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ROLE OF SONGS IN JAMES JOYCE'S *DUBLINERS*

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the role played by songs and other musical elements in the development of the stories in *Dubliners* (2010) by James Joyce. To understand the relationship of the songs with the literary text of *Dubliners* (2010) one has look at the connection between music and literature. Music and literature have always been influencing each other and music sometimes plays an important role in literature. Usually the readers of *Dubliners* (2010) focus on the plot and character. They tend to neglect an important element in *Dubliners* (2010) i.e., the songs. The paper will give an insight into the settings in which the stories are embedded. The settings can be better understood if we focus on the songs. The purpose of the paper is to lay emphasis on an underexplored aspect of this collection of stories so that a deeper understanding of the stories can be gained.

Keywords: Music- Literature relationship, Use of Songs, Impact, Joyce's response

Introduction

"He wanted to cry quietly but not for himself: for the words, so beautiful and sad, like music." – James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*(2012)

The musicality of the preceding words implies a close connection between music and literature. Long before the concept of art existed; it is evident that music and literature, usually in combination with dance, emerged as a single activity. The links between music and literature have shifted over time and period, varying from nation to nation. In Elizabethan England, the relationship was close while in Augustan England, it was distant. In the folk epic this relationship is close. The Homeric minstrel, the Anglo-Saxon scop, and a twentieth-century Yugoslavian storyteller always required a musical instrument to complete their art. Both Music and Literature influence each other in their own ways. According to Delia da Sousa Correa, Katia Chornik and Robert Samuels, critical theory has provided new methodologies to enhance the value of both the disciplines.

The effect of music on literature involves several successful and unsuccessful attempts such as adapting of musical forms, procedures, and techniques to literary purposes. Some are overt, while others are rather more subtle. Without independent documentation from Wagner to Dujardin to Joyce, and the final link by Valery Larbaud, we would never have discovered the derivation of the stream-of-consciousness technique from Wagnerian music drama. The attempts of literature to rival, replicate, or imply music such as Scher's verbal music is a part of the broader topic of the use of music as a literary theme. On the other hand, the influence of

literature on music would not form a precise parallel segment because the challenges are distinct. They would most importantly focus on two elements of program music; its incorporation of the freedom of musical form found in its literary models, and its efforts to obtain music specific "meanings" which are essential traits of the sounds of language rather than sounds of most music. The 'leitmotiv' as a musical word is one of the literary devices and techniques which show the literary influence in music but it is comparatively rare. Thus, music and literature continue to influence each other and music, sometimes, plays a significant role in literature. It occasionally adds an interesting or even humorous element, at times it propels the action, and at other times it serves as a cultural mirror to underline characters' feelings and environments.

Joyce's Response to Songs

Now coming to Joyce, one can find that Joyce combined literature and music in a very particular way. Joyce has a more subtle approach to music because he understood the power of music on the unconscious and so incorporated it into his works to make it more complex and diverse. *Dubliners* (2010) is one of his earliest texts where he beautifully intertwined the songs in the literary space. Before the analysis of *Dubliners* (2010) we need to look at the relationship of Joyce and music. Joyce was not only a fantastic writer, but a talented musician too. He had a strong attachment to music. Being an amateur singer, he was able to use songs from his childhood that he remembered well, and tunes that could express much more than words ever could. One of the first childhood recollections he describes in his semiautobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (2012) is his mother playing a sailor's hornpipe on the piano for him to dance. He belonged to a musical family. His mother had taken piano and vocal lessons for fifteen years at a school managed by her aunts, who are the original Misses Morkan in "The Dead."

Songs thus became a natural language for Joyce which he could use considerably with honed ability. Even in his early works, such as *Dubliners* (2010), songs play an important role in his writing. The reason is, Joyce was already placing enormous demands on language, which music could assist him meet. Later, in *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Joyce achieved his full prominence as a language creator. Most part of *Dubliners* (2010) was written in a manner of 'scrupulous meanness' as Joyce puts it, and the full flowering of his innovations had to wait for his later writings. Mabel P. Worthington and Matthew J.C. Hodgart discussed in their book *Song in the Works of Joyce* (1959) about how songs were used in the works of James Joyce. They mainly emphasized on the rhythmical patterns in his works. Joyce expresses emotion in terms of rhythm. Every rhythm in his consciousness seems to carry emotional overtones such as in the story "An Encounter" where the happiness of the truant boy is expressed by a musical rhythm.

