

In The Name Of GOD

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**A NIETZSCHEAN APPROACH TO
JOYCE'S *DUBLINERS***

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

A NIETZSCHEAN APPROACH TO JOYCE'S *DUBLINERS*

BY

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ABSTRACT

A NIETZSCHEAN APPROACH TO JOYCE'S *DUBLINERS*

BY

SARA SOLEIMANI KARBALAI

This study examines the influence of Nietzschean philosophy on Joyce's *Dubliners*. Having perplexed the reviewers and critics at its appearance in 1914, *Dubliners* shocked its readers with its novel, radical themes: the physical handicap, the public humiliation, the brooding sensibilities, the sense of grievance, the contempt for convention, the desire for self-justification and the appeal to higher authority. *Dubliners* is a quintessence of Modernism with a back-bone of Nietzschean philosophy. Drawing on affinities between Joyce's ideas embodied in his collection of short stories and the controversial concerns of Nietzsche, this study discusses *Dubliners* as a satirical reflection on paralysis and stagnation of modern life.

Nietzsche's various notions including "Will to Life," "Will to Power," "Overman" as well as his ideas concerning "man of today," "history," "memory," "conventions," "Christianity," "value system," "passion" and "reason" are focused upon to reveal that Joyce values life and self above all and condemns anything that leads man away from them. Setting out with the mission to produce a chapter of moral history of his country and betray the soul of paralysis, Joyce makes each sketch in *Dubliners* an illumination of how Christian morality and its resultant corrupted culture propagate false virtues that extirpate passions and refute earthly life as the concern of human existence.

By delineating the decadence and stagnation in every aspect of Dublin life, Dublin, that is to Joyce the epitome of all modern cities, turns to be a realm of living-death populated by a horde of 'living dead' who are typical modern men paralyzed by the degenerative force of religion, conventions and the resultant corrupted culture. Brought up with slave morality inculcated in them, they are weak, passive and timid people in whom passions are internalized as evil and sin; hence, autonomy and creativity cannot be realized. Keeping an eye on the ideal life, as a result of slave morality that places the "center of gravity" in the other world, these personae not only lack enough courage but are in want of **Will to Power** to change their paralytic life. Consequently, *Dubliners* is an epiphany of the nature of modern life--the servitude of conventions, the fear of violating them, the failure of emancipation and

the noble attitudes because of the weakness of the flesh and, in Nietzsche's terminology, **Will to Power**. Though "special order of corruption," as Joyce accepts, floats over his stories, the work as a whole reflects the possibility of change, and the existence of another perspective, in Gabriel Conroy's decision to follow a new course in life, a westward journey, only if man can disengage from excessive burden of the past, tradition, conventions and dominant moral system and attain a conscious will.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

As an Irish giant of English literature, Joyce (1882-1941) is well-known throughout the world. His ambition to establish the religion of art led to the intensity and complexity of his works that, though meager in size, contain the entire experience of man as they delineate individual reactions to the most universal dilemma of mankind. From his youth collection of poetry--*Chamber Music*--and his early prose experiment (*Dubliners*) to his last masterpieces--the three novels which establish his fame as a modernist and even post-modernist artist: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*--Joyce's development to depart from 19th-century standards can be detected. This radical divergence from the previous era results, in the first place, in radical reactions; "As for Joyce," notes Levin (1960), "his book could not...be published or sold in his native country. They are of Irishmen and by an Irish man, but not for Irish men; and their exclusion was [really] Joyce's loss as well as Ireland's" (21). Though today Joyce has achieved his aim to be regarded as the priest of art and has come, as Levin (1960) puts it, for us as a "Writer's writer" (2), he has suffered a severe injustice in his lifetime. According to Levin, "his work has weathered rejection by publishers, objection by printers, suppression by censors, confiscation by customs officials, bowdlerization by pirates, oversight by proofreaders, attack by critics, and defense by coteries--not to mention misunderstanding by readers" (1).

Despite the fact that his works of maturity are less personal and more humane, Joyce never severed himself from them. He puts himself in all his books and chooses Dublin--the native island he escaped from--as the setting of his entire artistic career. Givens says, "He is the unnamed boy in *Dubliners*, Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, Richard in *Exiles* and Shem the Penman in *Finnegans Wake* . . ." (20). A careful biographical probation of his achievements shows his substance to be extracted from his own personal life; however, it does not allow us to identify Joyce with the protagonists

of his works, especially those of his only collection of stories. In other words, though all his characters are based on real people known by Joyce, they are "primarily fictitious" (Benstock 1988:191). They are duplication of his contemporary Dubliners whose stories reveal the spirit of age: an age which fleetly diverges farther from the main course of nineteenth century.

