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Desire and Paralysis in James Joyce's "Dubliners" and Mohammed Dib's "La grande maison"

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Abstract:

This article suggests a comparative study of the theme of desire and paralysis in two authors belonging to two different literary traditions. The works in question are "La grande maison" by Algerian Mohammed Dib and "Dubliners" by Irishman James Joyce. The hypothesis of this comparison is that the two authors wrote in similar socio-political contexts, characterized by oppression. This affinity at the level of the writing context has induced analogies at the thematic level, where the themes of desire and paralysis appear as the most striking images.

Keywords:

comparison, desire, paralysis, Mohammed Dib, James Joyce.

Le désir et la paralysie dans "Les Dublinois" de James Joyce et "La grande maison" de Mohammed Dib

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Résumé :

Cet article propose une étude comparée du thème du désir et paralysie chez deux auteurs appartenant à deux traditions littéraires différentes. Les œuvres en question sont La grande maison de l'algérien Mohammed Dib et Gens de Dublin de l'irlandais James Joyce. L'hypothèse de cette comparaison est que les deux auteurs ont écrit dans des contextes socio-politiques similaires, caractérisés par l'oppression. Cette affinité au niveau du contexte d'écriture a induit des analogies au niveau thématique, où les thèmes du désir et de paralysie figurent comme les images les plus marquantes.

Mots-clés :

comparaison, désir, paralysie, Mohamed Dib, James Joyce.

The following paper attempts a comparative study between the novel of the Algerian writer Mohammed Dib "La grande maison"[(1)] and James Joyce's collection of short stories

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"Dubliners"[2]. Even though critics have not yet undertaken this task, we think that the similarities between the two fictions are striking enough in order to prompt a comparative analysis. The similarities may stem from a possible influence exerted by Joyce on his Algerian counterpart. Considering the Irish writer's worldwide reputation and Dib's mastery of the English language, the critical category of influence is indeed very probable. However, this alternative seems too easy to vindicate the comparison, particularly because it is difficult to detect any kind of "Bloomean" anxiety[3] in Dib's narrative. Therefore, rather than to jump on the intertextual or influence types of studies, we prefer to rely on literary analogy in order to situate the kind of comparative relationship that "La grande maison" bears to "Dubliners". Isidore Okpewho's article "Comparatism and Separatism in African Literature"[4] provides an interesting definition of analogy and influence studies, and may help to vindicate our choice of this literary category.

According to Okpewho analogy studies explore the political, social, economic, and cultural contexts that make possible the literary and ideological convergence between writers. As an organised line of research, they rest on the school of thought called "evolutionism". Okpewho argues that writers are likely to produce similar works even if they live in societies widely separated from one another in space and time, provided that they have experienced similar "enabling conditions"[5]. As regards influence studies, their main objective is to document the indebtedness of a literary work to particular sources and traditions. Such types of comparative scholarship rest on the school of thought that Okpewho calls "diffusionism". The similarities are often the result of the various contacts between peoples and their culture. In our view, analogies in contexts and life experiences apply more forcefully than any other influence study on the comparative relationship that binds Dib's "La grande maison" to Joyce's "Dubliners", since the Algerian novelist

experienced an intellectual life very much like Joyce's artistic career, and the colonial history of Algeria reveals a tradition of resistance which is highly evocative of the successive revolts of the Irish against the English invaders.

"La grande maison" is comparable to "Dubliners" because the task undertaken by Dib seems as "emancipatory" as Joyce's intentions in "Dubliners". To sum it up, we can say that like his Irish counterpart, who fought openly in order to challenge the spiritual ascendancy of the Irish Roman Catholic Church over the Irish mentality and its encroachment on both the collective desire and the individual will, Dib, too, devoted his art to the task of rehabilitating the humanity of his people who were the servants of French imperialism. To achieve their tasks, the two writers had first to rebel against the authorities under the shade of which they respectively grew up. They also espoused the cause of the nationalists and took open side with their oppressed people.

