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JAMES JOYCE'S DUBLINERS: "ALL MAY NOT BE AS IT SEEMS" IN "CLAY" AND "EVELINE"

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ABSTRACT

James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) presents a comprehensive picture of the city and its inhabitants from a multi-dimensional perspective and throws light on the aspirations, fears and anxieties of the characters. For the aim of this paper, the short stories "Clay" and "Eveline" are chosen since they complement each other in terms of following a chronological scheme – while "Clay" is one of Joyce's stories of maturity, "Eveline" is placed among those of adolescence. Maria in "Clay" is an elderly woman who longs for an ideal family that she has long missed, on the other hand Eveline is a young woman who longs for an escape from the oppressive atmosphere of her home – yet they both fail. Accordingly, by juxtaposing Maria and Eveline against each other, it is attempted to illustrate the way in which Joyce delves into the inner world of these two women figures and shows how they both suffer from not being able to choose life. Moreover, it is also intended to analyse the link between what Joyce constructs on a simple basis, and what he insinuates through various ambivalences, gaps and ironies in both stories.

Keywords: James Joyce, *Dubliners*, "Clay," "Eveline," Irony, Short story.

JAMES JOYCE'UN *DUBLİNLİLERİ*: "KİL" VE "EVELİNE" ÖYKÜLERİNDE "HİÇBİR ŞEY GÖRÜNDÜĞÜ GİBİ DEĞİL"

ÖZET

James Joyce'un öykü kitabı *Dublinliler* (1914), Dublin'in ve şehir sakinlerinin kapsamlı bir temsilini çok-boyutlu bir bakış üzerinden sunmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda karakterlerin istek, korku ve kaygılarına ışık tutar. Bu makalede, birbirlerini kronolojik düzlemde tamamlıyor olmalarından hareketle "Kil" ve "Eveline" öyküleri seçilmiştir – "Kil" Joyce'un olgunluk temasını işlediği öyküsüyken, "Eveline" yazarın gençlik temasını işlediği öyküleri arasında yer almaktadır. "Kil" öyküsünde, kurmakta geç kaldığı ideal aile ortamının özlemini çeken yaşlı Maria karakteri betimlenirken, "Eveline" öyküsünde evinin baskıcı ortamından kurtulmanın hayalini kuran genç Eveline karakteri ile karşılaşıyoruz – ancak her ikisi de başarısız olur. Dolayısıyla, bu makalede, Maria ve Eveline'in karşılaştırmalı analizini yaparak, Joyce'un farklı yaşlardaki bu iki kadın karakterin iç dünyalarına inışı ile birlikte, her ikisinin de hayatı seçememelerinden kaynaklanan üzüntülerini yazarın nasıl ele aldığını göstermek amaçlanmıştır. Buna ek olarak, Joyce'un görünür metin üzerinden ifade ettiği ile; çelişkiler, boşluklar ve ironiler aracılığı ile metnin alt katmanlarında kastettiği arasındaki bağlantı da her iki öykü üzerinden analiz edilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: James Joyce, *Dublinliler*, "Kil," "Eveline," İroni, Öykü.

Considered to be a starting point in the writing career of James Joyce, *Dubliners* (1914) contains a collection of fifteen short stories written between 1904 and 1907. Organized around the themes of childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life, the collection portrays an in-depth analysis of the lives of the city's inhabitants at various stages, as well as illustrating Joyce's connection with Dublin – which he left in 1904 yet continued to re-visit in the literary realm of his work. In this way, the author achieves to formulate an idiosyncratic stance, which enables him to view the city from within; as well as securing his position as an objective figure that observes it from outside. Accordingly, in a letter (1906) to his publisher Grant Richards, Joyce expresses his intention and method – while writing *Dubliners* – as follows: “My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because the city seemed to be the centre of paralysis. [...] I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness” (Ellmann, 1966: 132). Due to his ambivalent position as both an insider and outsider, Joyce makes use of a detached yet an equally involved narrative voice that allows him to convey his portrayal of Dublin to the reader in the most detailed way possible. Nevertheless, as a critic writing at the time of the work's publication puts it, “in *Dubliners* Joyce ‘carefully avoids telling you a lot you don't want to know.’ He also avoids telling you a lot you might want to know, and an important feature of Joyce's attitude in *Dubliners*, he expects the reader to perform in filling out stories, finding and creating meanings” (Blades, 1996: 13).

