Now, however, they consider the members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood to be spies for the Dublin Castle as well. This demonstrates that the paralysis of the Irish society not only consists of the problem of collaborators, but also of the general distrust they have for one another. Burdened by their experience and paralysed by their history, the Irish find themselves in a position in which they cannot have faith in anyone, in which everyone is a potential betrayer. What is also significant is the appearance of the figure of Father Keon, whom they claim to be a “black sheep” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 105), which could indicate that he has fallen

out of favour of the bishops because he supported Parnell. As it was case with Father Flynn in *The Sisters*, Keon has also given up on the “teachings” of the Catholic Church, in the sense that he refused to conform to their political opinions. The motif of sin is therefore also prominent in the story, and even though their transgressions differ, both priests are dissenters, ostracised for their behaviour that goes against the norm. The bishop’s meddling into politics is be criticised precisely through the figure of Father Keon, who appears at the doorstep of the Committee room looking for Mr Fanning, the sub-sheriff of Dublin.

The fact that the canvassers are able to criticise anyone for betraying Parnell reveals their hypocrisy, since at one point they declare the following: “We all respect him now that he’s dead and gone – even the Conservatives (...)” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 111). It is precisely in this that the micro, personal experience reflects the macro, national one: even though most of them abandoned Parnell while he was alive, the Irish glorify him in his death. According to Delany, “the real contest in this election is not between socialist and Nationalist but rather, as so often in Irish politics, between a decadent present and a retrospectively glorified past” (263). This is yet another indicator of the paralytic clutch of the history, as well as of the lethargy of the people. The oppressive influence of the dead, which was present in *The Sisters*, appears once again, in the figure of a politician whose death, even though it was in a certain sense provoked by them, the Irish seem unable to get over. It does not surprise then, that Joyce dedicates the only poem in the collection precisely to him. The myth that was being built around the persona of Parnell from the beginning of the story culminates in those verses. However, before dealing with the poem itself, it is interesting to note the ambiguity of Mr Henchy’s words about Parnell: “He was the only man that could keep that bag of cats in order” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 111). It is not clear whom he considers a bag of cats: the English, the Irish, the Fenians or perhaps even the Catholic Bishops. Whoever it may be, Henchy depicts them as bad-tempered and almost impossible to deal with, while the qualities ascribed to Parnell are ones of a universal leader,

which is not true, primarily because not all of the Irish supported him, not even all of the canvassers (they all revere him now that he is gone). It is obvious that Parnell was not capable of keeping order, since even some of his party members betrayed him. They seem to have a distorted image of the politician, one that was constructed in order to serve their purpose, which further emphasises the hypocrisy of the canvassers. William York Tindall claims that, “whether nationalist or conservative, whether moral, neutral, or sentimental, these unprincipled politicians agree in nothing but disloyalty. Holding noble Parnell's ignoble successors up to their dead chief and missing centre for estimate, Joyce approaches satire” (34).

This satire may even be found in the poem: comparing Parnell to the figure of Christ, Mr Hynes seems to consecrate him, to perceive him through the metaphor of religion, the same religion that condemned him as an adulterer (which would mean that he is in no way a saint) and abandoned him for it. The priests and other followers that turned on him are compared to Judas: “Shame on the coward caitiff hands/That smote their Lord or with a kiss/Betrayed him to the rabble-rout” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 113). Their betrayal is worsened by the implication that they owe everything to Parnell: “He lies slain by the coward hounds/He raised to glory from the mire” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 112). The usage of the Gaelic name Erin instead of Ireland demonstrates the necessity to differentiate themselves from the English, to respect Parnell’s legacy. What he strove to achieve was freedom, liberation from the colonial shackles, but his dream was not shared by many, which could indicate that his affair with Kitty O’Shea was a mere excuse to bring him down. In his death, he went down into history and became a heroic figure: “And death has now united him/With Erin’s heroes of the past” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 113). It is interesting how this figure, first practically accused of heresy, was later given a mystic aura of martyrdom and was embraced as such even by his most violent opposition (the Conservatives). According to Brown, *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* is a

comprehensive indictment of the casual, treacherous corruption of Irish political life in 1902, in contrast to the noble idealism of the dead Chief, Parnell. In writing such a work Joyce was bringing together a personal and national sense of betrayal and outrage that had origins in his own experience as a boy in Dublin a decade before (xxii).