Role of Songs in *Dubliners*

Focusing on the role of songs in *Dubliners* (2010) one can find that they play a crucial part in the development of the stories in this collection. Songs serve as ways of relating to the real world. *Dubliners* (2010) is a faithful naturalistic portrayal of the city of Dublin and its people before it is anything else. Music played a significant role in both the geographical and human landscapes. The streets of Dublin were filled with vibrant music which is echoed in these stories: The ballads and "nasal chanting of the street singers" are heard in "Araby" (Joyce 31), the street organs played in "Eveline" (Joyce 40)", and the harpist standing in the roadway amid his little ring of listeners performing "Silent, O Moyle" in "Two Gallants" (Joyce 54) show that song was one of the most living parts of Dublin culture in the 1900s. Stuart Gilbert in his study of *Ulysses* (1922) said that one of the most striking aspects of Dublin life during Mr. Bloom's glorious days was the unbridled excitement for music among all levels of citizens, particularly vocal and operatic music. Songs are an intimate part of the Irish culture. As the title of the collection *Dubliners* (2010) suggest the people of Dublin so the characters presented in this collection are not individual. They represented Dublin which is the centre of Irish culture and politics. A study of Irish culture shows how song is important in any culture. It includes a study of the traditional music of Ireland, Irish folk music, and also about the traditional musical instrument i.e., the harp. Traditional music of Ireland is the music of the community which has been transmitted orally. It was usually played at home or gathering and was rarely heard on a stage with two or more musicians. It was more rural than urban. Irish folk music includes older Irish songs and melodies, the Anglo-Irish songs and ballads of the countryside, and the rich vein of dance

music. In Ireland song entered into every aspects of life. Further, the most popular musical instrument in Ireland was the harp. It was a part of their national flag which shows the importance of music in Irish society. The harp was a symbol of the Irish state. It was used by the government departments and offices and also appeared on all Irish coins. Music and poetry are intertwined with political and social events of the state. A study of Irish rebel music shows that how music is concerned with Irish republicanism and nationalism. The tradition of rebel music in Ireland has a long history of dealing with events such as uprisings and expressing the hardships of living under oppressive British authority.

Songs, at times, function as the character's personal means of escaping reality. In these stories, music aids a character in remembering or realising something which leads them to the final epiphany through an almost hypnotic state. The most prominent scenario is Gretta's staircase scene in "The Dead". A still female figure standing on the top of the stairs, hearing just "a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man's voice singing," (Joyce 211) leading to a sudden remembrance of her tragically-fated friend. It is only because of the song that she remembered a person who used to sing it many years ago. The melody and words seared themselves on her consciousness, and despite the fact that she had forgotten about it for years, a brief listening of the tune brought back all the memories that was repressed somewhere deep down her heart. The very same pattern can be noticed in "Eveline". A young woman sitting alone in a quiet darkened room, hears "down far in the avenue a street organ playing" (Joyce 32) and recalls the day her mother died, eventually deciding to honour her mother's dying desire and stay at home rather than travel to Buenos Aires. The distant music here denotes a shift of mood in the plot. The character is only pushed to make her decision by the hushed tones. It is natural to use music, or more broadly sound, as a technique of sudden remembrance, because acoustic memory is far superior to, say, visual memory. As mentioned earlier song, as a means of escaping reality, helps one to flee into his own inner world, which can be observed in "After the Race". In this story, Villona begins playing the piano for a bunch of friends for their amusement. The young men then decided to go and play cards leaving Villona behind who then "returned quietly to his piano and played voluntaries for them" (Joyce 41) instead of joining them. We thus, get the image of a quiet figure sitting by the piano merely playing it and not really paying attention to what is going on around him. We can only speculate as to why the piano abruptly stopped playing, and why "Villona must have gone up on deck" (Joyce 36) what did he recall, what did he think of? Joyce rarely gives concrete answers to queries like this, preferring instead to leave his readers guessing and deciding for themselves. When the protagonists in *Dubliners* (2010) can no longer speak about their frustrations and desires, they sing and perform, implying a confrontation between reality and imagination. The desire conveyed in the song cannot be attained always in reality.

