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William Buttlar ENG 200 9/28/12 Style and Substance: An examination of Joyce's unique form of Realism There are not many individual who can claim to have completely redeveloped a style of writing, but James Joyce was not like most individuals. As an introverted yet observant youth, Joyce formed a highly progressive (while unpatriotic) view of his hometown of Dublin (Levin, 11). When considering that "[the] history of the realistic novel shows that fiction tends toward autobiography" (Levine, 41), it is no surprise that these observations and feelings that would eventually serve as the inspiration to the general setting of Dubliners. Dubliners is a collection of short fiction by Joyce, set exclusively in Dublin with protagonists born and raised in the city. Many consider the novel to be a prime example of "realism" (a style of writing that tends to reject symbolism in favor of realistic representation of daily life) because it "[functions] as a window on reality" in Dublin (Yee, 20). However, as author Frank O'Connor famously noted, Joyce's writing is more than realistic setting and characters, but a "direct correspondence between substance and style". Examining two of Joyce's works from Dubliners, "Araby" and "After the Race", we start to see a pattern of what constitutes the "substance" and "style" of Joyce's work; the "substance" being Joyce's representation of the inescapable reality of Dublin for each character, and the "style" being a focus on symbolism highly unlike that of any other realist author at the time. It is this combination of realism and symbolism, as well as the autobiographical tendencies of Joyce, that make his version of Dublin's inescapable reality so poignant. Dublin is, according to Joyce, the "centre of paralysis" for the entire country (Levin, 30). "Paralysis" can be seen as a representation of the protagonists' inability to move from or escape their own reality, as well as the stagnance of the society of the time.

While the reasons behind this paralysis are never made specifically clear by Joyce, it is accepted that cultural stagnance, the effects of the religious community, family values, and the general state of Ireland in comparison to the rest of the world are referenced within the stories of *Dubliners* (Walzl, 158). The inescapability of this paralytic reality is shown mainly by the character's reactions to their epiphanic discovery of it; both "After the Race" and "Araby" have a clear point in which the protagonist realizes that he is trapped by the reality of Dublin, but does nothing to fight against it.

Ironically, their acceptance of this reality only strengthens the bonds that keep them immobile. This inescapable reality is clearly represented in the events of "Araby"; it is, in the most basic description, a story of youth trying to break from the monotony of everyday life, but instead "becomes a cog in a paralyzed society" (Walzl, 167). The protagonist's desire to escape or transcend his life is made clear by his fixation on the exotic elements that appear in it (specifically, the bazaar at Araby and Mangan's sister). However, the society that renders the boy "paralyzed" shatters his fascination of the exotic, as "he realizes the unreality of his adolescent feelings ... [His] inability to buy even a trinket for the girl and his perception of the inanity of the flirtation he has just witnessed climax in an epiphanic vision, not of light, but of darkness" (Walzl, 175). The boy's acceptance of his existence "as a creature driven and derided by vanity" (Joyce, 40), traps him in the paralytic reality that does not permit him to even imagine escape (Gifford, 37). While the "substance" of Joyce's *Araby* is brought forth mainly by the character's reality, it is the symbolism of the setting that cements the idea that the reality of the character's life is inescapable. The story is set on "North Richmond Street", a "quiet" neighborhood with "sombre" house that

possessed a “ imperturbable faces” (Joyce, 35-36). Joyce focuses the imagery even more specifically on light and darkness, and describes the street first and foremost as being “ blind” (Joyce, 35). “ Blind” in this case literally means “ a dead end street”, but it is also a reference to the obstruction of vision, a motif that is seen throughout the descriptions of the narrator's normal setting and routine. The children of the street meet after “ dusk [had fallen]” under a “ sky ... of ever-changing violet”, playing in “ dark muddy lanes”, “ dark dripping gardens” and “ dark odorous stables” (Joyce, 36). The key feature of all these descriptions is that they tend to focus on the darkness of the street. “ After dusk” implies that the sun had completely set, allowing darkness to spread over the entirety of the children's lives; no matter where they go, the darkness is there (Gifford, 36). The emphasis darkness appears again at the bazar Araby, which “[is] in darkness” (Joyce, 39) by the time the narrator reaches it. By pairing the imagery of a “ completely dark” (Joyce, 40) hall with the narrator's realization of the inescapability of his reality, Joyce makes darkness an effective symbol of the life the narrator cannot escape. Joyce also uses the remnants of the past tenant to symbolize the inescapability of the narrator's reality; the “ old useless papers” and “ rusty bicycle pump” (Joyce, 36), which effectively bind the priest to his reality even after his death. By characterizing the setting with symbolism of inescapability, Joyce furthers the point that it is Dublin that renders the characters “ paralyzed” and unable to escape their reality. It seems only fitting, then, that the opposite of darkness (light) should serve as the symbol for escape from reality. Throughout the story, we see the narrator and his peers struggle to escape their reality; surrounded by darkness, they “ play till [their] bodies [glow]”, and “ when they [return] to

