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Constructing the Epiphany: Joycean Approach to Selected Stories from *Dubliners*

Shiv Raj Paudel
&

Babu Ram Dahal

yoursshivu07@gmail.com & baburmdahal@gmail.com

Abstract

*By using the Joycean lens in the construction of epiphany in some selected stories from *Dubliners*, James Joyce tries to uncover how tactfully he examines inner lives of his characters and their socio-cultural environment. By emphasizing on simple ordinary events Joyce finds extraordinary within the mundane offering deep insights into the characters of the stories in *Dubliners*. With regard to use of epiphany in the selected stories of the book *Dubliners*, the present study tries to investigate how James Joyce adopted the literary device of "epiphany" in *Dubliners*. It is argued that Joycean style of developing the epiphanic moment is accomplished through the mode of character transformation, especially among his protagonists. Through the potent use of symbolic characters, Joyce conveys a realistic reflection of *Dubliners* as a "Living dead" against the backdrop of the contemporary impact of modern developments in Irish society and their consequent implications of cultural, spiritual, and moral paralysis. The main*

characters in the chosen stories experience a psychological transformation from the private to the public, egoistic to social, ideal to real, childhood to adolescent, and ignorance to knowledge, which causes them to lose faith in the true nature of the universe they live in. Joycean epiphanies are more spiritual than those that result from outside forces. The concept of a Bildungsroman will be used in the study as a theoretical technique that focuses on the development and coming-of-age experiences of the main characters. It will also be used to analyze the conclusions that the psychological change of the characters is what drives Joyce's building of epiphany.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, egoists, epiphany, metamorphosis, psychological transformation

Introduction

This study sheds light on James Joyce's artistic approach to creating the epiphany and makes the case that he wants to capture the realistic image of Ireland in the 20th century as a morally bankrupt, spiritually paralyzed, and culturally lifeless country as a result of contemporary developments. Joyce is renowned for his realistic writing style, which he uses to portray realism. His modernist masterwork, *Dubliners*, is a collection of fifteen short stories that realistically depict *Dubliners'* state of death during their lifetime. The main theme of these stories is the cultural, spiritual, and moral crises that arise from the constraints of modern Catholic Irish society and its acceptance of the expanding modern western developments, particularly those from Britain. Joyce's portrayal of his characters, who embodies the traits of a life paralyzed by moral corruption, spiritual illusoriness, ideal separation from the real world that leads to the painful realization, repressed psychological desires for freedom, egoistic and self-centeredness that eventually brings about a sense of meaninglessness when disillusioned, etc., can help realize such a crisis. In the words of Florence (1961), "In *Dubliners*, then, Joyce gives the case history of a nation, he shows the Irish people as successively paralyzed in emotions, will, action and social values" (p. 228). It clearly

hints the readers that Joyce's characters are so emotionally dead that they are unable to follow their own wills, desires, or determined decisions.

The Joycean construction of epiphany is not instantaneous; rather, it builds to a peak through a sequence of thought-provoking occurrences. The protagonists of the chosen stories, *The Dead*, *Araby*, and *Eveline*, travel through several stages of metamorphosis, such as egoistic to mutual, ideal to practical, innocent to mature, unknown to knowledgeable or known, private to public, and illusion to disillusionment. The protagonists experience more internal changes as a result of external circumstances and events that lead to the epiphany.

The protagonist of *The Dead*, Gabriel, is shown to be conceited, egotistical, independent, unaware of his own Irish culture due to the impact of western ideals, and more inclined towards the west. Simply because he views Western ideas as superior to Irish lifestyle, he has a high opinion of himself. He eventually comes to the harsh realization that he is dying while still alive as a result of a few humiliations and abuses, including Lily's demeaning speech about his sense of masculine superiority, Miss Ivor's punch at his crisis of nationalism in life, his wife's recollections of her ex-boyfriend, and his vision of Michael's death as snow falls.

