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Male Prostitution as Irony: Corley and Leneha

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Set between "After the Race" and "Boarding House," "Two Gallants" may be read as one of the adolescent stories in *Dubliners* because Corley's seduction of a slavey can be categorized as adventure stories in the pattern of Jimmy Doyle's infatuation with international car racing and Bob Doran's love affair with Polly. After the race, Jimmy basks in the cameraderie of his friends from the Continent, drinking, dancing and not recognizing his heavy losses in the card game. Bob, a celibate, accepts Polly's amorous initiative and enjoys her companionship at the boarding house. Corley, however, never really seems to enjoy what he does, *i. e.* seducing working class girls to fulfill his needs. Unlike Jimmy and Bob, Corley seems more interested in bragging to Lenehan about his mischief. Lenehan, in turn, shows keen interest in listening to Corley's story and instigates him to conduct still another misdeed. On the surface, the narrative portrays two vagrants' trickery, as well as their parasitic lifestyles. Delving deeper, however, we glimpse not a few reflections. These are highly subversive in the betrayal of the flip side of the

characters' consciousness. This leads them to ponder their own futility. My paper will trace these delicate, elusive moments and clarify the diverse ironies, metaphors and implications contained because they reveal the truth of the characters' corruption as well as suggest any possibility of reform.

"Two Gallants" is a story of exploitation, which betrays "the wretchedness of Dublin's social and sexual life (Frawley 58)." With no honorable scruples, Corley keeps seducing working-class girls. Lenehan, a calculating listener, instigates Corley into yet another seduction. A slavey, a fit subject for their attentions, then appears. The beginning of the narrative is more preoccupied with a detailed report of Lenehan's response rather than Corely's actual adventure. Lenehan seems taken by Corley's monologue, and constantly breaks into laughter, with twinkling eyes and convulsive movement. Through such exaggerated gestures, however, Lenehan simply hides his true feelings. I doubt he actually enjoys Corely's story. Probably not. He enjoys much more watching his contrived response affect Corely. That's why Lenehan "glance[s] at every moment towards his companion's face (*D* 43)." Hence, his enjoyment is "cunning" and his laughter "noiseless (*D* 43)." If Lenehan doesn't really feel enraptured by Corley's story, why his false response and such exaggeration? Lenehan, I surmise, wants to persuade Corely to carry out the current project Lenehan fancies. Thus he applauds Corley: "Well! . . . That takes the biscuit (*D* 44)!" If we pay attention to the telling ellipsis in Lenehan's praise, where he lapses suddenly into silence, we cannot but doubt the authenticity of his utterance: "He became serious and silent when he said this (*D* 44)." Furthermore, I would ask if Lenehan's insinuation of Corley really rewards him. I think not. We hear his "tongue was tired," not simply because "he has been talking all the afternoon in a public house (*D* 44)" but also because, I would argue, he is tired of getting by as a "sporting vagrant": "No one knew how he achieved the stern task of living (*D* 44)." That's why he looks "ravaged (*D* 43)" when he takes off his mask and betrays his true self.

On the other hand, Corely is bent on delivering his amorous adventure to Lenehan. We overhear that he takes out a slavey to Donnybrook each Sunday and

receives a fine cigar, tram fare, etc. in exchange for sex in the field. He doesn't let her know his name while she regards him as "a bit of class (*D* 45)." Selling "the illusion of himself as a possible husband to women (Leonard 122)," Corley continues to have trysts with her and, in so doing, "turns his own failure or pent-up rage against those who are even more oppressed, socially or economically, than he (Henke 25)." Taking advantage of even more marginal beings and talking to Lenehan about his brutal affair, Corley confirms his own masculine ego. Neither his exploitation nor bragging, however, can truly satisfy his deepest desire for fulfillment. His boasting simply betrays his moral and financial impoverishment. Corley's case vividly exemplifies the pathetic life of one alienated from his own desire. The longer he pursues his parasitic ways, the more futile he feels. Corley boasts of his skill in exploiting girls from the lowest class: "I know the way to get around her (*D* 46)." But he fails to recognize that he is actually a male prostitute for returns such as a cigar and tram fare. Corley's cheap prostitution then turns out to be a metaphor for his emptiness.

