

# A little cloud essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

'A Little Cloud' is the first of the 'maturity' stories in Dubliners, preceded by 'Counterparts', 'Clay' and 'A Painful Case'. The story is archetypal of Joyce's style and embraces all the key themes of, class, materialism, escapism and above all the paralysis and struggle of Ireland. The opinion that Ireland is a country lowly in comparison to the rest of Europe is enforced at the beginning of the story when Little Chandler says "it was something to have a friend like [Gallagher]" because he "worked for the London press. The emphasis here is on "the great city of London" and Little Chandler has immeasurable respect for Gallagher as he has escaped the paralysis of Ireland in favour of this thriving city.

The environment Chandler lives in is lacklustre and uninspiring, his writing "tiresome" the nurses he sees are "untidy" and the old men dozing on benches are "decrepit". When Little Chandler thinks of his situation in Dublin "a gentle melancholy [takes] possession of him" which he feels "[is] useless to struggle against". In 'A Painful Case' a number of adjectives are used to convey the environment, such as "disused", "sombre" and "shallow". Joyce has subtly emphasised the burden of being a Dubliner and in particular the feeling of restriction which the characters are unwilling to challenge and from which they feel escape would be futile.

There are recurring references to the colour brown (not just in the maturity stories) and Maria in 'Clay' wears a brown raincoat, thus inadvertently resigning herself to the drab and motionless life of Dublin. Joyce contrasts two worlds in the story; the domestic, insular and paralysed Dublin with the fast-moving, energetic, cosmopolitan London and Europe. Little Chandler desires to belong to the wider, modern world and begins to despise his life

with his family in Dublin. By juxtaposing Little Chandler with the successful, exuberant Gallaher, Joyce sets up an antithesis between the two worlds which they represent.

The Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1800 abolished Ireland's political centre, resulting in Dublin being a city in limbo, without a clear purpose and with a confused identity. This is evident throughout *Dubliners*, with inhabitants such as Little Chandler and Farrington all feeling trapped by the narrowness of Dublin life. There is a pervasive feeling that to be glamorous, like Ignatius Gallaher, one has to leave Ireland. Little Chandler believes London to be the key to his dreams and that "if you wanted to succeed you had to go away.

You could do nothing in Dublin." The attitude of Little Chandler to social class is indicated throughout. He encounters children in the slums of North Dublin as he passes on his way to meet his glamorous friend, Gallaher. The children are described as "a horde", "grimy" and populating the street and depicted as vermin who "crawled" and "squatted like mice".

Little Chandler, like Duffy in 'A Painful Case' feels himself to be "superior to the people whom he passed", above the parochial, narrow interests of Dublin. He aspires to be a poet, loved by the more affluent English people. Chandler is shallow and materialistic, obsessed with appearance and class, excited about going to Corless's because "he knew the value of the name" and the "richly dressed ladies" caught his eye. Gallaher says if he ever married, his wife must have "a good fat account at the bank" otherwise "

she won't do for me". If he marries he intends " to play [his] cards properly" and secure one of the " thousand of rich Germans and Jews".

He dismisses the sacrament of marriage as just ' business' that could go ' stale', emphasising the immorality of London. The maturity stories all contain the presence of resentment in the main characters at the inevitable situation they have resigned themselves to living in. Joyce conveys Little Chandler's anger with a number of adjectives such as " trembled", " burst", " convulsively" and " a paroxysm of sobbing". His cheeks later " suffuse" with shame which gives way to " tears of remorse" at his failure not only to fulfil his dreams but for the resentment he feels towards his family for thwarting his freedom. In ' Counterparts' there is an established mood of anger with a " bell rung", " a heavy step" and Farrington's " spasms of rage".