Similarly, the protagonist in *Araby* is a young child whose idealistic, spiritual, and innocent views of the world and love are destroyed by the materialistic tendencies of the society. His conception of the world as spiritually ideal was constrained by his naive love for Magnan's sister, who was also his friend. A pivotal moment occurs when he promises to purchase a gift for her from the market. He enters a different universe when he travels to the market at night. At the end, there is an epiphany that is symbolic of his journey from ideal to real, childhood to adolescence, immaturity to maturity. This transition is marked by the sensual and erotic conversation between the man and women, as well as the market's sudden closure, which almost woke him up and made him forget why he had come. The storyteller's gloomy room in the deceased priest's apartment, Magnan's sister as a substitute for God, his uncle's inebriation, and the sensual exchange of words between the male and female in the market all serve to illustrate the paralyzed state of Irish society.

Joyce mirrored the moral and cultural crises along with the spiritual one in *The Dead* and *Araby*. However, he addresses the immobility of *Dubliners* from a gender standpoint in *Eveline*. Moral and spiritual paralysis exists, of course, but they are exemplified by the misery of women in a male-dominated culture such as Dublin. Since epiphany serves a gloomy purpose in the novel, its application is a little different. *Eveline*, the main character, has a very regimented and regulated life. Her dad is a heavy drinker. Her brothers are involved in their own world and very busy. Her mother has already passed away. Her decision to sit at the window and reflect on the past and future illustrates how confined she feels from the outside world. Joyce depicts a woman who is determined to reclaim her freedom by resisting patriarchal authority. However, she eventually goes back home, regardless of how powerful it is. She has two epiphanies: the first is when she chooses to leave her lover, Frank, for her independence; the second is when she gets ready to elope on a boat with him, but she decides to go back home because she is afraid of what the future holds for them. This succinct explanation demonstrates how the protagonist's changes serve as the focal point for the epiphany in Joycean theory.

Joyce attempted to convey an awakening message through his writings in part by using the approach of evoking an epiphany in both the readers and the characters. It was a potent tool that could shock the minds of the dead in Dublin and bring them back to life. Many modernist writers employed epiphany extensively as a literary device for a variety of objectives. It was one of the creative aesthetic approaches that resulted from experimenting with literature. Though Joyce employed epiphany for a variety of reasons, his use of it was distinctively different from that of other modernist writers. However, outside influences like social ethics have a more spiritual influence on his conception of epiphany. There are many definitions and interpretations of epiphany. Joyce has a clear understanding of it. James Joyce is known for using the epiphany technique. Every tale in his anthology *Dubliners* displays it. Theodore Spencer (1969) concurs, saying that "*Dubliners*, we may say, is a series of epiphanies describing apparently trivial but actually crucial and revealing moments in the lives of different characters" (p.10). It can be described as a state in

which one fully understands the truth. It's an exquisite comprehension. Joyce used it in a different way than other modernist authors. His realization occurs on a spiritual plane subsequent to being impacted by the outside environment. It is the level of awareness attained by an individual. According to Joyce (1969), "an epiphany is a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself...a sudden revelation of the whatness of a thing" (p.12). His characters experience a glimpse of revelation following a period of psychological turmoil brought on by unforeseen circumstances. It is not something that should occur immediately. It passes through a sequence of currents before ultimately bringing the main character to the revelation climax. It can be applied to any situation in which enlightenment on a problem or situation is realized from a new and deeper perspective, says Tang Xu, discussing the character's steady blossoming of epiphany. Typically, a shift in nature is the result of a sequence of minor consciousness shifts and intense psychological conflicts that lead to epiphany (Xu, 2011, p.133). As can be observed in the story protagonists, Xu here insists on the prerequisites that bring the character to the epiphany's climax.

The aforementioned opinions essentially state that an epiphany is the last realization of reality. The characters eventually come to a harsh realization of the truth during this process of disillusionment. Joyce manipulates his characters to create an emotional impact of awakening by taking them through such a torturous journey to get at the ultimate reality. Speaking on the characters' grueling journeys from *Dubliners*, Shen & Dong (2016) identifies "Epiphany cannot be formed without protagonists' painful experience and reflection. Almost all characters in *Dubliners* could gain insights into something in the end, and the existence of epiphany brings the stories to a climax" (p.31). The chosen stories, as these critics noted, start with the protagonists' enigmatic world and gradually bring them to a series of offensive, painful, and humiliating experiences that finally bring them to the point of disillusionment.