Finally, they also adopted a realist mode of writing whose ideology is based on the art of representing reality in all its ugliness in order to denounce the state of degeneration attained by their respective countries. In the subsequent investigation, we shall dwell on all these aspects of Dib's and Joyce's life experiences and their socio-political contexts, because they are further evidence of the two writers' literary affinity. In the analysis proper, we shall be concerned with the way Dib and Joyce keep feeding their respective narratives with images of paralysis, failure, and inhibition with the aims of translating the agonies of their people and challenging the established political powers. Our purpose will be to comment on the themes of desire and paralysis and show the extent to which the Algerian reality under French colonialism was close to the Irish condition under the authority of the Catholic clergy. We shall also show that the nature of oppression has always to do with the paralysis of desire, and that one of its universal manifestations is the inhibition of the will.

In a well-known passage of "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"[6], Joyce shows young Stephen Dedalus participating in a three days retreat given in honour of Saint Francis Xavier in the Jesuit school. Joyce explains that unlike all his peers who participate in the ceremony in order to sharpen their faith in death, judgement, Hell, and Heaven, Stephen means his participation as an act of penitence for the sin of adultery he has committed with a prostitute. During the whole retreat, Stephen displays a great zeal and a sincere regret so as to reach the ultimate act of atonement which would help him confess his sin and throw off the burden of evil. Yet, in spite of its emotional force and its religious motivation, Stephen's retreat turns to be a piece of irony at the end of the novel. Indeed, by the time he reaches artistic maturity, it is his religious education that Stephen sees as a yoke to cast away in order to break free from the spiritual shackles of the Irish clergy. His new beliefs and his dedication to art have prompted him to consider intellectual independence as a vital pre-requisite for the success of both his own artistic career and any revolutionary change in Ireland.

Stephen's / Joyce's withdrawal from the Irish clergy reveals a Promethean dimension. In his autobiographical novel, Joyce alludes to the myth of Prometheus in the words of his aunt Dante, who cries after young Stephen: "apologise / Pull out his eyes / Pull out his eyes / apologise"[7]. These words echo the same fate that befell Prometheus after his betrayal of Zeus. At the end of the novel, when Stephen declines priesthood and repudiates the Church of Ireland, the incarnation becomes complete. Stephen has definitely made the "heroic crossing" from the world of gods i.e. the Irish clergy, to the world of common humanity i.e. the Irish people. His crossing is accompanied by the wish to serve his people and "to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race"[8].

During his youth, Dib too led a life similar to Joyce's

Promethean-like career. Born to a poor family in 1920, he lived and studied in the French school of Tlemcen, a relatively urban town in Western Algeria. By virtue of his education, he became among the first Algerian elite formed in the colonial school. These elite were given education and instruction in order to absorb the coloniser's culture, to sympathise with its 'civilising' mission, and serve as intermediaries between the colonial authorities and the natives. However, as soon as he achieved his intellectual maturity, Dib turned to militant journalism in "Alger Republicain" newspaper, and joined the Communist Party. By the time he published "La grande maison", he had already versed in the nationalist claim and embarked on a long struggle against the colonial presence in Algeria.

The reasons behind Joyce's and Dib's repudiation of their childhood education should be sought in the social and political contexts that prevailed during their coming to artistic maturity. In 1906, when Joyce completed "Dubliners", Ireland was still an English colony, and in spite of all the nationalist agitation of the previous decades, it was not granted the Home Rule status. The failure of the Irish nationalists to engage a new relationship with England was attributed to the perverse attitude of the Irish Roman Catholic Church that had retrieved its support to the charismatic nationalist leader James Stuart Parnell and undermined the nationalists' efforts at achieving the desired autonomy. After the fall of Parnell, the Irish unity shattered and the power of the Church grew increasingly political. Taking profit out of the disintegration of the political parties, the religious institution worked to extend its influence over the political sphere, and to prevent the planting of the seeds of European Enlightenment thoughts on Irish soil. Its frequent interference in political matters compounded the complex situation of Ireland, and contributed to the maintaining of a "status quo" whereby the hopes of the Irish revolution became illusions, and the dream of Ireland's unity, a utopia.

The context in which "Dubliners" was published recalls in many ways the Algerian scene in the beginning of the 1950's. In 1930, when Dib was only ten, the colonial authorities celebrated the centenary of the French occupation of Algeria. The latter was the oldest and the biggest French colony in Africa. On this account, the colonial power proclaimed its wish to make it the model of its superior culture and the example of its firm presence in the continent. Yet, less than ten years after this event, France entered World War II and underwent a terrible defeat at the hand of the German army. The years that followed its capitulation were depressing for its people, and particularly disastrous for its overseas subjects. In Algeria, the indigenous populations endured harsh living conditions among shortcomings in food, harvests, and employment. Besides, the political scene was closed upon their grievances, and prisons thronged with political activists. On May 8th, 1945, when the world rejoiced at the end of World War II, the Algerian populations, too, went out celebrating the happy event and claiming their own freedom. Unfortunately, the demonstrators were faced with fire, and thousands of people were massacred to death(9).

