

Barbara Poważa-Kurko

State School of Higher Education, Oświęcim

THE THEME OF PARALYSIS IN *DUBLINERS 100*

Abstract: The paper analyses the sources of paralysis in *Dubliners 100*, which is a collection of ‘cover versions,’ as its editor, Thomas Morris, called them, of James Joyce’s collection. They were written by different authors and published in 2014 to commemorate the centenary of the publication of Joyce’s *Dubliners*. The only common denominator they share with one another and their great predecessors is the theme of paralysis. Whereas in Joyce’s *Dubliners* religious motifs are ubiquitous, they are almost absent from *Dubliners 100*. The question is asked what supplanted religion and the theme of religious guidance and oppression. Subsequently politics is analysed with special emphasis on the sense of disappointment and totally new problems it entails. Personal rigidity is discussed as the main theme of several stories, as well as the constricting impact of Internet addiction. Homoerotic unrequited love and the isolation of an overweight, unattractive hero are poignant reminders of the solitude which one faces in society. The theme of transgression as limiting one’s sense of security is raised in three stories of the collection in the form of sexual perversion, business machinations, excessive drinking and plagiarism. The ultimate form of the paralysis gripping the protagonists of Joyce’s *Dubliners* results from a sense of the imminence of death. In the new collection the theme is present, but it is conspicuously avoided in the only short story whose title suggests it should be the main theme.

Key words: *Dubliners*, *Dubliners 100*, Joyce, paralysis, modernism

Writing about *Ulysses*, Eliot states that James Joyce “is pursuing ... [what] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.”¹ This could equally be applied to his collection of stories *Dubliners*. The sense of crisis, so crucial for modernists, prompted Richard Sheppard to propose that all forms of modernist thought and art can be seen as one of seven responses to crisis.² Interestingly, in *Dubliners* James Joyce cannot be said to have consistently taken one of the approaches Sheppard mentions, possibly due to the fact that he describes the crisis in the individual lives of his protagonists without resorting to very radical modernist means of expression. This is what Peter Childs, drawing on David Lodge and Roman Jakobson, had in mind when he stated that *Dubliners*, with the exception of “The Dead,” have been written in the

1 Thomas Stearns Eliot, “*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth,” in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 177-178.

2 Richard Sheppard, “The Problematics of European Modernism” in *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory*, ed. Steve Giles, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 33- 39. The responses are the following: nihilism, ecstasy, mysticism, aestheticism, a decision to turn one’s back on modernity, primitivism and modernolatry.

metonymic rather than the metaphoric mode, which suggests the author's adherence to realism.³ Nevertheless, it has left an important mark on literature written in English after modernism. Not only literary critics but also writers have drawn on this famous literary collection. In 2006 a collection, *New Dubliners*, edited by Oona Fawny, was published, and in 2014 two other collections refer directly to Joyce's work: Daniel Zuchowski's *The New Dubliners 2014* and *Dubliners 100*.

The present paper is an endeavour to analyse *Dubliners 100*, published in 2014, with reference to Joyce's collection of short stories published in 1914. The first difficulty such an analysis poses lies in the establishment of the criteria for comparison. Unlike the other collections, which draw loosely on the original, *Dubliners 100* is a well-thought out project whose aim is to write a "cover version", as its editor, Thomas Morris put it, of each story from Joyce's *Dubliners*.⁴ On the one hand, it is meant to be a tribute to Joyce to commemorate the centenary of the first publication of Joyce's *Dubliners*; on the other hand, the writers commissioned with the task were given exceptional freedom to approach the story in whatever way they liked. Still, one cannot discuss their output in terms of post-modern text fluidity, as all the authors were well aware that they were vying with a writer in whose shadow they have to live. And yet some took exceptional liberty with the original, the result unrecognizable but for its title.

The specific unity of Joyce's cycle cannot be replicated in the new collection for a number of reasons. The first one is very obvious and yet of particular consequence: the unity of authorship has been lost. Instead we have a variety of styles, literary interests and attitudes in comparison with the work of their predecessor. Moreover, Joyce's stories, as the title itself suggests, are set in the Irish capital, whereas "Counterparts" and "After the Race" in *Dubliners 100* are set in the USA, and the action of "The Dead" takes place in some apocalyptic future in a place called Hyberny. Even though all the stories from *Dubliners* employ free indirect speech and make the protagonist the focal point through whose eyes the reader experiences Dublin life in its multifarious forms, the stories concerning childhood additionally employ a first person narrator, making them even more emotionally charged, whereas the remaining stories are told by third person narrators, which certainly creates some distance for the reader to feel, but also to assess and consider. The new collection, on the whole, adheres to the original narrative patterns, but departs from them markedly in three cases. "An Encounter" features a very rare type of second-person narration, while "Eveline" and "The Dead", unlike their Joycean counterparts, are written in the first person. Another difference is that the protagonist's gender has been switched in some stories.

