

Adrift Aimlessly in Dublin — Lenehan's Woe in 'Two Gallants' —

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I

It is a commonplace in the Joycean studies that, around the time he contemplated eloping to the Continent with Nora Barnacle, the Irish author espoused an excessively acerbic view of his homeland and Catholicism, a view possibly encapsulated by the utterance that 'Ireland is the old sow that eats her own farrow' (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 470). Indeed, the country, with her extended, ignoble history of submission and subservience to the brutal English rule, had wrecked innumerable dreams and ambitions of her own people and driven a considerable part of them abroad. Although this ingrained feeling of Joyce's came to be reconsidered and modified to some extent later, prominently in 'The Dead', it was already reincarnated scathingly into the tough, overbearing figures of Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney in the earlier stories of *Dubliners*. These female characters display no hesitation not only to capitalize on other people but also to subvert the wills and desires of their own flesh and blood, simply in order to achieve their selfish aims that are largely material and specifically pecuniary gains. Resigned to the political, cultural and psychological suppression of her conqueror and eventually to her colonized condition of existence, Ireland as a result subjected her own people to a collective destiny of enslavement and destitution.

The issue of Joyce's aversion of and hostility towards his homeland and its representation in his art, however, do not end there: to make the matter more complicated, the interrelationship between Ireland and her people, and among the people themselves, has another and more lurid aspect in his first work of fiction. The country's unwholesome condition, in particular its state of paralysis as the writer apprehended in his early adulthood, was far more advanced than such a simplified notion as synopsized into the female exploitation of the opposite sex and offspring. A more sordid vision emerges implacably from the other end of the spectrum of Dublin life on the pages of 'Two Gallants'. Composed during the winter of 1905~6 and placed as the sixth story in the entire collection and the third in the category of 'adolescence', the tale lays bare a sardonic episode in which there seems to be little honesty between men and women and much less hope for either: both sexes are engaged shamelessly in devouring and demolishing each other as if

they were endeavouring to prove themselves to be genuine farrow of 'the old sow'. It seems in Joyce's notion of the land and people that the multi-layered social circle and historical cycle of subjugation and exploitation take root in the national milieu and proliferate themselves around anything Irish.

Through a sketch of conventional betrayal of a poor woman by a cunning, unemployed man in 'Two Gallants', Joyce evokes a state of humanity that can be reckoned as much more than 'a chapter of the moral history' of his own country (Richard Ellmann, 134). The downtrodden may think that they have hit the bottom of their fate and expect that nothing worse will happen, that things will improve in due course, but the harrowing fact they never come to figure out is that there is no bottom line in man's misery or evilness. Intriguingly, despite the poignant storyline, the pair of virulent characters, and the scandalous rendition of realism obsessed with geographical details, 'Two Gallants' has ever enjoyed high critical acclaim and reception. The Joycean critique has opined that it was 'one of Joyce's favourites' (Jackson and McGinley, 52), or more precisely 'his second favorite' (Florence Walzl, 73) after 'The Dead', and his 'most successful synthesis of the major themes of *Dubliners*' (A. Walton Litz, 66). This little essay purports to dissect the shabby silhouette of Lenehan, one of the three major characters of 'Two Gallants', and explore how he can be a hero of a story and which position the tale itself occupies in the author's artistic process of reassessment of the inherent Irish values and virtues.

II

'Deception' might best define the thematic fibres of 'Two Gallants' as Walzl shrewdly observes via slightly different phraseology such as 'vulgar intrigue' and 'betrayal, social, political, and religious' (73). The subject matter also has much bearing on the structural or compositional dimension of the story. Some literary devices of dissimulation and distortion are embedded in and between the lines of the work. The initial and significant piece is posited in the title of the story, 'Two Gallants'. The two main and male characters are emphatically a far cry from whoever deserves to be called a 'gallant' in the sense of the medieval model of chivalric devotion, magnanimity and rectitude. They are little better than an unlikeable pair of vulgar men, or more appropriately, despicable predators who prowl a modern-day moorland named Dublin for easy meat and money. The opening scene reinforces the mechanism of deception and treachery hinted sarcastically and paradoxically by the title. The idyllic ambience of Sunday evening in late summer, with a throng of merry strollers and passers-by, can hardly be a clue to what follows: in fact, it stands in sharp contrast to the development and consequence of the plot. For, all the

main characters, unlike the nameless pedestrians in a jovial spirit, cut morally dubious and temperamentally sombre figures and preoccupy themselves with the depraved acts of taking advantage of others and making gains with no pains or decent labour. The distinction between the bullied and the bullies, victims and victimizers, preys and hunters, remains blurry, and the roles of the two groups ever alterable and interchangeable upon the smallest twists and turns of circumstances. When the night waxes in the story and the whole plot is played out, the reader might end up feeling weary and dispirited, not necessarily on account of the futile perambulation along with one of the characters, but because of the benumbing sense of delusion and ennui that permeates the finale. Furthermore, the end of the story does not terminate such wasteful meandering but entails a gloomy prospect of endless continuation of it. This feature of circulation and wearisomeness marks the culmination of the theme of deception and betrayal in 'Two Gallants'.

