

# Dubliners college essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

This is the first of these stories and there are several elements within that hint at the dull lifestyle experienced by the young boy that the story focuses upon. Near the start of the book it talks about how one boy's parents "went to 8 o'clock Mass every morning", leaving the boy behind on his own.

This shows the dominant effect that religion had upon Irish family life at that time and how it took up much of peoples' time, in this case meaning that the family was often separated. Another example of how predominant religion was at that time is when the story refers to Leo Dillon's brother who had a vocation (calling) as a young teenage boy to be a Priest even though it went against his adventurous nature and came as a shock to those who knew him. Their teacher, who is a Priest, also seems to suppress the dream which all the boys share and when he finds Leo Dillon's book he calls it "rubbish".

This can be compared to how religion crushed the wild dreams of Leo Dillon's older brother. The Priest expresses surprise at finding this book because they are not ordinary "national school" boys but they study at a religious school run by Priests.

This shows more was expected of boys with this education and shows the desire shown by Priests and other adults to shield children from anything they considered to be pagan or unchristian. You can also see from the stories that the boy and perhaps his friends want a real adventure not "mimic" adventures or pretend stories. This shows that merely imagination wasn't enough for the boy and this can perhaps explain why so many young people left Ireland; searching for real adventures in other countries rather than trying to pretend their lives were exciting. You can see symbolism in the story when the boy "hides his books in the long grass". It seems like he is

rejecting his education by embarking on this adventure and we are never told that he retrieves the books from the grass; a sign that he may have given it up for good.

We can also see much detail concerning Dublin in the story and this can help us vividly picture the city and the life that would have been typical for people there. Joyce describes the ashpits of Dublin which were dumps for anything whose smell the ashes might hide. This hints at how dirty Dublin would have been at that time and how unpleasant this would have made life there. It is also symbolic of decay being covered up by ashes; the rotten core has been simply covered over. Although this was typical of many big cities at the time it would certainly have added to the negativity of Dublin life. Further description of the city can be found when Joyce is describing the boys' adventure.

He talks about the horse-drawn trams around Dublin which shows how backward life still was in Ireland at that time and how this would have affected the aspirations of people there. There is also a degree of symbolism within some of these descriptions; Joyce describes a canal/wharf where ships would depart for foreign lands and as well as the spring and summer weather (sun and blue skies etc) he also describes new shoots of green leaves. This gives the impression that the boy is beginning a new chapter in his life and that he is somehow getting a fresh start. It helps to make his adventure seem more idyllic and you begin to believe that nothing could go wrong for him. When the two boys meet some younger children in the street who insult them, saying that they are "Swaddlers" (Protestants) we can get an impression of how sectarian parts of Dublin were at that time. Although

nowadays the Protestant population in Dublin and the Republic of Ireland is much smaller than it was then and at that time this would have led to some conflict between Protestants (who were considered English or Unionist and unwelcome in Ireland) and Roman Catholics who were predominantly Nationalist (considering themselves to be true Irish citizens).

Mahoney reacts to his freedom by being eager to get into mischief; he longs to rebel as much as he can against his school life. He uses slang freely and refers to Father Butler as " Old Bunser"; this is to make him feel even more rebellious. He also chases children from a local slum and would even like to shoot down some birds with his catapult. The two boys are fascinated by the thought of taking one of the boats they see in the canal out to sea. The idea of sailing out to a new land in search of adventure seems to them to be an even worthier cause than their own truant escapade from school. It is this fascination (felt by so many Irish people at that time) that can be seen in the great numbers of people leaving Ireland, seeking adventure in other countries.

Although the boy's adventure seemed idyllic at the start of the story soon the first elements of disappointment (a key theme in many of the stories in this book) and boredom begin to creep into the tale. The clouds begin to obscure the sun and there are only crumbs left of the boys' feast. They also begin to have " jaded thoughts". This unease is epitomised by the introduction of the old man to the story. As he approaches there is definite sinister element to his actions. The boy notices that everything he does is very " careful and planned"; it is almost as if the old man has planned this

event beforehand and has thought out how he could approach the boys without looking suspicious.

He also walks past them and says nothing but then retraces his steps merely to bid them good day; in reality he is trying to talk to the boys. He tries to ensure that they do not notice him by acting casually, but in doing this his actions become even more suspicious. He also does everything with great care as though he is anxious not to scare off the boys, making him even more suspect. The old man uses different methods to try and gain a false sense of security with one boy, perhaps to separate him from the other (Mahoney).

He addresses one of the boys and compares them to himself in an attempt to gain a rapport with him. He also hints at reading some of Lord Lytton's more adult poetry and already sexuality seems to be creeping into his discussion with the boys. The old man has an upper class accent which indicates a high social class and he utters many monologues within their discussion, he is very verbal. However, the boy seems to think that the old man's monologue is something that is being repeated or that it has been learned of by heart.

He also talks to them secretly at times, like he is saying something inappropriate that he does not wish others to hear. The content of his monologue also becomes quite sexual and after talking about Lord Lytton's adult poetry he starts to talk about sweethearts and how beautiful young girls are and how soft their hair is. He clearly begins to excite himself sexually and goes off to the end of the field (still within view of the boys) to “

relieve" himself. He is clearly sexually fascinated with children and a paedophile but when he comes back we see an even more sinister element to his sexual fantasy and he starts to talk excitedly about corporal punishment and whipping boys, showing that he has a sadomasochistic inclination. Imagery is used to make him more frightening and Joyce describes his " bottle-green eyes peering out from under a twitching forehead". Ironically these green eyes are what the boy was searching for at the start of their adventure; he was looking for a sailor who had green eyes like the mythical character Odysseus.

This is just another aspect of how the boy's dream has become an inversion of his hopes and a disappointment. By this time the boy has realised the man's true nature and he struggles to get away calmly although he is scared. He walked up the slope calmly but his heart was beating with fear that the man should grab him by the ankles. At the end of the story the boy talks about how he is penitent that Mahoney came to his aid because in his heart he had " always despised Mahoney a little".

This revelation is quite shocking as we were of the impression that the two were good friends. To learn that the friend who has come to his aid and whom he has embarked on this adventure with is someone that he despises adds yet another strange and abrupt twist to the tale, this time culminating in an ending, where the young boy is confirmed in his reliance on his peers rather than liberated from their values.