Noon declares that for Joyce "the artist . . . has no other responsibility than to embody in his art a uniquely personal vision of his world." To reproduce this vision, Joyce takes advantages of the "events of his life to strengthen his youthful presumption" (258). With resort to identification of his neighbors as character prototypes, Irish history, his biography and endless lore of several generation back which, in Benstock's eyes, is the "Joycean way" (1983:281), Joyce provides the fundamental material of his fiction. However, the story does not end here. In fact, as a priest of artistic truth, Joyce amalgamates, using the words of Noon, "faction" with "fiction" skillfully--"to grasp the full import of all the facts" (256). Nevertheless, the least relationship is observable in his only short story collection --*Dubliners*. Though again Joyce draws his material from his life experience, the characters are his foils. In fact, as Levin reveals, "Joyce puts himself into his early book, not directly this time, but as he might have been if he had remained a Dubliner" (42).

In his voluntarily detachment from his native land, he is highly determined to reflect the decadence and hypocrisy hidden under the masks to his countrymen. As a priest of temple of art for whom writing was a religion, and the word a sacred material, Joyce initiates his career (Givens 23). He puts it as his ultimate end to bring forth, as he himself alleges, "the nightmare of history." To carry out his intention and to stir his addressees toward their illusive life, it is indispensable for him, as Stephen announces, to "fly by" the nets of "nationality, language, religion" (*A Portrait* 469). Disengaging himself from these nets, he concentrates his fictional works on these deteriorative agents which has deprived man of his true life. In his enterprises including *Dubliners*, he shows that, borrowing French words, "the church, state, social and business worlds all participate in transforming erotic and affectionate feeling . . . into an economic and political arrangement that stifles the very feelings it is intended to channel and control"

(457).

To exhibit the depraved functions of religious and social order, he resorts to familiar concrete examples; he takes advantage of his own personal experiences and ordinary incidents in an exclusive, Joycean way. According to Magalaner and Kain, contrary to Maupassant who "usually selects the extraordinary moment in an ordinary existence," his stories "are keyed to the tempo of routine of middle class life" (1956:56). To elaborate it, as Stanislaus affirms, the focus of Joyce's fiction is on the every-day life with his own stamp; that is, "the incident, in itself so slight . . . serves only to illuminate a certain moment of the every day life. Judgment is always suspended" (qtd. in Magalaner&Kain 1956:59). In this way, Joyce brings forth the Janus-faced quality of life on the page and lets the illusory aspect of life illuminate itself to the reader through sudden revelation. To repeat Rodway, the image of life Joyce represents "forces us to see through aggrandizing illusions about it, and yet makes it acceptable, finally, without the pretensions (largely by the life and gusto of his style, and the control of his structure)" (192).

By using slight incidents as the backbone of his fiction and applying unique, exclusive techniques, Joyce succeeds in creating a multi-dimensional fiction which is accepted in critical agenda as the corollary of Dante's influence (Walzl 1965:438 & Osteen 1997:516). The main feature of this multi-leveled fiction is its "sliding signification"--a useful term Osteen introduces in comparing Joyce and Dante to refer to the way they create "multiple-simultaneous meanings" (516). This "sliding signification" is the natural, indispensable outcome of his Nietzschean quest to reveal truth as it is. With his sensitive spirit and penetrating eyes, he dissects familiar human experiences to no end but detecting the neglected part of human life. Utilizing raw materials from his background and everyday life, he delicately opens the eyes of his addressee to the overlooked core of their existence. Joyce's ultimate aim is to communicate all his visions. He is truly a difficult writer but in sense of attaining out of the restricted precincts of his observation abnormally acute perceptions to which every normal, crass observer is blind (Levin 37). In fact, it is no matter of critical controversy now that as Joyce became more and more mature in his career, he sees more in things and finds more ways to say what he sees.

The twentieth century, the time Joyce commenced his artistic career, was a complex age in which the process of modernization had already made man suspicious of all previous dominant discourses: social, cultural, economical, political and especially religious. In fact, although this process with its mechanisms has made man's life easier and comfortable, it has many other severe negative effects on his life. It made a drastic change in man's point of view and his interpretation of the world with more hidden side-effects on man's experiences. The mechanization of life and its consequent unique development in human history gave man such an arrogance of his intellectual power and reason that he considered himself the authentic agent to reconstruct the past order.