In “Clay” and “Eveline” it is possible to see how Joyce foregrounds his narrative voice within his characters' points of views, and thereby adopts a highly perceptive third-person narration. Called ‘free indirect style’ or ‘free indirect discourse,’ this method of narration “has the significant advantage of enabling a narrative to appear to arise naturally through the perspective of a character who become both an actor and a narrator and, further, a commentator on him/herself” (Blades, 1996: 43). However, it also “blurs the boundary between an impersonal narrative mode and protagonists' subjective attitudes” therefore it becomes highly difficult for the reader to pinpoint a stable point of view since “characters are frequently shown to be anxious and lost, for both their own and other people's lives are perpetual source for confusion” (Gasiorek, 2015: 186). In this light, by presenting an analysis of these stories it will be attempted to illustrate the ambiguities and the ironies that Joyce displays through a set of silences, gaps and absences in his work.

“Clay” which is described as a “deceptively simple little story by design” has a lot more to convey than what appears on the page (Norris, 1987: 206). Similarly, though the shortest of the stories in *Dubliners*, “Eveline,” too, “contains more than meets the eye” (Hodgart, 1978: 46). It mainly stems from Joyce's narrative technique which urges the reader to read through the details that the text provides. In this way *Dubliners* lends itself as a work that encompasses various interpretations at a time, and it turns reading into a pleasurable activity. As Reynolds also argues, “[o]ne of the pleasures that Joyce, like all great artists, gives his readers is a never-ending stream of new-discoveries” (1993: 4). Correspondingly, unlike the “docile consumer of the nineteenth century narrative conventions” who is satisfied with what the text presents and does not try to look beyond; Joyce's narration is bound to transform the reader's “docile response” into a “critical gaze” (Norris, 1987: 208).

While analysing the stories, it will be attempted to assume the docile response of the reader first, so that it will be possible to make a comparison between what the text constructs on a simple basis, and what it insinuates through various ambivalences, gaps and ironies. “Clay,” as a ‘deceptively simple little story by design,’ is about the unfulfilled desires of an elderly woman, Maria. Employed as a kitchen maid at the *Dublin by Lamplight* – a Protestant institution for the rehabilitation of drunkards and ‘fallen women’ – Maria is planning to take her leave earlier to be able to spend the Hallow Eve with Joe and his family. Maria had nursed Joe and his brother while they were young, so she feels that

it will be a good opportunity to see them again and feel connected. However, the story does not end on a happy note. As part of a divination game played on that day Maria, blindfolded, goes for a dish of clay which stands for death. Not able to recognize the trick that is played on her she chooses to turn a blind eye to it and escapes into her romanticized world. At this point, it is important to note that the word 'clay' does not appear in the story except for its title. Accordingly, it is possible to argue that "[w]hat is censored by the narration is the significance of what happens, and that significance is the demonstration (once more) of Maria's fear of utter insignificance" (Norris, 1987: 212).