The events of May 8th, 1945 massacres clouded the hopes for Algerian independence as much as Parnell's betrayal sanctioned once for all the Irish disunity. Nevertheless, even if the two events plunged the two countries in unprecedented turmoil, they also impelled their respective intellectuals to take their responsibilities over the situations in the countries. Joyce and Dib are thus counted among the products of Irish and Algerian artistic Renaissance, who took it upon themselves to support the cause of the nationalists and to take up the task of freeing the countries. Their early works bear strong testimonies of their sympathies toward the suffering of their people and their loyal commitment to the nationalists' ideals. In his defence of "Dubliners", Joyce interpreted his collection of short stories in terms highly evocative of Dib's motives in writing "La grande maison", and

declared that his intention was "to give" Dublin to the world; a task that, in his view, had never been achieved before him. Joyce insisted also that Dubliners was "the first step towards the spiritual "liberation" of (his) country" and added: "Dublin would find it an unwelcome sight, but Dublin and Ireland would be "liberated" by it" (my emphasis)[(10)].

In his effort to present his native city to the world, Joyce shifted his narrative away from the celebratory narratives of the Celtic Twilight and inscribed it in the line of nineteenth century European realist masters, namely Flaubert, Tolstoy, and Ibsen. He also explored naturalistic possibilities in Dublin urban life and borrowed insights from the philosophy of Nietzsche and Freud. The result became neither a romanticisation of Irish provincial life, in the manner of the Irish Revival poets, nor a surface record of mundane local customs, in the manner of local colour writers. Joyce's achievement was rather a profound dissection of personal behaviour and communal condition, an exposition of social contradictions and a denunciation of religious orthodoxy. It has owned his collection of short stories an outstanding place among the best European naturalist writings that have ever succeeded to describe the life in modern cities and its encroachment on the individual will and the collective desire.

The process through which Joyce "gave" Dublin to the world and commented on its social evils is not far removed from Dib's rendition of the Algerian reality on the eve of World War II. In "La grande maison", the Algerian writer relied on a closer realist mode of representation in order to reach a faithful exposition of the Algerian condition and a true replication of its people's sufferings. His realist mode of writing was supported by a naturalist stance that recorded the social life in Tlemcen in its minutest detail, and scrutinised both the existential and social tensions. In the end, Dib's first fiction became an emancipatory narrative, like Joyce's "Dubliners", because it has succeeded to throw insights into the psychology of the colonised and lend him

a voice to express his plight; a voice that had been denied to him by the colonial power, as much as the voice of the Irish was silenced by the ideology of their Church.

To appreciate more the artistic as well as the ideological achievements of Dib's first novel, one may contrast it with the literary tradition which characterised the first narratives written in French by Algerian writers. Two of those writings were Abdelkader Hadj Hamou's "Zohra, la femme du mineur" (1925) and Ould Cheikh's "Myriem dans les palmes" (1936). These narratives were exotic-like stories with pronounced ethnographic traits. Their authors are novelists who evidence what Frantz Fanon has qualified in his "The Wretched of the Earth" as "unqualified assimilated"(11). Hadj Hamou's and Ould Cheikh's artistic endeavours were the tapping of the folkloric aspects of native life for the sake of entertaining the metropolitan craving for alien customs. On the whole, the two novelists had so much been interested in recording the indigenous traditions and praising the national past that they lost grip with the struggle of their people and became estranged from the reality of their country.

The understanding of Joyce's and Dib's recourse to the realist/naturalist mode of writing is crucial to the appraisal of "Dubliners" and "La grande maison". Writing about his piece of fiction, the Irish writer explained that his task had been guided by the desire to make Dublin sound like "the centre of paralysis". In other words, paralysis is the motif which governs the reading of all the short stories and connects them together. As it often involves the theme of desire to which it stands as the antithesis, the theme of paralysis betrays the naturalist propensities of early Joyce, and provides the best perspective to analyse "Dubliners"; naturalism and myth are, in Northrop Frye's "Anatomy of Criticism" (1957), the two poles of representation, the one involving a world of bondage and repression, the other the representation of action at the probable limit of desire(12).

