

A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS IRONY AND THE ILLUSION OF REDEMPTION IN JAMES JOYCE'S *GRACE*

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Abstract

The research paper at hand conducts a stylistic analysis of James Joyce's short story, Grace, to explore religious hypocrisy and the myth of spiritual redemption within early 20th-century Irish Catholicism. Since earlier research has only focused on the theological or cultural themes in Grace, this paper fills a significant gap by rigorously examining the story's linguistic and narrative devices using the stylistic model proposed by Leech and Short (2007). Following the stylistic model, the study analyzes the text at four levels; lexis, grammar, figures of speech, and discourse. Evidence from the story reveals that Joyce's usage of formal religious vocabulary set against colloquial and euphemistic talk, his syntactic preference for passivity and parataxis, and his subtle narrative voice, all combine to expose the illusion of redemption. The story's irony lies in the way the language is constructed, emphasizing the performative, socially motivated nature of religious observance through symbolic imagery and flat narration. According to this stylistic interpretation, Grace is not only a thematic critique of Catholicism but also a prime example of how language both reinforces and subverts moral and ideological truths. The research concludes that Joyce's stylistic skill enables him to draw a satirical portrayal of Dublin society, thereby giving a critical perspective on the way language reveals and hides the truth of man.

Key Words: stylistic analysis, hypocrisy, false redemption, spiritual superficiality

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Stylistic analysis is a critical method which employs linguistic principles in order to analyze literary texts, and focus upon how language is utilized in order to establish meaning and bring about particular effects. It facilitates a more systematic and objective interpretation of literary language by serving as a bridge between linguistics and literary criticism. With the aim of understanding how writers employ linguistic options to affect the readers' perceptions, stylistics examines language on various levels, including lexical, grammatical, phonological, and discourse (Leech and Short 2007). Stylistic criticism takes into account how the diction, syntax, figurative language, and narrative structure all co-operate to form the overall aesthetic and thematic texture of a piece, not separating language as a neutral medium. Stylistics, according to Widdowson (1975), enables critics to observe not just what is said, but how and which defines the role of language in creating meaning, tone, character, and atmosphere. In those texts where interpretation is being powerfully influenced by subtle linguistic cues, it is especially useful. Stylistic analysis is a rich tool for literary analysis since it is systematic, and this makes it give us a better idea of how content and form interact in literature. For Simpson (2004), stylistics enables critics to break down literary imagination by illustrating how linguistic resources are put to use to realize ideological and narrative goals. Also, stylistics bases literary

interpretation in language patterns that can be seen, combining subjective analysis and objective facts, as proposed by Carter and Stockwell (2008), which enriches the understanding of literary texts. When examining texts with intricate irony, ambiguity, or symbolic meaning where language carries multiple levels of meaning, and this method is particularly helpful. Through methods like cognitive stylistics and critical stylistics, stylistics also interacts with larger social, ideological, and psychological contexts, increasing its applicability outside of the text itself (Jeffries, 2010; Stockwell, 2002). As a result, stylistic analysis improves close reading techniques while also expanding our comprehension of the intricate connection between language, literature, and interpretation.

The delicate interplay between language, structure, and thematic depth in James Joyce's short story *Grace*, which is included in his landmark collection *Dubliners* (1914), makes it good and effective for stylistic analysis. The narrative and linguistic devices used in the story, which tackles themes of religious hypocrisy, moral paralysis, and the illusion of redemption, are well-chosen and deserving of careful stylistic analysis. One can learn how Joyce's choice of words satirize religious ceremonies and expose the superficiality of spiritual change by applying the stylistic model created by Leech and Short (2007), which comprises lexis analysis, grammar, speech figures, and discourse structure. For instance, a contrast between the sacred and the profane is expressed in the contrast between colloquial speech and formal religious language, which subtly ironizes the tone. Irony may result from the disparity between what is suggested and what is stated due to the observational, restrained style of the narrative voice, contributing to the detached effect. The thematic effect of the story is also supplemented by the application of exact syntactic constructions, symbolic allusions, and indirect speech. The ideological and narrative functions of linguistic features are revealed by stylistic analysis, as Simpson (2004) points out, and in *Grace*, it highlights Joyce's criticism of the phoney performance of piety in Dublin's Catholic society. By using this method, the story is not only valued for its literary value but also gain a deeper understanding of how language shapes and challenges moral and cultural realities.

