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### Dublin: The City That Affects

**Özet:** Surprisingly, there has been little interest in the strong influence the city of Dublin wields over the characters in James Joyce's short story collection *Dubliners*. Until recently, scholars have rarely approached the city as the major cause for the indifference, misfortunes and paralysis haunting the characters. With the recent studies of affect theory it has become easier to view an inanimate source, such as a city, as the main reason behind particular actions, feelings and emotions. The considerably new theoretical framework of affect brings attention to organic and inorganic matter and explores the power of inanimate things to alter and shape the world. This paper applies Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* and Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* to James Joyce's *Dubliners* and discusses Dublin as a force that plays a significant role in the development of *Dubliners'* perceptions, in the ways they feel and deal with mundane matters. I do not only approach Dublin as an assemblage of different operators such as the urban landscape, the houses, the trains, the trams, the shades and colours of despair and many others, but as an assemblage with its own agency that leads to negative influence. The reasons behind the negative impact are traced mainly in Irish history: in the traumatic experiences of British colonialism, in the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution and in the disaster of the Great Irish Potato Famine. The paper contributes to the analytical works of Joycean scholars by offering a new way to approach the short story collection: a way that gives voice to, what Bennett calls, a 'thing-power'

**Keywords:** Dublin, affect theory, 'thing-power', James Joyce, Ireland

### Dublin: Etkileşim Gücüyle Değiştiren Şehir

**Abstract:** Şaşırtıcı bir şekilde, Dublin şehrinin James Joyce'un kısa öykü kitabı *Dubliners'*ın karakterleri üzerindeki etkisi gerektiği ilgiyi görmemiş, üstünde durulmamıştır. Neredeyse hiç denecek kadar az çalışmada Dublin şehri karakterlerin yaşadığı talihsizliklerin bir nedeni olarak ele alınmıştır. Duygulanım/etkileşim (affect) teorisi üzerine yapılan güncel çalışmalar, şehir gibi cansız bir kaynağı belirli eylemlerin, duyguların ana kaynağı olarak görebilmemiz için yeni bir bilimsel düşünce tarzı sunmuştur. Önemli ölçüde bu yeni teorik çalışmalar, organik ve inorganik maddelere dikkat çeker ve cansız şeylerin dünyayı değiştirme ve şekillendirme gücünü araştırır. Bu makale Jane Bennett'in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* ve Kathleen Stewart'ın *Ordinary Affects* çalışmalarını James Joyce'un öykü kitabına uygular ve Dublin'in evlerini, trenlerini, tramvaylarını, umutsuzluğun renkleriyle boyanmış karanlık peyzajlarını karakterlerin başlarına gelen olumsuz olayları şekillendirmede önemli rol oynayan güç olarak inceler. Örneğin, "Araby" kısa öyküsünde en başından itibaren kör sokaklar ve bir birlerine bilinçli bir şekilde bakan kahve tonlarında evlerdir başkarakterin yaşadıklarını etkileşim gücüyle yansıtan. "Eveline" öyküsündeki genç kadını harekete geçmekte engelleyen de Dublin'in ta kendisidir; genç kadının şimdiki ve geleceğe ilişkin algıları etrafındaki kentsel görüntüyle etkileşimdedir. Dublin'in modern araçları kahramanların hedeflerine ulaşmasını engelleyen bir güçtür aynı zamanda. "Kil" kısa öyküsündeki yaşlı çamaşırhane çalışanı Maria'nın misafirlik için götürmek istediği pahalı erikli kekin tramvay tarafından 'alınması' gibi. Zaman ve hava durumu da şehrin karakterlerle etkileşimi sağlayan operatörlerden bazıdır ve hemen hemen her kısa öyküde yer alırlar ("Yarıştan Sonra" , "Acı bir Olay" gibi). Şehrin olumsuz etkisinin ardındaki nedenler ise İrlanda tarihinde aranır: İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin travmatik etkilerinde, Sanayi Devrimi'nin getirdiği değişikliklerde ve Büyük İrlanda Patates Kıtlığı'nın felaketinde. Bu makale, bu kısa öykülere yaklaşmanın yeni bir yolunu sunarak,