Apart from the sense of power, his excessive trust in his reason bestowed him, there was another process under the surface; man's wholeness of experience shattered and he turned into an automaton who reacts and functions bereft of emotion and passion. The whole effect of modernization destroyed or suppressed man's spirituality in the sense of inclination to live a human life. In contrast to the more radical social, economical and cultural conversions, this suppression, the causes which escalate it and its hideous aftermath were concealed to ordinary modern man. Nevertheless, it was not obscure to those institutions of the age whose major concern was human life including literature, philosophy and psychology. To tell the truth, each, in its own way, concerns the anxieties, self-alienation, self-deception, and psychic disorder of modern man. The intelligentsia of the era felt responsibility to reflect this undercurrent reality.

To elaborate more on this, a reference to the three terms central to the following discussion is helpful: Halliwell (2001) makes a distinction between "modernisation, modernity and modernism." According to him, "modernisation" ascribes "the changes to technological processes driven by the development of capitalism and urbanism which made living in the early twentieth century markedly different from life prior to and in the nineteenth century" (10); "modernity" refers to "the individual and collective experience of the modern world, particularly as it is embodied in ideas which represent a reaction to the social and economic processes of modernisation." And "modernism" is actually "the artistic medium through which the experience of modernity is expressed,

whether in poetry, prose, film, painting, sculpture, or in other art forms. . . . It contains a series of experimental artistic trends that revolted against the dominant art forms and belief-systems of the nineteenth century" (12).

The definition of modernist literature has specific implications; it specifies modernist literature reacting against nineteenth century realism which portrayed social reality as relatively objective. To quote Halliwell, the main characteristic of modernist writers was not only to represent reality from the viewpoint of individual experience that was considered a state of flux, but many, like the late modernists including Beckett and Nabokov, remained essentially skeptical about the possibility of reflecting reality at all. "Instead of being familiar and orderly," in modernist writing, "reality loses its stability" (16). All facets of modernist literature including theme, style, narrative techniques manifest that no objective, firm reality is identifiable: the uncertainty, contradiction, with the skeptical or ironic narrator's voice and the rarely worthy protagonists in the sense of "deserving social respect or merit" (Halliwell 12). Besides, the common issues of modernity such as morality and those, Magalaner and Kain enumerate, including "fragmentation and urbanization of culture, the decay of social institutions and the consequent alienation of man, the dichotomy of art and life, the problems of semantics and communication. Relatively both psychological and metaphysical, and the relationship of myth, religion, and history to modern life" (1956:13), all demonstrate that belief in objective reality which had its own epistemological and moral basis has gradually shattered.

With a novel view of reality, the modernist writer deals with new themes or treats the old themes in a novel way. The concepts of God, ideality, freedom and self are evaluated in a thoroughly different way. Hence the whole construction of value system shatters into pieces. This chaotic situation and its effect on man necessitate alteration in the form and content of literary medium. The freedom that the modern world is unable to deliver as it has promised, claims Halliwell, is mirrored in the modernist writing either in terms of a purposeless world or of the individual paralysis to decide between possible choices (3). Furthermore, the anxieties and uncertainties of modern man for its expression require literary works to be ambiguous and equivocal. Though this ambiguity and equivocation has

turned to be one of the major critical problems of modern art, it is a "starting point in the self-examination of the art medium and its value" (Magalaner&Kain 1956:5). This equivocal modernist writing vocalizes the themes of "trickery, transformation" and questions "the legitimacy of particular forms of social action" which in contrast to Halliwell's attribution of them to the writers of 1930s (9) are much older and return to earlier time when writers like Nietzsche and Joyce emerged.

In almost all modernist literature the question of morality is dealt with whether implicitly or explicitly, directly or indirectly. With the loss of the fixity of reality, morality as the basis of the value system falls short of its authenticity as yardstick. Universality which was the core of morality is repudiated as a mask with which religious ideology controls people. Referring to Michael Ignatieff, Halliwell suggests, "the rhetoric of universal rights is often a smoke screen for obscuring a fragmented world divided into privileged or protected 'zones of safety' in which liberal values can be preserved, and 'zones of danger' in which universal morality cannot prevail" (4). The contrast between 'zones of safety' and 'zones of danger' is the source of conflict in modern art. However, the prevalence of this dilemma does not transform the literary modernism into a pedagogic cultural movement, but proves moral questions to be of paramount importance as Halliwell emphasizes (6).