Maria's name is the Church's title for Mary in Latin (Brandabur, 1971: 70). As it is also stated by many critics, it is obvious that Joyce is forming an analogy between Maria and the Virgin Mary. Although the analogy may seem to be working properly on the surface since we have an unmarried, childless, virginal woman who is considered to be a "peace-maker" (Joyce, 1996: 110); at a closer look it is seen that Joyce in fact parodies the analogy between them. Unlike the holy virgin who is revered and paid homage to, here in her social world Maria's unmarried status turns her into an object of ridicule. As a Roman Catholic, she works at a Protestant charity which rescues women from streets and offers them an alternative family environment where they can set up a new life for themselves. Misfit among the magdalenes of the *Dublin by Lamplight*, Maria's virginal integrity is pointed at and made fun of by the women. While Maria superintends the distribution of the brambracks, which are cakes used in another divination game on Halloween containing a ring and a nut, (the ring stands for marrying first and the nut for marrying a wealthy widow or widower depending on whether the nut is empty or not) contrary to her authorial stance implied in her administrative position, the women laugh at Maria by alluding to her inexperience with men: "There was a great deal of laughing and joking during the meal. Lizzie Fleming said Maria was sure to get the ring [...]. Then Ginger Mooney lifted up her mug of tea and proposed Maria's health, while all the other women clattered with their mugs on the table" (Joyce, 1996: 112). Maria's similar reaction to the comments made by Lizzie and Ginger exhibits – between the lines – her sorrow and disappointment with her life. She simply tries to ward off the painful impact of the moment by masking her face with a laugh: "Maria had to laugh and say she didn't want any ring or man either; and when she laughed her green eyes sparkled with disappointed shyness and the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin" (Joyce, 1996: 112). Here, Joyce does not allow the reader to have a direct look into the feelings of Maria. Instead, by drawing a contrast between the assertion of Maria's authoritative status and the "depiction of her nervous and disorganized behaviour" he confuses the reader's reaction and compels them to "decide whether to trust the narrative speech or the narrated gestures" (Norris, 1987: 210). In this way Joyce endows his work with a set of ironies and ambiguities that render various readings and interpretations possible. As Norris argues further:

The narration has here produced another ambiguous scene whose possible interpretations hold the extremes of estimation for Maria: was the tea fun, was Maria made much of by people who love her, and did she express her grimace of hilarity, or was it a frequent ritual of cruel humiliation in which the aging prostitutes mock Maria's unlosable virginity? (1987: 214)

Despite Maria's statement that she does not want any ring or man, her following actions prove the opposite. Old though she is, Maria's desire for husband, home and children still stays young. After the women finish their tea, and the cook and the dummy begin to clear away the tea-things, Maria takes shelter in her little bedroom where she gets ready to leave for the house of Joe Donnelly to spend the Hallow Eve together. Moved by the atmosphere of the day and the references to marriage, she stands before the mirror and appreciates her body: "[S]he looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adored. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little

body” (Joyce, 1996: 113). It may be interpreted as Maria’s attempt to restore the shattered fragments of her self-composure which has been attacked by the women at the tea. As she gets outside and moves away from the laundry, the place’s negative impact upon her consciousness also begins to wear away. She reminds herself that – as opposed to the prostitutes – she is lucky to be independent because she has her own money (Joyce, 1996: 113). Moreover, unlike the prostitutes she is also lucky enough to have a family. It does not matter whether there is a blood bond between her and the brothers, because just like a true mother Maria took care of Joe and Alphy when they were young. Maria believes that she will receive respect and affection among their company, because Joe “had wanted her to go and live with them” but she, having become accustomed to the life of the laundry, chose not to (Joyce, 1996: 111). Again, although she lacks her own biological children, she fulfils the demands of motherhood by nursing the brothers – as is often said by Joe: “Mamma is mamma, but Maria is my proper mother” (Joyce, 1996: 111). As Norris elaborates more, “[a]ccording to this version, Maria is a well-bred, middle-class maiden lady living on a small but independent income from a job that earns her the respect of co-workers and superiors” (1987: 208). Still, there is also “a second, repressed version that is never articulated in the narrative speech,” but it is made apparent through the gestures, narrative silences and gaps in the story.