Whatever the issue addressed in "La grande maison" and in every short story that composes "Dubliners", and whatever the source of inspiration of each writer, the true "hero" in Dib's narrative, as well as all Joyce's stories, is never one of their characters, but the residence of Dar-Sbitar and the city of Dublin, respectively. By Dar-Sbitar and Dublin we mean the physical, social, and spiritual environment that surrounds, directs, and oppresses the characters and their desire. For Joyce's city and Dib's "big house" are respectively held as the prototypes of Irish and Algerian conditions, and the samples of life they represent are meant to evoke the prevailing situations in the two countries. Therefore, any analysis of "Dubliners" and "La grande maison" ought to start with the examination of the settings of Dublin and Dar-Sbitar, the two places that lend their names to the two fictions.

The image that Joyce draws of the capital city of Ireland is complex, though in its complexity there is neither sophistication, nor refinement, nor even the slightest excitement that one finds, for example, in Sandburg's "Chicago". Instead, Dublin is described as a "dirty" (p. 82) city, made of "mean, modern, and pretentious" (p. 119) suburbs, "ruinous houses" (p. 35), and "dull inelegant" streets (p. 79). Its environment smacks of confinement, gloom, and dust. For instance, in "Araby", the little boy lives in "high, cold, empty, and gloomy" rooms (p. 33); in "Eveline", the girl looks at the "little brown houses" (p. 37) and wonders "where on earth all the dust comes from" (p. 38); in "A Painful Case", M. Dufffy dwells in "an old sombre house" (p. 119). All these examples picture Dublin as a big prison house, where the air smells nasty and the characters suffer confinement. The prison motif is also sustained by the oppression that hangs over the head of all the characters and their continuous longing for escape.

In his portrayal of Tlemcen, Dib, too, conveys an atmosphere as mean as Joyce's Dublin. His descriptions overlook the European district of the town and stress its suburb,

particularly the residence of Dar-Sbitar. The suburb is an irksome place made of small houses and a maze of small sombre streets. In summer days and in the heat of August, the sky "vomissait des tourbillons de mouches que des odeurs de fosses attiraient. Ces journées lâchaient sur le quartier une puanteur subtile, tenace, de charogne que ni les coups d'air, ni la chute de température nocturne ne parvenaient à défaire" (p. 101). Dar-Sbitar rises amid this blazing atmosphere, at the very back of the back town. It is a "big house", not indeed in terms of space, but in terms of the number of people it shelters and the amount of misery and resentment it bears. Its inhabitants have come to live in it simply because they couldn't afford a decent living elsewhere. With time, they have come to see it not as an opportunity, but a "prison" (p. 115) that contains all their anger and hides all their wretchedness.

The closed setting of Dar-Sbitar offers an interesting parallel with Mrs Mooney's pension in Joyce's "The Boarding House", for the Algerian collective residence represents the kind and quality of social interactions in Tlemcen, as much as the pension epitomises public life in Dublin. The love story that takes place in the boarding house between the educated Mr Doran and Mrs Mooney's daughter, Polly, expounds many aspects of Irish social life and elicits its "code of honour". Thus, the gossip that had followed the discovery of the affair aroused an air of scandal that informs the ominous contiguity of Dublin's folk life and elucidates its repressive quality - after all, as Joyce himself puts it, "Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else's business" (p. 71).

Besides, when the affair reaches the proportions of a scandal, Mr Doran is left with only two alternatives: either to marry Polly or run away. But before the turning of the events, and before Mrs Mooney's shrewdness, Doran dismisses promptly the second option and acquiesces to marry Polly, though he knows that his family would look down at her and scorn his

behaviour. In fact, his choice appears to be no less than a surrender to Dublin's code of honour and a vow of powerlessness before its conservative values.

