
UNGALLANT GALLANTRY: THE PROCESS OF DEFAMILIARIZATION AND THE READER'S RESPONSE TO JAMES JOYCE'S "TWO GALLANTS"

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RESUMO

Este ensaio pretende, através da descrição e análise de três "subversões" (dos códigos da 'galanteria', das histórias de 'mistério' e da 'prostituição') que são, claramente, subversões de um código mais amplo, o da **narrativa**, entender como James, no conto "Two Gallants", o sexto de *Dubliners*, também subverte o código tradicional da **leitura**, exigindo, para seu texto novo, *moderno*, uma leitura postura também nova, *moderna*, por parte do leitor.

If we look for signs of gallantry in Joyce's "Two Gallants"¹, we easily find them. The story presents an amorous quest or adventure, comradeship, narratives of previous amorous conquests, and final victory. Also, one of the "gallants" wears his waterproof "in toreador fashion" (50), while the other aspirates "the first letter of his name *after the manner of Florentines*" (52; emphasis added), and is described, by his friend, as "a gay Lothario ... the proper kind of a Lothario, too!" (52). Nothing more, however, reminds us D. Juan or Casanova.

Joyce's two gallants are, in fact, subversions of the code of gallantry. Lenchan is "squat and rudy" (49), a "leech ... insensitive to all kinds of discourtesy", whose "name was vaguely associated with racing tissues" (50), who "walked on the verge of the path and was obliged to step on the road, owing to *his companion's rudeness*" (40; emphasis added). This companion, whose rudeness is mentioned, is Corley, who has a "burly body," a large head, "globular and oily" which "sweated in all weathers; and his large round hat, set upon it sideways, looked like a bulb which had grown out of another." Corley is out of job, "often to be seen walking with policemen," speaks without listening to the speech of his companions," and talks "mainly about himself" (51). Also, he does not pursue a beautiful lady, but "a slaver ... a fine tart" he spotted "under Waterhouse's clock," while he "was going along Dame Street" (50; significant name), a woman who "every night" brings him "cigarettes," pays "the tram out and back", and who once brought him "two bloody fine cigars" (51). She has blunt features, "broad nostrils, a straggling mouth which lay open in a contented leer, and two projecting front teeth" (56). Since those cigars she brought Corley are "the real cheese, you know, that the old fellow used to smoke" (51), we can imply that she stole them from her employer to give them to Corley. Corley himself tells

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that he "used to spend money on them [the slaveys] right enough" (52), but now he is more likely to expect gifts himself, and, in the end of the story, the girl gives him a "small gold coin" (60), of course, also stolen. That is why Corley says she is "a fine decent tart" (54), because "she's up to the dodge" (51).

As we can see, Joyce defamiliarizes his narrative from the very title, for he introduces the code of gallantry and then subverts it. Since the girl is a "tart" (perhaps not a whore, but clearly a wanton and loose girl), there is no amorous adventure and/or conquest. Corley is not a man marked by valiant or resolute performances, he is not brave nor chivalrous, high-spirited, noble, self-sacrificing. He is not even eloquent, for his speech is repetitive, poorly built on simple coordinate sentences. For example:

– one night, man, he said, I was going along dame Street and I spotted a fine tart under Waterhouse's clock and said good-night, you know. So we went for a walk round by the canal and she told me she was a slave in a house in Baggot Street. I put my arm round her and squeezed her a bit that night. Then next Sunday, man, I met her by appointment. We went out to Donnybrook and I brought her into the field there. She told me she used to go with a dairyman. ... It was fine, man. Cigarettes every night she'd bring me and paying the tram out and back. And one night she brought me two bloody fine cigars – O, the real cheese, you know, that the old fellow used to smoke. ... I was afraid, man, she'd get in the family way. But she's up to the dodge (pp.51-52).