Two messages are quickly delivered at the outset. First, the city looms dominantly over her dwarfed citizens and interacts with them without letting them perceive her invasive and corrosive influences. The opening paragraph fixes its focus of description on the 'city, streets, and lamps' (52) while the citizens are kept in the background and endowed with the inferior role of 'the living texture' (52) of the locale:

The grey warm evening of August had descended upon the city, and a mild warm air, a memory of summer, circulated in the streets. ... the living texture below, which, changing shape and hue unceasingly, sent up into the warm grey evening air an unchanging, unceasing murmur. (52)

Attention should be directed to the single word 'circulated' squeezed between the city and the streets and also to the contradictory sequence of 'changing' and 'unchanging' and the double dosage of 'unceasing'. The repetitive use of certain words in the guise of a clumsy, amateurish style of composition is intended for dressing the reader's imagination for the second message of the opening lines: a slice of vernacular life carved out of a corner of Dublin in an unchanging, unceasing state of flux serves as a small lens of fiction through which an eternal, unchanging aspect of the human reality is glimpsed.

The city is truly awash with ordinary, nameless people, buzzing with the lively traffic and ceaseless chats and laughs of pedestrians roaming in the alleys and streets at the dusk of Sunday in August. Here is a familiar, almost universal scene of the agreeable banality and prosaic euphoria of everyday life as can be seen on summertime Sunday evenings anywhere in the world. An undue emphasis is placed on such positive values as coziness and vivacity in the atmosphere

through the sequence of the words 'warm', 'mild', 'repose' and 'pearls' (52). Buried underneath this sleek, buoyant surface is the reality of the nocturnal Dublin shrouded in isolation and bleakness, two conceivable signs of alienation or 'paralysis' in the Joycean parlance. As the plot unfolds, the city grows dim and somber, lit only by the street lamps and the moonlight. The contrast between light and dark, mirth and gloom, noise and silence, by which Joyce once again, yet moderately this time, aborts the reader's anticipation, announces that a modern-day hero doomed for a prolonged journey embarks on an urban odyssey without fanfare and equipped with no destination, no itinerary, no companion, or little capital. His destiny is foreshadowed by the latter part of the opening lines cited above: namely, not by 'mildness or warmth' but by 'circulation'.

Then the focus of narration swiftly zooms out of the anonymity of a multitude of citizens onto the individuality of a pair of not-so-young guys named Corley and Lenehan. Neither men are married or have a steady job or a straight life. They subsist on irregular and meagre earnings gleaned precariously from odd jobs, dirty tricks or shady dealings of back-street information. Corley fares better, thanks to his respectable family background – his father being a police inspector – and his atrocious selfishness as implied in 'He spoke without listening to the speech of his companions' and 'His conversation was mainly about himself' (55). Rigidity, robustness and globularity succinctly sum up his outward person while his inward landscape is kept verbally opaque: his personality, his manhood in particular, ought to be inferred only from his words and behavior. Except a brief reference to his father, nothing definite or obvious is mentioned concerning this character, but it could be presumed that Corley represents Protestant Irishmen of English ancestry and the middle-to-upper strata of Dublin society. The perception of a smack of harshness and repulsion in the author's portrayal of this character may not really be groundless.

In the meantime, Lenehan plays a double role of witness to and spokesman for Corley's immoral acts. He is thirty years old with a belly growing pudgy and hair turning grey and sparse, a rather unattractive Dubliner whose third role might be that of everyman in a stagnant, inhibiting society. The plot, if there is any worth that name, hinges on his thoughts and actions, especially on his words uttered inwardly and his bitter moods shifting from unhappiness through dissatisfaction to regret. *Dubliners*, as a whole, is a third-person narrative except the first three tales, which all fall into the category of childhood and have a first-person narrator. The anonymous storyteller of 'Two Gallants' adopts Lenehan's inner monologues technically as free indirect speech for the bulk of the plot at the expense of Corley's version of the story. Corley