It is obvious that this topic was of great importance to Joyce, since it appears in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in form of a violent familial conflict. One of the most significant episodes in the novel, the Christmas Dinner scene offers a brilliant insight not only into the personal relations of the members of the Joyce family, but also into the impact of politics on the Irish everyday life, which constitutes another element of paralysis. It was obvious from the canvassers that politics was able to produce deep trenches in the Irish society, as well as on the personal level, but from this example emerges its ability to divide the very nucleus of a Christian society. What is problematic here is precisely religion, the fact that the bishops betrayed Parnell, which was prominent in the poem, as well: “–The bishops and priests of Ireland have spoken, said Dante, and they must be obeyed. –Let them leave politics alone, said Mr Casey, or the people may leave their church alone” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 28). Stephen’s father and his friend Casey hold the priests responsible for Parnell’s death: “When he was down they turned on him to betray him and rend him like rats in a sewer” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 30). In the poem, the priests were identified with a rabble-rout; here they are compared to rats. Rather violent imagery of tearing a person apart is used to portray the ambition of the bishops that drove Parnell into his grave. The reaction this provokes in the young protagonist is one of emotional disarray, since he considers all the parties involved to be in favour of Ireland:

He was for Ireland and Parnell and so was his father: and so was Dante too for one night at the bend on the esplanade she had hit a gentleman on the head with her umbrella because he had taken off his hat when the band played *God Save the Queen* at the end (Joyce, *A Portrait* 34).

This is an indicator of the complexity and intricacy of this situation: both the Parnellites and their opposers claim to be doing what is right for Ireland, even though their attitudes on the Irish Question could not be any different.

What is also rather significant is that the Dedalus family lives in the Wicklow County, which was also Parnell's home, while municipal elections were held in Wicklow Street. The Dedalus family may be supporting him as a form of local-patriotism, as well as advocating his fight for the Home Rule on the national level. In a certain sense, everything seems to be pointing to Parnell. The centrality of this figure is reflected in the micro-fates: his death has left Ireland and her people paralysed both on the level of personal mourning and having no adequate political leadership.

### **The past as a deadweight in *The Dead***

The topic of relationship between Irishness and Englishness is reiterated in *The Dead*, along with a series of other motifs that were present in the collection. This short story seems to deal with all the problems expressed in the previous stories, be it paralysis, poverty, nationalism, colonialism or mourning. However, Gabriel is a much more gallant character: not only is he an Irish gentleman, but is also highly educated (at a British institution, no less). His persona, therefore, differs greatly from other Dubliners, such as Lenehan and Corley (*Two Gallants*) or the canvassers (*Ivy Day in the Committee Room*). His attitude towards Ireland is most obvious from his conversation with Miss Ivors:

–And why do you go to France or Belgium, said Miss Ivors, instead of visiting your own land?

–Well, said Gabriel, it’s partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.

–And haven’t you your own language to keep in touch with – Irish? asked Miss Ivors.

–Well, said Gabriel, if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language (Joyce, *Dubliners* 163).

Several things can be concluded from their conversation: Miss Ivors is an Irish Nationalist (which is also visible from her modest attire), and even though she and Gabriel are colleagues (they both teach at the university), they have rather conflicting positions on patriotism. Miss Ivors accuses Gabriel of writing book reviews for an English paper, as well as of going abroad for vacation. On various occasions, she refers to Gabriel as “West Briton”, which would indicate that he supports the English rule in Ireland. He, on the other hand, demonstrates not only to prefer England and Europe, but also that he is, to a degree, ashamed of the fact that his

wife Gretta is Irish. In Kiberd's opinion, "Gabriel (...) is forced to come to terms with the spiritual gulf between himself, a sophisticated Dublin intellectual, and his homely wife from the west" (*The Irish Writer and the World*, 62). His snobbery affects even the ones closest to him, making him paralysed within his own close-mindedness. Yet, it is unclear what produced such resentment towards his own country: was it the fact that, as a gentleman, he was able to receive British education, or is it simply the matter of prestige and the necessity to be superior to his compatriots.

The problem of language and linguistic paralysis reappears, as well. Just as Stephen Dedalus claimed in *A Portrait*, Gabriel seems to be one of those Irishmen who have given up on his own language (Gaelic, referred here as Irish in order to further differentiate it from English). However, Gabriel is not bothered at all by the English linguistic dominance. In fact, he is obsessed by (the English) language and the effect his speech might produce on the guests. At a certain point, he becomes downright condescending of his Irish audience, who might not comprehend the English poetry: "He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 154). While Stephen Dedalus was contemplating the way the English words sound on his lips, Gabriel has complacently embraced the use of a foreign language. He uses the verses of an English poet to transmit a message to his listeners in Dublin, even though he could have cited an Irish one. This indicates that he has opted not only for the English language, but also for the culture, which he perceives superior in every way. As the dialogue between him and Miss Ivors progresses, Gabriel claims to be "sick" of his own country (Joyce, *Dubliners* 164). Once again, it is not clear why, as Gabriel is not always coherent in his attitudes – during his speech, he praises the Irish hospitality, hinting at the possibility that this very hospitality may be the reason behind the English dominance: "Some would say, perhaps, that with us it is rather a failing than anything to be boasted of". (Joyce, *Dubliners* 175).

