

# A painful case by james joyce essay sample

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'A Painful Case' by James Joyce is a story about a man, Mr James Duffy, who lives on his own, and has very little contact with anybody. He is very lonely and isolated from the outside world, until one day he forges an unlikely friendship with a married woman, Mrs Emily Sinico. Their relationship becomes very close, and eventually Mrs Sinico attempts to develop it to a more intimate level - the prospect of which frightens Mr Duffy, who is then forced, by his own fear and pride, to end the relationship. The story then moves on several years, and Mr Duffy returns to his solitary and somewhat distant lifestyle.

He reads of the death, and suspected suicide, of Mrs Sinico, and begins to reflect on his isolated and desolate past, and regret his actions towards his relationship with Mrs Sinico. The story ends with: "He thought he was alone". Joyce uses a lot of imagery in illustrating the character and behaviour of Mr Duffy. The characteristics of his rented room represent much of his character, and indeed, some of the main themes of the story: these being desired elitism and consequent loneliness. His "uncarpeted room" has "lofty walls".

This would give the impression of a grand, wide open space, which, being uncarpeted, may possibly be prone to echoing, emphasising the idea of emptiness. The fact that the room is "free from pictures", again, illustrates an empty and lonely atmosphere. Mr Duffy has "four cane chairs", only one of which is regularly, (if ever) used. These extra, unoccupied spaces are, again, representations of emptiness and loneliness. Mr Duffy sleeps on a "black iron bedstead". This is hard and uncomfortable, where beds are supposed to be places of comfort, on which to relax.

Joyce has used this to show how Mr Duffy is generally used to discomforts, and that his life is in fact barren of such comforts and luxuries, both physically and emotionally. The shape and colour of the furniture in his room have deeper layers of meaning still. His "square table" is the most simple of shapes, and shows how Mr Duffy's life has no extravagant shape, and is somewhat rather plain and boring. The "black" bedstead, the "shelves of white wood", the "white bed clothes" and the "white shaded lamp", firstly all emphasise his plain and boring character.

He has no colour, no excitement to his life. He is regular, and routinely. Secondly, it illustrates his frame of mind: he thinks in black and white and will refuse to empathise with anybody; things are either right, or wrong. The only reference to any colours other than black and white, are, firstly, a "black and scarlet rug" at the foot of his bed. This notion of a red carpet demonstrates his elitist preference; it gives the subtle impression of royal stature. Secondly, there is a "manuscript translation of Hauptmann's Michael Kramer... in purple ink".

This shows that Joyce wanted to portray Mr Duffy as an intellectual, or somebody who thinks of himself as a literary connoisseur. This idea is pursued with the fact that Mr Duffy has a "complete Wordsworth". He also owns a copy of "The Maynooth Catechism", which is a book outlining Christian morals and commandments, presumably published in the Irish town of Maynooth, in County Kildare. This, along with the fact that he accompanies his family at funerals, is the only evidence of any religious interest of the character of Mr Duffy.

However, minor religious connotations are referred to in the story. For example, Mrs Sinico becomes his “ confessor”, and in their final meeting, he thought that, in her eyes, he would ascend to an “ angelic stature”. This shows that his character is somewhat divided. He has no specific church or creed, and has no communion with others, but doesn’t discard any catechism or basic human faith and morals: an analogy to his accustomed social rebellion. His aesthetic characteristics also play a prominent part in the understanding of his character and behaviour.

“ His face... as of the brown tint of Dublin streets”: he is a Dubliner, by law, and by milieu and culture, but his “ large head”, metaphorically speaking, withdraws him from communal with “ an obtuse middle class”. He thinks he is superior to other people of his society, of similar cultures and backgrounds. Because of this, he has led his character to be “ dry”, “ unnameable”, and “ harsh”. All of which, at some point, also describe his physical appearance. He “ looks at the world from under his tawny eyebrows”: he can’t see the full picture, hiding under his harsh image, he can only see what he wants to see.

His daily habits and lifestyle give much away about his character and behaviour. Mr Duffy works in a “ private bank”, dealing only with societies wealthy elitists. This shows, again, how he does not wish to commune with the middle class majority, even though he himself, may be considered lower middle class. After work he would dine “ in an eating house where he felt himself safe from the society of Dublin’s youth”: evidence again, of his condescending attitude towards society.

He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time short sentences about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense": he is completely infatuated with himself, his interests lie purely in his own small world, yet, one might think that with " short sentences" written " from time to time", Mr Duffy is obviously stretched to find many interesting aspects of his own life, that is, until the final paragraph, which consists of eight short sentences of this type, describing his misery and anxiety. He turned back the way he had come, the rhythm of the engine pounding in his ears.

He began to doubt the reality of what memory told him. He halted under a tree and allowed the rhythm to die away. He could not feel her near him in the darkness nor her voice touch his ear. He waited for some minutes listening. He could hear nothing: the night was perfectly silent. He listened again: perfectly silent. He felt that he was alone.

Although, written as part of a short anaphoric narrative in the story, it gives the subtle impression of a connection to Mr Duffy's own autobiographical habit. This concluding paragraph is the most important clue to Mr Duffy's continual behaviour, yet also a sudden epiphany. It not only gives the readers a final overview of Mr Duffy's behaviour throughout, but it is also a realisation within the story - Mr Duffy, as well as the reader, is summing up the facts that have been prominent from the beginning - Facts that beforehand, Mr Duffy was oblivious to.