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the street light ... [fills] the areas" (Joyce, 36). The imagery of glowing bodies and the kitchen light against the darkness is a clear symbol for the children's attempted escape from reality; they find refuge in their playing, even as they are surrounded by darkness. Similarly, light is used often when describing Mangan's sister. Associating the narrator's fixated symbol of escape with light only strengthens the idea that this was Joyce's intention; the first description of her is that she is "defined by the light" (Joyce, 36). In a literal sense, this means that she is simply being illuminated, but "defined" also implies that her very existence is characterized by "the light", with "light" being the symbol for the narrator's intended escape. The "substance" of "After the Race" is very similar to the reality presented in "Araby", in that both prove inescapable for their narrators. In this instance, the reality for protagonist Jimmy Doyle is that ascension into the high society life of his companions is essentially impossible, due yet again to the "inaction" (Joyce, 44) (or paralytic nature) of his home. Doyle is by no means poverty-stricken; his father is "rich enough to be alluded to in the Dublin newspapers as a merchant prince" (Joyce, 45). However, when compared to his acquaintance Segouin, who is part of a higher society (determined by wealth and connections) (Joyce, 45), Jimmy's social status becomes irrelevant. Joyce's decision to write Jimmy as a wealthy Dubliner not only serves as a necessity of a realistic plot, but as a means to show that Dublin's inescapable reality is more than socio-economic, but over-arching and affecting all individuals (Walzl, 176). Jimmy's attempt to escape the reality of Dublin through wealth and influence is foiled by his own inexperience in dealing with individuals of the higher society, and his thankfulness for the "dark stupor that would cover up his folly" (Joyce, 49) marks the final stage of his ensnarement in the

reality of Dublin, as he accepts that there is no other way of life for him. While not as gratuitously used as it is in *Araby*, Joyce's "style" of symbolism is an important element of *After the Race*, which is yet again used to highlight the "substance" of the work. One of the most important symbols for Jimmy's reality is the race itself; The cars specifically mentioned are driven by French and German, who "[run] evenly like pellets" while the natives of Dublin "[gather] in clumps to watch" them "[career] homeward" (Joyce, 44). This is a clear symbol of the "paralysis" that Joyce argues Dublin suffers; instead of racing alongside the other countries, Dublin is simply watching, rooting for the success of "their friends, the French" (Joyce, 44). The cars of "wealth and industry" speed through the "poverty and inaction" of Dublin. As competition describes the reality of Dublin, it is also a symbol of Jimmy's inescapable reality. Like the cars, Jimmy's most successful friends are from countries of progress (specifically, the French cousins Charles Segouin and Andre Riviere), while Jimmy, a native of Dublin, cannot seem to break into the high society. This is shown as the four drive together through Dublin, as "[the] two cousins [sit] on the front seat" while "Jimmy and his Hungarian friend [sit] behind" (Joyce, 45). These friends and others, representations of the society that Jimmy cannot ascend to, eventually begin to beat him in a game of cards (Joyce, 48). As "play [runs] high and paper [begins] to pass" (Joyce, 48), Jimmy begins to fall behind the others; he is losing the symbolic race of wealth and high society to the "devils of fellows" (Joyce, 48) that view him in the same regard that he views them, as evidence by their willingness to calculate his I. O. U.'s instead of convincing him to keep what's left of his money (Joyce, 48). "Substance" and "style" may be largely responsible for the poignancy of the inescapable settings Joyce describes,

but the autobiographical nature of the texts makes the description of Dublin as “paralyzing” even more authentic, as Joyce struggled with many of the same snares of reality the protagonists were caught in. Biographer Harry Levine remarks that “His youth in Dublin, subject to the limitations of poor eyesight, the perceptions of acute bonds of emotion and unnatural tensions or resistance, furnished his only subject matter. ... Joyce's life is so inextricably woven into his work” (Levin, 11). Joyce shared many of the same struggles as protagonist Jimmy Doyle; Jimmy “did not study very earnestly” and “he divided his time curiously between musical and motoring circles”, while Joyce, around the time of the publication of *Dubliners*, “faced an uncertain future” and that during those years, “Joyce made three abortive starts in medical schools” (Walzl, 158). Yet another struggle that Joyce could not control in his life was his blindness. While darkness against light is a common symbolic conflict, the significance of his symbolic use of it is that Joyce himself had to face the reality of darkness on a daily basis. Joyce's eyes had multiple complications which left him “with eyes so weak that long periods of his life were passed in a state of virtual blindness” (Levin, 12). The decreased eyesight had an obvious effect on Joyce's daily life, and “The physical handicap” became one of the major “elements of Joyce's attitude towards society and towards himself” (Levin, 55). Joyce may have been extremely critical of the society of Dublin, but never placed the blame on his characters, or the real-life citizens of Dublin. His stories “implicitly [criticized] life in Irish society”, but is sympathetic to the struggles individuals face when escaping in and “reflects an understanding of the inner lives of those in that society” (Yee, 35). Perhaps this sympathy stems from his own inability to escape the reality of his blindness or family issues