Moreover, songs symbolize romance in most of the stories. Each story in *Dubliners* (2010) might be interpreted as a clash between pragmatic and falsely idealistic worldviews. May it be Jimmy Doyle's grand party, Doran's love affair with Polly, the young narrator's adventurous day of truancy in "An Encounter," Little Chandler's Byronizing, Hynes' paeon to Parnell, Fr. Purdon's sermon, Gabriel's passion for Gretta—all are striving for a higher, better, and happier world, a world that has never been and will never be. And in every case, the quest is misguided, the objective is profaned to grasp, and any success is radically and ironically different from the purpose. Songs acts as a natural image for the romantic point of view in these stories because of its deep emotional connotations, and Joyce uses it in three of them. The singing and chants of street singers initially in "Araby" became part of the texture of the real world. The mundane world is imbued with latent romanticism, vibrating and resonating with it because of the young narrator's romantic cast of mind which is also conveyed through the image of music: "The career of our play brought us... to the stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness" (Joyce 30). In "Eveline" the heroine's suitor, Frank, who "was awfully fond of music and sang a little," courted her by singing about "the lass who loves a sailor" (Joyce 39). In "Two Gallants," the orchestral reprise connects Lenehan's soliloquy to the previous scene, encouraging him (and the reader) for retrospection. Joyce's favourite song "Silent, O Moyle," as previously discussed, tells the story of Fionuala, the sea god's daughter, who was turned into a swan by a spell and was forced to wander the Irish seas for millennia until she was freed by the arrival of Christianity. Joyce constructs

an image of romance that rises above the sordidness of the scene by incorporating song with its melancholic yearning for release and its recollection of tragic Irish love and beauty.

The author sometimes uses songs for the revelation of characters. Songs can bring out real human emotion and character more easily than any other medium. Thus, Joyce utilises songs for swift revelation of character in various stories of *Dubliners* (2010).

"I'm a ... naughty girl. You needn't sham: You know I am" (Joyce 62)

Polly sings these lines in "The Boarding House". And the rest of the story is just the working out "in prose" of the truth revealed in those three lines. Similarly, in "A Painful Case," Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico are unveiled to each other and to the reader through songs and music. Both of them met each other at a concert and songs played a large part in their friendship, as well as their acquaintance "The dark discreet room, their isolation, the music that still vibrated in their ears united them"(Joyce 111). Mozart's music has the richness and depth to appeal the two very different people: Mrs. Sinico is drawn to life and human warmth, while Mr. Duffy is drawn to classical beauty and formal precision. Two different forms of music reveal two different types of character in the cheerful young men of "After the Race". For instance, "Cadet Roussel" (Joyce 47), a lively public drinking song that they all sing together, linking arms and stamping their feet at the chorus expresses their youthful exuberance. The Hungarian pianist Villona's performance, in contrast, helps to distinguish him as a distinct artistic persona representing various aspects of the Joycean artist in exile. Villona is, in some ways, more cultured than his peers. Maria reveals herself most movingly in "Clay," not so much in character as in spirit. There is a spirit of compassion and decency locked within that sad body and mind that doesn't even comprehend what she is saying, a spirit that has every claim to the "high ancestral name" of "human."

In *Dubliners* (2010), songs are used to capture the uniqueness of a particular moment. For instance, just before Gabriel begins his monologue in "The Dead," he leans against the table and listens to the song for a few moments, relishing the moment and absorbing himself to the mood. "The piano was playing a waltz tune" and Gabriel imagines people "standing in the snow on the quay outside, staring up at the lighted windows and listening to the waltz music" (Joyce 203). It is almost as if the scenario deliberately halted for a while, then rewinded and with a deep breath finally plunged into the monologue itself. Even if we are completely mesmerized by reading this story, we must eventually realize that this is just a single party, that there are countless other stories in the entire city of Dublin, in the entire country of Ireland, which are left untold and which may be connected to one another by songs.

Songs also symbolize sociability in *Dubliners* (2010). Joyce portrays it as an ideal setting for meeting new people and sharing mutual interests. The main character in "Eveline" is invited to the opera "The Bohemian Girl," for a date and it appears that their shared love for music and singing was what initially drew them together. In "A Painful Case," Mr. Duffy meets Mrs. Sinico at a performance. They became friends after attending a series of classical performances together. Even the couple in "Two Gallants" mention taking their dates "to the band" (Joyce 46). Music always appears to be an essential element of courtship, providing an ideal opportunity to celebrate what two individuals share in common. However, it is debatable whether one might meet completely new acquaintances or potential partners because of a shared passion, or just because attending multiple performances necessarily brings one into contact with a considerably larger number of individuals. Songs play a crucial role in the social lives of *Dubliners* (2010). When these stories were written, most of the technology that now pervades and influences modern life had not been invented. So it was likely for Little Chandler in "A Little Cloud" to invite his old friend Gallaher home "to have a little music" (Joyce 79); for Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case" to enjoy his evenings before his landlady's piano (Joyce 109); for Mrs. Mooney to have Sunday night reunions in the front drawing room with waltzes, polkas, and singing (Joyce 62); or for the young men in "After the Race" to rejoice with street singing and music and dance on their yacht (Joyce 47). Singing and playing piano were favourite party pastimes. The satirical backstage depiction of the musical industry in "A Mother," is based solely on Joyce's personal experiences and is a narrative wholly concentrated on Dublin musical life. Perhaps the most sympathetic image is of Mr. Duggan, the bassist, who rose from humble origins to become a first-rate performer through dedication, talent, and modesty.