The tight social relationships in Dar-Sbitar partake of the same code of honour and mutual tensions as the atmosphere in Mrs Mooney's boarding house. For example, in Omar's residence, confidentiality is a strictly observed rule of behaviour, for no one is immune either against the folk gossip, or the evil of the "bad eye". In addition, the public opinion chastises pitilessly anyone who dares transgress the rules of "decent" behaviour, even if his / her demeanour has only involved him / her in the boasting of a piece of meat or an amount of potatoes. And when the breach has to deal with a question of honour, the offender is repudiated and driven out of the community. This fate has befallen upon Omar's cousin who, in her poverty, has had a prohibited relationship with a stranger in order to provide for the needs of her family. Her proscribed behaviour has aroused the reprobation of everybody, and owned her the scorn of her brother Mourad who has sworn to kill her and to avenge the honour of the family.

However, love between adults is not the only love banished from the world of Dar-Sbitar and Dublin. Love between children, too, is repressed and reprimanded. In "Dubliners", Joyce exploits the children's eagerness for fantasy and romance in order to implement a number of plots of desire which are all unfulfilled and untoward. For if love is among the best stimuli of desire in the world, the hearts of children are its best recipients. The child's sense of wonder knows indeed no limit, and his love involves pure and sincere emotions of affection, passion, and compassion, whereby the lover and the beloved experience great moments of happiness. And when this kind of ideal love is applied to a blasted world such as the one of Dublin, or any world indeed, the "unworthiness" of the actual life appears in all its ugliness and meanness.

It is in "Eveline" and "Araby" that Joyce draws plots of desire

involving children. In "Araby", the boy feels a Platonic passion for the sister of his friend Mangan. Her image accompanies him everywhere, "even in places the most hostile to romance" (p. 30). And when his mind recalls her lovely face, his eyes are filled with tears, and "a flood from (his) heart (seems) to pour itself out into (his) bosom" (p. 31). The sway of Mangan's sister on the boy's imagination is such that his resolution to bring her something from the bazaar - something that is likely to stand for the token of his affection and/or adoration - transfigures reality for him into an "ugly monotonous child's play" (p. 33), completely removed from that "eastern enchantment" cast upon him by his romantic quest.

As regards "Eveline", the love story is woven between young Eveline and a sailor named Frank. Eveline is a girl bereft of mother, and the only daughter of her father's three children. Since the death of her mother, she has endorsed the responsibility over the household, and endured the harshness of her job in Miss Gavan's stores. The ruthlessness of her drunkard father has increased her anxieties, and given her palpitations. But since she has known Frank, things are no longer what they used to be. His tales of distant countries soothed her sufferings and provided an outlet for her imagination through which she wants to consecrate her right to happiness. In her lonely existence, Frank has become the only issue of escape and the brightest promise of a better tomorrow. Yet when the time to elope with Frank reaps, Eveline relinquishes all her hopes and forsakes Frank. In fact, her education as well as her religion interpose between her and her desire and force her to abandon her dreams.

Eveline's incapacity to follow Frank is a motif of paralysis. It suggests the Irish incapacity to overcome the Irish orthodox values which strangle individual liberties and hinder social emancipation. Its tragic outcome is similar to the disillusionment of the little boy in "Araby" in his journey to the bazaar. In the two

stories, Joyce achieved plots of unfulfilled desire, whereby the desire of the protagonists is heightened only to lead to disappointments and frustrations. His aim was to stress the "unidealised existence" of the Irish and to underscore the implacability of its code of respectable behaviour.

The protagonists of "Eveline" and "Araby" are not without reminding us young Omar in "La grande maison". Omar, too, is a boy prone to believe in the dream world of romance. Actually, because of his age, neither the social conservatism of Dar-Sbitar, nor its crippled environment, nor even his mother's violence can stand between him and his desire. His romantic impulse is thus given free run through the outlet of his relationship with Zhor. But his involvement remains a secret affair, because he is aware that boys/girls, as much as men/women, relationships are severely reproved in Dar-Sbitar. In fact, Omar's initiation to the notion of love is achieved only through his mother's secret chatter with Zina about stories of infidelity. This is why in his first meetings with Zina's daughter he remains circumspect and wary. Dib describes Zina's first meeting with Omar in the following words:

Elle lui lança par trois fois son appel ; au dernier, il y alla. Elle s'approcha de lui. Il la sentait debout contre son corps, dont la tiédeur l'envahit. Soudain, elle lui donna un violent coup de genou dans l'aine. Omar jeta un petit cri et tomba à terre en sanglotant. Zhor se pencha sur lui et lui bâillonnât la bouche de sa main. Il dut s'immobiliser pour ne pas être étouffé; il se tint tranquille. La main de la jeune fille glissa le long du corps d'Omar sans difficulté... Puis elle fut secouée de frissons. Plusieurs fois elle essaya de caresser l'enfant, mais ses efforts demeurèrent vains : "elle n'arrivait plus à surmonter l'indécision qui paralysait ses mouvements" (p. 78 my emphasis).