In literary Modernism of twentieth century, the renunciation of moral certainty leads to what Halliwell calls "a reappraisal of the parameters of what is considered to 'be reality'" (16). The contemporary realism, to use Lukács term, diverges essentially from the Realism movement. Instead of focus on the exterior collective reality which modernism regards as a mask, modernist literature involves fragmented sketches of the idiosyncratic and often psychological world of the individual. Therefore, what modern art sheds light on is another facet of reality not as Lukács (1963) claims in the *Meaning of Contemporary Realism*: a "distortion" or misrepresentation of reality. According to Halliwell, for Lukács what supersedes moral values of previous fiction is "a nihilistic realm without value or a solipsistic life in which the individual reinterprets moral action solely on his or her own terms" (19). Though in regard to other modernist writing,

especially the late modernism, Lukács' statement is justifiable, it cannot so easily be drawn out of Joyce's writing.

A close examination of Joyce's fictional works shows that what he delineates in his literary achievement is an atmosphere of moral uncertainty and lassitude. In his writing, the characters are caught in a moral dilemma in an ambience that arouses questions of general structures of belief and motivates a set of epistemological questions. As Halliwell suggests, the best way to explore this moral problematic in literary modernism is through "the vacillation between stasis and action" which is the thematic backbone of Joyce's fiction in particular *Dubliners* (3). Nevertheless, the representation of the moral dilemma in his writing especially the focus of this study--*Dubliners*--does not imply that "no alternative code is articulated as a coherent philosophy" in his work--a claim Halliwell regards true of all modernist literature (3). To elaborate upon this, "though the virtue defined in traditional terms as the practice of moral excellence or the Aristotelian sense of 'the good life'," as Halliwell regards, "is rarely discernible in the lives of modernist protagonists" (16), the implication is not that there is no virtue at all. Another value system looms large at the back of *Dubliners* to approach its stories one should suspend moral judgment. The protagonists are unconscious of this system and the author does not treat it explicitly. However, it is no proof of its absence. In the following elaboration, Joyce's underlying value system turns out to be the one Nietzsche suggests in his inclusive, complex philosophy in which life is the central value. The moral dilemma at the heart of each component of the collection is psychologically indicative of a split-self the personae feel as the consequence of deep-rooted moral influences. As a modern artist with materials from everyday life, Joyce brings into foreground the self-negation of modern man that results in experience of a double reality: "world of experience"--exterior world--and "world of dream"--interior world. By doing so, he mediates between the two worlds what, according to Litz, is considered in *Stephen Hero* the fundamental, exclusive feature of any artist (1966:43).

1.2. Objective and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a Nietzschean reading of *Dubliners*. By

exploring the prominent issues of modernity, this study draws on affinities between Joyce's ideas embodied in *Dubliners* and the controversial concerns of Nietzsche. Each sketch in *Dubliners* is indicated to be an illumination of how morality, Christianity and its resultant corrupted culture propagate false virtues that extirpate passions and refute earthly life as the concern of human existence. It shows that though the decadence and stagnation of Dublin life, as an epitome of all cities, is pictured in *Dubliners*, the work as a whole reflects the possibility of change, the existence of another perspective only if man can disengage from excessive burden of the past, tradition, convention and dominant moral system. This study declares that another prospect in which man is aroused to Nietzsche's *Overman* would be triumphant if man repudiates the resentment (a term Nietzsche use for reference to jealousy and revenge) and attains a conscious will.

Nietzsche's various notions including "Will to Life," "Will to Power," "Overman" as well as his ideas concerning "man of today," "history," "memory," "convention," "Christianity," "value system," "passion" and "reason" are focused upon to reveal that what Joyce dramatizes in his only collection of short stories is a Nietzschean outlook; that Joyce, in concordance with Nietzsche, values life and self above all and condemns every thing that deviates man from them. To this end, moreover, in the overall investigation, *Dubliners* is put forward as what Yeats calls: "satiric stories of great subtlety" whose reflection on both the inner self and outer experience--neither of which is perceivable fully without the other--causes it to be "a fiction which like life assaults the perceiver with its complex vitality," a quality Melnick attributes to all fiction representing such "formulation of existence" (51).

