

Shannon Walsh

11170574

EN388 Essay

Appearance-Reality in Joyce and Yeats

Irish Literature is a very complex subject when it comes to the inner lives of those living in Ireland. As a country, Ireland has a strong political and religious background as well as a harsh history. Through the literature of James Joyce and poetry of William Butler Yeats, we are able to have a detailed understanding about the lives and most inner thoughts of the most basic people of Ireland. Whether it is through stream of consciousness, storytelling, or musical poetry, the words transcribed on the pages of Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Dubliners* or Yeats's "The Stolen Child" and "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" artistically portray the lives of the characters. There is a significant contrast in these texts between the appearance and reality of how certain characters perceive themselves, their surroundings and Ireland as a whole. It is crucial to analyze both the realities and appearances portrayed in the works in order to have a complete knowledge of Ireland. When we look at the "real Ireland", we are able to see the actuality of the character's lives and experiences, but when taking an even closer look at their inner thoughts, we have a more personal understanding of Ireland because we can view it from their eyes, ears and feelings. Experiencing the appearance of Ireland tells a lot about the reality of Ireland because in actuality, it is the Irish, their experience and their thoughts, that define the nation. Reading these texts and interpreting the appearance and reality in contrast as well as together, we can really get a feel for the truth which is expressed through these pieces of literature. Through Joyce's *Dubliners*, I will examine how truth is revealed and the reality of Ireland is emphasized through the lives of his characters through Dubliner's real experiences. In contrast, I will analyze Joyce's *Ulysses* in order to understand the appearance and myth of Ireland revealing the ideal through character's unconscious. Yeats's poetry is also a significant contributor in seeing the contrast between appearance and reality in Irish literature but it does so in a way that brings the two

opposites together. Together these two authors present both the appearance and the reality of Ireland in a complete way.

It is crucial to have a feel for people's reality to know what they are experiencing. In contrast to analyzing how people perceive reality, or how it appears, knowing the reality lets us know the truth. Joyce focuses on the reality of situations in *Dubliners* to reveal certain truths about the real Ireland. Joyce uses his fourteen stories in *Dubliners* in order to show the very real, grotesque and "creeping paralysis in a progressive diminution of life"(Walzl 222). This is the reality that Joyce sees and through his work he will show this vicious aspect of life that the people of Dublin encounter. Through "The Sisters" and "The Dead" and an understanding of Joyce's narrative style of an omniscient narrative and free indirect discourse we are able to relate to the characters and the harsh realities they live in.

Joyce uses certain types of narratives in his works in order to send different messages or give different points of view. In his *Dubliners*, in order to convey the reality of their experiences, Joyce uses an omniscient narrative giving a view from God instead of the actual characters. This is used in order to accurately portray the lives of those living in Dublin at the time with no bias or emotion to distract the reader from what is happening in reality. In *Dubliners*, Joyce is trying to reveal certain truths about Dublin by using epiphanies and paralysis through stories such as "The Dead" and "The Sisters". It is easy to see the epiphanies in most of the *Dubliners* stories because of the third person narrative in the free indirect discourse style. The use of narrative as epiphany is "a visible sign or manifestation- extending to the book as a whole"(Walzl 222). The use of paralysis that Joyce uses is also telling about the realities of Ireland and how hard it is to leave or escape their realities. Joyce wanted to write about the "moral history" of Ireland and Dublin because it "seemed to be the centre of paralysis"(Walzl

221). The paralysis is a consistent pattern throughout the books and usually perceptivity follows. This paralysis and character perception ends up consuming their lives as well as any relationship they are in (Walzl 222). It is significant to look at these stories from the omniscient view for many reasons but most importantly because of the religious references to epiphany, revelation and transcendence. What ends up happening by the end of *Dubliners* is the characters become so paralyzed to the point of complete unawareness. At the same time that the characters lose awareness, the reader becomes aware of what is going on and ends up having their own epiphany (Walzl 223). This is where the omniscient narrative becomes evident especially because the reader now has the control where the characters do not. Both the omniscient narrative and the use of free indirect discourse are also effective because it sets us up in anticipation for the interior monologue used in *Ulysses*. Reading about ordinary objects, people and settings in a God's eye view makes the realities even more clear concerning the people of Dublin and Ireland as a whole.