To make his story compelling, he collects justifications for his savage game. First, he expresses confidence that the slavey has fallen for him: "She's a bit gone on me (*D* 46)." Second, he reveals that she is not as innocent as we assume: "I was afraid, man, she'd get in the family way. But she's up to the dodge (*D* 44)." Third and most importantly, he refers to her possible prostitution: "She's on the turf now (*D* 47)." She has had, he adds, other fellows before him, including "a dairy man (*D* 44)." Such is the "philosophical" reasoning Corely resorts to in order to support his argument. Does such a life on the periphery grant Corley inward satisfaction? Probably not. With nothing to do, and no inclination to work either, Corley simply kills time hooking girls on the street: "Corley occasionally turned to smile at some of the passing girls (*D* 45)." In doing so, he longs to bolster false image of himself as well as milk Lenehan's reluctant compliment. Corely's detailed report of the seduction is his means to self-esteem. What really gratifies Corley is not the seduction itself but the recognition he expects from the audience. Lenenhan is not ignorant of Corley's fraud and exposes it by referring to what he actually

does, *i. e.* his possible connection with the nighttown establishment: "I suppose that's your doing, said Lenehan (*D* 47)." Corley boasts of exploiting lower class girls but doesn't realize that he, in turn, is manipulated by Lenehan's observations.

Corley's connection with the police yields more data for self-flattery and wielding some sort of power satisfies his elf-esteem. A police inspector's son, Corley's case puts in historical context the recurrent theme of "Irish self-betrayal (Werner 92)." Textual evidence suggests that he may be a police informer: "He was often to be seen walking with policeman in plain clothes, talking earnestly (*D* 45)." In addition, his decisive manner betrays his ignominious connection with police espionage: "He knew the inner side of all affairs and was fond of delivering final judgments (*D* 45)." Such a secret background helps him establish a phoney image of himself and gives him a sense of psychological protection from whatever misconduct he commits against working-class girls. Interestingly, Corley aspires to pronounce his name "Whorely" "after the manner of Florentines (*D* 45)." He remains ignorant of the irony of such an aspiration.

Not only Corley and Lenehan but the slavey herself proves to be another debased being, one supposedly alienated from her true self. Her case finds an outstanding example in the shape of "half-undressed" harp and its player close by the Kildare Street Club. The harp is a symbol of Ireland and her legendary past, and the Kildare Street Club represents the Anglo-Irish "caste superiority and reactionary attitude (Brown 262)."

> Not far from the porch of the club a harpist stood in the roadway, playing to a little ring of listeners. He plucked at the wires heedlessly, glancing quickly from time to time at the face of each new-comer and from time to time, wearily also, at the sky. His harp too, heedless that her coverings had fallen about her knees, seemed weary alike of the eyes of the strangers and of her master's hands. One hand played in the bass the melody of *Silent, O Moyle,* while the other hand careered in the treble after each group of notes. The notes of the air throbbed deep and full. (*D* 48)

The weariness and heedlessness of both the harpist and his instrument is a tired metaphor comparing Ireland's situation to that of a wronged woman, thus anticipating the tragedy of the slavey soon to be deprived of all she has. The "sloppy" appearance of the harp strongly suggests the modern degradation of Ireland under British colonial rule. It also provides a grim metaphor of the victimized girl "who unknowingly offers herself to exploitation (Heller 16)." Like the "half-undressed" harp, the slavey doesn't realize that she is being sexually abused by her "master." So enamored with Corley, she is "heedless" of her own situation. She is alienated from her own desire and, like a mannequin lacking will or consciousness, she simply does as she is told.

One more consideration concerning the "harp" metaphor is the lyric of the song played. "The Song of Fionnuala," the harp and the slavey clearly represent Ireland's contemporary subjugation and her lack of national pride. According to Thomas Moore, Fionnuala, the daughter of Lir, transformed into a swan, is condemned to wander Ireland's lakes and rivers endlessly until the first Christian mass bell rings (Brown 262). Pointing to the similarity between the blue color of the sea and the slavey's clothes, Litz also connects the plight of "Lir's lonely daughter" to that of the servant-girl who, like the harp, must submit to the "eyes of strangers" and obey "her master's hands (Hart 67-68)." Like the harp carelessly plucked, all the Irish including Corley, Lenehan and the slavey cannot but feel "weary and heedless" until they achieve Ireland's freedom.

