Themes Raised In Dubliners

Due to the epidemic of alienation, paralysis and/or social fragmentation in today's world, James Joyce's Dubliners raises issues and offer perspectives which are more relevant than ever.

Discuss.

In James Joyce's collection of short stories, Dubliners, the issues of alienation, paralysis and social fragmentation do have significant impacts today, and the 15 short stories that make up this collection provide an insight into how these issues affect the citizens of 20th century Dublin. The three short stories, The Boarding House, Two Gallants and After the Race portray how different the outcomes of not conforming to a social standard is through many different perspectives. These issues give way to many other issues, such as commodification which is generally instigated through intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, yet another idea explored in Dubliners. This connection between social standards, which if not met can cause a form of paralysis, and the lives citizens within a city facing enormous change is shown by Joyce through many aspects such as the setting of a very diverse but very demanding 20th century Dublin, the perspective of all levels of authority and decision-making in terms of experience and age and the portrayal of various political and religious restrictions which invokes a different mindset within the reader. The connection between these social standards back then and now is something that Joyce explores, and this can be analysed with the different perspectives that Joyce has provided to see how they impact society today.

In The Boarding House, the way that the themes of alienation, paralysis and social fragmentation is shown is firstly when the story introduces Polly, a young girl who was first working as a typist in the corn-factor's office but after her mother noticed the something was happening at the office every other day, she made Polly work as a waiter of sorts at her boarding house. This is the first instance of paralysis as she set out to do one thing but eventually returned without achieving what she set out for. This is a consequence of paralysis as when one is paralysed, they are unable to do anything, even what they set out to do. The consequence of this is also seen when Mr. Doran is genuinely paralysed before his meeting with Mrs. Mooney as his religious belief held him back from continuing with this relationship, as "the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair and in the end had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation." This shows the religious constraints that he had put on mentally put on himself which in a line in the poem "London" by William Blake, it is described as "mind-forged manacles." This line and this particular event shows us how social standards make people impose restrictions on themselves that separate themselves from the rest of their community and eventually, denies them of the social relationships they once had. This alienation of themselves to justify their own decisions is something that happens today and is the reason that there is a visible gap between the ordinary and the "outcasts", the people who start their own movement or idea to justify their everyday decisions, therefore alienating themselves and causing social fragmentation amongst their closest friends and family, like Mrs. Mooney's fixed, forced and somewhat wrong opinion about the marriage between her daughter and Mr. Doran. This is the way that different perspectives and issues highlight the themes of alienation, paralysis and social fragmentation in Dubliners.

In The Story So Far by Monbiot George, he suggests that the majority of the information that we perceive may be in the form of data, but our “beliefs about it are held entirely in the form of stories”. This explains the relationship that Jimmy had with the rest of the French racing team in the short story After the Race as at the start, when he couldn’t hear his cousin and the driver over the sound of car, the reader has a sense of Jimmy’s true involvement in the group and eventually, it is obvious that the only reason he may be part of the team at all is because of the money that he is promising to invest into Segouin’s company. This is when the story that he trusts so much, the wealth and fame that him and his father have earnt his family, begins to fade away and it becomes clearer to the viewer that this is all an illusion. This is also shown when Dublin is portrayed as having “[worn] the mask of a capital” as it did not have the power of a capital, this illusion of power and control over people is very prominent, almost clouding the thoughts of the character. The theme of paralysis and alienation is shown in many scenes of the story, such as when Jimmy and his “friends” board his yacht to enjoy the rest of their night. A minor detail is that the boat remains anchored, another form of paralysis. All the wealth that he possesses, whether it be the expensive and luxurious yacht to the amount of money that he promised to invest into the company, alienates him from the rest of the team to the point where the reader may consider them “using” him for the wealth that he owns. This unique perspective of a person with a successful background allows for the themes of alienation and paralysis to shine through amongst the many illusions that James Joyce portrays in Dubliners.

Joyce restates the theme of a path that leads the character not far from where they started or another form paralysis, one where the character is unable to do anything to release themselves from the path that they choose, another