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James Joyce'un eserleri üzerindeki çalışmalara katkıda bulunmakta, şehrin sesine, şehrin gücüne ışık tutmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dublin, duygulanım/etkileşim (affect) teorisi, James Joyce, İrlanda

## Giriş

Attention to the role that organic and inorganic matter can play in a constantly changing world has been a notable feature in the literary, political and social theoretical frameworks over the last few decades. Works such as Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* and Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* have contributed to the novel approaches to life in general and literature. Once things are perceived as animate forces which exercise power that affects, relations can no longer be understood in a simple manner. They become inter- (between, among) and intra- (from within) relations, in which everything takes part and everything matters. The following essay will "give voice to a thing-power" (Bennett 2). It will analyze James Joyce's *Dubliners* from a novel perspective, in which the city of Dublin- the hybrid, the Irish city that continued its English dependency in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century- is an assemblage<sup>1</sup> with its own agency that "has a certain vital force" (Bennett 24) to affect. Such a reading of the short story collection leaves the author behind and concentrates on Dublin as the main actant built of many different operators<sup>2</sup> such as the houses, the streets, the trains, the trams, the time and weather which shape and alter the characters' lives and personalities. A closer look will be taken at the formation of Dublin as an assemblage. George Simmel's essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" as well as Cathy Caruth's trauma theory will provide insights into how Dublin, due to its troubled past, has become a trauma experience that seeks representation in literature. The reasons behind its specific (mostly paralyzing and negative) influence in the stories will be traced in Irish history: in the loss of land and life because of the British domination and the Great Potato Famine, and in the suppressing influence of the Industrial Revolution.

The relationship between literature and what seems to be the 'real world' has been a long debated issue. As the famous 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and aesthetician Monroe Beardsley states in *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, "by their nature literary works seem to have an essential and unavoidable reference to, and concern with, reality" (Beardsley 436). The following essay does not have for purpose to answer the question to what extend literature reflects reality (if it reflects it) or what the nature of their inter-relation is. It approaches

literature as part of the 'real world', and as part of it, regardless the complexity of the relationship, literature deals with 'reality'. James Joyce's short story collection named after the real city Dublin, more precisely, its citizens – the Dubliners, is not a history book, it is no doubt a fiction. However, although the characters are 'fiction' and what happens to them is 'fiction' too, they are still named after the real city; their concerns, fears, emotions, often inabilities to cope with what happens to them - are not unfamiliar to the 'real world' and the 'real people'. This essay claims that Joyce's Dublin (in the short stories) - the way it appears and acts – has to do with Irish history. Along with analysing how the characters' lives are affected by the city in the short stories, it also approaches how real historical facts (like the Potato Famine and British imperial influence) might have affected 'real' and 'non-real' people and places.

Understanding 'thing-power' and the relation between organic/inorganic matter and people will shed light on the dimensions of Dublin's impact upon the characters in the short story collection. Thus it is important to look into Jane Bennett's and Kathleen Stewart's works on matter and its power to affect. Bennett defines 'thing-power' as "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6). In the first chapter of her book *Vibrant Matter*, for the sake of explaining how it works, she tells "a speculative onto-story" in which the characters are "a dead rat, a plastic cap [and] a spool of thread" (3-4). I will not go into detail and retell the story, but will briefly set out its main idea. The author's encounter with the objects causes affects in her, expressed in the change of her perceptions and flow of thought. She realizes that they, the characters of the story, are not passive entities, but things that possess the faculties to incite action. The 'onto-story' "highlight[s] the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip-slide into each other" (4). Bennett goes on by defining the characters and herself as actants in an assemblage. The actants "can be human or not" (9), their significance lies in their capacity to effectuate. The actants or the operators/ agents, as she further refers to them, usually exercise power within assemblages. It is important to know that not only every operator in an assemblage "has a certain vital force", but also that "there is [...] an effective proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage" (24). The 'vital force' of thinghood is also studied in Kathleen Stewart's book *Ordinary Affects*. Her theoretical work on 'affect' is in tune with

Bennett's theory of 'thing-power'. Stewart defines 'ordinary affects' as "things that happen" and "give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies" (2). They are in constant motion, moving "through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social wordings of all kinds" (3). What makes them significant is the potential to cause feelings and thoughts. Once perceived as an assemblage with its own agency, Dublin becomes an operator built of many actants that apply vital force and affect. Both Bennett's and Stewart's theoretical works offer important insights into the influence the city of Dublin wields over the characters.

