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A Sense of Love in *Dubliners*

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In *Ulysses* (1922), the most important work of James Joyce, the word 'love' and its many variants appear almost three hundred times and most of them are used in an ironical way.¹⁾ To Joyce love is always a tremendous problem. It seems fruitful to consider the problem of love in his early collection of stories, *Dubliners* (1914) which can be said to make the issue a significant motif of the stories though it has less mentions of love than *Ulysses*. The book comprises a series of episodes which can be divided into three parts: childhood, adulthood and maturity.²⁾ Each of the three parts, 'Araby', 'A Painful Case' and 'The Dead' is respectively examined in this study for the purpose of revealing how the writer treats love in *Dubliners*, because the three protagonists seem to be modeled after Joyce himself.

I

What the young protagonist of 'Araby' experiences is a typical first love. The boy adores 'her [Mangan's sister] figure defined by the light from the half-opened door' (30)³⁾ or her imagery, not her personality: he is only fascinated by a vision and a love. What he really cherishes is not his beloved herself but the romance or, in other words, the lover himself. This is endorsed by the fact that he self-contentedly murmurs 'O love! O love!' (31) with a theatrical action. He determines to go to the bazaar not purely for the sake of Mangan's sister who wants to go there, but for the sake of himself who wants to have a chance of becoming intimate with her. Through undergoing several obstacles in the way of the bazaar his mind completely forgets about her. When he finds out that there is nothing to gain by coming to the bazaar at all, he vaguely knows his own mind, understands the nature of his love and feels disillusioned at last.

The way of love in 'A Painful Case', though it is realistic, severe and not so fanciful as in 'Araby', must be much more childish in a sense. James Duffy is an ordinary banker whose face is 'of the brown tint of Dublin streets' (108). He has 'neither companions nor friends, church nor creed' and does not feel the need of 'any communion with others' (109). He always observes himself in an objective manner. In short, he is lonely, gloomy, boring and does not seem to have an attraction for women. And his partner Mrs. Sinico is described by Duffy as follows:

Her face, which must have been handsome, had remained intelligent. It was an oval face with strongly marked features. The eyes were very dark blue and steady. Their gaze began with a defiant note but was confused by what seemed a deliberate swoon of the pupil into the iris, revealing for an instant a temperament of great sensibility. (109)

In general the adjectives 'handsome', 'intelligent' and 'defiant' can be hardly considered to be suitable for describing female charms: like the male lover, Mrs. Sinico does not seem to be very fascinating. But to Duffy she must be attractive; for he looks on her with favour from this first impression. He requires a woman to be 'handsome', 'intelligent' and 'defiant'.

Duffy and Mrs. Sinico meet regularly, and they become so intimate that he begins to think that 'this union exalted him, worn away the rough edges of his character, emotionalised his mental life' (111). He is certainly fond of her. But even at such an exalting moment he keeps his 'odd autobiographical habit' of 'compos[ing] in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense' (108). His mind is always full of interest in himself and justifies itself:

As he attached the fervent nature of his companion more and more closely to him, he heard the strange impersonal voice which he recognised as his own, insisting on the soul's incurable loneliness. We cannot give ourselves, it said: we are our own. (111)

Although Duffy declares the voice which coolly talks to him to be 'the strange impersonal voice', he notices that it is himself that utters the

voice. He insists that *he* cannot give *himself* and *he* is *his own*, and yet he foolishly believes Mrs. Sinico to be so intelligent and sensible as to understand him and wants her to give herself to him.

As is shown by Duffy's words for expressing her, he does not want to have sexual relations with Mrs. Sinico. Because he is apprised of the fact that she is already married and has a daughter from the first, so serious a man as Duffy who has 'a distaste for underhand ways' (110) can never regard her as a partner for a love affair. When she affectionately holds his hand and pushes it to her cheek, he becomes horrified and angry about her foolishness in being unable to understand his *sublime* spirit as well as her one-sided interpretation that he wants to have a sexual intercourse with her. And he suddenly leaves her. Duffy does not care about what his beloved expects or wants. The person he loves most is doubtlessly no one but himself. Then what is Mrs. Sinico's love like?—it can be thought to be about the same as Duffy's. The reason why she makes an approach to him is not that she is fascinated by him, but that she wants someone to be near her and heal her loneliness. She is left all alone as her husband and daughter are often out. Her partner does not have to be Duffy. She loves him for her own sake. And she holds his hand not because she tries to comfort him, but because she wants to do it. There is no evidence to be found that their romance could work out well. After parting from him she begins to be addicted to drinking and dies a tragic death. When Duffy is confronted with her tragedy, he reflects on his way of love and recognises the necessity of respecting other people — but it is too late.