Corley is not affected by the song, but the "mournful" melody haunts the more sensitive Lenehan all the way to Stephen's Green. The "following music" leads him to self-introspection, opening a lyric moment, when he transcends his own banality and ponders the possibility of transforming into a truer self. Such a moment is when Lenehan takes off his mask as a "leech" and confronts himself as well as his stark reality of loneliness, anxiety, frustration, hope and desire.

> This vision made him feel keenly his own poverty of purse and spirit. He was tired of knocking about, of pulling the devil by the tail, of shifts and intrigues.

> He would be thirty-one in November. Would he never get a good job? Would he never have a home of his own? He thought how pleasant it would be to have a warm fire to sit by and a good dinner to sit down to . . . Experience had embittered his heart against the world. But all hope had not left him. He felt better after having eaten than he had felt before, less weary of his life, less vanquished in spirit. 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. (*D* 51-52)

This is a bitter but precious moment of self-recognition. He is thirty one, we hear, old enough to have "seen something of the world (*D* 59). Youth and ignorance cannot be his excuse, like Bob Doran's in "The Boarding House." Both post-adolescents refuse to mature. Rafroidi criticizes their "prolonged adolescence" which he criticizes as "another form of paralysis (34)." Their exhaustion, moral and spiritual, is keen. He knows too well how weary it is to live on shifts, intrigues and stories, threatened continually by financial impasse. Jobless and homeless, Lenehan lives on the periphery by selling his loquacity: his "vast stock of stories, limericks and riddles (*D* 44)." Hence his dream of a "domestic settlement": to get married and settled. But his view of marriage reveals his male-chauvinistic perspective. He wants a simple-minded girl for a wife, like the slavey perhaps, whom he can manipulate, who also has some dowry on which he can subsist as long as possible. This fantasy of starting a family turns out to be another facet of his marginal life.

Lenehan approaches the poetic moment when he faces himself and reviews both his inner and outer lives. Instead of striding toward a new existence, however, Lenehan continues to tease Corley's inflated pride and instigate him into a "murky" game played on the slavey: "I suppose you'll be able to pull it off all right, eh (*D* 46)?" A man of subtle calculation, Lenehan manipulates Corley's wavering mind by changing his rhetoric moment by moment. Corley feels elation when called "a gay Lothario" and degradation when called a "[b]ase betrayer"(*D* 46-47) soon after. Caught between extravagance and humiliation, Corley gradually decides to carry out

the impending seduction. Thus both of the town's swingers continue to survey the street for prey. Neither want to break the vicious chain of their parasitic lifestyles.

Right after the street musician and his "sloppy" instrument, we see the personification of the Irish harp, the slavey. Much more interested in watching his scenario acted out by Corley, rather than gratifying his own voyeurism, Lenehan catches the slavey's coarse, uncoordinated, blue and white "Sunday finery." Two items specifically underline her outfit: a silver buckle depressing "the center of her body" and red flowers pinned upside down, "stems upward"(*D* 49). Both subtlely express masculine manipulation of her body, her deflowering, and the inversion of the feminine. Moreover, her "carefully disordered (*D* 49)" fashion subtlely underlines her acceptance of, and at times, "desire [for her] own victimization (Werner 42)." Lenehan also reads in her demeanour a rustic innocence to be exploited by urban corruption: "Frank rude health glowed in her face, on her fat red cheeks and in her unabashed blue eyes (*D* 49)." Furthermore, her disgusting appearance connects her to the "heedless" harp on the street. Again, the slavey's fashion proves a metaphor of her debased, exploited lot. Sexual connotations hitherto hinted at converge in this powerful image of deflowering the slavey. She is like a heroine of cheap pulp fiction. Corley's complete supremacy over her body takes the image of "a big ball revolving on a pivot (*D* 50)," unmistakably phallic. He says he can "pull it off "(*D* 47). In addition, his whole body and gesture seem phallic, charged with imminent sexual desire.