1.2. Summary of *Grace*

James Joyce's short story *Grace* from his work *Dubliners* published in 1914 is about Mr. Tom Kernan, a middle-aged salesman who drinks too much, who tumbles down the stairs of a pub drunk. The event, witnessed and dealt with by courteous strangers, introduces the story. His wife, having seen Mr. Kernan's many slips, brings him home and nurses him. In order to "rescue" him spiritually, three of his friends, Mr. Power, Mr. Cunningham, and Mr. M'Coy convince him to go on a Catholic spiritual retreat in a Jesuit church. The action consists of vapid dialogue, shallow humor, and shallow moralizing on the part of the men, who talk more about politics, religion, and trivia than Kernan's imbibing or religious longings. The men's speech never becomes more than superficial and histrionic, with lots of social respectability and religious platitudes even as they do their best. The action concludes with the men attending the retreat and hearing a priest sermonize about how much repentance, confession, and grace are needed.

The title of the story, "*Grace*," is extremely ironic, though, as it implies spiritual renewal, but no transformation or redemption takes place. Kernan's transformation is forced and external; it is not accompanied by genuine self-examination or regret. Joyce does this as a criticism of Catholic society's social pressures for morality, the empty formalism of religious ceremonies, and the overall moral stagnation of Dublin society.

1.3. About the Author

Irish modernist author James Joyce (1882–1941) was a trailblazer whose innovative narrative tactics and perceptive psychological insights defined 20th-century fiction. Joyce was raised in Dublin and educated in Jesuit schools and University College Dublin, two that significantly

impacted his literary outlook and repeated themes of religion, identity, and exile. His writing tends to critique the sociopolitical limitations of Irish life and religiosity immobility under British colonialism, especially Catholicism. Some of Joyce's most notable works are *Finnegans Wake* (1939), *Ulysses* (1922), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and *Dubliners* (1914), all of which showcase his experimental use of language and form. Joyce portrays life in Dublin in the early 20th century in a realistic and ironic manner in *Dubliners*, a collection of fifteen stories including *Grace*. This collection preserves the stagnation of a society divided between the modern and the traditional. Joyce was one of the significant writers of the modernist school and revolutionised narrative fiction in his style, which was marked by stream of consciousness, free indirect discourse, and symbolic richness. Though living abroad for most of his adult life in Paris, Zurich, and Trieste, Joyce's literary imagination remained deeply anchored in the streets, voices, and spiritual climate of Dublin.

1.4.Statement of the Research Problem

In the framework of early 20th-century Irish Catholicism, James Joyce's short story *Grace* presents a nuanced depiction of religious themes, especially the ideas of sin, repentance, and redemption. The thematic interpretation of Joyce's religious critique has received a lot of critical attention, but the stylistic devices used to express these themes have received less attention. The story's critique of religious formalism and moral superficiality is significantly shaped by its nuanced use of irony, narrative distance, lexical choices, and syntactic structures. Existing research, however, frequently approaches these topics from theological, biographical, or cultural viewpoints without methodically examining how Joyce's stylistic devices and linguistic choices create the appearance of spiritual transformation. Because of this lack of attention to style, it is difficult to comprehend how Joyce's narrative uses form to convey meaning. By performing a thorough stylistic analysis of *Grace*, this study aims to close that gap by examining how Joyce's use of language highlights the contradiction between the idea of redemption and the underlying moral emptiness and religious performance.

1.5. Objectives of the study

- To explore James Joyce's use of the stylistic devices in his short story *Grace* for constructing religious irony
- To examine the ways in which Joyce's narrative and linguistic choices contribute to the portrayal of false redemption and spiritual superficiality in the story

1.6. Research Questions

- How does James Joyce use the stylistic devices in his short story *Grace* for constructing religious irony?
- In what ways do Joyce's narrative and linguistic choices contribute to the portrayal of false redemption and spiritual superficiality in the story?