Constructing Epiphany and The Dead

The Dead, the final and longest narrative in *Dubliners*, is a collection of stories by Joyce. It centers on the psychological conundrum that Gabriel, the story's main character, faces as he gradually awakens and experiences a painful epiphanic sense. He represents the *Dubliners'* spiritual and cultural immobility in bodily form. Joyce describes him as an embodiment of the *Dubliners'* state of being living dead. When Bernard Benstock reads the narrative The Dead, he affirms that it is about "those who remain alive, but fail to live: the disillusioned, the self-destructive, the blighted and wasted lives" (Benstock,1994, p.24). These sentences further support Joyce's desire to use Gabriel's projection to depict *Dubliners* as living dead. Because of his ego, self-centeredness, arrogance, individualism, ignorance of his own Irish culture due to the influence of western values, and more Western views, Gabriel's, the central character personality is seen as a representation of the paralysis that many *Dubliners'* experiences in their daily lives. Because of his Western ideas, which he considers to be superior to Irish culture, he has a high opinion of himself. He does, however, experience a few humiliating situations that break his feeling of egoism and individualism, which he believes to be true.

Eveline's Epiphany Construction

Joyce is able to bring up the gender viewpoint that is pervasive in modern Irish culture in the story Eveline. He addresses the subjugated status of women, which was sustained by the conservative and religious beliefs of that era. The patriarchal rules and beliefs that dominate Irish culture are shown via Joyce's depiction of gender reality. Various perspectives on the subjectivity of women in Dublin are presented in *Dubliners*. Although Joyce presents Eveline as a socially marginalized woman, Ms. Ivor in The Dead is portrayed as a revolutionary and fiercely independent lady. The investigation of women's roles and situations in society is also present in *Dubliners* by Joyce. Suzette A. Henke (1980) contends, analyzing Joyce's portrayal of female characters in *Dubliners*, as Joyce's portrayals of women in *Dubliners* are typically balanced between sympathy and satire (p.15). They acknowledge, if subtly, the

undercurrents of violence, frustration, powerlessness, and rage that are a part of Irish existence. The "hemiplegia" of the will affects nearly every character in *Dubliners*. However, compared to men; Irish women are much more constrained. Henke's study effectively demonstrates how Joyce's *Dubliners* explores the realities of women's lives at the period as well as the male characters' paralyzed way of existence. Joyce draws attention to the reality of Dublin's male-dominated culture, where women are severely constrained by Catholic Irish dogma and so excluded from the city's social majority, as he concludes. Eveline is a tangible example of how patriarchal restrictions strain women's wills and freedoms. Eveline is forced to live a life like to that of a dead person due to external suppression brought on by the male-dominated limiting norms, while Gabriel and Araby are immobilized by their own incapacity to act morally and spiritually. The conservative principles of nurture, selflessness, and submission have shaped her mentality. The flow of experience from childhood to present unpleasant realities in Eveline's mind is how Joyce skills to generate the feeling of epiphany in her life. He allows her to be exploded by the memories of her childhood, mother as well as present behaviors of her violent father so that she can be mature enough to be closely observing the crisis she has been living through. Her state of being enlightened didn't take place at once. Her journey from innocence, unknown, domesticated thinking to knowledge about her right to freedom and happiness goes through the mode of transformation.