> He walked with his hands by his side, *holding himself erect and swaying his head from side to side. His head was large, globular and oily; it sweated all weathers*; and *his large round hat,* set upon it sideways, *looked like a bulb* which had grown out of one another. (*D* 45, italics mine)

Interestingly, Mahony's "unloaded catapult" in "An Encounter" is recharged by Corley's full-fledged masculinity in "Two Gallants." The story signifies the sexual transition from immature childhood to adolescent realization. That Corley

successfully plays the role of sexual conqueror and controls the slavey's mind and body is confirmed by the servant girl at the end of the narrative. (Tindall puts Lenehan in the role of "conqueror" because the character becomes the harpist as he sweeps his fingers along the railing to the recalled melody of Moore's song (25).) Now, Corely leaves the scene with the slavey to discharge his desire or "pull it off." Lenehan encourages him to: "Work it all right now (*D* 49)."

Left alone, Lenehan looks older, with no gaiety lingering on his face. Having nothing else to do, killing time seems tough for him. He starts a listless, circular walk in downtown Dublin. His path reminds us not only of the topography in *Ulysses* on a smaller scale but of the pervert's mind in "An Encounter" or the racing cars in "After the Race." Yes, it is another tired metaphor that "suggests hopeless acceptance (Tindall 24)." However, this moment of disorienting promenade gives him a chance to face the futile cycle of life on the street: "He found trivial all that was meant to charm him and did not answer the glances which invited him to be bold (*D* 50)." A man with a bit of sophistication, Lenehan feels "tired of knocking about (*D* 51)." However, he does not try to escape entrapment but falls easily into his routine. To restore forsaken gaiety, he therefore resorts to drinking and fantasizing. The pub quenches his thirst as well as re-invigorates his tired masculinity through verbal performance. Calling the pub "the Irishman's home away from home," Ingersoll reads "Two Gallants" as "a literary joke about Irish joking (84)." But Lenehan, an inveterate joker, feels exhausted at joking away the stern task of life: "He knew that he would have to speak a great deal, to invent and to amuse, and his brain and throat were too dry for such a task (*D* 50)." But when he realizes how Corely's project is coming, his mind becomes "active again (*D* 53)." He even identifies with Corely who is currently at work: "He suffered all the pangs and thrills of his friend's situation as well as those of his own (*D* 53)." If Lenehan derives vicarious satisfaction from Corley's project, he displaces his sexuality with his loquacity, thus enjoying the sexual exploitation to which he has conspired. In this way, he assuages his bitterness against society and confirms his own defeat.

At about 10:30, Lenehan spots the couple and feels impatient. Like a film director, Lenehan secretly observes the slavey's movement in and out of the house where she works. She delivers something to Corley.

—Hallo, Corley!

. . .

—Hallo, Corley! He cried again.

. . .

—Well? he said. Did it come off?

. . .

—Can't you tell us? he said. Did you try her? (*D* 54)

Lenehan's incremental utterances reveal his mounting curiosity about the result, the exact amount whoring has earned Corely. Yet, Corley lapses into silence with an imperturbable face ranging from "stern calm" to a "grim stare." Corley's mock-seriousness may be an intentional deferral to intensify "his disciple's" shock. It may also denote self-recognition by Corley of the futility of "invidious moral simony," to borrow Henke's phrase (25-30). If so, Corley's consistent silence subverts his previous complicity with Lenehan and suggests the meager possibility of a turning point. His inscrutable "smile" is not, then, self-complacent but ironic and mocking. The coin in Corley' hand has transformative power, leaving Lenehan enclosed in his vision. It is regrettable that we cannot witness Corley's look when he, in turn, scrutinizes Lenehan gazing rapturously at the sovereign in his hand. The gold coin is epiphanized and shines with the ironic perversion of romantic gallantry in modern times:

> Then with a grave gesture he extended a hand towards the light and, smiling, opened it slowly to the gaze of his disciple. A small gold coin *shone* in the palm. (*D* 55, italics mine)