Nietzsche is a great versatile philosopher and Joyce too is an all-embracing thinker. Conscious of modernity there is no doubt that their ideas may overlap at many points. In this regard, pursuing Nietzschean imprint in Joyce's creations seems not so much a novel research topic. However, it is noteworthy that all related previous studies, surprisingly meager in volume, deal with the novels of Joyce and no detailed scholarly investigation has been undertaken to prove the affiliation in *Dubliners*. Therefore, this study is the first comprehensive study which deals with this issue.

Since the first emergence of Joyce as writer till now there has always been controversy upon his works. Regardless of various critical inspections, the purpose of this study is to prove that, Joyce's fiction swerves from the traditional fiction, his fiction has many novel characteristics in form and content and he makes art function as religion by following the Nietzschean philosophy. However, it should not be overlooked that nowhere his art has been understood as the outcome of a total severance. According to Litz, in addition to the fact that some of the crucial Joyce's aesthetical tenets are modifications of Aristotelian theory, Joyce is indebted to Aquinas who provides him with "some hints, and materials to be manipulated" (1966:41). Litz believes that "Joyce's chief debt to scholasticism may have been in the area of style and form of argument" (1966:41). In Litz's opinion, restating the ideal of classical art in terms of his own personality and the modern life was one of Joyce's objective and his hope was "to direct the natural tendencies of modern literature toward classical ends" (1966:43).

To elaborate it, Joyce's innovation does not make him a dissenter. As the disciple of art as religion, Joyce takes advantage of anything that may contribute to the articulation of his vision: not only classical tendencies, religion and scholasticism but also literary movements such as realism, symbolism, expressionism and impressionism. Influenced by all these contributions, he synthesizes an artistic whole that, though centered upon provincial background, involves questions endemic to the modern time. Though the difficulty of Joyce's fiction especially his last--*Finnegans Wake* which is mainly a language experiment--is not thoroughly due to the contribution of these influences, they lend a great deal as is obvious in Magalaner's & Kain's claim: "One of the major sources of difficulty is that the art stems not from the main streams of classical and Renaissance culture but from neglected tributaries of scholasticism, theosophy, and symbolism" (1956:11). The difficulty that traditional and current forces bestowed on his fiction is caused by his personal exclusive exploitation of them. As Beck clearly implies, Joyce does not owe to a particular influence in terms of imitation (9). On the contrary, his delicate deployment of various influences proves that Joyce is, as Beck insists, conscious of the main weight and wealth of tradition which negates the conviction that "a genre was burnt out and

must be not just reconstituted from its ashes but metamorphosed" (9). Joyce is not a founder of new genre; his accomplishment lies in his discovery and application of diverse potentialities of the existent ones. He does it so elegantly that it is not unfair to consider him what Levin claims to be: "a school by himself" (23). Because of his skillful dissolution of diverse influences in his own overall project, it is not easy to identify Joyce with any movement (Levin 23). He cannot be included in any school because he is a devoted disciple of none of them.

Unsatisfied with the cause of Irish revolution, namely "nationality, religion and language," he considers himself a European man of letters "whose iconoclastic influence would transcend national boundaries, break down parochial prejudices, open windows and slam doors" (Levin 23). Like Ibsen, his concern is the realm of psychology and inner world of modern man; hence by illuminating the uncertainties, anxieties and contradictory feeling and thought of individuals, he, likewise, questions the authenticity of domineering institutions in man's life. Setting all his narrative especially *Dubliners* in Dublin, he dramatizes the narrowness and sterility of Ireland's political, religious, and cultural life and, according to Attridge, "struggles to forge a progressive European cultural outlook in opposition to the ideological fantasies" (2004:9).

Bearing in mind the psychological perspective from which Nietzsche treats modern man's experience and what has been world-widely accepted as the primary characteristics of modernism, it is no matter of controversy to range Nietzsche as one of those thinkers who looms large behind modernist writings. Moreover, an estimation of Joyce as a man, artist and philosopher reveals certain characteristics that enable us to categorize him as a modernist avant-garde with a Nietzschean frame of mind. According to Butler (2004:75), Nietzsche's volumes were among his library books. A thorough examination of Joyce's career brings to light not only his familiarity with Nietzsche but also his absorbing a great deal of Nietzsche's insights.

1.3. Review of Literature

Joyce often offered as "the prime example of modernism in literature" (Buttigieg 189) is another Nietzsche. Both are aware of the causes that have reduced the