1.7. Significance of the study

This study provides a thorough analysis of how language shapes meaning in James Joyce's short story *Grace*, which is valuable for both literary stylistics and Joycean studies. Although earlier research has examined the themes of religion, morality, and paralysis in Joyce's writing, comparatively few studies have taken a stylistic approach to these topics, concentrating on the linguistic devices that create religious irony and the appearance of redemption. The study's application of a stylistic framework to *Grace* advances our knowledge of how Joyce's formal decisions; such as diction, syntax, narrative perspective, and irony which serve as both critical instruments for social and religious commentary and as aesthetic elements. Additionally, by showing how useful stylistic analysis is for revealing hidden ideological structures and ironic subtexts in classic literary works, this study advances the field. By revealing how language functions beneath the surface of narrative, it also helps the reader better appreciate Joyce's

prose's technical precision. By providing fresh insight into Joyce's criticism of spiritual shallowness and adding to larger discussions on the relationship between language, belief, and modernist narrative technique, the study ultimately seeks to close the gap between linguistic form and literary meaning.

2. Literature Review

The stylistic analysis of literary works through literary methods has become more advanced with the inclusion of discourse and systemic-functional linguistics. As does Leech and Short (2007), more akin to recent research such as Huang (2021) examines clause-complexing structures in Joyce's short fiction, based on Halliday's functional grammar, illustrating how parataxis and hypotaxis construct narrative meaning (Huang, 2021). This approach expands the stylistic field by looking at how grammatical construction relates to narrative tone and thematic effect.

Language and meaning in literary discourse has been the focus of much searching study using stylistic analysis, a technique that bridges linguistics and literary criticism. Traditional works such as Leech and Short (2007) provide a methodology for stylistic feature analysis, lexis, syntax, and discourse, that forms the basis for interpreting how meaning is constructed in fiction. Widdowson (1975) also argues that stylistic devices allow critics to investigate how language operates to produce literary effects, offering a more realistic account of such themes as irony and ambiguity. Simpson (2004) also discusses the point of view and narrative voice in bringing about irony, a technique of particular interest to Joyce's narrative technique in *Grace*. Critics have long observed James Joyce's fascination with issues of religion, paralysis, and moral hypocrisy, especially in the Irish Catholic context. Ellmann (1982) and Norris (2003) emphasize Joyce's complex relationship with Catholicism, highlighting how his early religious education influenced his portrayal of spiritual authority and human frailty. In *Grace*, this is evident in the satirical depiction of religious rituals, which appear more performative than redemptive. Norris (2003) contends that Joyce lays bare the shallowness of Catholic salvation in characters that can mouth religious platitudes but have no genuine moral passion.

Scholars studying Dubliners have noted that Joyce frequently employs suave narrative irony and symbolic restraint to satirize the social and spiritual stagnation of Dublin existence. Brown (1985) and Fargnoli and Gillespie (2006) note that the illusion of redemption in *Grace* is skillfully created by controlled narrative comment, indirect discourse, and juxtaposition of religious and secular vocabulary. Hutcheon (1994) continues that irony not only is a literary tool but serves as a political and ideological instrument as well, able to reveal belief-behavior contradictions. Using this lens on *Grace*, it is possible to understand how Joyce's technical exactness conceals profound social criticism.

Even with wide-ranging thematic critique of Joyce's writings, there is still a comparative void in literature that utilizes a scientific stylistic framework to apply it to *Grace* in order to tease out the contribution of linguistic factors towards irony and pseudo-redemption. This research seeks to fill this void through an elaborate stylistic critique of the narrative, illustrating how Joyce's linguistic manipulation underpins his overall critique of religious and cultural expectations.

Parallel to this, critiques of Joyce's spiritual and religious motifs make use of stylistic models to readuminate underlying textual gestures. Lobner (1989) explores "equivocation as a stylistic device" in *Grace*, demonstrating how Joyce consistently leads the reader astray with theological and Dantean references to simulate redemption while subverting it. This ambivalence of tone heralds Joyce's deeper religious irony (Lobner, 1989).