In the studies of affect, affect is always defined as a neutral force. However, what it causes can be harmful and destructive. The force the city of Dublin applies to the characters is an example of a negative impact. It lies at the root of the characters' dysfunctional relationships and burdened lives. In this part of the paper I will look into the workings of the assemblage Dublin and analyze how some of its actants: the urban landscape, the streets and the houses; the trains and trams; the weather and time play important roles in altering Dubliners' perceptions and thoughts as well as the ways they cope with everyday situations.

The combined forces of the urban landscape affect Dubliners and contribute to their failure to develop and progress. In "Araby", for example, from the very beginning of the short story the blind street and the "conscious" houses that "gaz[e] at one another with brown imperturbable faces" (17) exercise their affective powers and become a reflection of what happens to the protagonist. Similar to the street the boy goes blind. His vision gets blurred by the attraction to Mangan's sister and only in the very last scene, in which, like the conscious houses he gazes "into the darkness", the boy becomes aware of his vanity and sees himself as a creature (21). The animated street and houses make the young man unconsciously experience their dark intensity. Akin to the houses that afterwards are described as "grow[ing] sombre" (17), his eyes go gloomy and "bur[n] with anguish and anger" (21). The "silent street", "the dark muddy lanes behind the houses", "the dark dripping gardens" (7) also mirror the silence of the closed bazaar and the boy's unfulfilled desires. He is left alone with his own 'creatureness'. The houses and the streets have acted their "thing-power" upon him and "produce[d] effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett 6).

Like the boy in "Araby", the young woman in "Eveline" is affected by the urban atmosphere, which deprives her from taking action. The 'things' tell Eveline's life story before she even lives it. The short story starts with her looking through the window and encountering the novelties of the 20th century: the new industrial life with "the concrete pavement[s]" and "bright brick houses with shinning roofs" (23). These buildings are different from her "little brown hous[e]" filled with memories to which she is attached emotionally, but hopes to leave in order to escape from the heavy duties and obligations to her family. Similar to the new houses built by the man from Belfast, Frank, her boyfriend from Buenos Aires, offers Eveline a shiny and bright future away from home. Akin to the red buildings which have taken the place of the field, where she "used to play together" with "[t]he children of the avenue" (23), what Frank offers sooner or later will turn her present into a nostalgic memory. Thus Eveline's perceptions of her present and future become an echo of the interactions with the surrounding landscape. The "dusty cretonne" she inhales constantly, not only accompanies her remembrance of a carefree childhood in the first part of the story, but also towards the end, makes her recall the promise to her mother. The urban odour plays an active role in triggering her memories and eventually reconsidering the possible departure with Frank. Similar to the reoccurring dust in her room, her fears and past reappear and she gets stuck, unable to get rid of them. The dusty atmosphere suffocates her and at the end, she is "passive, like a helpless animal" (26). Following the progression of the plot, Eveline is first seen to examine the landscape, the houses, then all the "familiar objects" (23) in the room. The operators enact their "thing-power" and "drive [her] [...] toward thought and extension" (Gregg and Seigworth 1). She falls into contemplation, which influences her decision to stay in the city. Dublin's landscape interacts both with the boy in "Araby" and the young woman in "Eveline". It affects and subconsciously influences them.