3 Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 188.

4 Thomas Morris, "Far Away and Very Close: Dubliners at 100", *Wales Arts Review*, 19.6 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, <http://www.walesartsreview.org/far-away-and-very-close-dubliners-at-100/>.

Having enumerated the most prominent similarities and differences, I realize that this is insufficient to provide a viable framework for a good analysis. The fifteen new stories, even if meant to honour the great Dubliner, were also written as independent literary works. Instead of speculating on their inherent value as such, I propose to compare the two collections not in terms of merit or faithfulness, but in terms of the theme which Joyce himself considered to be the crucial unifying element in his work, that is, the concept of paralysis, which appears in his frequently-cited explanation: "My intention was to write a chapter in the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis."⁵ If this concept was central for Joyce himself, it is reasonable to expect that his followers would at least take it into consideration. The question arises: What then are the sources of paralysis in contemporary Dublin as compared to Dublin of a century before? Even though Joyce was well aware that he may have been unjust concentrating only on the peculiar type of stagnation in which his characters found themselves entrapped in Dublin, he still thought it worthwhile "to give the two or three unfortunate wretches who may eventually read me" his own idea of "the significance of trivial things."⁶ Do the sequels share Joyce's passion for representing fear, failure and inaction? Rather than follow the thematic division of *Dubliners* into stories dealing with childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and public life, this paper focuses on the major factors that circumscribed the outlook on life of Joyce's characters and endeavours to pinpoint the constraints *Dubliners 100* are encumbered with. The factors which are crucial for the shaping of the confined lives of Joyce's heroes and heroines include religion, politics, personal rigidity, transgression, and death.

Religion permeates the lives of Joyce's characters to a great extent. It is the unquestioned authority for children as well as adults. Pictures of priests hang on the walls; their lives, deaths and political involvement are of the utmost significance; a retreat is chosen as the cure for an alcoholic; religious imagery pervades the language of a first love. The Dubliners live in the shadow of the towering presence of the Roman Catholic Church, but Protestantism has also left its mark on the lives of some. They may be sceptical, they may not be very devout Christians, yet religion is the very air they breathe. Thus its constricting influence accounts in many cases for the lack of will to pursue a dream, to enact a plan to change one's life. In *Dubliners 100* religion is conspicuously absent, even from the stories "The Sisters" and "Grace," where, in the original collection, it played a major role. In the "cover" version of the former the only vestigial ele-

5 Letter to Grant Richards, 5 May, 1906 in *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 83.

6 Quoted from Stanislaus Joyce's *Dublin Diary* in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 169.

ment of religion is the setting: the story takes place at Christmas time, which makes the fire in the building that the main character watches with his friend and a group of adults an even more poignant experience. Both boys are confronted with something which is powerful and which shakes their sense of security. In both stories there is the threatening presence of a paralysed person, but Patrick McCabe has replaced Father Flynn with Nurse Connolly, who is not the focal point of the drama. The fact that she is immobilized in her flat adds a sense of terror to the fire, which is the main threat to the lives of the occupants of terraced houses. There is no mystery or superstitious fear about the blaze for, after all, the fire brigade arrives in time to quench the fire.

In Joyce's story the adults talk over the head of the boy, employing cryptic language he is never fully able to make sense of; however, in the new version they try to interact with the boy, to reassure him and reinforce his shaken self-confidence. It is no accident that the boy in Joyce's story is nameless, but is addressed as Desmond in McCabe's version. Talking about Father Flynn, gathered around his deathbed, the adults do not even try to explain anything to the child. Thus the sense of religious awe is maintained: even if the boy realizes that there is more to the authority figure than meets his eye, it remains an unsolvable puzzle for him. This might influence the rest of his life, whereas little Desmond will simply grow out of the game "International Rescue" and his childish worldview. Instead of the "International Rescue" team, a regular fire brigade comes just in time for the inhabitants to go back to their cosy flats to celebrate Christmas, which is "that time of year when everyone prefers to forget all their troubles."⁷ The greatest difference between the world presented by Joyce and that presented by Patrick McCabe is the foreboding presence of authority in the former and its absence from the latter. Efficient public services remove the danger and allow the people to enjoy Christmas – a holiday that has lost its religious significance. They might learn to take more precautions in the future, but no residual metaphysical awe is going to trouble their lives. No looming authority figure, even if a flawed or even a fallen one like Father Flynn, will hover over the protagonists' lives in the future.