Wider thematic and stylistic analyses of Joyce's prose are found within modernist scholarship too: Sotirova (2010) analyzes the representation of consciousness in *Ulysses* using discourse anaphora and epiphany structures, applying structuralist and stylistic theory both. At the same time, Kuparadze (2020) points out Joyce's "scrupulous meanness" with language, observing how his exact and economical vocabulary leads to symbolic density and multiple meaning.

Together, these researches highlight the call for a form-over-function style of analysis, particularly in *Grace*. Through the blending of Hallidayan grammatical analysis (Huang, 2021), stylistic devices of equivocation (Lobner, 1989), and Joyce's laconic, symbolic economy (Kuparadze, 2020), one can uncover how linguistic decisions in *Grace* create religious irony and give rise to a mock-redemptive mood. This research seeks to extend these foundations by carrying out a multi-level stylistic analysis, ranging from lexis to grammar, figures of speech, and discourse to reveal the manner in which Joyce's language performs spiritual skepticism and satirical remarking.

Huang (2021) uses Halliday's clause-complexing model to reveal latent narrative effects in Joyce's prose, contending that the structuring of inter-clausal relations can tactically mark irony and characterization, a practice that promises to yield dividends when transferred to *Grace*. O'Halloran (2007) illustrates the potential of corpus stylistics on Joyce in analyzing *Eveline* to show patterns in free indirect discourse; this indicates the potential for data-driven, replicable stylistic observations within short stories. In the same vein, Ajmal and Afsar (2021) integrate quantitative and qualitative analysis through the use of AntConc to chart speech and thought presentation patterns in *Dubliners*, providing a methodological template for investigating narrative distancing and narrator character alignment, crucial factors in the identification of religious irony in *Grace*.

Supporting these structural methods, cultural-linguistic analyses investigate graphological and punctuation techniques as meaning-makers. Sotirova's (2010) and Kuparadze's (2020) talks highlight symbolic density and psychological complexity through Joyce's linguistic accuracy and express stylistics' ability to expose ideological currents. Cultural materialist critiques (Gaeini, 2023) also position Joyce's stylistic habits, such as deployment of official registers and sermons, as vehicles of cultural criticism, synthesizing discourse analysis and history.

3. Methodology

The nature of the research at hand is a qualitative, stylistic analysis approach based in literary linguistics to investigate how James Joyce's stylistic decisions in *Grace* express the related themes of religious irony and false redemption. The study is grounded on close reading of the short story and employs stylistic analysis as the primary approach, with the objective of revealing how linguistic and literary elements, such as diction, syntax, narrative voice, irony, and symbolic language; help construct religious criticism. In accordance with the stylistic model developed by Leech and Short (2007), the analysis is conducted at four levels: lexis (vocabulary), grammar (sentence structure and syntax), figures of speech (such as irony, metaphor, and symbolism), and context and discourse (specifically narrative voice and dialogue).

The main source of data is the short story *Grace*, from Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), with secondary data consisting of critical essays, scholarly articles, and books on Joyce's narrative style, religious themes, and modernist techniques. The data collection entailed several close readings of the text, during which textual annotation was employed to note down the examples of religious language, irony, and narrative technique. Thematic coding also assisted in organizing stylistic features within persistent themes of sin, salvation, hypocrisy, and ritual. Affirmatory critical evidence was retrieved via keyword searching across scholarly databases including Google Scholar and JSTOR. For stylistic analysis, chosen passages were studied to determine how devices of style operate in the text to build the illusion of redemption and to criticize

religious pretence, focusing on stylistic contrasts (like formal and colloquial tone or direct and indirect speech) used to signal the conflict between external religiosity and internal moral corruption. Findings were combined with other critical views to place Grace in Joyce's larger satirical critique of Irish Catholicism and colonial social structures.

The research is limited to *Grace* alone, though some brief comparative observations may be provided in reference to other tales in *Dubliners* where applicable. The analysis sticks to stylistic and thematic concerns, without encroaching on long biographical or historical investigations, unless such context is directly informative for the stylistic reading.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Stylistic Analysis of *Grace*

The use of religious irony and the conflict between spiritual language and moral emptiness in James Joyce's *Grace* offer a wealth of opportunities for stylistic analysis. The stylistic framework put forth by Leech and Short (2007), which looks at four main levels of textual analysis; lexis, grammar, figures of speech, and discourse structure, is used in the following analysis of James Joyce's *Grace*. The analysis examines how Joyce's stylistic decisions support the story's overarching themes of religious irony, moral paralysis, and the illusion of redemption through direct textual quotations and in-depth interpretation.