In "The Sisters", paralysis is the reoccurring theme and is made evident in the first line, "There was no hope for him"(Joyce). "The Sisters" is the first story in the collection so opening *Dubliners* with this line is very telling about Ireland and the people who live in Dublin. Stating that there is no hope symbolizes this paralysis. The reality in this story is death as liberation. We get the understanding that the only way to succeed is to leave Ireland and if you cannot then you must either go into exile or die. This story is told from the perspective of young boys and their reality. "All seek assurance of the reality of their dream world, from their elders or from experiences which will confirm their aspirations"(Walzl 223). Here the boys are hoping for an idealized world but instead they are slapped with the actual reality of their lives. "The boys meet the reality, not of their aspirations, but of a corrupt society embodied in a father-figure or a shattering experience as a result of attempts at escape"(Walzl 223). When they try to escape,

they are paralyzed and the ideal vision is taken away. Looking at “The Sisters” and “The Dead” together is significant because they mark the beginning and the end of *Dubliners*, which transitions us into *Ulysses*.

The most famous epiphany occurs in “The Dead”. This story from *Dubliners* is the conclusion to the short stories and is perfect for setting us up for *Ulysses*. Gabriel’s epiphany about his wife loving somebody else as well as his fascination with the in between of the living and the dead both emphasize the dark ending that Joyce leaves in *Dubliners*. Gabriel comes to a point of powerlessness at the end, which can symbolize how the reality of Ireland at the time is harsh and unbearable. He feels like a dark shadow in his life and relationships with others bringing him to this in between point between living and dead or appearance and reality. Gabriel’s dark reality provides a good example for why the appearance of Ireland is a better alternative. The image of the snowfall covering Ireland represents a blank canvas or a vision of Ireland with no dark past. Ending *Dubliners* in this way, with an omniscient view overlooking Ireland, really sets the stage for *Ulysses*, the ideal Ireland, with no past but only a future. “Its plot consists of two related epiphanies: one a revelation to the protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, about himself; the other revelation about his society”(Walzl 228). On the other hand though, opening *Dubliners* with a view of no hope in “The Sisters” and then ending it with a blank canvas in “The Dead” is important to recognize when it comes to the theme of reality versus appearance. It proves that you must escape the realities of Ireland by perceiving it in a different light through how it appears in the minds of the Irish. “The Dead” is a great bridge between Joyce’s contrast of reality and appearance leading into the mythic Ireland portrayed in *Ulysses*.

Appearance as a theme is made clear through James Joyce’s *Ulysses* in a way that is unexpected and complex for many readers. We gain an understanding about how Ireland

appears to the characters in a way that, by the end, we as readers have our own vision of Ireland. The written record and the idealized vision of the past together give us insight into the people who live within that nation. In *Ulysses*, Joyce takes us on an excursion into a mythic reality where both history and myth are combined to create one idealized vision of Ireland. His use of mythology is his way of bypassing history in order to create this new, modern Ireland. He combines Christianity and Homeric style to develop this mythological Ireland in order to give form and structure to the Ireland he is trying to recreate. Narrative style has a lot to do with how appearance is portrayed in *Ulysses*. Joyce's goal with *Ulysses* was to set it up in a way that shows the very real life of these characters but through their own minds and thoughts. This is a story taking us on a journey through the realities of the characters but it is really just how the world appears to them; this is not a true reality. Reading *Ulysses* helps us to understand that there is no one truth. We all see the world differently and our realities appear to us all in very unique ways.

*Ulysses* is a significant piece of literature when it comes to Ireland and its history because of its many different narrative styles. Joyce uses stream of consciousness and interior monologue in order to support the ideal and myth vision of Ireland. The stream of consciousness gives us the inner thoughts, feelings, bodily functions, and sounds that the characters experience. We are able to have an understanding of how they perceive Ireland, which happens to be their reality but it is actually just how Ireland appears to them. Individuals experience their surroundings very differently and we all have our own realities but in actuality, our own realities are just our perception of reality making it an appearance. Through this narrative in *Ulysses*, we are able to clearly understand Dubliner's unconscious through their dreams and desires. This narrative style is different than what he uses in *Dubliners* because rather than it being a third

person, omniscient voice, it is instead direct thoughts from the characters. Joyce himself uses his own two works in order to contrast between appearance and reality because he understands how important both of these perspectives are in order to really know Ireland to its deepest core. It is through the unconscious that truth is revealed. This unconscious thought drives the appearance of Ireland and it is through Bloom that we understand their perception or their own reality.

The biggest example of Appearance versus reality in *Ulysses* is the relationship between Bloom and Gerty MacDowell. This relationship is significant in *Ulysses* because it reflects Joyce's theme of men's desire for women and what that means. Women in *Ulysses* represent a fantasy object and are a manifestation of men's desires. The way men perceive women is not a reality but an appearance of how they want to see them. They see in women everything that they are afraid to acknowledge about themselves. This repression of reality is very important to look at when analyzing the characters because it is reflective of what Joyce is trying to say about Ireland. Gerty MacDowell thinks that Bloom is looking at her in a romantic way because that is how it appears to be, but the reality is that he is only looking at her to fulfil his own sexual desires.