Maria’s struggle to restore an alternative self causes her to be taken by the very illusion that she has been constructing so far: that she is leading a happy and fulfilled life where she does not lack anything. Ironically enough, her position as an outsider becomes justified on the tram where “she had to sit on the little stool at the end of the car, facing all the people, with her toes barely touching the floor” (Joyce, 1996: 113). Her sitting in opposite direction to the other passengers exemplifies her problematic perception which is not firmly grounded upon facts and realities but is hovering in the air, just like her feet. Getting off the tram, she goes into a cake shop to get a dozen of mixed penny cakes for the children, and then she drops by another shop to buy some plumcakes for Joe and his wife. At this point, reminiscent of the way the prostitutes have made fun of her long-overdue unmarried state, the lady behind the counter “who was evidently a little annoyed by her” asks Maria if it was a wedding cake that she wanted to buy (Joyce, 1996: 114). Not able to read between the lines, Maria blushes and smiles at her so-called inquiry; but the young lady takes it all very seriously, cuts a thick slice of the plumcake, parcels and hands it to Maria, almost mechanically – devoid of any sympathetic gesture or connection (Joyce, 1996: 114). In the second part of her trip to the Donnelly house, Maria gets on another tram and disconnects herself further away from the ties that are binding her to truth and reality.

Her perception much distorted by the imaginary vision that she has been formulating, Maria goes far enough to turn a fat, old drunkard – who makes room for her to sit on the tram – into a country gentleman: “Maria thought he was a colonel-looking gentleman and she reflected how much more polite he was than the young men who simply stared straight before them” (Joyce, 1996: 114). Compensating for the cold attitude of the young lady at the shop, the old man starts chatting with Maria about Hallow Eve, the rainy weather, and the good things that she got for the children.

When we read between the lines and assume the role of the critical reader, it is seen that here it is not the old drunkard who is turned into a country gentleman; but Maria herself who, by applying to a romantic distortion of reality, transforms her own image into an idealized figure who is glorified and paid attention to. In this picture, the man on the tram acts as a functional medium that enables Maria to reflect her glorified image back upon herself. It is her need to be appreciated by the people around that makes Maria so much desperate for recognition. Maria’s fear of insignificance is powerful enough to meddle with her perception of reality.

Ironically enough, despite all her attempts to restore and validate an ideal image for herself, the last blow to Maria's sense of integrity comes at the Donnelly house where she is supposed to feel herself most secure:

Everybody said: 'O, *here's Maria!*' when she came to Joe's house. [...] Maria gave the bag of cakes to the eldest boy, Alph, to divide, and Mrs. Donnelly said it was too good for her to bring such a big bag of cakes, and made all the children say: 'Thanks, Maria.' (Joyce, 1996: 114-5).

When her desire to surprise the family with the plumcake fails, as she is not able to find it in her bag, Maria, for the first time in the story, directly encounters the true experience of lacking something. Unlike her previous attempts to fill what she lacks in her life – man, home, children – with imaginary substitutes, she cannot satisfy her deficiency now, since it is too real to be ignored:

Maria, remembering how confused the gentleman with the greyish moustache had made her, coloured with shame and vexation and disappointment. At the thought of the failure of her little surprise and of the two and fourpence she had thrown away for nothing she nearly cried outright. (Joyce, 1996: 115)

From this moment onwards, the 'glorious' image that she has been constructing in her mind begins crumbling away. The forgotten plumcake paves the way for "a series of ravaging revelations" about Maria: her hidden excitement on the tram; her bad manners in the moments of stress which is made apparent through her asking the children whether they ate the plumcake – which causes them to feel like thieves; and her inability to secure peace within the family (Norris, 1987: 211). She even loses her maternal function because now it is Joe himself who turns out to be the 'proper mother' figure. He soothes Maria and tries to make her forget about the cake: "He was very nice with her. He told her all that went on in his office, repeating for her a smart answer which he had made to the manager" (Joyce, 1996: 115). Obviously, Maria is gradually stripped off the figurative shields and the masks that have been protecting her from acknowledging the fact that she has been leading a pointless life. Ironically enough, even after putting her hand into the clay Maria does not seem to recognize the trick that is played on her. Like her "literal blindfold or 'bandage,' the gap in the narration—the narrative voice's failure to explain to us what really happened—represents metaphorically [...] [Maria's] imaginary lacks and fears" (Norris, 1987: 212).