The absence of religion is even more conspicuous in Sam Coll's version of "Grace." Alcoholism seems to be a perennial problem and the downfall it leads to is presented as being as abhorrent in the early 21st century as it was at the turn of the 20th. The protagonist, whose name has become Vernon Crumb, has an updated profile: he is a "ligger," someone who gate-crashes conference get-togethers and takes advantage of the buffets on offer at cultural events in Dublin. But the grim reality of his addiction when he finally collapses in "the building's bowels,"⁸ where the toilet is located,

7 Patrick McCabe, "The Sisters," in *Dubliners 100*, ed. Thomas Morris (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), 9.

8 Sam Coll, "Grace," in *Dubliners 100*, 190.

is not alleviated by the culture which accompanied his drinking. Yet the solution that his concerned friends offer is devoid of any religious content. They want to help him recover by arranging a stay in “a woodland retreat, to live like a hermit and get back in touch with nature. To wake up to the sound of birdsong and not the fucking traffic.”⁹ The mention of “hermit” is religious in tone, but the whole concept of moral recovery through the beneficial influence of nature is rather flimsy. It smacks of insubstantial spirituality, resembling a holiday more than a retreat. Not surprisingly, Mr Crumb assents to the proposal and lets his friend drive him to a cottage owned by a cousin, where he will be able to rest and recover. Paradoxically, having so much leisure could have proved conducive to relapse, but his well-meaning friends do not seem to have considered such a possibility. Nor, in fact, is this the case. The story ends abruptly and without giving the reader any sense of a proper denouement. To give the writer his due, the ending is certainly one element of Joyce’s story the writer might have wanted to emulate, yet the outcome is totally different. In Joyce’s “Grace” the importance and influence of Catholicism has been reinforced, even though the people remain unchanged. In Coll’s “ecological” version nature reasserts its power, but not in the way Crumb’s friends would have wished: death is presented as part of nature, as inexorable as all its laws. The ending, one must admit, is effective precisely because it is so baffling. It puzzles as much as death itself. It cannot be explained by the protagonist’s own actions. It just happens as a kind of *non sequitur* amidst a pastoral landscape. In the short story by Joyce, even if religion is unable to provide solutions, one is still able to accommodate it in one’s sinful life and thus find respite and consolation. Here, instead of God the “spiritual accountant,”¹⁰ the reader encounters Death the absolute tyrant. The absence of religion, or rather, as he calls it, “shying away” from the theme is what Adam Duke perceives as a serious flaw in the story, pointing out that religion is “still very relevant to Irish life.”¹¹ The above-quoted review recommends caution when treating the aspects of paralysis described in *Dubliners 100* as a credible diagnosis of the reality of Dublin. Still, it is interesting that an “ecological” retreat should replace a traditional Catholic one in this particular short story written by a contemporary Irish writer.

To redress the balance between traditional spirituality and secularity in contemporary Dublin it seems appropriate to discuss Paul Murray’s rendition of “A Painful Case,” which is the only one to consider the metaphysical yearnings of modern man. It is certainly unjust to call it “a mere rewrite” of the original, as Adam Duke does.¹² On the contrary, it seems to depart from the original in many important respects even if

9 *Ibidem*, 200.

10 James Joyce, “Grace,” in *Dubliners*, (London: Penguin, 1926), 198.

11 Adam Duke, “Review: *Dubliners 100*”, *College Tribune*, 1.2 (2015), accessed August 20, 2017, <http://collegetribune.ie/review-dubliners-100/>.

12 *Ibidem*.

there are obvious similarities as well. As with Joyce's prototype, Mr Duffy lives "at a little distance from his body."¹³ In the original story he is a cashier, but the quasi-monastic quality of his rigidness has been noted by critics, most clearly by Suzette A. Henke. Murray focuses on this particular quality and elaborates on it. This approach enables him to develop the story of an unreligious, embittered and spiteful restaurant critic, who, against his better judgment, develops a fascination with monastic life. If Mrs Sinico serves as a "Lacanian mirror – an echo, a *heimlich* womb of mental warmth whose hothouse heart encourages Duffy's shrivelled soul to sprout tendrils and gradually blossom,"¹⁴ then Bill, the mysterious monk from Murray's version, has a similar influence on the protagonist, who "had never spoken like this to anyone; listening to himself, James wondered if it was the wine making him emotional."¹⁵ It turns out that there is a conflict of expectations between the two partners. Bill, who sought in the monastery a refuge from his family and probably also from the truth about his sexual orientation, encourages Duffy's interest and hopes for a fulfilling relationship. Duffy, on the other hand, relishes the simplicity of the monastic cuisine and the pervading silence, unaware of the fact that he is killing it with his own constant babble. Involved in the process of his frustration and disappointment and absorbed in his spiritual disquisitions, he invents his own version of Bill, whom he treats instrumentally, completely ignoring him as a human being. His quest for spirituality stems from a mixture of egoism and honesty. He interprets the meetings with the silent monk as "some kind of epic pilgrimage," "some great slab of a door swinging open"¹⁶ within him on exposure to the silent holiness of the monk. The language which Murray uses to describe the protagonist's experience has deeply religious or even mystical overtones, yet his brutal rejection of Bill as a person testifies to his extreme egotism. The one-sided silence provides a space which allows the two men to create false images of each other. But the original spiritual craving which motivated Duffy to return to the restaurant in the monastery and keep in touch with Bill cannot be questioned. It would be difficult to ascertain whether it is the lure of traditional religion or simply the presence of a non-threatening, silent human being that this withdrawn restaurant critic finds so enticing. What constrains him most is his personal rigidness, a theme which this story shares with some others from the collection: "The Boarding House," "A Little Cloud," "A Mother," and "Counterparts." What is more, the first three share the theme of marriage in crisis, which stems from the protagonists' lack of ease and obduracy.

