
The Farrington's Case

In literature authors often attempt to create meaning by causing characters to undergo some form of moral reconciliation or spiritual reassessment. In the case of *Dubliners*, James Joyce has created a series of stories that center on one central epiphany, that of paralysis within a cycle of frustration and disillusionment. The word epiphany is important because it suggests a divine manifestation of some kind. The characters in Joyce's stories are far from spiritual creatures, and in exposing the unostentatious and even unpleasant moments of their lives, Joyce leads the reader to sudden realizations regarding universal problems in society. In the story "Counterparts," the main character Farrington is a large vulgar man. He is trapped in a monotonous job as a copyist in a law firm, and it soon becomes clear that he is a raging alcoholic who cares about his work only because it provides him with the money to get drunk. "Counterparts" deals with Farrington's realization that he is trapped in an unfulfilling existence, paralyzed by his own alcoholism and ignorance.

The principal institution of paralysis in Farrington's case is the law office in which he works. Clearly, he feels absolutely trapped in this bureaucracy, having to answer to Mr. Alleyne, Mr. Shelley and Mr. Crosbie. It is easy to see why he dislikes Mr. Alleyne in particular because being "tall and of great bulk," Farrington respects strength, virility, and athleticism. It totally frustrates Farrington to be in a subordinate position to a bald "little man" who wears "gold-rimmed glasses." Taking this into account, it is easy to see why Farrington insults Mr. Alleyne later on in the story, because he feels he must assert his perceived superiority. Nevertheless, this victory is empty because he is forced to humble himself and apologize if he wants to keep his position. This is the first of the emasculating incidents in Farrington's day, all of which arise from his need to assert his masculinity and strength and are linked to his alcoholism.

In many of the stories in *Dubliners*, the characters seek escape from the unpleasantness and boredom of their everyday lives. In Farrington's case, alcohol, and the "comfort of the public house" provide escape in the form of drunkenness and a boisterous party atmosphere. When he feels angry or impassioned the feeling of "thirst" (an innocent word which belies the miserable nature of alcoholism) becomes stronger and he feels he must slake it immediately. The reader is first alerted to Farrington's dependence on liquor after he goes to drink a beer after being told off by Mr. Alleyne. When he returns, the dialogue with the clerk reveals that this is not his first. In fact, he has performed the same charade of sneaking furtively away "five times in one day." Clearly, the dependence on alcohol is going to lead to Farrington's downfall, and this is evinced when he fails to complete his copy at the end of the day and is nearly fired when the alcohol he has imbibed loosens his tongue so much that he does not consider the consequences of insulting Mr. Alleyne.

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Despite the fact that he is forced to apologize, Farrington still feels that he has the right to brag about his initial "triumph." At a loss for spending money, he is reduced to pawning his watch in order to have a good time. However, the evening of carousal that he imagines is not in line with the true course of events. At first he is pleased because he has money in his pockets and his friends all praise him and stand him drinks, but then he is snubbed by a beautiful woman who he is attracted to. This is the first incident of emasculation, and it is followed by two successive defeats in arm wrestling by the young acrobat Weathers. Thus, Farrington has his manhood symbolically taken from him in the most primitive way possible; he succeeds neither in sexual conquest nor a test of strength. Furthermore, he does not even achieve his original goal, which was to get drunk! Finally, he is left with only "twopence in his pocket" and returns home in a sullen rage.

Overall, we see that Farrington is a corpulent, oafish, and brutal man. He has no prospects in his profession; in fact, his job situation is extremely precarious because of his behavior, and furthermore the various humiliations he suffers from leave him with no sense of self respect. His home life is miserable and squalid, and while wife seeks escape in the form of religion, Farrington chooses the lurid and contemptible pleasures of alcohol abuse. This weakness is destroying not only his life but those of his wife, whom he bullies when drunk, and his children, one of whom he beats mercilessly at the end of the story. In the end, the only way for Farrington to reaffirm his manhood is to beat his innocent son Tom on the pretext of his having let the fire go out. His tragic epiphany is that he cannot escape the cycle of alcohol abuse and that he is trapped in miserable existence. Significantly, "Counterparts" is presented after "A Little Cloud" in *Dubliners*. The title and chronology suggests that Joyce intends the reader to compare the two. In the end, we see that Little Chandler and Farrington are counterparts. While their personalities and social situations are different, they both end up abusing their children, frustrated with an empty life. While Little Chandler is paralyzed with by his shyness and sensitivity, Farrington is paralyzed by ignorance and alcoholism. By juxtaposing these characters, Joyce presents the reader with the epiphany that paralysis and a lack of fulfillment are universal problems regardless of financial status, level of education, and personal strength.

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