Joyce is great in showing the contrast between reality and appearance in his two works. Even more, Joyce contrasts on this theme with William Butler Yeats, whose poetry attempts to push the realities of the world away and replace it with his words and the way his words shape the way people see Ireland. Yeats's narrative style is unique when it comes to his readers understanding what he is trying to say about Ireland and truth. His goal is to write about the truth, leaving the realities of the world behind and focusing on how his words produce an image of the ideal vision of Ireland. Yeats's poetry has a combination of myth and Irish legend in connection with the visual arts. He focuses on the idea of the Celtic revival in his poetry and at

times paints a picture of an ideal Ireland. He uses Irish folklore in order to bring peace to his poetry and refer to the mythic past of Ireland that he so loves.

Yeats uses his poetry in many ways in order to express this appearance reality theme, which reflects on the image of Ireland. Yeats's "The Stolen Child" can be interpreted in many different ways and people can read it differently for their own purposes. For the purposes geared toward the theme of appearance and reality I think we have a lot to work with in this poem.

"The Stolen Child" is a poem about a boy being seduced by faeries away to their world in order to escape the realities of the complicated world. The refrain is musical and easy to follow,

*"Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you  
can understand" (Yeats 9).*

This refrain refers to Yeats's narrative style with the musical tune and reference to Irish folklore. This poem also highlights the beauty of leaving an urban place and escaping to a more peaceful, natural setting. The urban setting represents the negatives in life combined with the many anxieties that go with it. When I read this poem, I understood its meaning to be that people have different realities in their life and see the world through different eyes resulting in the way they desire to see the world and not how the world actually is. It is significant that it is a young boy being lured away to the faery world because it represents how they want to protect his innocence. He is naïve about the realities of the world at this point in his life and the faeries want him to continue to see the world the way it appears to him in his childhood; carefree, beautiful and easy. Another way to look at this poem could be in a more morbid way. This could be a death of a child and the faeries are representing angels taking him away to heaven. After reading this

poem a few times, I came to the realization that perhaps Yeats is trying to say that sometimes death is even better than the realities of the world.

There are many examples of appearance and reality in Yeats's "The Song of the Happy Shepherd". It is a significant poem in Yeats's collection because it is the opening poem from *Crossways* in his collection. Yeats is establishing himself as a poet with this first poem by bringing to attention the fact that his poetry will be separated from the things of the world in order to write about the truth. Here, Yeats takes us away from the realities of the world and into an idealized world where the truth lies. In this poem he is stating that he will use his words to speak the truth; "words alone are certain good"(Yeats line 10). "She" in this poem is used to refer to truth just like "She" in Irish literature is used to refer to Ireland. This is significant if you look at what he might be trying to say with this in regards to the true Ireland. In order to discover the truth though, his reality or idea, the real world must be set aside.

*"The no wise worship dusty deeds,  
Nor seek- for this is also sooth-  
To hunger fiercely after truth,  
Lest all thy toiling only breeds  
New dreams, new dreams; there is no truth,  
Saving in thine own heart"(Yeats lines 22-27).*

He is trying to express that we need to discover truth and our own reality based on how the world appears to us, "saving in thine own heart"(Yeats).

*No learning from the starry men,  
Who follow with the optic glass,  
The whirling ways of stars that pass-  
Seek, then, for this is also sooth,  
No word of theirs-the cold star-bane"(Yeats lines 28-32).*

In order for us to understand reality, we can listen to the things of the world, but must listen to ourselves and interpret it how we see it. That is our reality and that is the truth.

James Joyce and William Butler Yeats successfully contrast appearance and reality through their works. We are able to see the reality of Dublin and Ireland through Joyce's *Dubliners*, the appearance through *Ulysses* and a combination of the two in Yeats's poetry. When reading these texts we are able to come to our own understanding about the reality of Ireland. Whether it be through the subconscious of characters, an omniscient narrative, interior monologue, or stream of conscience we are able to read and understand how Ireland appears to the characters in the texts. Joyce and Yeats successfully create a vision of Ireland through this appearance-reality contrast allowing us to define for ourselves the truth behind Ireland and the characters in their works.

## Works Cited

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Random House, 1946. Print.

Walzl, Florence L. "Pattern of Paralysis in Joyce's Dubliners: A Study of the Original Framework." *Jstor*. National Council of Teachers of English. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/373025> .>.

Yeats, W. B., and James Pethica. "The Song of the Happy Shepherd and The Stolen Child." *Yeats's Poetry, Drama, and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000. 3+. Print.