The trains and trams also affect the characters in Dubliners. They often have a profound impact on their psychological states or become obstacles. For example, "the noises of tram-gongs and swishing trolleys", Mr Farinngton from "Counterparts" experiences, fill his head (65). The trams and trolleys do not only interact with him, but they are in a constant intra-action. They exercise their subliminal power from within him and subconsciously play a role in his frustration and violence. It can be speculated that similar to the noise of a continuous bee buzz in the

antagonist's head, the actants take part in his escalation of anger in the pub and later on at home. Though the tram that takes him home is described as "little" in contrast to the others in the busy streets, it still builds its intensity and Mr Farinngton returns home in a state of loathing (68) and brutally abuses his little son. In other stories such as in "Clay" and "Araby", the modern vehicles prevent the protagonists from achieving their goals. Maria, the elderly lady who attends a dinner party at Joe's place, nearly goes into tears when she realizes that "her little surprise" has failed (74). Maria had bought an expensive plum cake for the hosts and dreamed about their satisfaction and thankfulness when the cake is presented to them. Nevertheless, the plum cake never reaches Mr and Mrs Donnelly's house; it has been 'taken' by the tram. The atmosphere of the tram and the alluring chat with the gentleman has made her forget the gift there. Similar to the tram in "Clay", the train in "Araby" is an actant obstacle to the fulfilment of the boy's wish. The "intolerable delay" (20) of the train contributes to the late arrival at the bazaar and consequently to the young man's emotional distress.

The operators time and weather take part in almost every short story in Dubliners. They subconsciously influence the characters' moods and predetermine their experience. For instance, though Jimmy, the protagonist in "After the Race", is aware of the forthcoming regret after losing a great amount of money playing cards, for the time present, he feels "glad of the rest, glad of the dark stupor that would cover up his folly" (31). He perceives the darkness of the night as a comfort that hides his failure. Nevertheless, through its actant time, the city does not allow any relief for the man. The announcement of daybreak signalizes his entrance into a dark reality of shame and remorse. The day becomes a cruel operator which thoroughly changes his feelings. Dublin's gloomy weather also exercises its intense powers. For example, once Mr Duffy from "A Painful Case" reads about the death of Mrs Sinico and steps out of his house for a walk, the first thing that meets him on the threshold is the "cold air", which "cre[eps] into the sleeves of his coat" (83). Soon after in the public-house, similar to the "cold air", grave thoughts begin to sneak into his head. He comes to realize that "[h]is life [like the deceased woman's] [will] be lonely too until he, too, die[s], cease[s] to exist, become[s] a memory" (83). The actant weather does not only contribute to his change of mood, but also provides the setting for the encounter with the dead woman. On Mr Duffy's departure of the place, it is already "after nine o'clock" and "[t]he night [is] cold and gloomy" (83).

The evening's chilliness and greyness awake sensations which are unknown to Mr Duffy and soon after he meets the ghost of Mrs Sinico, hears and feels her voice and touch. Subconsciously, the weather plays a significant role in the change of the protagonist's perceptions and experience of life. Once a proud and inconsiderate man, who feels ashamed of Mrs Sinico's suicide, he becomes thoughtful and sympathetic to the deceased, aware of his similar lonely life.

The city's urban landscape, the houses, the streets, the trains and trams, the time and the weather have been discussed as some of the actants in the assemblage Dublin. Not only does each of these actants have its particular negative effects over the characters, but their combined forces build the harmful influence of the agency of the assemblage Dublin. The reasons behind its peculiar negative formation are hidden in Irish history which will be explored in the next few paragraphs. Though the title of the collection is *Dubliners*, Joyce's work is not merely about the people who live in Dublin: it is about Ireland, it is about the city. The city, similar to the Irish people, carries on its shoulders the traumatic baggage of the history of suffering: the oppression of the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution, the loss and grief caused by the Potato Famine. Too close to Great Britain, Ireland for centuries remained a colony of England, bound politically, economically and culturally to the Empire. In Joyce's lifetime, the situation of Ireland and Dublin did not much differ. Laurence Davies, in the introduction to the Wordsworth Classics edition of *Dubliners*, provides a brief overview:

Ireland [...] was still governed as a dependency whose economy and culture were subordinate to British, and especially English, interests. Dublin, the country's largest and most cosmopolitan city, had been for centuries the legal, financial and administrative capital, the brain, if that is the proper word, of the colonial system, the place where the vortices of power and change converged. (vi)