and Lenehan are sort of friends to each other, but they seem not to be on equal terms or akin in personality, views or attitude. Apparently, Corley excels in cunningness and experiences of wrongdoings and assumes the position of mentor for Lenehan in callousness and street-wise skills of survival: the latter degrades himself, or at least so pretends, into the humiliating position of the former's 'disciple' (65). While busy diluting his 'servility' in a camouflage of 'mockery' (55), Lenehan takes utmost caution in retaining 'a little tact' (57) not to offend Corley too much or be told that his advice is not wanted. It is ironical that Corley's insensitiveness as a matter of fact requires no such alertness of anybody. Lenehan's obsequious manner more or less reflects what is endemic to the Irish people of Celtic ancestry. That might be the deciding factor of the question why the reader is led mostly to listen to Lenehan's voice instead of his friend's.

III

The chief topic of the conversation between the two men is how to dupe a domestic girl-servant usually called 'slavey' into sexual molestation and dump her with ethical impunity: Corley defends himself by quipping boastfully, 'There's nothing to touch a good slavey' (55). It was an open secret in those days that such domestic maids not uncommonly practiced street-walking on the side to make up for their insufficient earnings. Corley has already sent one girl to that occupation and pathetic fate without remorse or guilt: he is in a sense on the fast lane to being a full-time gigolo. The scheme embraced and discussed now by the duo, albeit to be performed by Corley alone, is launched after dark, under the moonshine. The narration guides the reader's gaze vertically from the earthly matters to the celestial panorama a couple of times in the course of the action: (55, 56, 57). While the two men walk down the street, Corley is busy smiling at the passing girls but Lenehan's 'gaze was fixed on the large faint moon circled with a double halo' (55). 'Double' might refer to the pair on the earth, but the 'halo' sounds more like a sarcastic ornamentation for the crooked and deviant saints. Of course, through its shape, the 'halo' stirs up the idea of 'circulation' and the faint anticipation of Lenehan's course of life going nowhere. Corley, too, a little later looks up 'at the pale disc of the moon, now nearly veiled' (56), and so does the street harpist. The one-night adventure, conducted under the pale-yellowish, empyrean light, is brought to an end with the mundane sparkle of a coin minted by the people who have long circumscribed and restricted the Irish mindset and lifestyle. In the feeble light of the street lamps, veiled now by a drizzle, dimly glitters the multiple scheme of betrayal and exploitation epitomized into 'a small coin' (65) on Corley's palm. It is widely acknowledged that Joyce employs brown, yellow and some other colours of the similar tints to illustrate his hometown: the

colour of the coin ought to be grouped together with them.

Inserted into the conversation between the two men is mention of things closely associated with Ireland. First comes the street musician who plays mournful music on the harp. His instrument is a traditional symbol of Ireland and is here likened to a helpless female body fondled by a male hand:

His harp, too, heedless that her coverings had fallen about her knees, seemed weary of the eyes of strangers and of her master's hands. (57-8)

The tune played by the musician is the patriotic melody of *Silent, O Moyle*, a part of 'the Song of Fionnghuala' included in Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* (Jackson and McGinley, 46). Only after the evocation of the vivid image of a vulnerable woman does Corley's girl enter with her Sunday best on, a blue dress and a white sailor hat: the hues of her costume are known to symbolize the Virgin Mary and Catholicism.

Corley's departure leaves Lenehan alone and at a loss about what to do till the time arranged for their reunion. Incorporated into the system of deception, the yachting cap Lenehan has on, just like the sailor hat of Corley's girl, betokens no journey by boat or any other mode of transportation except on foot: the guy, together with the lass, is perhaps doomed not to cross the seas to any better place but to be moored in Dublin all his life. A voyage out of the land is accessible only to the extremely privileged, lucky or aspiring few among the citizens. All Lenehan could do is to ride the 'waves of expression' (52) that rise and fall on his own face in response to other people and to drift in the city without a lucid sense of direction. Another piece of his costume, 'the light waterproof' (52) which he keeps slung over his shoulder, suggests his readiness and vigilance for the Irish wet weather since it is not before long that some drops of light rain start coming down as is warned by the 'double halo'. Pitiably for Lenehan, that wary frame of mind fails to contribute to his lifestyle or long-term planning of survival. At any rate, for the evening, till he meets Corley again, he opts for wandering around the city as he did all afternoon – and will do for years to come. Such a futile mode of activity is the most the city could offer to people of the lower class, with limited resources, of a Catholic upbringing, or all combined, like Lenehan.