¹³ Suzette A. Henke, *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 36.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Paul Murray, "A Painful Case" in *Dubliners 100*, 146.e

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 147 and 145.

Elske Rahill presents the young Kathleen from Joyce's short story "A Mother" at a later stage in her life. Influenced by her mother, she is in the habit of doing things "right."¹⁷ She has acquiesced to marrying the unromantic but upright Graham, who would provide for the family and safeguard stability and civility in their relationship. Having given priority to prudence, she has sacrificed her Romantic dreams and settled for their substitutes: romances on DVD's watched with a box of Turkish delight to sweeten her mundane life even more. She suppresses the feeling that there is something missing in her life by cultivating a sense of her own superiority, which, in turn, makes her censorious about other people, especially single parents at her children's school. She finds the "brazenness" of one mother especially annoying: "The way she kissed her child [...], and tousled his hair, all sweetness and joy – you'd swear she was the world's best mum."¹⁸ The author's use of free indirect speech here is especially effective as it emphasizes the protagonist's bitterness, which derives, partly at least, from jealousy. She is intransigent in her rigidity though, and she even persuades her daughter not to invite the single mother's son to her birthday party. She is so preoccupied with morality that she equates the little boy with moral permissiveness, which is at odds with the school ethos and thus must be eradicated. She does not see the human being behind this ethos, completely indifferent to the fact that he is, after all, no more than a small boy. Apart from the cherished sense of moral superiority and her secret viewings of romances, she finds one more source of solace: she organizes a "Brides Again Party". This is a pathetic attempt at Romanticism, but executed in her "right" way. All the details are seen to, and the whole event is organized with due pomp and ceremony. She becomes so excited about this surrogate romance that she does not listen to her friends' objections that the limousines are too expensive, which leads to bickering about money. Sadness and disappointment permeate the party, for the women seem to be happier talking about their husbands and re-enacting their weddings without the actual husbands being present. This rift between the wives and their husbands is clearly seen when Graham returns from his business trip earlier than planned, making his wife feel awkward. He does not fit into this play, so he leaves the stage quickly, settling the payment for the taxis first, ironically emphasizing his role as Kathleen's bread-winner. Interestingly, his wife seems aware that in her husband's life there has been another woman whom he still loves, but she chooses to ignore this knowledge as it might jeopardize the stability of her marriage. Her marriage, after all, is one based not on love or passion, but on propriety.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne is rather critical of Rahill's rendering of "A Mother", which allegedly shares the flaw found in Oona Frawley's version of "The Boarding House".

17 Elske Rahill, "A Mother," in *Dubliners* 100, 167.

18 *Ibidem*, 172.

According to the critic, in both stories James Joyce “lampoons a middle aged, managerial type of woman – the only kind of woman for whom he has little sympathy,” and the cover versions, even though well-written and entertaining as such, do not attempt to “reassess the gender politics of the master.”¹⁹ All four heroines of the original short stories and their cover versions are control freaks, but Mrs Kearney from “A Mother” acquires an even more conservative character in Rahill’s version and develops from “a pushy mother who wants her daughter’s performance fees to be paid” into “a crazy upholder of traditional family values.”²⁰ Conservative family values are thus emphasized in *Dubliners 100* even to a greater degree than in the Joycean originals.