In contrast with Gabriel is the figure of Freddy Malins, a drunkard (just as were the canvassers) who made a New Year's resolution to give up on alcohol, which he was obviously unable to uphold. His character could be interpreted as a representative of Dublin: Gabriel treats him with an air of superiority. Aside from his drinking problem, Malins seems to be a modest working-class man, most likely not as educated as Gabriel. Even though he is definitely not a central figure in the short story, it is interesting to see the glaring disparity between him and the protagonist – Gabriel is composed (with occasional unpleasant intrusion into his subconscious by Miss Ivors and a surprising retort from the usually placid maid), serious and refusing to have fun. On the other hand, Malins' insignificant, trivial story is contrasted with the solemnity of the speech Gabriel gives. He is certainly one of the guests (in Gabriel's mind, at least) who would not comprehend Browning's verses. Through the figure of Freddy Malins, Ireland is represented as an uneducated simpleton tending to its basest needs.

The figures of Gabriel's two aunts resemble a great deal to the Flynn sisters from the opening short story. According to Tindall, "Gabriel's aunts, like Father Flynn's sisters, are fixed in the past, which they try to maintain. The annual dance of the Morkans is a dance of death, as Gabriel's graceful tribute, a funeral oration" (43). Their paralysis can be registered both in trying to maintain appearances (by hosting a graceful dinner) as well as in their conviction that everything used to be better in the past, even the opera singers. Their obsession with controlling every little detail of the dinner party, so that everything goes just the way they have envisioned it, is reflected not only in their behaviour towards Freddy Malins. It is also visible from the very opening of the short story, in the thoughts of their servant, Lily: "Though their life was modest they believed in eating well; the best of everything: diamond-bone sirloins, three-shilling tea and the best bottled stout" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 152). What is also interesting is the fact that the lavish dinner they serve to their guests can be contrasted with Lenehan's dinner: in *Two Gallants*, he eats a plate of peas and some ale. Since poverty is one of the major topics of the

collection, as well as one of the most important factors of paralysis, it is obvious that both the Morkans and the Conroys differ greatly in that aspect from the rest of Dubliners. However, it is implied that they live beyond their means which, combined with Gabriel's air of presumptuousness, characterises them as desperate to appear better than the rest of the citizens. Another topic that re-emerges is the criticism of religion by one of the aunts: "(...) I think it's not at all honourable for the pope to turn out the women out of the choirs that have slaved there all their lives" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 168).

The strongest paralysing influence in the short story is undoubtedly the past or the overemphasis of its superiority. Every character seems to be burdened by it, be it Gabriel, his aunts or his wife, Gretta. The allusion to death, beyond the title itself, can be found in several motifs: the painting of Romeo and Juliet, the mention of the coffin in which the monks sleep, the emptiness of the piano piece that has no melody for the main character, the mention of Gabriel's dead mother and Gabriel's reminiscing of the imminent death of Aunt Julia. However, one of the strongest symbols of death is the snow that is mentioned several times (its symbolism being most evident at the end). Snow constitutes one of the most powerful symbols of paralysis in the short story, in two ways. First of all, it represents the reason behind the physical paralysis of the characters (at the end of the story, they have a hard time finding a ride home due to the blizzard). Several times the characters observe that such a quantity of snow is a rather unusual sight for Dublin. Secondly, it symbolises the mental state of the protagonist, his coldness and general lack of passion. Gabriel gives a great deal of attention to the snow, contemplating it in the closing lines, which demonstrates that it is particularly important both for the protagonist and in the context of the story as a whole. Snow is a paralysing factor because it covers the whole city, as well as the whole nation, putting its inhabitants into a slumber. This symbolises the state of the living-dead in which the Dubliners find themselves (which was demonstrated in the earlier stories).