II

Of the fifteen stories in *Dubliners*, the longest, the most complete and the most important one is without doubt the last one 'The Dead', which must naturally demand the most careful and considerable attention to be analysed. The protagonist Gabriel Conroy resembles Duffy or the boy of 'Araby' in several ways. They are all shy or timid: this aspect of their nature has a special meaning in *Dubliners*. But Gabriel is

more amiable and sociable than the other two. He is a schoolmaster with literary tastes, a well-conducted man and he writes a column for a newspaper. Gretta, his wife, is frank, childlike, innocent, a little lacking in education, and comes from the west part of Ireland which is regarded as rustic. Though her husband feels ashamed of her coming from the country, he knows that he can be predominant over her because of it. What seizes the mind of Gabriel is to maintain the best behaviour towards other people. His primary concern is what they think of him. He ponders long and deeply over the speech which he is to deliver at the party, because he expects to win the respect of all the people there. It appears that Gabriel is as self-centred as the previous two protagonists.

His behaviour is often accompanied by unnaturalness. He talks to Lily, a housemaid of lower position than himself, with some intention 'in a friendly tone' (178), and when he finds that he hurt her feelings, he gives her a tip in order to redeem his honour and leaves her 'waving his hand to her in deprecation' (178) as if repressing uneasiness in his mind. And to Miss Ivors, who embarrasses him in company and seems to disagree with him, Gabriel offers a gentleman-like send-off though he does not want to do it at heart. That is, he always tries to play the part of an ideal Gabriel on the basis of a scenario written by himself in the deeps of the mind. He is an actor. In his scenario he is both a complete hero and a producer who can direct other people as he pleases. People around him are supporting players as well as spectators of his drama.

His acting is prominent when he feels unrest, and examples of his performances are as follows:

Gabriel knitted his brows and said, *as if he were slightly angered*:
(181)

Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows, *as if he did not understand*, . . . (187)

—Why should I be ashamed of myself? asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and *trying to smile*. (188)

He [Gabriel] *tried to keep up his tone of cold interrogation*. . . (220)
(italics mine)

Gabriel, who dramatises himself in his mind, contrives to perform what

he should be in the actual world. He is so afraid of exposing his uneasiness or weakness that he hides his emotion; for he believes that the hero must be generous, intelligent and serene at any time. But Gretta is in contrast to her husband. She is natural, straight and can never make any pretence. When she feels amused, 'she [breaks] out into a peal of laughter' (180); when she feels glad, she 'clasp[s] her hands excitedly and [gives] a little jump' (191) like a little child, and when she feels sad, she is 'in outburst of tears' (218). She is honest to her sensibility and does not care about other people's view of her at all.

What is Gabriel's affection towards Gretta like? He is conscious that he really loves her and self-contentedly expresses his feelings towards her in the universe of imagination. This is best accounted for by the last part of the story. When the party is over and Gabriel is ready to leave Misses Morkan's house, Gretta listens attentively and absorbedly to Mr. D'Archy singing *The Lass of Aughrim*, remembering her dead lover in her youth. But Gabriel, who feels her abstracted air without comprehending what absorbs her mind, begins to produce his self-contained drama about him and his wife:

She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say *something* foolish and affectionate into her ear. She *seemed to him* so frail that he longed to defend her against *something* and then to be alone with her. Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory

. . . . He longed to be alone with her. When the others had gone away, when he and she were in their room in the hotel, then they *would* be alone together. He *would* call her softly:

—Gretta!

