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THE PARALYSIS OF NATIONALISM: JAMES JOYCE'S *IVY DAY IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM*

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Abstract

James Joyce is well known thanks to his short stories collected in his household word *Dubliners*, among which "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" has a unique space for its political theme through which the hypocrite canvassers and partisans are questioned for their nationalistic discourses. Since the plot is related to municipal election, Joyce deals with the themes of localism, nationalism and customs. The aim of this paper is to examine the story "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" referring to the terms and themes of nationalism and political dissidence. Although the canvassers in the story act as if they were nationalists, it seems that they do not really care about the nationalist Irish leader Charles Parnell or Ireland. Nation and nationalism are the terms revealed through the dialogues of the canvassers in Joyce's story. It will be concluded that the canvassers and the partisans in this story are spiritually and politically decayed since they do not care the policies of their parties.

Keywords: James Joyce, *Dubliners*, Ivy Day, Charles Parnell, Nationalism, Ireland and England.

1. Introduction

James Joyce, born in 1882 – Dublin, was a modernist writer portraying the life of man and woman struggling in the changing society and world of the 20th century. Although an Irish, Joyce lived in Europe, especially Paris and Zurich, throughout his life, yet he wrote about the Irish people and Dublin as if the city were a character both embracing and flinging away its people. As Tymoczko quotes in his book, Joyce says "... I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal." (qtd. in Tymoczko, 1997: 260). By particular, Joyce means Dublin and therefore *Dubliners* stand for the universal nature of human. Joyce's well-known works are *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) in which universal themes and motifs lie. As Kevin J. H. Dettmar has put it, "[Joyce's] one short-story collection, three novels, one play, and two volumes of poems have won him the devoted attention of students, scholars, and general readers alike; in scholarly terms alone, Joyce is now the second most densely explicated of English-language authors, after only Shakespeare" (Dettmar, 2004: xiii). His work *Dubliners* portrays the "... picture of Dublin and the domestic, social and political ills of its middle class at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Mahon, 2009: 2). Kuğu Tekin, in her comparative article, states, regarding Dublin, that "Dublin [is an] inspirational cit[y] shaping the intellectual, literary and artistic world of James Joyce..." (2015: 410).

Joyce's well-known work *Dubliners*, 1914, "...offers the reader an apparently faithful picture of Dublin and the domestic, social and political ills of its middle class at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Mahon, 2009: 2). It is a truth that "Dublin suffered a lot throughout history from wars, plagues, British exploitation, which caused the decay and decline of Ireland, and Dublin" (Balkaya, 2013: 55). This paper examines "Ivy Day in the Committee Room", the twelfth short story in Joyce's *Dubliners*, in terms of the politics and nationalism as represented through the manners and dialogues of the canvassers in it. It is also the aim of this paper to reveal the fact that "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" has a unique space for its political theme through which the hypocrite canvassers and partisans are questioned for their nationalistic discourses. The canvassers are portrayed to be passive because of not taking into action for Home-Rule; therefore, paralysis of nationalism, put forth twice –the first: through the poem read by Joe Hynes, the second: through the dialogue on the arrival of King Edward, as a theme is analysed in this paper.

2. "Ivy Day in the Committee Room"

The story takes place at a committee room on 6th November, the death anniversary of the Irish political leader Charles Stewart Parnell, whose importance constitutes the background of the story. Ivy Day is a national day, held on October 6 in Ireland, in memory of the nationalist politician leader Charles Stewart Parnell, lived between the years 1846 and 1891. Therefore, "Irish political paralysis after the political downfall of Charles Stewart Parnell..." (Mahon, 2009: 3) forms the essence of the story which revolves around the dialogues of the canvassers of the upcoming municipal election. Among the canvassers are Mat O'Connar, Joe Hynes, John Henchy and Mr. Crofton. Other characters are Old Jack, the caretaker of the

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room, a suspended priest named Father Keon, about whom the canvasser gossip. Also, they talk about politics and poverty prevailing around Ireland. The poverty of the country is compared, in a way, with the richness of the mother country, that is, England. In that case, the tone of the story is satiric and it deals with Irish politics, culture and society.

Although the canvassers in the room act as if they were nationalists, it seems that they do not really care about Parnell or Irishness. For instance, the nationalist Mr O'Connor has "... a leaf of dark glossy ivy in the lapel of his coat" (Joyce 327) in memory of Charles Parnell but in reality he cares money, not nation or nationalism as he reveals with his question, "How does [Tierney] expect us to work for him if he won't stump up" (331). Therefore, it seems that money and being paid means more to him than his nation. Regarding nationalism, Anthony Giddens states that nationalism is "... a set of symbols and beliefs providing the sense of being part of a single political community. Thus, individuals feel a sense of pride and belonging in being British, American, Canadian or ... [Irish]" (Giddens, 1997: 340). Within the context of this definition, ivy day stands as a symbol to the Irish canvassers; however, they are not acting the way Parnell would do in the case of King Edward VII's visit. "Many of the usual home-rule pieties find expression. But the major argument turns on the plans for Edward VII's projected visit, and Irish plans to welcome him" (Farrell, 1983: 10).