Construction of Epiphany in Araby

In contrast, Araby follows the development of an anonymous young narrator from an idealized childhood to a mature adolescent who is aware of the realities of life. Like Gabriel, the young narrator experiences a terrible epiphany at the end of the novel when he realizes that his idealized version of Magnan's sister, his object of love, is not as spiritual as the world he lives in. He is thrilled to oblige Magnan's sister in her request to purchase a gift from Bazaar because of his intense love for her. Without delay, he pledges to purchase a present for her. Her dreams have completely engulfed him. After getting some cash from Uncle, he sets off on a nighttime adventure at ten to ten. He was eager for the next day to arrive. It was

almost time for the bazaar to close. He was already resolved to go there, no matter how dark it was. Steven J. Doloff (2011) who highlights the symbolic significance of clock time as a turning point in a boy's development from childhood to adolescence, at ten minutes to ten, the large hand of the clock overtakes and passes the small hand, symbolizing the boy's passage from childhood into adulthood and reflecting the imagery of his having to pay a shilling admission fee to walk through a clocklike, rotating turnstile when he could not find a child's six pence entrance into the bazaar (p.153). Joyce intended to shock the narrator by exposing the materialistic world that he had always believed to be spiritually and morally ideal. Doloff's symbolic interpretation of clocktime as a young boy's psychological process of transition here reflects Joyce's purpose. He nearly lost sight of his purpose for being there. His act of forgetting he would provide a present signifies his psychological transition from childhood to adolescent and from ideal to real. "In *Araby* presumably the boy's epiphany of the absurdity in going to the fair and in his aggrandizement of Magna's sister is brought home by the shallowness of the conversation in the confessional-gift stand at the fair" (Bowen, 1981, p. 107). These lines hint us that the superficial nature of the talk in the confessional-gift stall at the fair is likely what brought home to *Araby*, the boy's epiphany of the folly of attending the fair and his aggrandizement of Magna's sister.

Bildungsroman in *Dubliners* as a Narrative Technique: An Overview

Consequently, the researcher herein expounded upon its analysis of those character modifications from the theoretical perspective of the Bildungsroman, which, as a narrative device, has no bearing whatsoever on the protagonists' psychological development and progress. The Bildungsroman literary tradition became more well-known when it originated in Germany. This kind of narration demonstrates the growing moment of the story. Such a narrative approach places a lot of emphasis on the characters' dynamic physical and psychological states. Characters are increasingly shifting their perceptions of themselves in connection to the wider social spectrum of the public realm, especially the protagonists. That is to say, the Bildungsroman literary genre is defined by the psychological journey that

the protagonists take when they move between states. As a result of their journey, the characters eventually discover who they are. These associative occurrences, which together allow the plot to reach the point of resolution and reconciliation, constitute the structure of such a progressive story. Marianne Hirsch (1979) defines the Bildungsroman as "a progression of connected events leading up to a definite denouement," (p.293). And he highlighting its progressive style.

Every story in *Dubliners*, including the selected chosen for the study, has a Bildungsroman-style storyline that follows a progressive narrative that is realized through the protagonists' psychological development. Brewster Ghiselin (1999) notes "the episodes are arranged in careful progression from childhood to maturity, broadening from private to public scope" (p.36), analyzing the protagonists' transition from personal to public, childhood to adolescence, ideal to real, illusion to disillusionment, innocence to knowledge as a process of maturing. This remark is closely related to the core of the Bildungsroman narrative, which is about the protagonists' process of self-discovery and their development of a new sense of self that is compatible with their social identity. Mikhail Bakhtin defines Bildungsroman as the characters' process of learning and contends that the reader is presented with the image of man in the process of becoming (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 19). Gabriel's from the story *The Dead* quiet sense of remorse about his individualism, egoism, and self-centeredness, as well as his ongoing reconstruction of his identity by valuing others, are the perfect examples of Bakhtin's view of Bildungsroman writing as the characters' evolutionary process of becoming. Once he compared himself to Furey, he began to mature and fully realized how weak he was at undermining both his Irish beliefs and the values of those around him. Since his egoism and self-centeredness have caused him to become emotionally detached from his own wife, an epiphany revelation of truth occurs, allowing him to rediscover his new sense of self in relation to society values.