Lexical Level: Irony in Word Choice

Joyce's use of lofty, moral, or religiously charged language in situations that starkly contradict those meanings makes his word choice in *Grace* extremely ironic. This lexical irony highlights the discrepancy between appearance and reality, particularly in the way Dublin's Catholic community indulges in vice and superficiality while professing spiritual uprightness. Joyce purposefully juxtaposes scenes of moral or physical degradation with words that are considered respectable or refined in a number of passages. This results in verbal irony, where the situation demonstrates the opposite of what the language suggests, such as virtue or dignity. For instance;

"Two gentlemen who were in the lavatory at the time tried to lift him up..." (p.255)

There is social status, morality, and refinement associated with the term "gentlemen." Nonetheless, the action of rescuing a man covered in blood and filth from a drunken fall and the setting which is a public restroom undercut the dignity typically connected with that term. Joyce quietly mocks the social pretenses of Dublin's middle class, who continue to speak in terms of respectability while denying their own decline.

Joyce frequently uses language that conjures images of bodily fluids, physical contamination, and illness, a sharp contrast to the story's purported theme of grace or spiritual salvation.

"His clothes were smeared with the filth and ooze of the floor..." (p.255)

"A dark medal of blood had formed near the man's head..." (p.255)

"His mouth... covered with clotted blood... a piece of his tongue seemed to have been bitten off." (p.255)

A man in complete physical and moral collapse is depicted by these lexical choices. Ironically, Joyce uses the phrase "medal of blood" to describe a man's drunken wound, even though it conjures up images of religious or military honour. As a result, honorific language turns into a symbol of shame.

Symbolic Lexical Items: The "Silk Hat" and "Gaiters"

Joyce also employs irony when discussing objects of status, which recur frequently through specific lexical markers: "Mr Kernan was a commercial traveller of the old school... He had never been seen in the city without a silk hat of some decency and a pair of gaiters." (p.258)

When viewed earlier, the "silk hat," which is a symbol of external decorum, turns into a recurrent ironic motif: "One of the gentlemen... held a dinged silk hat in his hand." (p.255)

The elegance of the item is undermined by the word "dinged." Like Mr. Kernan, the hat, which represents dignity, is worn down and tainted. Like religious rituals carried out without faith, this illustrates how language symbols of status and grace are hollow shells that preserve form without substance.

Joyce uses mild or deflective words to describe serious moral or physical issues, often through dialogue. This euphemistic lexis reflects the characters' tendency to downplay vice, which contributes to the satirical portrayal of spiritual superficiality.

"Sha, 's nothing,' said the injured man..." (p.255)

"Only a little accident,' he said." (p.256)

"I think I caught cold on the car." (p.261)

The use of the words "nothing" and "little" repeatedly trivialises a violent decline brought on by alcoholism, implying that neither the character nor the society around him take his moral failings seriously. A lexical dissonance is produced by this word choice: although the words seem innocuous, the reality is serious.

According to Joyce's lexis, even the title of the story, *Grace*, is ironic. Kernan is never truly spiritually redeemed in the narrative. Faith is reduced to banality by the characters' use of ambiguous or formulaic language when discussing religion.

"It's just a little... spiritual matter," (p.265)

"We're all going to wash the pot," (p.265)

These kinds of expressions make salvation seem like a social activity as informal as doing the dishes. The language of grace and conversion is mocked in this instance, becoming a mere shadow of its theological significance. The spiritual becomes transactional, banal, and informal.

Deliberate incongruity between word choice and context characterises Joyce's vocabulary. For example: "The manager said something about a hospital and some of the bystanders gave advice. The battered silk hat was placed on the man's head." (p. 256). The ironic juxtaposition of "battered" and "silk hat" represents Mr. Kernan's diminished dignity. Like the man himself, the hat, which once served as a symbol of respectability, is now broken and ridiculous.