The moralistic conservatism of Marie Mooney is rendered even more stringent as she does not simply arrange the marriage of her daughter to avoid scandal, as her counterpart did, but interferes directly in the life of her married daughter and her son-in-law, whom she has caught visiting porn websites. Ger and Therese’s marriage may not be unhappy, but their bankruptcy and the need to live once more with the wife’s mother place a lot of strain on their relationship. Ger compares it to living in a boarding house, which is a reference to the original story, but also an apt diagnosis of their condition, which is further complicated by the fact that they have a little child and Therese is expecting another. Therese herself is angry with her husband’s secretive use of online porn sites, yet it seems that the fact her mother knows about it makes it even harder for her to bear. On the other hand, the mother-in-law’s cross-examination makes Ger question his own normality. It seems unjust to blame the matriarch for the crisis in this marriage, yet her vigilance and dominance do not help to solve the couple’s problems. The ending is ambiguous: Therese going into labour may signal a new beginning or a new limitation. When Therese is “calling for him, the waters everywhere”²¹ it may mean that she trusts him after all, or it may emphasize her helplessness. Family life, it seems, is just as limited by external circumstances as it was 100 years ago.

The sense of failure in the context of a loveless marriage is one of the main themes of “A Little Cloud” by John Kelly, a story which remains very close to the original. For this very reason Adam Duke perceives it as a “mere rewrite” and thus “redundant.”²² Yet the author introduces some changes to make the conversation between a successful writer who comes to visit his homeland and his friend, a poet manqué, more contemporary. Moreover, Chandler has a teenage daughter rather than a baby son, which emphasizes the struggle in his marriage as the two women unite against the only man, whom they

19 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, “*Dubliners 100*. 15 New Stories Inspired by the Original *Dubliners*,” *Estudios Irlandeses*, accessed August 20, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.24162/EI>.

20 *Ibidem*.

21 Oona Frawley, “The Boarding House,” *Dubliners 100*, 82.

22 Duke, “Review: *Dubliners 100*.”

consider “a loser.”²³ Both Chandlers would like to blame their wives and family lives for their lack of success, yet the modern version seems to go further in questioning this claim. Inky Chandler is presented as an extremely egocentric man, too busy with inventing metaphors for describing a homeless woman to be at all sensitive to her plight. On the other hand, the hysterical, aggressive behaviour of his daughter may make the reader sympathize with the protagonist to a greater extent than the hopeless crying of the small child in Joyce’s story. Nonetheless, the tears the protagonist sheds in both versions are ambiguous: they might be tears of shame and remorse, but also of self-pity. Nevertheless, it seems that both characters will go on living their limited lives, aggravated by the illusion that the family is to blame for their artistic failure.

Two stories in *Dubliners 100* mention a new source of paralysis, namely addiction to the Internet. In both “Counterparts” and “Clay” it seems to derive from a deeper psychological disorder. The former is one of the few stories set outside Dublin. The author, Belinda McKeon, admits she was unsure of that decision, but it is certainly a choice she can defend. Elizabeth, the heroine, although physically in New York, “is living in a sort of Dublin of the mind.”²⁴ Her homesickness, ennui, unwillingness to complete her article on *Re:Joyce* – “a collaboration between the New York Fiction House and the Irish Department of Culture”²⁵ – and her reluctance to be an intern now that she “knew the dance”²⁶ all push her deeper into addiction. Instead of writing, she watches Dubliners chat on Facebook and Twitter. On the one hand, the story presents a longing for the real life experience of Dublin and Dubliners instead of any artfully mediated one; on the other hand, Elizabeth seems to be killing time and escaping from work. She peeps into the lives of the people she follows instead of aiming at any real interaction or participation in their lives. This Internet addiction twists and perverts her intentions. Following the story of an abducted girl, Elizabeth is more concerned with the fact that a person she dislikes, Richie Mulligan, has more followers than she does than with the missing girl. On the other hand, the Internet and mass media expose their users to so much misery that it evokes rather a sense of helplessness than any incitement to action. Elizabeth is so overwhelmed by the multifarious exploits of these Dubliners that she herself is indeed paralysed. The idea of counterparts, very clear in Joyce’s story, is not so evident in this tale. Elizabeth’s aggression towards Richie Mulligan may be paralleled with her boss’s anger which leads to her eventual dismissal. It is worth mentioning that Sullivan’s anger is partly justified, as Elizabeth has not completed her article, but at the same time it is in some sense absurd. Obsessed with political correctness, Sullivan

23 John Kelly, “A Little Cloud,” in *Dubliners 100*, 99.

24 Belinda McKeon, in Cahir O’Doherty, “Portrait of the Irish: Belinda McKeon on *Dubliners 100*,” *Irish Central*, 14,6 (2014). Accessed August 20, 2017, <https://www.irishcentral.com/>.