The literary style of Bildungsroman is characterized by the characters' development of a new identity as a result of a succession of progressive events. Following a series of thought-provoking occurrences, the characters gradually begin

to perceive the world differently. *Araby* is a Bildungsroman story that demonstrates the protagonist's transformation as the novel progresses. Similar to the story's characters, the Bildungsroman depicts the young boy's self-evolution as he emerges and transforms into the public eye. He experiences a new world that in contrary to his old philosophy of life as spiritual, moral and ideal. His encounter with the pervasively commercial and material relation between the young lady and the two men disillusioned him. As stated by Sidone Smith & Julia Watson (2010), "[T]raditionally the bildungsroman has been regarded as the novel of development and social formation of a young man. It recounts the youth and young manhood of a sensitive protagonist who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and patterns, and acquire a philosophy of life and the art of living" (p.189). These sentences succinctly describe the bildungsroman genre as the protagonists' journey from their previous, deceptive life to their adoption of a new philosophy and way of living.

In the story *Eveline*, Eveline personifies the bildungsroman genre because of her steady ascent to a more mature understanding of the world, which culminates in her elopement with Frank from her father's patriarchal domain. Her incapacity to flee for freedom and happiness reminded her of her spiritual crisis, so she calculated the gallery of her experiences from childhood to the present. She eventually experienced enlightenment and had the courage to challenge the patriarchal narrative that kept her in the home. Suzette A. Henke (1980) again says, "The balance between sympathy and satire upon women in Joyce's story tacitly acknowledge the undercurrents of anger, frustration, helplessness, and aggression that pervade Irish life. Almost all the characters in *Dubliners* suffer from the "hemiplegia" of the will... Yet Irish females are even more restricted than their male counterparts" (p.15). Henke's study effectively highlights the fact that Joyce explores the realities of women's lives during the time in *Dubliners*, in addition to expressing the male characters' paralyzed way of living. Joyce draws attention to the reality of Dublin's male-dominated culture, where women are severely constrained by Catholic Irish dogma and so excluded from the city's social majority, as he concludes.

In this sense, Joyce's artistic method of creating epiphanic feelings in his protagonists incorporates a psychological shift. It is more spiritual because it drastically alters their inner perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. When his protagonists fully understand the ultimate truth, they experience a complete transformation. Through the flow of experiences, Joyce crafts a mental cycle of ups and downs for his characters. It is evident from the protagonists' epiphanic experiences in the stories that Joycean epiphanies are spiritual or psychological shifts from one state to another; however, these are made possible by outside forces that exert an emotional pull on the characters' development.

The tone of the story is also comparable to that of a bildungsroman. The bildungsroman form of story advancement is actually incorporated into the Joycean construction of epiphany. The characters eventually have awakening understanding as a result of the connections between all the events. Bildungsroman: Following a sequence of thought-provoking experiences that pierce the characters' consciousness, the protagonist of this story of formation happens to adopt a new identity. As previously indicated, the selected stories feature Joycean characters who progress from a condition of innocence, ignorance, personal egoism, and idealization to a world of knowledge that is real, public, mature, and social. Emotions and terrible feelings accompany this journey. This sort of epiphany is constructed in Joycean characters through this kind of psychological metamorphosis.

In *The Dead*, Gabriel grows and forms a new identity after realizing how egotistical, self-centered, haughty, and incapable he was of appreciating the worth of other people. A pair of harsh external factors that threaten his inner weakness cause him to have an epiphany. Lily's combative conversational style offended his sense of social prestige. It numbed him because her emotional tone made him feel helpless. He even felt bad about using the money to purchase her as a sign of his superiority. He loses all pride in his western education and morals when Ms. Ivor calls him a "West Briton" during the party. It pricked him because it made him see how ignorant he was of the history, values, and customs of his own country. These two embarrassing experiences had already caused psychological harm to him. The

turning point in the story came when he realized that his own wife was not his. His self-centeredness led him to believe that his wife was his physical possession. Gretta was emotionally alone and there was no way to communicate her feelings. Her memory of Furey from the past drags her along. After having an epiphanic impression that he is disconnected from the social realm, Gabriel eventually goes through a hard metamorphosis from personal to public and egoism to social.