Songs make the readers of *Dubliners* aware of the great Irish musical tradition. The usage of songs in *Dubliners* (2010) refers to the vast Irish musical tradition both directly and indirectly. Dublin was and continues to be a very dynamic musical city and the indications and effects of songs may be found in almost every story of *Dubliners* (2010). Many stories have characters walking through the streets, perhaps passing by a street performer or singer. A young boy in "Araby" follows a girl he likes and hears "nasal chanting of street-singers who sang 'come-all-you' or a ballad about the troubles in our land" (Joyce 23). We can interpret the picture of an ordinary rush on the streets as "come-all-you" was a "topical song sung on streets." Since street performers were native to Dublin, there was no reason to leave them out of the picture as they reflect the reality of everyday life. This could also be the reason for Joyce's numerous mentions of street performers: they were certainly a part of the Dublin experience who could not be ignored in reality. Thus, Ireland had "a vast repository of songs and ballads which recounted the wrongs suffered by the nation and the daring deeds of her patriot" (Joyce 252). Similar allusions to Irish nationalism may be seen throughout the book, most notably in the use of traditional Irish songs. Even in the narrative itself, "The Lass of Aughrim" from "The Dead" is described as having the ancient Irish tone. It is undoubtedly a traditional Irish ballad, which Joyce may have heard from his mother when he was a child. In addition, the songs that Eveline hears at the concert and Maria performs on the piano in "The Clay" are both from the same opera, "The Bohemian Girl," composed by M. W. Balfe, a Dublin musician. We may find countless such examples of Joyce in the text, more or less hinting at traditional Irish music. It might be an exaggeration to say that he thus made *Dubliners* (2010) a part of the national cultural treasure, but it can be argued that it did bring the stories closer to Ireland, closer to their home.

Use of different musical instruments in the stories also have special significance. Instruments such as harp, organ, piano are mentioned in these stories. The minstrel's harp has long been associated with Irish romance. The purest romance is evoked by a striking musical depiction of the narrator's youthful infatuation: "... my body was like a harp, and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires" (Joyce 31). The harp playing "Silent, O Moyle" in "Two Gallants" is perhaps the most iconic musical symbol of romance in *Dubliners*. It has been noted earlier how a playing of the harp evokes a romantic yearning among the sordidness thus becoming a significant aspect in the structuring and development of this story. We can also see the use of piano in some of the stories such as "After the Race," "The Dead," "A Painful Case". "The Dead" is widely regarded as the pinnacle work in *Dubliners* (2010). Music plays an important role in this incredible and most extensive story. The characters, the plot, and the topic are all connected to music in some manner, and music is evident in the crucial three roles in *Dubliners* (2010); as a social and professional activity, as a romantic symbol, and as a tool for character revelation. In the narrative, the closed square piano functions as a sideboard for refreshments, as the everyday profession of music underpins most of the household's activities.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that songs are one of the crucial aspects that this collection deals with. Songs enrich the ambiance of the stories. When we notice it, we understand that it gives the stories a new dimension; that it changes the shades of meaning slightly, and that it enhances our reading experience. Whether we like it or not, the songs of *Dubliners* stay with us long after the book is finished. With sheer authority and expertise Joyce introduces music in his writing. It is interesting and enlightening to study the complexity and depth that Joyce's musical message attained in his earliest and most naturalistic fiction, *Dubliners* (2010).

Joyce is a remarkable writer. He is not just about what on the page. He liberates the literariness of words. Joyce, is all about the sound of the words too. Not only so many writers but also many musicians have been attracted towards Joyce. When one reads him he realizes what melody really is all about. One can indulge himself and his intellect completely in *Dubliners* (2010). His prose works immediately strike the ears. When the readers are reading Joyce, they are also listening to him. The best way to read Joyce is to read him out loud preferably to oneself and that is where the real enjoyment comes.

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