25 Belinda McKeon, “Counterparts,” in *Dubliners 100*, 107.

26 *Ibidem*, 108.

fears that Elizabeth's wish to be Hasidic and thus enjoy her Sabbath may be read as an anti-Semitic jibe. The atmosphere pervading this short story is that of stagnation, and, as Éilís Ní Dhuibhne notes, the story "lacks the raw horror of the scene in Farrington's cold and dark kitchen."²⁷

Another story from *Dubliners 100* which deals with computer addiction is Michèle Forbes's version of "Clay," which Valerie O'Riordan calls "a knockout piece," a story which is "perfect in its narrowness: in a single journey, we get the entirety of a sad life so succinctly that we reckon Aristotle himself would be pleased."²⁸ Furthermore, just as Joyce, Forbes writes from the perspective of his protagonist throughout.²⁹ Conor, an overweight young man who, like little Maria, is quite satisfied with his life, is, just like her, dragged out to perform in front of others only to be ridiculed. But before that happens, he looks forward to spending Halloween alone at home, now that his mother has gone out, in front of his computer, well-equipped with sugary drinks and snacks. In this respect he seems different from Maria, who is paying a visit to relatives, but, in fact, both characters are equally isolated from a society which finds them both unattractive and ridiculous. Conor's computer addiction is only a symptom of his loneliness, something that he does not want to face and change. His singing a song about a strong macho man makes him ridiculous in the eyes of the girls listening, just like Maria's romantic song makes her an even more pathetic figure in the eyes of her family. Whereas in "Counterparts" the computer, which should be the protagonist's work tool, becomes a means of escape, in "Clay" what seems to be a solitary addiction contains some elements of creativity. Conor is unwilling to work, and accepts his training as an administrative assistant in Mr Wyrzykowski's office only to remain eligible for unemployment benefit. What he really wants to do is to make movies, which he does for his own pleasure. Even if computer addiction is a modern phenomenon, it is easy to imagine Elizabeth addicted to alcohol, for the nature of addiction has not changed.

Another source of social alienation in *Dubliners 100* is homosexuality. If the young narrator of Joyce's "Araby" imagines his love as "a chalice" which he carries "safely through a throng of foes,"³⁰ the narrator of John Boyne's story is totally confused by his feelings. This is emphasized by the name used to refer to the object of his love: "the brother of the Mangan girl."³¹ He is well aware that it is she who should be the focus of his attention, not her brother: "Were boys not supposed to think of girls, had I not read

27 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, "Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories..."

28 Valerie O'Riordan, "An Interesting and Attention-Grabbing Volume – *Dubliners 100*, ed. Tomas Morris," *Bookmunch*, 24.7 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, <https://bookmunch.wordpress.com/author/bookmunch/>.

29 Ní Dhuibhne, "Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories..."

30 James Joyce, "Araby," in *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 31.

31 John Boyne, "Araby," in *Dubliners 100*, 35.

that somewhere?"³² The confusion the boy experiences is exacerbated by his parents' absence; they have left for Canada with the vague promise that they will send for him later. His aunt spends her time in front of the television; his uncle is either at work or in a pub. Left to his own devices, he longs for a father figure. The sight of the older boy's strength and masculinity makes him "hope for a protector."³³ It is only at the end of the story, when his presence at the match, even if acknowledged, does not evoke the same degree of elation, and his gift is ignored altogether, that he realizes that he has reached "a place" that would take him "years to understand and negotiate."³⁴

If, as Suzette Henke points out, in Joyce's *Dubliners* "Women and children have been relegated to the margins of discourse in a culture that is male-centered and woman-avoidant,"³⁵ they do not seem to be similarly unrepresented in *Dubliners* 100. Several stories have a heroine instead of a hero, and the substitution of a male protagonist by a female seems especially important in two short stories from that collection, namely "An Encounter" and "Two Gallants." Both deal with the particular sort of oppression that women still suffer in society, and yet both avoid simple feminist propaganda or sentimentality. Both consider the theme of transgression. In "An Encounter" the central theme is the sexual threats two girls face when they enter a forbidden city zone. The sexual transgression of meeting a man the protagonists take for a flasher does not exhaust the exploration of the theme. There are at least two more forms of transgression. The very fact that they ride on bikes down the same slope where a friend lost control of her bike and was killed turns their escapade into a dangerous game with death. Moreover, when a suspicious man approaches them and strikes up a conversation, one of the girls, Jo, leaves, apparently to find help, but for her friend this is an act of treachery. The encounter with the stranger, although nothing really happens, puts such a strain on their relationship that later she realizes it was not the flasher but Jo she is afraid to meet.³⁶ The story is the only one to employ the second person narration, as if the older self of the protagonist were discussing the past events and their significance with the younger self. It seems at the end that the man they met as young girls and who was responsible for their estrangement might not have been such a monster. After all, Ely's Arch, the construction he might have invented in order to, as it seemed then, lure them into some forbidden sexual act, is really there to see. So the man's invitation might possibly have been innocent. There is a sense of loss which pervades the ending: the loss of innocence, friendship and childhood. The encounter has affected their lives forever.

32 *Ibidem*, 33.

33 *Ibidem*, 32.

