Epiphanies Of Dubliners

In the initial four stories of Dubliners by James Joyce, the focal topic of the stories was the youthful protagonists' unfolding consciousness of the paralysis of adulthood. The significance of the theme of paralysis used by Joyce in his writings were to express the fact that Joyce had accepted that the Irish society and culture just as the nation's economy had been deadened for a considerable length of time by two powers: the Roman Catholic Church and England. James makes it obvious to the readers that there isn't simply moral paralysis that Joyce alludes to in his works but also the paralysis of the intellectual and spiritual state of a person. Joyce achieved his goal through the progression of epiphanies, a succession of related snapshots of knowledge and comprehension. The characters in James Joyce's Dubliners have all been overloaded and caught up, not just in the oppressions of their outside environment but by the abuse inside themselves and within their families. Joyce's Dubliners, experience the daily practice of their regular daily existences, with these they have these moments, these glimpses into themselves and their lives that Joyce characterized as 'epiphanies.' Through the use of the five senses: taste, hear, smell, touch and sight, diction, imagery and tone, Joyce was able to reveal the epiphanies to the readers. The protagonists in "Araby", "The Sisters", "An Encounter", and "The Dead" all experience their own epiphanies one way or another whether it may be revealed to the reader in a direct or complicated structure.

The occurring of epiphanies happen in the typical course of everyday life. At some point of their routine life, the character endures some kind of thwarted expectations or frustration. In these occasions the character sees their life and its uselessness. This moment delivers a clearness and acknowledgment that this wretchedness, torment and pity are their reality. Joyce paints his characters in all the first four stories, in a way that depicts them as a person who longs for someone or something whilst setting up difficulties for them to defeat signifying their liberation from the everyday practice and bitterness of their lives. It is in these moments, these epiphanies, that the reality of their lives is uncovered to these characters and to the reader. All the four Dubliners share a similar characteristic: they are incapacitated and kept from living satisfying lives. Different characters perceive their failure to push ahead, yet most fail to address it. Rather they place the blame on others for their very own issues or imagine that there's not much wrong. Though Joyce's goal of epiphanies remain similar, Joyce ends his stories with the epiphany in the form of a speech in "The Sisters", a state of the mind in "Araby" and "The Dead" and a physical encounterment in " An Encounter". With this, the reader's revelation about the character's condition satisfies Joyce's purpose in writing the story.

Unlike all the other young narrators in Dubliners, the main character of "The Sisters" experienced his epiphany after a series of disbelief. The death of Father Flynn did not come easy to the young narrator due to his close relationship with Father Flynn. Though he saw his relationship with Father Flynn as a healthy one, discussing their spiritual life and Church rituals, Old Cotter did not see it that way. It is inferred to the reader that Father Flynn's relationship with children was one of a pedophile. The narrator's inability to understand the subject of death reveals his youthfulness to the readers, specifically when he was offered crackers and responded by saying "because I thought I would make too much noise eating them"(Joyce 15). He believed that the chewing of crackers would be too loud, as if the sound would disturb Father Flynn in his coffin. The narrator went through many stages of denial and disbelief before

finally encountering his epiphany, which was the acceptance of the fact that Father Flynn was dead. His denial began at the very beginning of the story when he says “ if he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew that two candles must be set at the head of the corpse” (Joyce 9). The narrator admits that the likeliness of Flynn surviving was minimal because it was his third stroke, yet still does not give into the facts. Later, when he hears, again, that Father Flynn is dead from Old Cotter, the narrator pretends not to hear or care so he continues what he is doing “as if the news had not interested me”(Joyce 10). The main character's strong-willed mentality began to budge once he admitted to the readers that the reading of the card persuaded but did not solidify his change in belief that Father Flynn had died. Just before the epiphany of the main character, Joyce uses the five senses to enable the narrator to experience his epiphany. The epiphany is triggered by the two sisters that appeal to his sense of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, when he goes to see Father Flynn in the flesh. At this moment, the narrator was able to really keep his mind on Father Flynn and all that he was. He expected to see the priest smiling in his coffin like in his dream, from the night prior, but that was not the case. The boy describes the priest’s face as he sees it, “ truculent, grey and massive” which was not what he was expecting to see (Joyce 14). At the beginning of the story, the boy only used one sense to perceive Flynn’s death, using this one sense caused his perception of the death to be very limited. At the beginning of his epiphany, the narrator begins to describe the atmosphere of the room with the utilization of his five senses. He first used his sense of touch, describing what he did once he saw the priest lying there. He narrates that they “three knelt down at the foot of the bed”, at this moment the narrator was already starting to believe the rumors about the death of Father Flynn. He then goes on to the narration of the description of the smell that he experienced while viewing the body. He reveals to the readers that while seeing the body, the room began to smell like “flowers” (Joyce 14). With his sense of hearing, he describes the room as being filled with “silence” and with his sense of taste, he describes to the readers a taste of his “sherry”(Joyce 17). When he was drinking his sherry, he was drinking wine which indirectly reveals to the readers that the church is corrupt and that the priest did not have good intentions in the end. With all these senses and evidence, the narrator was able to finally encounter his epiphany by finally admitting that “ the old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him” using his sense of sight, concluding the use of all his five senses(Joyce 18). With this, the narrator is completely aware of the physical death of Father Flynn and the paralysis of his life. The application of his five senses contributed to the unlocking of his epiphany because it made him acknowledge the death and understand that it is okay to feel free and comfortable with the death of the priest.