The solitude has another effect of suspending Lenehan's masquerade, his social performance, temporarily. In isolation, he is released from his habitual need of acting and self-protection in the presence of others and inadvertently led to reveal his real self through internal monologues. The slackening of his cautiousness then renders him susceptible to the stimuli of the immediate circumstances. The melody of the street harpist, which has been reverberating on and off in his

mind, now vibrates rhythmically and exercises control over his mood and movements: 'His softly padded feet played the melody while his fingers swept a scale of variations idly along the railings after each group of notes' (60). His inbred nature as an Irishman and Dubliner instinctively reacts to anything Irish, which enables history, politics and religion to crawl up to him and clasp him in their constricting hold. What usually attracts his attention or amuses his eyes now appears to him insipid and charmless. Only the raw instincts newly set free dictate his being. He becomes aware that an acute sense of hunger and thirst throbs inside him and begs to be quenched: he has eaten nothing since breakfast. At a dismal-looking restaurant on a back street, Lenehan makes a scanty order of ginger beer and boiled peas. The colours of his victuals, orange and green, harks again to Ireland while the red and blue of 'a cut ham on a great blue dish' (61) can be connected with Britain (Jackson and McGinley, 48). The invisible net of Irish culture, politics and religion is spread over him prior to his moments of meditation in which he comes to face his inner self and ruminates on the orbit of his own life. Lenehan is suddenly placed at the crossroads where his way of living might be redressed, where a prospect of an upward turn in his discontented state of being might be brought within his grasp.

During his miserly dinner, Lenehan ponders first on the lovers – Corley's 'deep energetic gallantries' (62) and 'the leer of the young woman' (62). He then proceeds to put himself under scrutiny and reflect on 'his own poverty of purse and spirit' (62) in sharp contrast to his friend's fortuitous situation. His thoughts further run along the line of his own loss of youth at thirty, the emptiness of a vagrant life, his yearning for a good job, home of his own and, most of all, 'some simple-minded girl with a little of the ready' (62). His wish for easy cash, on one hand, evinces his subconscious reluctance for independence and maturity or his 'parasitical' nature in C. H. Peake's interpretation (26), but these moments of self-analysis and meditation could on the other be construed as a sign of promise and reformation, a rare opportunity for resurrection, where his self is to be made born anew and into a better being with positive, solid views of life and the world as a whole. A path is being offered for him to take toward reinstatement of what he has wasted over the years in walking the streets of Dublin and cultivating not so fruitful relationships with men and women. His 'embittered' (62) feelings might be rehabilitated and placated only if he resolved himself to wash his hands of a street life and restart from scratch for a solid, straightforward mode of living.

The evening advances on to the time zone in which holiday pedestrians bid good-night to each other and take their way home, leaving the city and the moon to hardened night-prowlers. Besides having no place to go for the night, Lenehan has a good reason to stay out and, putting

aside musings about his own welfare and livelihood, resumes thoughts on Corley and the outcome of his least chivalric adventure. Through the restored channel with him, Lenehan's connection with the Dublin underworld seems to regain its force over the dreams of a good and honest life. Around the same time, something totally unexpected, something dark and grim, grabs his attention: he abruptly discovers himself confronted by the problem of faith, not in religion or politics but in camaraderie. Acquainted so well with Corley's personality and habits, Lenehan entertains a burgeoning suspicion that his friend has 'seen her home by another way, and given him the slip' (64). His nerves grow jittery and irascible, whereas his last cigarette breaks loose and has to be 'flung into the road with a curse' (64). Now he is being tested about his trust in people, specifically in his friend Corley of all people, and fails in an unequivocal manner. A lack of trust is mutual, and in Lenehan's case, expounds why he is nicknamed 'leech' and floats 'at the borders of the company' (53) though not entirely rejected from the circles of friends thanks to his 'vast stock of stories, limericks and riddles' (53). This little anecdote gropes deep inside this man's soul and brings to light what his real problem is: while Corley is a 'Base betrayer', Lenehan is not much different, either, or could be worse as a hypocrite and parasite, as is to be proved in the final scene in Merrion Street. The breach of trust against his friend has brought him back to the point where he started in the story: this is perhaps the morally worst and spiritually most lethal of the circulations Lenehan has committed. His fate is sealed once and for all, and the rest of the story is to be told to confirm the death of his soul.