34 *Ibidem*, 37.

35 Henke, *James Joyce...*, 12.

36 Mary Morrissey, "An Encounter," in *Dubliners* 100, 27.

“Two Gallants” raises the topic of plagiarism in the context of female exploitation, and is very much in the vein of Joyce’s original. The protagonist, Ruth, participates in a conference on Joyce for which she has prepared a paper on “Two Gallants.” However, she is not preoccupied with any new interpretation of the story, but rather with its historical setting, claiming that she is a descendant of the skivvy cheated by Corley, one of the gallants. Roz Lewis notes that the theme itself is a theft not only from Joyce, but also from Trevor Williams’s story “Two More Gallants,” in which a student dupes a hated professor into believing the story of an old lady he bribes to say she was the skivvy from Joyce’s story.³⁷ Even if the reader cannot be certain that the letter allegedly written by Ruth’s ancestor is a mere hoax, there is a strong suggestion that originality in literary criticism is tainted with plagiarism. It thrives on stealing from the authors it interprets. Keith Hopper points at the layers of plagiarism in the story, in which “the usual conference shenanigans are intercut with italicized parodies of the original characters, Lenehan and Corley. Joyce’s mean-spirited protagonists are comically counterpointed by two boorish plagiarists who are eventually unmasked (plagiarism is wryly figured here as an unacknowledged form of adaptation).”³⁸ It is no coincidence though that the only official, criminal act of plagiarism that is committed is intended to victimize a woman. All the dealings are submerged in a sexist mentality which treats women academics in a disparaging way. TD, the villain of the story, instructs his accomplice, Lachey: “If you’re worried about being found out, remember that if you stole from a man chances are someone might have heard it before, but a girl, it’s unlikely. You’ll never be caught.”³⁹ So when he is caught out at the end while reading Ruth’s paper that Lachey stole for him, apart from it being a deliciously ironic reversal, the ending also proves that, after all, times have changed.⁴⁰

Women may have more power in contemporary Dublin, but the paralysis experienced by a young man in his dependence on a rich father has not changed much. “After the Race” from *Dubliners 100* does not alter the storyline or depart from the original in any dramatic way. The only marked departure of Andrew Fox’s version from the original is that the setting has moved to New York, where the creators of the Celtic Tiger’s greatness gather at a charity run. Participation in such events has been recommended by media strategists to “rebuild what they called the firm’s *reputational equity*.”⁴¹ The account of the dealings of the Irish businessmen is reminiscent of a media report

37 Roz Lewis, “Two Gallants by Evelyn Conlon – a short story from *Dubliners 100*” <http://www.rozz.ie/?p=1723>, accessed August 20, 2017.

38 Keith Hopper, “New Dubliners”, in *Times Literary Supplement*, 4.6 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/new-dubliners/>.

39 Evelyn Conlon, “Two Gallants,” in *Dubliners 100*, 66.

40 Ní Dhuibhne, “Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories...”

41 Andrew Fox, “After the Race”, in *Dubliners 100*, 50.

with all its references to business terms and control institutions and the complexity of accusation and evidence, but the reader is certain to grasp one important point: the need to “humanize”⁴² the businessmen is urgent. James, the protagonist, is trapped in his life. His education has been paid for by his father from an income whose source is questionable. He is part of fashionable society, trying desperately to keep pace with the other wealthy youths. He is trapped in the luxurious life he has become accustomed to. However, he struggles with the sense of dependence on his father, who resorts to “bullying tactics”⁴³ both in his professional and private life. James tries desperately to convince himself that he owes everything he has achieved to his own hard work, and that his father only “paid the bills.”⁴⁴ At the end of the story James has to pay one bill himself; he pays with a hangover and an empty wallet after a night’s carefree carousing. Daybreak is equally painful in Joyce’s and Fox’s stories.

The oppressiveness of politics is the main topic of “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” and it remains so in Eimear McBride’s cover version, in which she, as she claims herself, “was trying to capture or show something of the multi-layered disappointment of the nation.”⁴⁵ This particular story has invited the most diverse responses. Some critics accuse the author of inadequately confronting the theme of politics,⁴⁶ while others praise the story for the fact that “the satirical savagery of the older story is replicated with integrity in the new version, so that it both speaks back to the past and makes its own distinct statement about present-day corruption and cowardice.”⁴⁷ The same critic notes furthermore that the story will be difficult to understand for readers who do not know much about Irish political life, just as Joyce’s story, too, was difficult. Even if McBride’s version seems to refer to a particular event – the fall of Bertie Ahern – Éilís Ní Dhuibhne points to the perennial nature of politics, which the episode emphasizes. McBride, the critic suggests, ignores the modern technology used by politicians, thus drawing the readers’ attention to the fact that “Politics is all talk.”⁴⁸

“Eveline” addresses another problem connected with politics, namely immigration; this is the reverse of Joyce’s exploration of emigration. If, for Eveline, the thought of changing her life by accepting Frank’s proposal to go with him to Buenos Aires proves paralysing, the situation for the illegal immigrant in Donald Ryan’s cover is even more constricting. Joyce’s Eveline cannot overcome her sense of duty and fear of the unknown.