Nation and nationalism is revealed through the dialogues of the canvassers in Joyce's story. "Though Joyce objected to nationalism, at the same time he believed that artist had to be national" (Tymoczko, 1997: 260). Nation refers to "... a group of people united by birth or birthplace. In its original usage, 'nation' thus implied a breed of people or a racial group, but possessed no political significance" (Heywood 155). Although the canvassers Mr. Connar, Mr. Crofton disaccord in political views, they come together and talk on politics. Regarding politics, Potts states that

Joyce raises the issue of political relations between the two cultures in "Ivy Day" through Crofton's presence as a canvasser for Tricky Dicky Tierney...[who] appears here appropriately as a member of the Protestant supported Conservative or Unionist party, while Tierney is a candidate of the Catholic-supported Nationalist party. The party designations reflect an old political difference between Catholics, whose Nationalist party claimed Parnell as its founder, and Protestants, whose Conservative party opposed Parnell and everything he stood for. Catholics were in the habit of regarding this difference as evidence that they were more patriotic than Protestants. "Ivy Day," however, shows that the distinction no longer exists. (Potts, 2000: 70-71)

The Conservatives support the union of Ireland with England whereas the Nationalists stand for the Irish Independence as Charles Parnell aimed to. Therefore, the two parties are at two opposite poles through their policies. Although Mr. Crofton is a canvasser of the Conservatives, he now supports the Nationalists because "... when the Conservatives had withdrawn their man, and choosing the lesser of two evils, [the Conservatives gave] their support to the Nationalist candidate [so Mr. Crofton] had been engaged to work for Mr Tierney" (336). As realized, the two opposite ideologies are mingled so "... the distinction no longer exists" (Potts 71). It is revealed that these people are spiritually and politically decayed since they do not care the policies of their parties. San Juan, in this respect, points out that "Joyce's intention to expose the spiritual decay of his countrymen and to caricature their afflicted souls was part of an attempt to set down a chapter in the moral history of his country" (18). The conservatives, nationalists, and radicals come together in the room to drink beer while talking on the politicians, culture and priests.

Through dialogues of the canvassers, we can realize the "... Irish political paralysis after the political downfall of Charles Stewart Parnell ..." (Mahon, 2009: 3). Joyce deliberately narrates the case of drinking and smoking of these Irish canvassers, in a way, these are the twofaced traitors, who only think of themselves. The nationalists are interested in nothing but being paid by the politicians they support as revealed within the case that Mr. Hynes jokes around with Mr. O'Connor since he is not paid by Tierney. However, Mr. Hynes supports the other candidate Colgan, who "... goes in to represent the labour classes" (329) as is revealed by Mr. Hynes, who adds that "[t]he working-man ... gets all kicks and no halfpence. But it's labour produces everything. The working-man is not looking for fat jobs for his sons and nephews and cousins. The working-man is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch" (329). Through what Mr. Hynes says, Joyce holds up to ridicule the politicians and the aristocrats who fund and show favor to their sons and other close relatives because of their ruling power. Also by stating "German Monarch", Mr. Hynes refers to Edward VII, son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

3. Nationalism as Represented through the Story

Since the plot is related to municipal election, Joyce deals with the themes of localism, nationalism and customs as Tymoczko states:

Joyce begins with the impulse toward localism that is characteristic of the Irish literary revival as a whole; as Joyce himself noted to Arthur Power, his localism is seen in the fact that all his works are written about Ireland and about Dublin in particular. Like O'Casey, Joyce's localism is expressed in terms of Irish urban life rather than country life ... (Tymoczko, 1997: 263)

Since they come from the same culture, it seems that there is not much difference among their ideologies and worldviews. For instance, Mr. Hynes supports the working class as he says "The working-man ... gets all kicks and no halfpence. But it's labour produces everything. The working-man is not looking for fat jobs for his sons and nephews and cousins. The working-man is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch" (Joyce 329). As a supporter of Parnell, Mr. Hynes cares about the oppressed, in this case, the working-class, who does not favour "a German monarch". Also, the nationalist-conservative Mr. Crofton tries to collect votes for Tricky Dicky Tierney. As his name suggests, "a tricky person is clever and likely to deceive you" as explained in Longman dictionary. His second name Dicky means "weak, and likely to break or not work properly" (Longman). Therefore, Joyce presents the reader a *weak* and a *tricky* politician, who probably will *not work properly* for his people when he is elected.