Zina's furtive and superficial flirtations with Omar attest of the orthodoxy of the Algerian manners. They are also further evidence that love is a taboo, and that the male/female

encounters are proscribed.

What comes out of all the analysis above is that Dar-Sbitar's code of honour and Dublin's priggish virtues are among the most sinister agents of paralysis in "La grande maison" and "Dubliners". They reveal two communities closed on themselves, living in a condition of bondage, and incapable of any salutary change. Joyce holds the religious institution of the Church responsible for the wretched predicament of the Irish, whereas Dib indicts the colonial system for the sufferings of his people. The short story in which the Irish writer incriminates the teaching of the Church is "An Encounter". The latter illustrates how the religious teachings of Ireland work to repress the imagination of children and to stultify their desire. It is narrated by a schoolboy who relates that Joe Dillon, one of his schoolmates, has introduced the class to the stories of the Wild West, such as "The Union Jack, Pluck, and The Halfpenny Marvel". The boy adds that these tales of adventure diffused a "spirit of unruliness" (p. 18) among the pupils, and "opened doors of escape" (p. 19) to them. But when Father Butler discovers the affair, he reacts vehemently and forbids the boys to read such "rubbish" and "wretched stuff", written by some "wretched fellow who writes these things for a drink" (p. 19). Father Butler's reaction illustrates the will of all oppressors to control the education of children, because they are aware of the subversive result which may stem from their readings.

The theme of education in "An Encounter" reminds us the "lesson of moral" in the school scene in Dib's "La grande maison". The lesson deals with the concept of 'mother country' and intimates that the mother country of the young Algerian boys is France. During the course, Omar feels that all the lesson, like all the teachings in the school, is but a set of lies (Cf. p. 21). His impressions are shared by his friends and sustained by the schoolmaster himself who is at pain to explain the meaning of the concept to the pupils. Thus, M. Hassen keeps appealing to

"solemn accents" in order to confer consistency and significance to the inherent fallacies of his lesson. Nonetheless, his solemnity is of no help, since Omar and his schoolmates exhibit attention only in so far as it allows them to avoid the big stick of the schoolmaster. The violence of the latter appears, thus, as the main motive which prompts the presence of the pupils and keeps them in the class. It suggests the coercive nature of the colonial education and the force through which it maintains its ideological subjection of the natives. It also reads as Dib's open denunciation of the colonial fallacies, whose main catchword was "nos ancêtres les gaullois".

Among other examples of paralysis in "Dubliners" and "La grande maison", Father James Flynn and Omar's grand mother, Mama, are the starkest ones. On account of their physical disabilities, the two characters stand as symbolic figures that evoke the spiritual paralysis of the two countries. To begin with, Flynn's story is one of faith and devotion leading to disappointment and despair. During all his office in the Church, he had had a strong bond to the ideology of the Irish clergy, though his understanding of theology had always been superficial. But when he broke the chalice which contains the mind of God, his life was radically transformed. In the simplicity of his mind and education, he thought that the sky would fall upon his head. But to his great disillusion, nothing happened, and no supernatural power took heed of his deed.

As a consequence, Flynn became a "disappointed man" (p. 16), who could no longer reconcile his "sacrilegious" behaviour with his literal beliefs. Because he could neither bear living in a spiritual contradiction, nor withdrawing from an ecclesiastic function that he no longer believed in, his mind turned mad. He began, then, "to mope by himself, talking to no one and wandering about by himself" (p. 17), and in his endless retreats, he was often found "in the dark, in his confession box, wide awake and laughing-like softly to himself".