The shadow that has come over the protagonist at the beginning of the short story culminates with the emergence of a ghost from his wife's past: her late beau, Michael Furey. The motif of sacrifice (the fact that her dead lover died for Gretta) makes Gabriel feel incompetent and insecure, as if he did not love her enough. According to Anthony Burgess, "there is a sense in which the dead Michael Furey is more alive, through the passion which killed him, than the living Gabriel Conroy with his bits of European culture and his intellectual superiority" (236). However, the presence of this figure proves to be crucial for Gabriel's personal development. It brings the "dead" Gabriel back to life. He seems to perceive Furey as the epitome of Irishness, which could be interpreted as a martyrdom of Ireland as a nation. Nevertheless, in the closing lines of the story, Gabriel concludes that "the time had come for him to set out on his journey westward" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 194). The figure of his rival serves as reconciliation with his nationality: in a certain sense, the dead, which were a paralysing force up to now (Parnell, Father Flynn), seem to lift the paralysis from Gabriel. In Richard Ellmann's opinion, "the west of Ireland is connected in Gabriel's mind with a dark and rather painful primitivism, an aspect of his country which he has steadily abjured by going off to the continent. The west is savagery (...)" (178). Since Gretta's first, fatal love had taken place at the West, Gabriel's journey may be interpreted as a pilgrimage to "cure" the flatness of his emotions.

As many critics have noted, Gabriel might be another one of Joyce's alter egos. They certainly seem to share some attitudes about Ireland. In his autobiographic novel, the protagonist claims that "Ireland is an old sow that eats her farrow" (Joyce, *A Portrait* 210). The usage of the metaphor of a beast preying on her young demonstrates that Stephen Dedalus treats Ireland with contempt. Once again, the imagery with which the country is represented is rather violent. It is a country that annihilates her own people by keeping them eternally paralysed in the historical and social conflicts and that has become their enemy. Instead of fostering and nurturing them, as a mother should, she is consuming her offspring. This personification of

Ireland is cannibalistic, thus committing one of the most controversial sins. It is also hypocritical and sanctimonious, because it adheres to the Christian values only superficially. Stephen's personal development was based on gradual rejection of the specific type of Irish nationalism, the one that Miss Ivors stands for, as well as Simon Dedalus. Following the decline in Stephen's relationship with his father, he has given up on all the values that Simon held onto. In the closing lines of the novel, Stephen makes a very significant remark on his nation: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." (Joyce, *A Portrait* 262). Once again, he is being rather critical of his compatriots, but what remains ambiguous is what kind of conscience he is trying to create with his expatriation. Taking into account Joyce's wish to offer a mirror for the Irish to take a good look at themselves, the creation of the "collective consciousness" could be precisely making his compatriots see that the path they are taking is wrong.

What is certain, however, is that Joyce had a very complex relationship with nationalism and patriotism, which is reflected both in the figures of Gabriel and Stephen. Emer Nolan sees Joyce as an "Irishman unswayed by patriotism, who not merely refused to participate in a popular nationalist movement in his own country but rebuked and challenged it at every opportunity" (Nolan 2). His alter egos, in a certain sense, not only verbalise Joyce's disdain, but also serve precisely as mirrors of the consciousness that he forged in "the smithy of his soul". In the figure of Gabriel, the author denounces the subordination to the English culture, yet through Stephen, he shows that the artistic creation (Joyce's at least) could not flourish in such an oppressive environment as Ireland was at that moment. For both characters, and for many others in the collection, Dublin itself is the crux of the paralysis, as well as its producer.

## Conclusion

As a socially and politically committed author, Joyce wanted to demonstrate the dangers of historical paralysis both for the Irish social life, as well as for its political scene. Even though he physically abandoned his country, he never truly did leave it behind; he remained focused on its capital as both the source and the focal point of paralysis. Precisely due to that, he depicts the ordinary lives of average Dubliners, thus proving that even the basic strata of the society are “contaminated” by paralysis, and that this “disease” has a national impact as well. In his collection of short stories, Joyce criticises a number of problems present in Ireland. Through a series of awkward silences and omissions, in *The Sisters* he hints at a possibly nefarious relationship between the priest and the altar boy, at the same time denouncing the priest’s sisters, who were aware of it but chose to ignore it. Both the sisters and the boy are paralysed by the shadow of the dead priest. By analogy, the author reprimands the relationship between the Irish and the Church: the example from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* shows that people are perfectly conscious of the corruption of the Catholic Bishops, yet are unwilling to put their harsh words into action.