(Walzl, 158), but regardless, it shows that Joyce firmly believed it was entirely the society of Dublin that trapped individuals, not simply a collection of human maleficence or folly specific to that area. This raises the question, are there other cities such as Dublin, or is the world in general one collective "Dublin"? While Joyce never answers explicitly answers this, his uses of realistic, relatable setting and powerful symbolism paints a picture of an escapable society poignant enough to raise such questions. " His youth in Dublin, subject to the limitations of poor eyesight, the perceptions of acute bonds of emotion and unnatural tensions or resistance, furnished his only subject matter. He forgot nothing and forgave nothing. Any resemblance to any persons and situations, living or dead, was carefully cultivated ... His books are crowded with public characters who turn out to be friends of the author in disguise. Enemies of the author, from time to time, are introduced by name into inconfruous situations. Like Dante, Joyce took considerable satisfaction in paying off old scores ... Joyce's life is so inextricably woven into his work... " (Levin, 11). "... with eyes so weak that long periods of his life were passed in a state of virtual blindness" (Levin, 12) " An epiphany is a spiritual manefestation ... There are such moments in store for all of us, Joyce believed, if we but discern them. Sometimes, amid the most encumbered circumstances, it suddenly happens that the veil is lifted, the burthen of the mystery laid bare, and the ultimate secret of things made manifest" (Levin, 28). " Joyce's intention, he told his publisher, " was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis". In every one of these fifteen case histories, we seem to be reading in the annals of frustration-a boy is dissappointed ... Things almost happen. The characters



are arrested in mid-air; the author deliberately avoids anything like an event ... The author merely watches, the characters are merely revealed, and the emphasis is on the technique of exposure" (Levin, 30). " The history of the realistic novel shows that fiction tends toward autobiography" (Levin, 41). " The physical handicap ... these are all elements of Joyce's attitude towards society and towards himself" (Levin, 55). " Dubliners was written during a period of turmoil and change in Joyce's private life ... In June 1902 Joyce completed classwork at University College, Dublin, and faced an uncertain future ... Joyce's experiences with medicine, though brief, were to affect all his fictional works ... During the next two years, Joyce made three abortive starts in medical schools" (Walzl, 158). "... a medical career had originally been intended as a means to a different end ... " (Walzl, 159). " The Joyce household rapidly disintegrated ... The only wage earner was Stanislaus" (Walzl, 160). " Dubliners, in its fifteen narrative, each dealing with a different set of characters, traces the archetypal life pattern of the youth who stays in Dublin and becomes a cog in a paralyzed society" (Walzl, 167). " ...he realizes the unreality of his adolescent feelings ... his inability to buy even a trinket for the girl and his perception of the inanity of the flirtation he has just witnessed climax in an epiphanic vision, not of light, but of darkness" (Walzl, 175). " In " After the Race", well-off Jimmy Doyle is about to invest most of his heritage ... and all the indications are that he will lose his money. " (Walzl, 176). In November of that same year, John Joyce was entered in Stubbs Gazette (a publisher of bankruptcies) and suspended from work. In 1893, John Joyce was dismissed with a pension, beginning the family's slide into poverty caused mainly by John's drinking and general financial mismanagement. (Ellmann, 132). " A classic realist text is defined as one

that “ refuses” to acknowledge its status as a linguistic artifact; instead, it claims to function as a window on reality” (Yee, 20). “ The story implicitly criticizes life in Irish society but reflects an understanding of the inner loves of those in that society” (Yee, 35). WORKS CITED A Companion to Joyce Studies, ed. Bowen, Zack and Carens, James F. “ Dubliners”, Walzl, Florence L. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984. Print. Gifford, Don. Notes for Joyce. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1967. Print. Levin, Harry. James Joyce: A Critical Introduction. Norfolk: New Directions Books, 1941. print. Yee, Cordell D. K. The Word according to James Joyce: Reconstructing Representation. Lewisburg: Associated University Press, Inc., 1997. Print. Joyce, James. The Essential James Joyce. London: Lowe and Brydone (Printers) Limited, 1948. Print. Thesis: Joyce uses reality to shatter idealistic illusions of the characters, similar to the way his life was changed by realities. Sources: <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=QaHVANQByVUC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=+James+Joyce:+The+years+of+growth,+1882-1915&ots=Fc7acmQoBV&sig=NcFv39wEMeFeHxx-2s9fHBhfa9o#v=onepage&q=James%20Joyce%3A%20The%20years%20of%20growth%2C%201882-1915&f=false> pg 45 Focus on ESCAPE — Jimmy tries to escape his socio-economic status, just as Ireland tries to assert itself in competition with the dominate powers of Europe (represented by the nationalities of the race, bigger/more wealthier nations are dominate in race). The narrator of Araby and his peers escape the realities of Dublin (as represented by the signs of past tennants) through the exotic (Mangan's sister, Araby) NO ESCAPE POSSIBLE — Jimmy realizes that there is no escape from his social status/ascention to a higher class as he begins to lose (losing yet another race). Similarly, the narrator cannot escape reality (darkness, the stand fails

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to live up to expectations, reminders of daily life, leading to a realization that his romantization of Mangan's sister is false). Neither character ACTS after realizations — Jimmy takes comfort in the “ daylight”, the narrator ends on thoughts, no resolve to change or rise about realities. Relates to Joyce — economic status, poor schooling (After the Race), eyesight (Araby).