Flynn's paralysis is symbolic of all Ireland. It suggests the incapacity of the Irish to depart from their archaic way of living, and to initiate any revolutionary change in the country. In some respects, every character in "Dubliners" undergoes a crisis similar to that of Flynn and shares something of his inner contradiction. For instance, Eveline cannot elope with Frank because of the promise she made to her mother to keep the home together; Little Chandler too cannot emigrate to London like his friend Gallaher because he has a wife and a child to support; likewise, Gabriel Conroy cannot express honestly what he feels for his aunts' party, because their tradition and its protocols are much more powerful than all his oratory skills. In the end, like Flynn, all these characters seem inhibited and apathetic. Of course they remain aware of their condition, but in spite of their awareness, their efforts at improving their lot are either continuously delayed or simply doomed. And during all this time, the only thing available for them, as for all the Irish, is self-delusion, or, at best, a deadly routine.

Omar's grandmother / mother in "La grande maison" fulfils the same symbolic function as that of Father / father Flynn in "Dubliners". Like him, she is struck with paralysis. Her sufferings stand for the ancestral suffering of Algeria and its people, probably as back as the beginning of the French occupation. In one of Mama's endless lamentations, Dib comments: "ce n'était pas plus un être humain qui se plaignait, mais bien la nuit entière et tout ce qui rodait alentour, mais bien la lourde, l'inconsolable maison. La voix de l'aïeule ouvrait un passage a une détresse immémoriale" (p. 166).

The story of Mama has not always been one of incapacity and indigence. She was an active and powerful mother, who bred up her children and cared for them. And when all of them have grown up and married, she went living with her only son and continued to serve him faithfully until she fell ill and became disabled. From that moment, she became a burden to her son

who resolved to abandon her to Aini. The latter could neither provide for her food, nor for her health. She put her in a small cold kitchen room far from the room of the children, and forsook her lamentations. The situation of Mama degenerated and her disease aggravated to the extent that, one day, a huge number of worms was found thriving on the flesh of her leg. The worms are symbolic of those parasitic forces, which fed upon the Algerian people, sucked their vital energies, and inhibited their desire.

Beside the symbolic figure of Father Flynn and Mama, the other example of paralysis in "Dubliners" and "La grande maison" has to do with the matriarchal order of society, whereby the male characters involved in the two narratives are degraded, whereas the women are propelled to the position of family masters. Dib represents the matriarchal order of the Algerian society through Omar's mother Aini. Aini is a shrewd woman whose portrait has many counterparts in Joyce's stories, the best one being probably Mrs Mooney. The two characters are shrewd characters that manage firmly their households and run their own business. They share a common condition of bereavement (Aini's husband is dead whereas Mrs Mooney's is away), and an unquestioned authority over the domestic affairs. Their respective responsibilities are, however, no less than the outcome of two lives of common sacrifices inherited from their respective drunkards of husbands.

The prominence of the mother image in Joyce's and Dib's respective narratives is meant to point to the "paralysis", if not the absence, of the father. It informs the matriarchal order of the Irish and Algerian societies, whereby the active forces of change i.e. men, are dwarfed. In "Dubliners", Mr Mooney, the "shabby, stooped drunkard" (p. 66) who left his home and "began to go to the devil" (p. 66), elicits this category of characters. His portrait is similar to many other male characters, such as Eveline's father, Lenehan in "Two Gallants", Farrington in "Counterparts", and even Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead". All these

characters have something of Flynn's paralysis, in the sense that they are all failures that lead a life full of waste and despair. Their situation is worsened by their intemperance and idleness that repress their desire and crush their aspirations.

The force of intemperance that strikes Joyce's male characters inhibits also the few male characters of "La grande maison". Just like Cherrak, the "Dido Boracho", most of Dib's masculine figures are drunkards, completely overwhelmed by that "force aveugle" (p. 99) which submerges Dar-Sbitar. For instance, Aini's husband, Ahmed Djezairi, was in her view "un propre à rien" (p. 30), i.e. worthless, and her brother is an unworthy individual, because he spends all his time loafing in cafés. The two characters are constantly present in Aini's curses and vituperations, but remain terribly absent from Dar-Sbitar.