The end of the tale envisages a stunning scene of vileness, deception and multiple betrayal all packed together. Both to his personal embarrassment and delight, Lenehan notices Corley and his girl walking towards him, embarrassment due to his vehement doubt and delight due to the end of his solitary hours: the 'gay Lothario', the 'proper kind of Lothario' (55), has in fact kept his words. His unease immediately dispersed and his mistrust left behind, Lenehan feels thrilled and starts stalking the couple by keeping their dark figures in sight while taking caution not to be seen. When the lovers reach the house where the girl is employed, she goes in and comes out after a short awhile. What she has done is never elaborated but becomes inferable from what she does towards her man: she brings out a small gold coin worth considerably for a live-in servant and hands it to him. It has been conjectured in the Joycean critique (for example, Bernard Benstock, 42) that she shamelessly betrays her master's confidence and steals the money. It could also be a precious part of her savings and imply that she remains faithful both to her master and her lover, though she more probably pilfered the 'two bloody fine cigars' (54) she gave to Corley on a previous date. She might even 'borrow' the sovereign as Ingersoll passingly

remarks (92). In any case, the layers of deception and betrayal still keep her enmeshed, as Heyward Ehrlich argues (90), in the pathetic pattern of violation of Irish girls by English men, originated in the mystic Kathleen Ni Houlihan.

After the girl enters the house, Lenehan walks up to Corley but feels baffled and ill at ease at his friend's complete disregard of his salutation from afar and direct enquiries at close range on the consequence of the outing. The playboy obstinately sticks to silence for the rest of the story as if engaged in mute protestation against his friend's lack of trust. Lenehan is unable to fathom his friend's mood from the utter absence of verbal replies while Corley imperturbably keeps his features 'composed in stern calm' (65). The latter might in another likelihood as well be in the middle of savoring his amorous exploits on his own, for he not only conquers another Irish girl but also triumphantly brings back spoils of an amorous battle to his humiliating 'disciple' (65). On his part, Lenehan has by now become oblivious about his future plan (or, it is more likely that his dreams have forsaken him) and meekly follows in the footsteps of his master in expectation of his share. By so doing, he betrays his own self and, by degrading himself to a follower of English brutality and power, also his homeland. His reward will be a few drinks and some food to be paid for by Corley. The precious opportunity of his resurrection is dumped and forgotten by Lenehan himself. In this pitiable and dismal sense, he is a 'proper kind of Dubliner', trapped in the dirty streets of Dublin and wading in his inveterate skepticism about self and others.

Thus, Joyce's treatment of Ireland in 'Two Gallants' is as harsh as ever. His recognition of Irish lovable qualities and customs such as hospitality, devoutness and self-denial can hardly be traced in the story, whose charms instead dwell in its relentless views and illustrations of the capital and her citizens. Litz goes as far as to declare that 'When he came to write "Two Gallants" his sense of personal betrayal was at its height' (64). It might not be until the last tale of *Dubliners* that Joyce's 'sea-change' perceptibly takes place. However, this tentative verdict ought to be equilibrated by a judgement made from a perspective at once wider and more detailed. As this present author has pointed out in his series of studies that have spanned over a decade and half, Joyce's first work of fiction is not just a bundle of negative and critical illustrations of his fellow citizens and hometown. For instance, Evelyn's selection of 'home' through the denial of 'Come!', a command voiced by Frank, on the basis of her self-immolation and dedication derives from Catholic teachings and the Irish collective valuing of family and home (Yoshioka, 'Eveline'). Mrs Sinico, on the contrary, pathetically incarnates a motherhood quite antithetical to that of the 'old sow', a motherhood which loves and cares, breeds and nurtures, against the constraints of religion, gender and community, even in the barren, wintry ground of

Phoenix Park (Yoshioka, 'A Painful Case'). The aunt in 'Araby', first uncooperative and even detrimental to the boy's nocturnal adventure, provides him with decisive support at the last moment against her intoxicated husband and obliquely sets him on the course of epiphany in collaboration with Mangan's sister (Yoshioka, 'Araby'). Inept more than simple-minded, trouble-maker more often than peace-maker as she may be, Maria is possessed of something pristine and fundamental as a human being, something that lies beyond verbal elucidation (Yoshioka, 'Clay'). All in all, this little study might deliver its over-all judgement and conclusion thus: although 'Two Gallants' scarcely casts a sympathetic light on Ireland and her people, *Dubliners* as a whole is dotted with characters and episodes which, contrary to the widely received views, sings, though somewhat impassively and in a muffled tone, of the national spirit, vernacular lifestyle and even Catholic values and registers on the surface of the pages the author's suppressed bitter-sweet sentiments towards his fellow citizens, homeland and the national religion.

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