The other canvassers, feeling a sense of belonging and honour in supporting different political leaders, support the radical Mr. Colgan. However, they discuss whether to welcome Edward VII in his visit as they talk about Parnell and his forgotten idea of Home-Rule. Opposing to what Mr. Lyons says about King Edward VII, Mr. Henchy says

What we want in this country, as I said to old Ward, is capital. The King's coming here will mean an influx of money into this country. The citizens of Dublin will benefit by it. Look at all the factories down by the quays there, idle! Look at all the money there is in the country if we only worked the old industries, the mills, the ship-building yards and factories. It's capital we want. (Joyce 337)

Mr. Hency supposes that coming of the king to Dublin will be beneficial to the poor workers and factories of Dublin but Mr. O'Connar opposes what he says by stating that "But look here, John ... Why should we welcome the King of England? Didn't Parnell himself ... " (337). At that point Mr. Hency is interrupted. Joyce makes an entry about what Mr. Henchy would say: "When Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, visited Ireland in 1885 Parnell advised all "independent and patriotic people of Ireland" not to respond to the presence of the prince and princess" (337). This fact shows how patriotic and nationalist Parnell was. But as realized, the characters in the story discuss Edward VII's visit, and they cannot build a consensus:

Parnell," said Mr. Henchy, "is dead. Now, here's the way I look at it. Here's this chap come to the throne after his old mother keeping him out of it till the man was grey. He's a man of the world, and he means well by us. He's a jolly fine decent fellow, if you ask me, and no damn nonsense about him. He just says to himself: 'The old one never went to see these wild Irish. By Christ, I'll go myself and see what they're like.' And are we going to insult the man when he comes over here on a friendly visit? Eh? Isn't that right, Crofton?" (337).

Later, Mr Lyons says "... we have our ideals. Why, now, would we welcome a man like that? Do you think now after what he did Parnell was a fit man to lead us? And why, then, would we do it for Edward the Seventh?" to which Mr. O'Connar says "This is Parnell's anniversary ... and don't let us stir up any bad blood. We all respect him now that he's dead and gone – even the Conservatives" (338). In appearance these friends seem to respect Parnell and their country, but in reality they do not know the reason why Parnell is respected. Therefore, Joyce delineates the self-seeking mood of human being who prioritizes his/her own benefits instead of a benefit for a whole community.

The poem, read by Mr. Hynes, at the end of the story, for Parnell's commemoration – a summary-like one standing for Joyce's point of view to the canvassers and their manners – is a criticism of the unfaithful ones against Parnell. Parts of the Poem are as such:

He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead.

...

In palace, cabin or in cot
The Irish heart where'er it be
Is bowed with woe-for he is gone
Who would have wrought her destiny.

...

He dreamed (alas, 'twas but a dream!)
Of Liberty: but as he strove
To clutch that idol, treachery
Sundered him from the thing he loved. (339)

Charles Parnell is called to be the uncrowned king, whose death grieves all the Irish whether rich or poor, nationalist or not since Parnell dreamed of liberty and Home Rule, that is, the fully independent Ireland. But that is not the case, as realized, in the poem since treachery and hypocrisy prowl around Parnell. As Farrell has put it,

Although Hynes' poem claims that Parnell's "spirit may/rise, like the Phoenix from the flames," his use of the weak, subjunctive *may* is reinforced at the end of the story by the assertion that the poem is simply "a very fine piece of writing": the prophecy of return is recognized as meaningless (Farrell, 1983: 10).

Although all applaud the poem, they do not really seem to care about the theme of the poem as Joyce reveals "Mr Hynes sat down again on the table. When he had finished his recitation there was a silence and then a burst of clapping: even Mr Lyons clapped. The applause continued for a little time. When it had ceased all the auditors drank from their bottles in silence" (340). All lapse into silence; none has a word to say about Parnell or his dream, the Home Rule. The apparently nationalist politicians and canvassers think about drinking their beer and being paid. No one in the committee room is deeply moved by the poem Hynes reads because they go on drinking their beers and gossiping although they act as if they were doing something important. In that sense, it can be said that, "... the story's theme of political ineffectuality [is underscored]: like the "Pok!" with which the bottles of stout are uncorked, the words reduce to hot air" (Simmons, 2008: 34). Within this context, they fail to cherish and glorify the memory of Parnell and they represent the dead of Irish politics.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, Joyce's short story "delineates how hegemonic consent operates" within a paralysis in general (Simmons, 2008: 24). The historical dead character, Parnell, reveals such kind of a paralysis because of the fact that the canvassers are, in a way, unable to think of him who stands for home-rule. The manners of the characters in the story are representations of Irish treachery as the reference of the title "Ivy Day" invokes the dead figure of Parnell who is, ironically enough, more alive as compared to the other characters together with their hypocrite manners and speeches. Therefore, the canvassers seem to be spiritually and politically decayed since they do not care the policies of their parties. The babbles and the silence, prevalent as a motif, set forth indifference of the canvassers talking on Parnell, King Edward and politics. The silence is almost always interrupted by another character, yet through some folderol, as in the "Pok!" example which reveals the ignorance of the so-called nationalist canvassers towards Parnell, a true archetypal to Irish history.

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