Perhaps she *would* not hear at once: she *would* be undressing. Then *something* in voice *would* strike her. She *would* turn and look at him. . . . (213-14, italics mine)

For Gabriel Gretta is a person whom he can control at his will in his world of dramatisation—and he thinks that he is able to do so in the world of reality because he tries to reproduce in the actual world what his mind invents. For him to love is to handle the partner to his satisfac-

tion. The love of Gabriel is almost the same as the boy of 'Araby' or James Duffy. He ignores the identity of his wife, and what is the most important to him is himself: the person whom he loves best is none other than himself. Thus for such a person as Gabriel, the most suitable beloved is not the unmanageable Lily or Miss Ivors but naïve Gretta.

The figments of the imagination can never come off satisfactorily in the real world. In spite of his sweet expectation that he would spend happy time alone with his wife, he finds himself in the unexpected plight of being told of her memory of her dead lover. It can be said that the striking contrast between the sweet drama of his fancy and the stern reality makes Gabriel like a character in a comedy. In his scenario he calls to her 'Gretta!' and then they come together. But in reality, though he calls to her 'Gretta!' just as he fancied, her face 'looked so serious and weary that the words would not pass Gabriel's lips' (216). He tries to reproduce the drama again and articulates 'By the way, Gretta!' (216), but this only results in the topic of Freddy Malins. Under such circumstances Gabriel still conjectures what his wife is thinking about in a self-satisfactory way:

Perhaps her thoughts had been running with his. *Perhaps* she had felt the impetuous desire that was in him and then the yielding mood had come upon her. Now that she had fallen to him so easily he wondered why he had been so different. (217, italics mine)

Then he asks tenderly 'Gretta dear, what are you thinking about?' (218) although he has no doubts that he understands what she is thinking about. Her answer is unpredictable: 'O, I am thinking about that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*' (218). The more faithful to his story he strives to be, the farther from his intention the situation proceeds.

The romance between Gretta and Michael Furey can be construed as the loftiest love in all the stories of *Dubliners*; for they saw each other having no other intention. Michael said that he did not want to live without her, and Gretta kept her affection towards him in her mind without expecting him to love her. They loved each other purely for the sake of the partner. It is ironic that of all things imagined by Gabriel, who has not yet conceived real love for anyone, the only true allusion of his

is that Gretta was *in love* with Michael.

Gabriel is greatly struck by his wife's statement that she thought he had died for her (220). It is absolutely beyond his thought to die for someone: he has selfishly killed other people's personalities in order to project the stories in his head, but he has never thought of killing himself for someone else. While Gretta is asleep, he gets into a solitary meditation looking out of the window and comprehends the truth of love:

The air of the room chilled his shoulders. He stretched himself cautiously along under the sheets and lay down beside his wife. One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age. He thought of how she who lay beside him had locked in her heart for so many years that image of her lover's eyes when he had told her that he did not wish to live.

Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling. (222-23)

His monologue of the last part of the story is completely different from the precedent one: other people's eyes, the element of acting or dramatisation are eliminated. This is just what Gabriel is talking in this mind. He sheds tears simply for the sake of his sweetheart for the first time. His consciousness excludes his ego. That is, he spiritually kills himself at this moment. It is not until he dies for another person that he can be apprised of true love. His resolution to go to the west part of Ireland from which Gretta came is a representation of his resolution to be reborn to be natural just like her.

It can be considered that the three people analysed in this study are similar to one another: they are so introspective that they always

dramatise themselves in the mind and produce the situation of love in their own pleasing ways. Their love is nothing but self-love. The boy of 'Araby' is too young to comprehend true love, though he vaguely discovers that his feelings towards Mangan's sister is not real love but an illusion. James Duffy of 'A Painful Case' finally reflects on his selfish love and recognises the necessity of taking other people's thoughts into consideration. And Gabriel of 'The Dead' is the only person that can gain the epiphany of true love which requires people to be *dead* for his or her sweetheart. Before being disillusioned they are 'paralysed' with pretension and not able to reach the real mind. Only by being galvanised into new life can they gain the truth.

NOTES

- 1) A. Walton Litz, ' "Love's Bitter Mystery": Joyce and Yeats', *Yeats Annual No. 7* (ed. Warwick Gould. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1990), p. 85.
- 2) Brewster Ghiselin, 'The Unity of Dubliners', *Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Ed. Morris Beja. London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 100.
- 3) James Joyce, *Dubliners* (1926; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). Hereafter the quotations from the novel are from the same book and edition, and the page references are in parentheses within the text.