
Urban life in Dublin: Duality in "Two Gallants"

Duality and Paralysis in "Two Gallants"

James Joyce's "Two Gallants", from *Dubliners*, is at first glance the tale of two men driven by greed to manipulate a slavey. Lenehan and Corley enjoy their mischievous banter as they stroll through Dublin, all the while plotting to deviously collect money from a woman. When examined closer, "Two Gallants" is Joyce's commentary on urban life in Dublin, particularly the social paralysis of its inhabitants. In his article "Two Gallants," A. Walton Litz describes the story as "a cold-blooded assault upon the conditions of Irish society" (Litz 329). The culmination of the story exposes the gold coin, the end result of Corley's and Lenehan's scheme. The coin itself represents the two sides of Corley and Lenehan, men who live a perpetual adolescent existence in Dublin. Though Litz's description of the coin as a "true epiphany, a showing forth of a hidden reality" is accurate, he fails to probe deeply enough into the true meaning of this epiphany (Litz 335). In "Two Gallants" Joyce uses the coin both to symbolize duality within the main characters and to demonstrate the men's spiritual paralysis through their greed.

Much like the cliché "two sides to every coin," Lenehan and Corley illustrate the duality of their characters throughout the story. The men contain both unattractive and positive qualities in their character. Corley is described as an unemployed, self-absorbed ladies' man who "spoke without listening to the speech of his companions. His conversation was mainly about himself" (Joyce 51). He incessantly brags to Lenehan that the slavey is wrapped around his finger. Corley tells him, "Cigarettes every night she'd bring me [...] paying the tram out and back. And one night she brought me two bloody fine cigars" (Joyce 51). Even Corley's physical appearance is unappealing as he is described as having a large head, "globular and oily; it sweated in all weathers" (Joyce 51). Joyce portrays the man in an unpleasant light, making Corley a disagreeable character.

However, Joyce also shows the duality of Corley by including subtle hints of his moral distinction and conscience. Corley is "the son of the inspector of police and had inherited his father's frame and gait" (Joyce 51). This description of Corley implies a certain air of stature, conflicting with the idea of Corley as an untrustworthy vagrant. When Corley meets up with Lenehan after his rendezvous with the slavey, Corley "stared grimly before him. Then with a grave gesture he extended a hand towards the light [...] A small gold coin shone in the palm" (Joyce 60). Here the ambiguous grim expression could possibly indicate guilt, though nothing more than speculation is feasible. Corley's visage could reveal a slight conscience within Corley, a second side of him that differs from the hard mischievousness of his character.

As with Corley, Lenehan is also perceived as an unfavorable individual. Lenehan is seen as a brown-noser, drifting from one job to the next. Joyce describes his physicality as "squat and ruddy" and his eyes "twinkling with cunning enjoyment" (Joyce 49). The narrator recognizes that "most people considered Lenehan a leech" (Joyce 50). Lenehan constantly quizzes Corley about his capabilities of manipulating the slavey, and when he refers to Corley as a "gay Lothario," there is a "shade of mockery" that "relieved the servility of his manner" (Joyce 52). From these images of Lenehan's persona, he is seen as an unlikable character.

However, like Corley, like the gold coin, there are also two sides to Lenehan. Although he is seen as a "leech," his "adroitness and eloquence had always prevented his friends from forming any general policy against him". Lenehan is a "sporting vagrant armed with a vast stock of stories, limericks and riddles" (Joyce 50). This revelation of duality in his character illustrates a charming and entertaining side to Lenehan. When he sits to eat his plate of peas, the reader is shown Lenehan's decent side. He contemplates his life and admits that he is "tired of knocking about, of pulling the devil by the tail, of shifts and intrigues" (Joyce 58-9). Lenehan ponders, "Would he never get a good job? Would he never have a home of his own?" (Joyce 59). Here Joyce evokes sympathy for Lenehan by showing the human side of him. And once again, the duality of this character is expressed most blatantly with the revelation of the gold coin at the story's conclusion.

The coin in "Two Gallants" also represents the main characters' paralytic lives and the greed that dictates their actions. Corley and Lenehan are directionless, aimless men who instead of finding steady jobs rely on others to provide advancements. On page 51 of "Two Gallants," Corley is depicted as "about town. Whenever any job was vacant a friend was always ready to give him the hard word." Corley not only has no job, but relies on his friends to refer him to work. And instead of directing his efforts towards finding employment, Corley is instead more concerned with meeting up with the slavey and getting the gold coin. Because of his lack of motivation to improve the quality of his life, Corley is governed by greed. Much like the city he lives in, Corley is paralyzed by that greed.

Although Lenehan is the more sympathetic character, he is not without paralysis of spirit. Through Lenehan's stagnant position in life, Joyce shows the duality of his paralysis, and that of Dublin, with the greed that administers this character's actions. Lenehan is also without steady employment, and although he yearns for a more productive life, he lacks the direction to do so. While eating his peas Lenehan wistfully thinks that "he might yet be able to settle down in some snug corner and live happily if he could only come across some good simple-minded girl with a little of the ready" (Joyce 58). Here Lenehan implies he would only be happy with a girl who had wealth and remarks nothing of love in his fantasy relationship. Throughout the story, he constantly harps to Corley, "Are you sure you can bring it off all right?" (Joyce 53). This illustrates Lenehan's lack of personal responsibility, as he looks to Corley to provide monetary gain, and is indicative of his covetousness for money.

Litz's article, though valid and insightful, lacks an in-depth look at the symbolism of the gold coin. Much like the two sides to every coin, Joyce offers characters that contain duality within their personae, and offers a criticism of the stationary lives of Corley and Lenehan, based on the avarice of their actions. He achieves this duality and paralysis through the symbolism of the gold coin.

Works Cited

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