42 *Ibidem*.

43 *Ibidem*, 51.

44 *Ibidem*, 53.

45 In an interview with Gill Moore, “The Joy of Joyce: *Dubliners 100* Preview,” *Totally Dublin*, 5.6 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, <http://www.totallydublin.ie/arts-culture/joy-joyce-dubliners-100-preview/>.

46 Duke, “Review: *Dubliners 100*.”

47 Valerie O’Riordan, “An Interesting and Attention-Grabbing Volume...”

48 Ní Dhuibhne, “*Dubliners 100*. 15 New Stories...”

Hope has the law of the country against her. She depends on the nigh-eponymous Evelyn to a much greater extent than Joyce's Eveline did on Frank. The theme of the parents' suffocating emotional influence on the grown-up child is present here as well, additionally aggravated by religious differences. The first person narration, presenting the point of view of the Irish citizen, the one who has a right to live where he does and may deny this right to others, marginalizes Hope even further and exposes the ironic overtones of her name. The name of the other protagonist is no less ironic. He claims to have been named after Evelyn Waugh, a Catholic writer preoccupied with the theme of divine grace operating in the world. It is Evelyn who abandons Hope, not wishing to antagonize his own Christian mother – or simply out of cowardice. Ryan highlights the sad fact that love in the contemporary world may face social and political restrictions we have long thought of as belonging to past epochs. It is still easier to cling to one's culture-bound certainties, it would appear.

“Death is one of the few things that happen in *Dubliners*.”⁴⁹ In *Dubliners 100* even death is mentioned rarely. Death is even absent from the last story, despite its title. Instead of the many themes dealt with by Joyce, we have a very simplified story which focuses on the precariousness of culture. A great masterpiece can burn well in a world which does not recognize conventions that we readily accept, yet some of the survivors of this post-apocalyptic world are deeply moved by the story of Gabriel. So, paradoxically, masterpieces prove eternal. Literature unites people and teaches tolerance: the protagonist is chased away from the pub and from a religious meeting by a priest, but is accepted by those who appreciate Joyce's masterpiece. The library is the centre of the insurgency the regime fears and endeavours to crush. On the other hand, Crazy Mary burns Joyce's masterpiece, calling it “men's palaver,”⁵⁰ which offers a feminist critique of the original version of “The Dead”. The perspective has changed. The only dead person here is Joyce himself; his literary works are left at the mercy of the people who have come after him. They are also seen and described by the narrator as ghosts; this may be a comment on the vanity of all literary criticism.

As such a pessimistic vision of literary criticism does not seem a fit conclusion for a literary essay, I would like to draw on Adam Duke's review; although he does not come across as being particularly pleased with the whole collection, he gives it its due, claiming that “given Joyce's reputation as the most experimental author to use the English language, it's hard to think of a more fitting tribute”⁵¹ than *Dubliners 100*. Dublin may have changed, but the new stories “resonate,”⁵² as Chu He puts it, with Joyce's writing

49 Henry Levin, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 32.

50 Peter Murhpy, “The Dead”, *Dubliners 100*, 214. The word “palaver” is the exact word Lily uses talking to Gabriel about men in Joyce's “The Dead.”

51 Duke, “Review: *Dubliners 100*.”

52 Chu He, “New *Dubliners* and Joyce,” *Breac, A Digital Journal of Irish Studies*, 15.4 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, <https://breac.nd.edu/articles/new-dubliners-and-joyce/>.

style, thus providing the readers of this collection with a rich intertextual experience. All the stories from *Dubliners 100* show a world in crisis, which the protagonists find difficult to overcome. Even though the difficulties they face may have different causes than the obstacles Joyce's characters found insurmountable, yet the pervading sense of constriction, closeness and a lack of perspectives has remained very similar. It would be risky to draw conclusions concerning real Dubliners from literary fiction, yet it seems justified to assume the Irish writers had something to say about life in Dublin at the beginning of the 21st century. As evidence one may quote the unqualified "yes," which was Eimear McBride's answer to the question asked in a Bookclub discussion whether young writers, like herself, write about some "collective Irish unconscious" by describing it in their novels as a "scenario of hopelessness without apparent access to redemption."⁵³ From *Dubliners*, through all the responses to Joyce's collection, the theme of paralysis, a will frozen by crisis, seems to have remained a perennial Irish theme.

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