If this is a dramatic epiphany, the psychological impact seems more stunning for Corley than for Lenehan. This assumption is justifiable if we look back at several

minor revelations which betray aspects of Corley's mind. First, his eager efforts to exempt himself from the blame of corrupting the slavey show, paradoxically, he has been terrified by the inner voice of his conscience. At one point, Corley reveals his ambivalence toward executing unspeakable brutality on her:

> —She was . . . a bit all right, he said regretfully. (*D* 47)

The sudden ellipsis, so rare in the narrative, expresses Corley's change of mind and his decision not to say what he should. This is a strategic repression of his inner voice to hide nothing from himself. From his terse comment on her, we surmise that Corley has found some good quality in her which causes him to feel guilt or regret what he has done to her. From this perspective, the adverb "regretfully" implies repentance on Corley's part. Second, after passing the street musician with a harp, a sudden silence falls between Corley and Lenehan until they are "released" (*D* 48) by the din of downtown Dublin. They are not intellectuals who can read the symbols of the "half-undressed" harp as Ireland's subjugation, still less as their conspiracy against the slavey, yet the "mournful music" suddenly strikes them dumb. In Lenehan's case, self-examination follows silence. Third, we find Corley never says a word till the narrative's end. We observe instead his gestures, facial expressions and movements. Evidently, his mind has undergone some sort of change during the execution of the game.

Finally, calculating the exact value of a sovereign at that time will, I would argue, lay bare not only the brutal nature of Corley's exploitation of the girl but the psychological shock on Corley and Lenehan. Equivalent to twenty shillings or one pound, the gold coin must be a considerable sum for a slavey, and much more than Corley and Lenahan can hope for. A sum so large may embarrass Corley for his misconduct with her thus far, which partially explains his ongoing silence. We cannot tell how much Lenehan is surprised by the sight of the gold coin. But clearly their long-desired plot, at the moment of its accomplishment, is subverted by the servant-girl who unknowingly terrorizes them by presenting an unexpectedly

large sum. Ironically, she thinks the more she brings Corley, the longer she can enjoy his relationship. The gold coin, an old symbol for corrupted sexuality in a capitalistic society, now regains its power by attacking the complacency of the two characters. Their terror may be even more devastating if we recall that they were not actually interested in the money's amount. (Never in the narrative do they talk of how they want to spend the money.) They were more interested in the game. True, the whole narrative follows the seduction and corruption of a slavey, and reaches its climax when she voluntarily pays for her exploited body. It is also an ongoing process of deconstructing the "corrupt" gallantry, which exposes its emptiness as much as self-destructiveness. The two gallants, accordingly, turn out to be victims of their own scheme, exposing their real identities as male prostitutes, one metaphorically and the other literally. That is the poignant irony embedded in the whole narrative. On a dark night when the inner lights of humans have all gone out, a gold coin still glitters and faintly shines over Dublin.

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Abstract

Male Prostitution as Irony: Corley and Lenehan

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"Two Gallants" is a story of sexual exploitation. In the story, Corely and Lenehan, two swingers in Dublin, don't work for a living but kill time picking up girls, walking around town, and drinking at a pub selling jokes, stories and riddles. If they're unhappy with their parasitic lives, why do they continue the vicious cycle? By tracing lyric moments in the narrative when they confront themselves and seek alternatives, this paper strives to answer and lay bare the literal, ironic and metaphoric implications their lives contain. The main project of the two vagrants that night is to force a slavey to bring them something. Lenehan instigates Corely to play the game. Corely takes her out for a night. The slavey brings him a sovereign. The real value, however, pins them to the spot. The gold coin instantly deconstructs their actions and strikes them dumb. They thought they were exploiting the slavey for fun but the slavey unconsciously betrays that they have been no less than male prostitutes, physically in Corely's case and verbally in Lenehan's. The irony is all the more pungent because the two don't actually realize the full implications. Like other poetic moments in the narrative, in which the villains confront the futility of their life on the edge, the moral shock cannot last long. We know that too well and that is the tragedy of their "false" gallantry.

■ Key words : gallants, exploitation, male prostitution, deconstruction, irony
(한량들, 착취, 남창, 해체, 아이러니)