In this short paragraph, Corley repeats *man* four times, *fine* three times, and *you know* two times. The only conjunction *and* appears seven times. Corley's narrative is almost elusive, incomplete, as if he is unable to subordinate his remembrances of those nights to his ability to describe/narrate them. That is why coordinate sentences are predominant in his narrative. Corley is by no means a gallant, and never inspires admiration.

The other, the leech Lenehan, inspires even less admiration than Corley. Although he is described as "a spotting vagrant armed with a vast stock of stories, limericks and riddles" (50), there is no evidence throughout the story of his being so. His speeches, like those of Corley's, are repetitive, almost only small questions, or exclamatory outbursts of admiration for Corley and his narrative. The five first things he speaks are a good example:

– Well!... That takes the biscuit!
– That takes the solitary, unique, and, if I may so call it, "recherché" biscuit!
– And where did you pick her up, Corley?
– Maybe she thinks you'll marry her.
– Of all the good ones ever I heard, that emphatically takes the biscuit (50-51).

Also, when Lenehan meets some other friends, he has almost nothing to say. And so do his friends:

His friends talked very little. They looked vacantly after some figures in the crowd and sometimes made a critical remark. One said that he had seen Mac an hour before in Westmoreland Street. At this Lenehan said that he had been with Mac the night before in Egan's. The young man who had seen Mac in Westmoreland Street asked was it true that Mac won a bit over billiard match. Lenehan did not know: he said that Holohan had stood them drinks in Egan's (58).

Nothing lacks more content than this particular piece of narrated, indirect dialogue. In fact, Lenehan lacks content. He is Corley's shadow; he wanders around Corley, admires him, follows him when Corley meets the girl, and, impatiently and anxiously, waits for Corley to return. Lenehan, we may think of him, is a **voyeur**, and a happy one, for he finds in Corley an **exhibitionist** who needs an admirer like Lenehan, a "disciple" (60), as Lenehan is finally described. Nothing less gallant than these two Dubliners.

But the process of defamiliarization also works in a different way in "Two Gallants." If we take the title of this story as a simple but significant irony, not following the linguistic subversion of the code of gallantry, we can read "Two Gallants" as a mystery story, in which Lenehan functions as a detective who wants not to find out what crime Corley will commit, but whether Corley will really commit a crime or not (in this case, to have sexual intercourse with the girl).

Appropriately, the first paragraph (which also works on the level of the poetical in the code of gallantry) establishes the mood for the "mystery": "grey ... evening," "the lamp shone from ... tall poles ... changing shape and hue unceasingly" (49). The story can, thus, be summarized: Corley is going to meet a girl he already knows, and Lenehan is going to wait for him. While waiting for his friend, Lenehan has dinner, meets some other friends and, when the time comes, goes to the place where he is supposed to meet Corley again. His anxiety, we believe, is due to the fact that he does not know whether Corley is going to succeed with the girl or not. Although Corley has already given the information that he has "brought her into a field" in Donnybrook, we are not sure that this means he has already had sexual intercourse with her. At least, we think, only the expectation for the sexual relationship between Corley and the girl can justify Lenehan's anxiety. Lenehan's final questions seem to prove that: "Well? ... Did it come off? ... Did you try her?" (60). The solution for this "mystery" would be a simple affirmative answer from Corley. But this is not what happens, for, as a matter of fact, Corley does not give him an answer, he just shows Lenehan what Lenehan in reality had been waiting for, the "small gold coin."

If we follow the story as a "mystery story," then this ending is a perfect one, in the best of, for example, O. Henry's tradition. However, in this reading, we realize the opposite of it too late. It was not a surprise for Lenehan. He had been waiting

for the gold coin since the beginning. We, the readers, have been deceived by the narrator. The gold coin is the final defamiliarization of the code of mystery. The mistake is ours: in the same way as it had not been a story of gallantry, "Two Gallants" is not a story of mystery.

Now, if we can really say that we have understood this short story, we have to realize that this final showing of the coin is a subversion of another code, that of prostitution, for Corley gets paid for sex, not the "tart".² The defamiliarization is triple then, for it subverts the code of gallantry, the code of mystery, and the code of prostitution.