In comparison to the narrator from “The Sisters”, the narrator from “Araby” does not go through as much or any denial before encountering his epiphany. The narrator of the story is filled with innocence due to his age, with that the reader is able to experience the struggles and frustrations of a young boy in love through the first person narration. Like in “ The Sisters”, the young narrator in “Araby” expanded his use of his senses triggering his epiphany. His expansion of his sense of sight and hearing mainly contributed to the widening of his perception of his entire experience. He explains to the readers that as he looked up “into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity”(Joyce 35). While explaining what he saw he also tells the readers what he hears, he says that “her voice was no encouraging”(Joyce 35). Both of these senses help him realize that the world is not as grand has he had hoped. He realizes that he had unrealistic expectations. Which includes him thinking that the girl he loves would love him too, putting aside the fact that she is training to be a nun. He comes to terms with the fact that the bazaar is not anything special, just a place to buy materials. His epiphany also includes of him accepting the fact that buying Mangan’s sister gifts

will not make her like him and that their conversation was trivial. At this moment, the young boy went from a naive and innocent boy who experienced no hardships to an experienced adolescent who now has to deal with the harsh realities of life. Like in “The Sisters”, both narrators got hit in the face with the reality of life and have learned to deal with the unexpected hardships that come with life.

Like the first two stories, “An Encounter” is told through the eyes of an innocent young boy trying to find a way out of his mundane way of life. The main character and his friend aim to try and escape the rigidity of their school, as well. Joyce’s relevance in writing “An Encounter” was to express to the readers what Dublin was like during this time period. At the beginning of the short story, the young narrator was narrow minded due to his lack of experience. Once he unlocked the use of his other senses he, like the other characters in the other stories, he was able to experience his epiphany. With his sense of sight, he tells the reader what he saw as he saw it, for example he writes “ I saw a man” and he was “dressed in a suit of greenish-black”(Joyce 24). Him meeting the man led him to his epiphany because it revealed to him the reality of his situation. The description of his suit with the colors reveal the significance of his encounter; the green and black represents an eye for adventure, fear, mystery greed, an escape from the mundane world and the cyclical nature of monotony. The practice of routine has been embedded into the minds of the young men in Dublin and there is nothing they can do about it. Along with the black comes the color grey which too represents the dullness in being apart of the world of Dublin. The epiphany of the main character was that there is no need to venture out of your comfort zone, there is no escape from society. He admits to knowing this when he says “ I was ashamed of my paltry stratagem”(Joyce 28). Here, he admits that he needed the help of Mahony, though the two are not close friends. The narrator was ashamed that his big “adventure” did not turn out the way that he had hoped because they just ended up running back to the social norms of their society. Alongside the boy in “Araby”, both the narrators believed that the world outside their comfort zone was going to be great but in both situations, the two boys were filled with dismay as a result of stepping out of their society’s norms.

In the previous mentioned stories, all four were told through the first person narration providing the readers insightful information through the eyes of the main characters. As for “The Dead”, the story is told through third person, so instead of seeing the story through the eyes of the narrator, we look at the story playing the role of outsiders. With the use of Gabriel’s sense of hearing and sight, he experienced many epiphanies which affected him spiritually, mentally and emotionally. His epiphany was first triggered by the sound of the “light taps upon the pane” because at this moment he began to rethink his life and the decisions that he had made throughout (Joyce 223). Afterwards, the sight of “snow”, its motion of falling and “his journey westward” later help him unlock his epiphany(Joyce 223). Him seeing his future in the West reveal to the readers that he understands that he needs to be free from all of this. With this, he begins to understand what is happening and the repercussions that he will soon have to face. At this moment, Gabriel discovers that he is spiritually dead and is hoping for a rebirth, hence his longing for a journey westward. The snow signifies that Dublin is being frozen in time, hence the paralysis of Gabriel spiritually. The melting of the snow into water signifies the rebirth that Gabriel longs to experience. He notices that there is a fine line between the dead and the living, he uses the carpet of snow over Ireland to show that both the dead and the living are connected. The hill that Micheal sits upon makes Gabriel realize that even though Micheal is dead and Gabriel is alive, Micheal still and forever will be superior to him. He accepts the fact that though Micheal is dead, Greta’s love for him is still very much alive. At first, he realizes that

his marriage with Greta never had genuine love but also that his life in widely wide-spread has been passionless and numb. Gabriel looks out at the snow and acknowledges that the coldness of the snow has a numb or paralysis effect on Ireland, a lot like his life. Then, he realizes that he can't separate the past from the existing any more than the dead to the living. Michael lives on in her reminiscence as well as her heart as she will always have thoughts in the direction of this man no matter him being lengthy gone. All this reveals to Gabriel that his routine life is experiencing paralysis and he accepts the fact that with this type of life he will most likely be forgotten, unlike Micheal, again embracing the fact that Greta's former lover remains triumphant over her current lover.

The theme of paralysis of the living or the dead was a common theme in the collection of short stories called Dubliners by James Joyce. Alongside the theme of paralysis was the common theme of self-discovery and realization known as epiphanies. With Joyce's use of diction, tone, imagery and the five senses, the readers were able to experience the discoveries of the character's as they experienced it. Each main character in the four stories, "An Encounter", "The Sisters", "Araby" and "The Dead" realized something about themselves and the reality of their lives. Being blinded for so long, the characters perceived life through a narrow lens, but with the unlocking of all their senses, they were able to see what their life was really like leading them to aim to make it better. All four experienced their own epiphanies but all had one in common, the awareness of paralysis in their lives and/or in the environments around them.