The English occupation was not the only 'evil' in Irish history. Kevin Whelan, in his article on Joyce's "The Dead", claims that "the single most important event in Ireland in the modern period" was the Great Irish Potato Famine. "Over one million people died and two million more emigrated within a decade" (59). The British, as oppressors of Ireland, were often held responsible for the great magnitude of the disaster. They

were thought not to have provided the needed support. Whether there were strong grounds for believing the claims is ambiguous, but it is certain that such a terrible catastrophe was to be remembered not only by the ones who survived the plague, but by the later generations and the landscape itself. Both the experience of loss of land and life had traumatic impacts that were to be passed on and inherited. The traumatic memories were to haunt and possess and eventually define Irish identity and Ireland. In trauma studies the concept of memory is highly problematic. According to Cathy Caruth, a contemporary scholar of trauma theory, the most traumatic may remain beyond consciousness which makes it difficult to represent. She posits that the difficulty comes from the two peculiar features of trauma, namely, 'belatedness' and 'latency'. Considered in the realm of 'thinghood', these traits may explain the 'traumatized' actants' hostile intensities towards the characters in *Dubliners* years after some of the unpleasant historical events. Whereas considered in the realm of humans, the traits are mainly characterised by the impossibility of the senses and most importantly the brain to apprehend the traumatic event as well as by the need of time for assimilation, which is partial and sometimes impossible. Caruth makes a valuable suggestion by claiming that due to the belated reoccurrences and repetitions of images, it is impossible for trauma to be discussed in a juridical system or in any fixed historical timeline. For that reason, "psychoanalysis and literature are particularly privileged forms of writing that can attend to [the] perplexing paradoxes of trauma" (Luckhurst 5). Literature, notably, is perceived as a profound medium for expression, because it makes possible the transmission of the experience in literary grotesque and figuratively emotional ways and provides an audience, who must hear, share and communicate the memory. Thus by applying Caruth's theory it becomes possible to look for and discuss traumatic historical experiences in literary works such as in James Joyce's short story collection. Though direct references to British imperialism and the Great Potato Famine are absent in *Dubliners*, the traces of colonization and death are detectable in the city's adverse force and the protagonists' futile struggles against destiny and Dublin.

In addition to the trauma caused by the British domination and the Potato Plague of 1840s, the Industrial Revolution that came to Europe at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries also left its mark on the already problematic collective Irish memory. It was not an easy experience for the troubled Irish people. To the pressure of the

English oppression was added a new one- the pressure of technology. The condition of modernity in Dublin, the largest city in Ireland, became one of alienation, in which technological developments similar to the forces of colonization often invoked feelings of powerlessness. According to Georg Simmel, a German philosopher and sociologist, “[t]he deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of historical heritage and external culture and technique of life” (47). The attempt to maintain independence in Dubliners turns out to be without success as, for example, it is in the short story “Eveline”, in which the modern industrial city landscape and the heroine’s past exercise their thing-power and prevent her from leaving and gaining freedom. Common responses to the dynamic ways of urban life in the collection (in stories such as “Araby” and “Counterparts”) are often aggression, indifference towards the others and loss of selfhood. The trains, trams, clocks (all representations of the Industrial Revolution) contribute somehow to the characters’ dysfunctional lives.

The collective traumatic experience of the British occupation, the Potato Plague and the Industrial Revolution, has been inherited both by the Irish and the city. Thus, Ireland’s troubled history is the major cause of the formation of Dublin as an assemblage of inorganic/organic matter with negative influence. This paper has shown how the city, similar to the inanimate matter in Jane Bennett’s ‘onto-story’, has the potential to affect and cause actions, feelings and emotions; how it exercises its ‘thing-power’ and can be viewed as the utmost cause behind the characters’ psychological stagnations, misfortunes and dissatisfactions. This paper has shed light on the importance of approaching James Joyce’s short story collection from a perspective that recognizes the significance of nonhuman intensities, a perspective that gives voice to the affective powers of Dublin.

## Kaynakça

Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts" (Bennett 23).

"An operator is that which, by virtue of its particular location in an assemblage [...] makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event" (Bennett 9).

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