Because men are removed from the world of Dar-Sbitar, the pension appears to be a house for women and children, a kind of a big harem yet deprived of all sense of wonder and enchantment. Dib writes: Les hommes sortaient tôt, aussi les apercevait-on rarement. Ne demeuraient là que les femmes : la cour, sous les branches enchevêtrées de la vigne, en regorgeait. Elles l'emplissaient de leurs allées et venues. Elles encombraient la porte d'entrée. Dans la cuisine, une cuisine pour Titans, elles palabraient à n'en plus finir autour du puits. Chaque pièce, ayant recelé durant la nuit une kyrielle de bambins, les restituait jusqu'au dernier au lever du jour: cela se déversait dans un indescriptible désordre, en haut comme en bas. Les marmots, le visage luisant de morve, défilaient un à un. Ceux qui n'étaient pas encore aptes à se servir de leurs jambes, rampaient, les fesses en l'air. Tous pleuraient ou hurlaient. Ni les mères ni les autres femmes ne jugeaient utile d'y prêter plus d'attention que cela. (p. 82)

In spite of the presence of children in Dar-Sbitar, the stupor of the house knows no end. When it is not the deadly routine which haunts the building, hunger and fear which assail it from

every part and absorb its most vital energies: "Dar-Sbitar vivait à l'aveuglette, d'une vie fouettée par la rage ou la peur. Chaque parole n'y était qu'insulte, appel ou aveu ; les bouleversements y étaient supportés dans l'humiliation, les pierres vivaient plus que les cœurs" (p. 116).

Finally, one way to conclude this comparative study seems to quote once again Joyce, who once declared that the course of civilisation in Ireland would be retarded if his collection of short stories was not published. Whether this pretentious prophecy is true or not, it is a matter of discussion. But in the case of "La grande maison", we think that the emancipation of the Algerian people would certainly have been delayed if novels such as this one and others by other Algerian writers, such as Kateb, Mammeri, and Feraoun, had not been published. Today, the publication of the novel stands as a hallmark in the Algerian cultural struggle against colonialism.

This outstanding place is due to the artistic achievement of the novel and its political commitment. In fact, to paraphrase a proverb in Arabic which says that the diagnosis of the disease is half the cure, we can say that Dib's first novel pointed directly and accurately to the disease. This was colonialism which stifled the most fundamental human impulses towards happiness and well being. Colonialism had, therefore, to be resisted. It is no wonder that two years after the publication of the novel, the Algerian people had engaged in a long armed struggle against the foreign presence and, a decade later, they won their independence.

Notes:

1 - Mohammed Dib : La grande maison, Le Seuil, Paris 1952. References to this novel will be indicated between brackets within the body of the text.

2 - James Joyce: Dubliners, 1914, Penguin, London 1994. Subsequent references to this work will be indicated between brackets within the text.

3 - Harold Bloom: The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975.

4 - Isidore Okpewho: "Comparatism and Separatism in African Literature", World Literature Today, 8, 1981, pp. 26-31.
5 - The concept of "enabling conditions" does not belong to Okpewho's text. We have borrowed it from Mikhaïl Bakhtine in The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas, Austin 1974.
6 - James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 1916, Penguin, London 1994.
7 - Ibid., p. 8.
8 - Ibid., p. 288.
9 - The slaughters of May 8th, 1945 were among the bloodiest massacres in the pre-war period of Algerian history. One of its consequences was the growing consciousness of the unavoidability of the armed struggle for independence. The massacres inspired also a lot of artists, among whom we can mention Kateb Yacine, whose masterpiece Nedjma was partly written during his detention.
10 - Quoted in Seamus Deane "Joyce the Irishman", The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce, ed. Derek Attridge, 1990, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997.
11 - Frantz Fanon: The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington, 1961, Penguin, London 1967.
12 - Northrop Frye: Anatomy of Criticism, 1957, Penguin, London 1990.

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1 - Bakhtine, Mikhaïl: The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas, Austin 1974.
2 - Bloom, Harold: The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975.
3 - Deane, Seamus: Joyce the Irishman, The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce, ed. Derek Attridge, 1990, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997.
4 - Dib, Mohammed : La grande maison, Le Seuil, Paris 1952.
5 - Fanon, Frantz: The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington, 1961, Penguin, London 1967.
6 - Frye, Northrop: Anatomy of Criticism, 1957, Penguin, London 1990.
7 - Joyce, James: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 1916, Penguin, London 1994.
8 - Joyce, James: Dubliners, 1914, Penguin, London 1994.
9 - Okpewho, Isidore: "Comparatism and Separatism in African Literature", World Literature Today, 8, 1981.