James Joyce, in this short story, at the same time subverts the code of narration and the code of reading. Subverting the code of narration (through the subversion of the three codes of gallantry, mystery, and prostitution), Joyce also subverts our expectations as readers. The gold coin functions not as a surprising device at the end of the story, but as a striking new beginning. When Corley shows Lenehan the coin, we (the readers) are shown how to read this text: Lenehan's discovery of the coin corresponds to the reader's discovery of the text. The gold coin sends the reader back to the beginning: he must read not the "illuminated pearls" on the surface of this text, but the "living texture below it," for this text, like the lamps on "the summits of their tall poles," is "changing shape and hue unceasingly" (49).

Many readers have been deceived by this "small gold coin" shining "in the palm" of Corley's hand. William T. Noon and William York Tindall insist on the fact that this final scene of "Two Gallants" is an epiphany. But Noon also expresses the importance of "a strategic psychological preparation" Joyce had to make before that scene, with "no other means to effect except through the calculated arrangement of words as to achieve the right adjustment of symbolic insight". This arrangement of words, according to Noon, has the harp as its central image, since it is "a symbol of poor, paralyzed, charmed Ireland ... since in Corley the reader sees her ignored, despised, and sold for a gold coin."³ Noon also believes that "the imagery of the moonlight and of the rain" is important, for it is part of that "calculated arrangement of words," since "the faint romantic light of the moon is represented as gradually fading as the story develops, and as completely disappearing behind the rain clouds at the end, to be replaced by the hard glitter of the shining gold coin," becoming "thus the emblem of the 'base betrayer.'" Noon concludes that "it is in this way that the success of the gallants 'epiphanizes' as the betrayal of gallantry: 'the object achieves its epiphany' – but within *the symbolic dimensions of language* and not as a depressing vulgarity of nonliterary fact" (N 106; emphasis added).

Tindall, like Noon, understands "this goldpiece as an equivalent of thirty pieces of silver," for "it is certain that betrayal, one of Joyce's central themes, is involved – betrayal in this case of love, humanity, and ... of Ireland herself." For Tindall "this harpist of Kildare Street suggests Corley and his harp the girl," but also "in fancy Lenehan becomes the harpist too as he trails his fingers along the railing of the Duke's Lawn to Moore's remembered melody," and "to some degree a pitiless self portrait, *Lenehan seems Joyce's own epiphany – or one of them.*"⁴

It would be easy to accept these two interpretations of "Two Gallants" as far as the scene with the gold coin is concerned. Clearly, this scene is an epiphany, but whose epiphany it is constitutes the major problem. Tindall touches the problem when he refers to that scene as "Joyce's own epiphany." Noon does the same when he refers to "the calculated arrangement of words" Joyce had to make. What is not clear is how this scene can be, or is, one of Joyce's own epiphanies, since Tindall does not elaborate on this point. Also, whom is he referring to? To Joyce as an Irishman, as a Dubliner, or to Joyce as a narrator, that is, as the creator of narratives?

On the other hand, Noon seems to miss the point when he insists on maintaining his interpretation "within the symbolic dimensions of language" only, anxious as he is to defend Joyce against any accusation of "vulgarity." The symbolic dimensions of language in "Two Gallants" must be taken into account, but any interpretation on this level can only be drawn from outside the context of the story itself. The image of the harp as a symbol of Ireland does not depend on the context of Joyce's story. Thus, the harp's symbol is less important, for much more important is the meaning of Corley – police connections, British oppression – and of Lenehan – "disciple", follower, oppressed Ireland –, and this is established in and only in the **context** of "Two Gallants." If the scene with the gold coin is Corley and Lenehan's (perhaps only Lenehan's) epiphany, then it is also Joyce's epiphany, but as the narrator, that is, Joyce as the creator of narrative texts.