The figure of a young woman, Eveline, who participates in her own life as a passive observer, allegorically represents Ireland itself. Unable (and unwilling) to react and defend itself from the colonial influence of the English, Ireland receptively embraces the changes imposed by the coloniser as an unpleasant, yet inevitable fact. What is particularly interesting in this short story is the omniscient narration, which further accentuates Eveline’s alienation from her own experiences. In *Two Gallants*, Joyce employs a great deal of irony to represent betrayal and collaboration of the Irish with the Dublin Castle. Firstly, the implication of sexual escapades and prostitution demonstrates that there is no gallantry whatsoever in the story. Alongside that, by using those metaphors, Joyce implicitly claims that the Irish are partly responsible for the English colonisation and participate in it a great deal. By making the only female character

mute, the author emphasises the linguistic paralysis, which was also denounced in the novel. Even though Stephen is obsessed with language, he feels that English does not belong to him, that it sounds unnatural on his lips. Furthermore, he criticises his people for opting for the English language instead of Gaelic, thus giving up on their culture as well.

*Ivy Day in the Committee Room* deals above all with the political paralysis and a culture that is stuck in mourning of its dead leaders. The short story gives an ironical glimpse into the work of canvassers, whose meaningless, alcohol induced squabble culminates in the lament of Parnell. Even though they did not respect him while he was alive, his death turned him into a martyr betrayed by the priests, which will always remain a stain on the Irish history. The figure of Parnell is the cause for a violent dispute in *A Portrait*, as well. The Dedalus' Christmas Dinner turns into a familial conflict over the bishop's role in Parnell's downfall, which indicates that politics plays such a crucial role in the Irish society that it is capable of dividing families.

Gabriel, the protagonist of the last and the most important short story (*The Dead*), is a character ashamed of his Irishness. This story seems to contain all the motifs depicted by the rest of the stories: the gulf between the rich and the poor, the betrayal of one's nation, the problematic relationship with patriotism, the imminence of death, etc. The figure of his wife's late lover (an epitome of Irishness) reconciles Gabriel with his nationality and convinces him to embrace Ireland as an indelible part of him.

Joyce's self-imposed expatriation is portrayed in the closing lines of *A Portrait*, in which he claims that he himself has to create the inexistent consciousness of his nation. He uses violent imagery to represent and criticise his compatriots, which proves that he unquestionably did want to show them what they seemed like to someone observing them from afar. His choice to situate both his works in Dublin demonstrates not only that he perceives it as the metonymy for the whole country, but also that he has never forsaken it, even in exile. Even though he was forced to abandon it in order to realise his artistic ambitions, Joyce remained devoted to his city

and its people. His affection for his hometown is best visible from his effort to show the Dubliners that they are oppressed by history, whose paralysing influence they cannot escape from. Therefore, paralysis can be found in every aspect of the city life, traversing the individual fates of its inhabitants in order to coalesce at the national level.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effects of historical paralysis on the Irish society and politics, as depicted by James Joyce in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The fact that Joyce was rather committed to representing the citizens of Dublin and their everyday lives is visible from the fact that this city has a cardinal position in a number of his works. The short stories deal with the problems of colonial subjugation, betrayal, nationalism, poverty and corruption that all have one thing in common: paralysis that pervades even the basic layers of society. In *The Sisters*, Joyce criticises religion and its impact on the nation as a whole. *Eveline* deals with immigration, or the inability of the protagonist to escape the grip of paralysis and give up on her routine, due to her fear of the unknown. *Ivy Day in the Committee Room* depicts the political paralysis of the canvassers and of the society in general, marked by a strong sense of betrayal and the martyrdom of Charles Stewart Parnell. In the *Two Gallants*, the author ironically portrays the effects of collaboration between the Irish and the Dublin Castle, effectively claiming that his compatriots share the blame for the English colonial dominance. The protagonist of the last short story, *The Dead*, as a possible Joyce's alter ego, struggles to reconcile his Irishness with the prestige associated with the English language and culture. However, his presumptuousness ends with the emergence of a shadow from the past.

In his autobiographic novel, *A Portrait of the Artist of the Young Man*, Joyce illustrates a rite of passage of young Stephen Dedalus into adulthood. During his maturation, Stephen decides to abandon all the values his father stood for, primarily religion and nationalism. The protagonist is an austere critic of his nation and his compatriots: not only does he blame them for giving up on their language and embracing English, but also sees Ireland as a monster that destroys its "children". The inability of the young artist to create in such an oppressive environment culminates with his decision to emigrate, to free himself from the shackles of paralysis and ultimately create the consciousness of his people. Many of the reasons why Joyce

opted for leaving Ireland can be found in *Dubliners* as well, precisely because the author wanted to show the Irish the way he was perceiving them. Due to that, it is particularly interesting to read the two works together and compare them.

## **KEY WORDS**

Paralysis

Nationalism

Politics

Religion

Betrayal