As he progresses from childhood to adolescence and from innocence to maturity, the young boy in *Araby* begins to represent the characteristics of a bildungsroman, demonstrating his own formation process. The practical reality of society clashes with his idealized, spiritualized view of love. He exposes the world of his illusion by going to the market, which is a Joycean tactic. In contrast, the young boy's failure to recognize the spiritual decay of Dublin society—which is evident in the erotic conversation between the young lady and the two young men—was caused by his inability to express his emotionally charged, sensual feelings for her within the confines of the Catholic religion. This scene represents a turning point in the boy's psychological development because he used to think his belief in a spiritual world was ridiculous. Joyce uses the priest's symbolic death and the dusty chamber filled with stray religious literature to illustrate Dublin's spiritual paralysis. However, the boy is old enough to detect Dublin's lifeless scent. His disenchantment denies himself as a ridiculous creature and paralyzes his will. Joyce might be attempting to educate the *Dubliners* about the material world they live in through the small boy's realization. He might be advocating for a return to the importance of spirituality.

Conversely, Eveline represents Joyce's investigation of female subjectivity within the Dublin metropolis. Joyce is trying to bring attention to the hidden realities of the women who live in Dublin. The protagonist Eveline accepts the world of patriarchal dominance despite having desires for freedom, which makes her epiphany more negative. Joyce illustrates how women's wills are immobilized by Catholic Church dogmas that keep them inside the boundaries of the family. Even though Eveline knows she has the right to happiness and freedom, she prepares to live a patriarchal existence. She goes from being a scared young girl to speaking up for

independence and back again as a result of her experiences from childhood to the current crises. Her mother's domesticated existence was forcing her to battle for her own freedom, and she was a brave girl when she had her first epiphany. The patriarchal ideologies, however, grasp hold of Psyche and demand that she renounces her new subjectivity in order to return. Eveline's metamorphosis is a Joycean technique that compelled her to confront the ultimate reality of her tamed existence. Returning her to the realm of the patriarchy, Joyce teaches the female *Dubliners* that their own suppression stems from their own weak wills, rather than advocating that they put up with the oppression.

Conclusion

In his masterwork *Dubliners*, Joyce, a modernist writer, employs the realistic form of representation. He makes an effort to describe Ireland's history, which is marked by a decline in morality, a crisis of cultural ideals, and spiritual paralysis. The chosen stories assist him in addressing the degenerating consequences of European modernism and the dehumanizing effects of the Catholic Church on the *Dubliners*. He portrays *Dubliners* as being in a paralyzed state of death-in-life because they are unable to act in accordance with their wills, wants, and feelings. *Dubliners* are trapped in an illusionary world due to the influences of Catholic doctrines and modernity, which also contributed to their ignorance, innocence, egoism, self-centeredness, idealized reality, and self-sacrificing behavior. Thus, Joyce does more than just depict his protagonists' cultural, spiritual, and moral crises; he also guides them through offensive, humiliating, and upsetting experiences that ultimately cause them to experience an epiphany. Joycean conception of epiphany is more spiritual, arising from the protagonists' psychological metamorphosis under the impact of outside forces. Aiming to awaken *Dubliners* to their mistakes and show them how to recover things on time, one of Joyce's aesthetic goals is to create epiphanies. Joyce hopes to provide spiritual sustenance for the *Dubliners* by bringing the genuine truth to their attention through the protagonists' agonizing disillusionment, as exemplified by Gabriel, Eveline, and the young boy.

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About Authors

Shiv Raj Paudel, at present is a lecturer of English Education at Janajyoti Multiple Campus, Sarlahi, Nepal. He has been teaching English Language Teaching (ELT) courses to the Bachelors' and Masters' Level students for more than 5 years at

different public campuses of Nepal. To his credit, he has published articles in different national and international journals and presented paper in national conference.

Babu Ram Dahal, a sound academic prolific figure and an emerging ELT scholar, has been teaching to the students of Bachelors' and Masters' Degree at Janajyoti Multiple Campus, Sarlahi, Nepal for more than a decade. His areas of interest include Teaching English Literature, Teaching English Education, Business English, and Translation Studies.