What both Noon and Tindall forget is the fact that Lenehan is presented in "Two Gallants" as a listener to a narrative by Corley, and at the end he is described as a disciple. In a word, Lenehan is a *reader*: he listens to Corley's narrative, follows Corley, meets and examines the girl, wanders throughout the streets of Dublin, which means that he *reads* Corley's narrative and actions, *reads* the girl, *reads* Dublin. When he gazes as a disciple at the gold coin, he *reads* the coin. The problem is that Lenehan reads Corley's act of showing the coin on the naturalistic level of the text, and this is what is shocking about "Two Gallants," what constitutes the "vulgarity" Noon alludes to.

The reader of "Two Gallants," also reading Lenehan's ambiguous expectations (they constitute a "mystery" to be solved) on the naturalistic level, only then realizes his mistake: if the reader expects a solution for Corley's "mystery," he encounters another narrative problem already mentioned here, because the payment Corley receives from the girl is a subversion of the code of prostitution, through which the woman should be paid. In this case, Lenehan's reading of Corley's actions on the naturalistic level of the story is a subversion of the code of the narrative of "Two Gallants," for it subverts Joyce's readers' expectations. If the reader of "Two Gallants" reads the story only as "the betrayal of gallantry," as Noon remarks, or only as the subversion of the code of mystery narrative (present in the surprising end of the story), then the reader **misreads** "Two Gallants".

The reading of "Two Gallants" is a lesson on how to read any of Joyce's narratives and, by extension, any modern narrative, precisely the one Joyce was trying to create: not like that of Corley's, elaborated in the naturalistic tradition, but

a new and open narrative with its demands for a new kind of reader and/or a new response from the reader.

The reader demanded by "Two Gallants" must be the opposite of Lenehan: not a submissive disciple but a creative one, a reader who must complement the text, interfere with the text, collaborate with the text. That is the reason why the modern text is a demanding one, not an easy text.

Tindall completely misreads "Two Gallants" when he says that the story "opens awkwardly with characters' sketches, traditional devices that the later, economical, and more allusive Joyce would never have allowed" (T 24, emphasis added). Tindall is reading the story on the naturalistic level, precisely the level Joyce is subverting in his story. The opening of "Two Gallants" is anything but awkward, and traditional devices were exactly what Joyce needed, otherwise the scene with the gold coin would not be an epiphany as he intended it to be, but, and this is much more important, it would not be a subversion of the code of the naturalistic narrative. This subversion of that traditional code is what constitutes Joyce's main intention, that is, to make the reader expect for one reality and present him another one. Had the beginning of "Two Gallants" been allusive the whole point would have been missed, nothing would have been new, the naturalistic tradition (which the reader was used to) would not have been subverted, and a modern text would not have been created/written.

What makes "Two Gallants" a shocking text is its demand of a different reading response from the reader. The betrayal or subversion of the code of the naturalistic narrative demands another subversion or betrayal, that of the traditional code of reading. No wonder, as Tindall says, that this short story "was one of Joyce's favorites" (T 23).

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai prétend, à travers la description et l'analyse de trois 'subversions' (celles des codes de la 'galanterie', des histoires de 'mystère' et de la 'prostitution') qui sont, nettement, des subversions d'un code plus ample, celui du récit, comprendre comment, dans le conte "Two Gallants", le sixième de *Dubliners*, James Joyce bouleverse aussi le code traditionnel de la lecture, en exigeant, pour son texte nouveau, moderne, une lecture/posture elle aussi nouvelle, moderne de la part du lecteur.

NOTES

1. James Joyce, *Dubliners* New York: The Vintage Books, 1968, p. 49-60. subsequent references parentheticals.

2. This word means, in especial cases, "prostitute," as in the example given in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* (1966): <morals was that ket you out of going to bed ... with some tart or other - Richard Llewellyn>.

3. William T. Noon, Epiphany in *Two Gallants*. In: *James Joyce's "Dubliners"*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1969, p. 105; subsequent references parenthetical, N followed by page number.

4. William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1971, p. 25, emphasis added; subsequent references parenthetical, T followed by page number.