Joyce uses the symbol of the ' little cloud' as an image of entrapment, not just hope; the little cloud of unhappiness hovering over his marriage to Annie, which restricts him from being the fun-loving bachelor like his idol Gallaher. Joyce incorporates the fantasy and captivation of exoticism and wealth in the ' dark Oriental eyes' of the Rich Jewesses. Similar to fantasies of the East Joyce uses alcoholism as a method of ' escape' from the stifling lives of the Dubliners and this is particularly prominent in ' A Little Cloud'. Gallaher states that he " drinks [his whisky] neat" and that Little Chandler, who drinks very little " doesn't know what's good for [him]". Sobriety is here seen as the reason why Chandler's life is so ' inartistic' and dreary in comparison to Gallaher's.

Ireland is belittled and viewed as an engaging absurdity by the English when Gallaher says “ they’ve got a great feeling for Ireland” and the English “ were ready to eat [him]” because he was Irish. Little Chandler “ wishes his name was more Irish-looking” so as to endear the British with his book he dreams about publishing in London. This is ironic as Little Chandler’s wishes to flee the restraints of Ireland yet feels dependant on his heritage. The story is highly symbolic of Ireland’s historical state; how the rest of Europe refuses to treat Ireland with respect symbolising Gallaher continually refusing Little Chandler’s invitations to come for supper and to meet his family.

Gallaher’s visit gives rise to an epiphany within Little Chandler, a feature Joyce includes in each of his stories, an anti climax when a character realises his escape to be defective. In the ‘ maturity’ series it is through the characters own personality flaw they render themselves incapable of escaping the life they constantly bemoan. In ‘ A Little Cloud’ Gallaher’s visit evokes “ a dull resentment” within Little Chandler; he was “ useless, useless! A prisoner for life” and he feels acutely the injustice of his life is next to Gallaher’s. Little Chandler believes the only way of escape is if he publishes a book in London, but he cannot complete this because “ the wailing of the child” permanently permeates his ear.

Little Chandler projects the resentment he feels at his lack of achievement in comparison to Gallaher, onto his wife and he is “ repelled” by her passionless eyes and fantasises of the “ dark Oriental eyes” of the Jewesses which Gallaher mentioned earlier in Corless’s. Little Chandler begins to feel “ a little disillusioned” and “ Gallaher’s accent did not please him”. London, which Gallaher hitherto represents, is now seen as “ gaudy” and “ vulgar”

imprinting itself upon his original "old personal charm" and his "vagrant and triumphant life" upsets the "equipoise of [Chandler's] sensitive nature". Little Chandler believes that Gallaher's alleged friendliness to him is in fact patronisation just as "he was patronising Ireland by his visit". He has been too consumed with his own anger and resentment at his own entrapment and the failure of his own dreams, to see through Gallaher's version of an exotic, successful life.

In 'A Painful Case' Duffy becomes disillusioned with escaping, when "Mrs Sinico caught up his hand passionately" and similarly Little Chandler begins to wildly question "Could [I] go to London?", "[is] it too late?" But Duffy bids his only distraction from the paralysis of Dublin Mrs Sinico, goodbye and is blatantly scared of commitment. The reunion with a conceited Gallaher reminds Little Chandler of what he hasn't achieved and he feels resentment which he thus inflicts on those around him. 'A Little Cloud' is an evident example of Joyce's maturity stories in keeping with the aspect that binds them together, the characters' comprehension that all endeavours to escape are fruitless. Little Chandler and Duffy lacked conviction and ignored the opportunity that was once given to them for escape, something they blame everyone but themselves for. The characters Joyce writes of do not appreciate what they have, mourning instead for what they do not. The Dubliners are, like the city, reluctant to change and yet are embittered by the injustice of their paralysed lives.

Duffy does not appreciate until the death of Mrs Sinico, that he will never have a chance of marriage, or to love, through which he could have forgotten the monotony of the city he cannot escape. Congruously, Little

Chandler dismisses his family throughout 'A Little Cloud' and when his personal epiphany dawns on him he realises his failure to his family, "his cheeks suffuse with shame" and he cries with "tears of remorse" as much out of guilt at the egocentric way he has behaved, as for his hopeless venture of escape.