At the *Dublin by Lamplight*, Maria is turned into an object of ridicule whose aspirations for marriage are made fun of. On the tram and at the plumcake shop, she desperately tries to regain her shaken status by assuming to have been admired by a 'country gentleman' so much so that she even blushes upon the young lady's sarcastic comment on a wedding cake. Finally, at the Donnelly house she again misses her second chance to find the ring at a divining game prepared by the children, and she picks up the wet clay and the prayer-book "signifying death and convent before the year is out" (Glasheen, 1969: 103).

According to Edward Brandabur, Maria can be interpreted "as a grown-up Eveline in Joyce's scripture, just as the Virgin Mary is regarded traditionally as a 'new Eve'" (1971: 67). In this vision, Maria stands out as a "projection of what becomes of the lower-class Dublin woman frustrated in love by her own inhibitions, and that of course describes her precursor, Eveline" (Brandabur, 1971: 67). While "Clay" is one of Joyce's stories of maturity, "Eveline" is placed among those of adolescence. Similar to "Clay," "Eveline" too is narrated in the third-person narrator. However, it does not strictly limit the perspective of the narrator to that of the heroine's only, because as it is also exemplified in "Clay," the narrator of both stories has a perspective that Maria/Eveline does not. In this way Joyce points to the metaphorical blindness of the characters as their vision is not as enlarged as that of the narrator's, which in turn makes it possible to endow the work with various ironies – resulting from

“*the gap* between the stated ambitions of a character and his/her failure to achieve them, *the gap* between the ideals and realities of Dublin life” (Blades, 1996: 12; italics mine).

To regard the story of “Eveline” as a precursor to the story of Maria in “Clay” not only points to the thematic unity present in *Dubliners*, but it also serves as a significant key that will enable the reader to perform the duty that Joyce expects of him/her: to fill out the silences and the gaps in the stories and to create new meanings out of them.

Just like Maria who longs for a life that she has long missed out but continues to live in its shadow – desperately trying to make herself believe that she still has the chance to close the gap between the reflection and the real; Eveline, too, is longing for an escape from the oppressive atmosphere of her home. Unlike Maria however, for whom it is no longer possible to create a new life out of her past, Eveline has the power of youth and energy on her side. Yet, paradoxically enough, her reactions are characterised not by movement but by contemplation and inaction – as is justified through her sitting by the window at the beginning of the story: “She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains, and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired” (Joyce, 1996: 37). The reader does not see Eveline in the middle of a physical action, instead they observe her thoughts which move in and out of the street, going to the past and then again coming back to the present. It “helps set up the mood of hesitation, a feature both of Eveline’s state of mind and of Joyce’s technique in this story, setting up its central tensions” (Blades, 1996: 18).

Following her mother’s death, Eveline has been left in charge of the house where she has to look after her siblings, thus assuming the role of a surrogate mother; and at the same time coping up with his drunken father who, far away from the image of a protective paternal figure, threatens to apply violence on his daughter: “Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father’s violence. She knew it was that that had given her the palpitations” (Joyce, 1996: 38-9). In such a repressive environment, it is not surprising that the young sailor Frank appears as a saviour, and he urges Eveline to elope with him to Buenos Ayres and become his wife:

She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her. (Joyce, 1996: 41-2)

Finding herself in a dilemmatic condition as she is torn between the ‘promise’ that she has given to her mother – that she will hold the family together after the mother’s death – and Frank’s ‘promise’ of a new life, Eveline cannot bring herself to board the ship: “She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (Joyce, 1996: 43). She is unable to escape from the unhappy environment that is binding her, which contrasts with her desire for liberation. It is the discrepancy between desire and the inability to fulfil it that turns Eveline into a paralysed figure – not only physically but also spiritually.

However, as Blades argues “all may not be as it seems” in the story (1996: 20). As mentioned before, it is Joyce’s technique to apply to the missing bits of information or gaps in the plot which prevents the reader from arriving at stable interpretations. It is also important to bear in mind that the story is narrated “through the naïve eyes of nineteen-year-old Eveline,” who is more than ready to welcome any story that will loosen her connection with the grim reality of her life (Blades, 1996: 20). This is the reason why she is easily taken by the adventures told by Frank: “First of all it had been an excitement for her to have a fellow and then she had begun to like him. He had tales of distant countries” (Joyce, 1996: 40). Eveline is not in love with Frank himself, but with the alternative world

that Frank presents before her eyes. Just like Maria, who idealises the old drunkard on the tram; Eveline, too, romanticises the image of the young sailor and transforms him into a 'knight in shining armour' that will come and rescue her. Contrary to her idealised interpretation of the sailor however, Eveline's father warns the reader as well as his daughter about the reality behind the appearance: "I know these sailor chaps,' he said" (Joyce, 1996: 40). It is the clash between reality and appearance that enables the writer to make use of the Joycean irony in his work. Correspondingly, it would not be wrong to state that Frank may be anything but frank. As Hodgart explains further, "[i]f you are unfamiliar with Dublin, you might think that the boat at the quay is the one that is to take her [Eveline] to South America; not so, for Atlantic liners sail from Liverpool or other British ports, not from Dublin" (1978: 46). Therefore, it is quite likely that after seducing her, Frank will leave Eveline to a life of poverty and prostitution in Liverpool, "which was notorious as a place to which many Irish Evelines had been drawn by sailors like Frank" (Blades, 1996: 20).

Besides, "[a]nother irony of Eveline's predicament is that in spite of her father's treatment of her, she still feels obliged to him" (Blades, 1996: 20). On the surface, it is possible to interpret it as Eveline's affectionate feelings towards her father; nevertheless, when the reader applies to the 'critical gaze' instead of the 'docile response,' the text opens itself to various interpretations that are implied between the lines. "Like the earlier stories, 'Eveline' contains a thinly veiled sexuality, with the suggestion of incestuous perversity and sexual sado-masochism" (Brandabur, 1971: 63). The father's "blackthorn stick" which he used to hunt down Eveline and her siblings when they were playing in the field years ago (Joyce, 1996: 37) is "both an instrument of punishment and a symbol of incestuous desire" (Brandabur, 1971: 63). The sexual implications of the stick is insinuated via the father's threats that become more direct following the death of Eveline's mother: "When they were growing up he had never gone for her, like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl; but lately he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother's sake" (Joyce, 1996: 39). Here it should not be disregarded that Eveline's psychology constitutes an essential part of her dilemma (Blades, 1996: 20-1). Torn between Frank and her father, Eveline cannot claim a stable identity for herself. Instead, her identity functions as an outer element that is imposed on her, which is shaped in accordance with the expectations of the people around: a surrogate mother for her siblings; a dutiful server for her father; and a beloved for Frank. Unable to integrate herself into an authentic relationship, Eveline finds the escape in cancelling out the life of the action and restricts herself to self-imprisonment where she is reduced to the position of a helpless, passive animal.

To conclude, in "Clay" and "Eveline" Joyce presents a somewhat veiled exploration of the inner realities of two women figures that belong to different ages: maturity and adolescence. Maria suffers from her mistake in not having chosen the 'life' once she had the opportunity to do so, whereas Eveline is exempt from the "forces of any life-will which would impose a direction from within" (Blades, 1996: 21). As a result, they both choose not to be involved in life directly. Maria consoles herself through the family of Joe where she can feel herself 'important'; and Eveline not able to confront the emptiness in her soul, chooses to stick to the routine and the monotony of her daily life where she feels herself 'secure': "In her home anyway she had shelter and food; she had those whom she known all her life about her" (Joyce, 1996: 38). However, though ages apart Maria and Eveline both meet on the common ground where they end up leading a pointless and passive life. Turning out to be living death, it is not surprising that what awaits them in the end is nothing other than a saucer of wet clay.

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