"He carried on the tradition of his Napoleon, the great Blackwhite, whose memory he evoked at times by legend and mimicry"(p.258) is another instance of lexical irony. By calling a commercial tea-taster "Napoleon," Mr. Kernan's exaggerated sense of importance and status is parodied. The trivial ambitions of Dublin's petty bourgeoisie are ridiculed by such diction.

Grammatical Level (Grammar and Syntax)

Religious irony and spiritual coldness are reflected and reinforced by Joyce's formally structured but emotionally detached grammar in "Grace." Joyce mimics the detached rhythm of ritual or official report while capturing the hollowness of religious and moral pretence through the deliberate use of passive constructions, parataxis, and syntactic parallelism.

Passive Constructions: Diffusion of Responsibility

Joyce frequently employs the passive voice to obfuscate moral responsibility and agency, reflecting the tendency of institutions such as society and religion to avoid direct involvement or shift blame.

"He was quite helpless. He was surrounded by a ring of men. His collar was unfastened and his necktie undone." (p. 256)

These instances turn the subject (Mr. Kernan) into a grammatical object of action, one that is acted upon but lacks a moral actor or obvious agency. No one assumes responsibility; there is no subject carrying out the action. The inability of the community and the Church to actively

"redeem" the fallen man is analogous to this grammatical detachment. Like a sacrificial victim, he is left to vomit and lie in his own blood with no one to offer him real assistance.

Parataxis: Emotionally Flat Sequencing

Joyce mimics the ritualistic coldness of religious or medical reports as well as detachment by using paratactic sentence structures, which are collections of independent clauses connected by simple conjunctions or punctuation, to create a monotonous rhythm. "His hat had rolled a few yards away and his clothes were smeared with the filth and ooze of the floor on which he had lain, face downwards. His eyes were closed and he breathed with a grunting noise." (p.255) With little subordination or emotional assessment, the syntax resembles a litany or inventory. Similar to how a formal confession in a Catholic context might enumerate sins without evoking any emotion, this is a mechanical unfolding of disgrace rather than a dramatic portrayal of a fall from grace.

Similarly:

"The brandy was forced down the man's throat. In a few seconds he opened his eyes and looked about him. He looked at the circle of faces and then, understanding, strove to rise to his feet." (p.256)

Each sentence in this instance lacks emotional or psychological nuance and is declarative and structurally straightforward. By emphasising physical action and outward behaviour, the bare reporting separates the reader from the character's inner world and echoes the externalism of religious ritual, appearance without inner transformation.

Parallelism: The Ritual of Repetition

The way interactions are structured exhibits stylistic parallelism, particularly in the manager's frequent questions: "The manager asked repeatedly did no one know who the injured man was or where had his friends gone." (p.255)

Although it is structured in an official, interrogative style, this repetition of questions is similar to catechistic questioning and does not result in enlightenment or confession. There is spiritual concern in the form, but not in the content.

In dialogue:

"Where do you live?' repeated the constable." (p.256)

'Sha, 's nothing,' said the man." (p.256)

While the slurred, evasive responses reflect moral decay and spiritual deflection, the syntactic repetition reflects the formal structure of religious or bureaucratic authority. Once more, the form is maintained but the content is absent, signifying Joyce's criticism of religious organisations that prioritize external appearances over significant internal transformation.

Syntactic Irony in Dialogue

Joyce emphasises the superficiality of morality and spirituality throughout the passage by using syntax in dialogue. Examine Mr. Kernan's inebriated slurring:

"'I 'ery 'uch o'liged to you, sir,' said the injured man." (p.257)

"'Sha, 's nothing,' said Mr Kernan..." (p.257)

These fragmented, grammatically incorrect statements highlight the discrepancy between degraded content and respectable form. Like his moral and spiritual faculties, Kernan's syntax fails him despite his attempts to maintain social decorum through courteous phrases.

Joyce uses meticulously planned, grammatically correct syntax that supports the narrative voice's emotional distance. Even dramatic or violent events are described by the narrator with syntactic balance and grammatical accuracy:

"His hat had rolled a few yards away and his clothes were smeared with the filth and ooze of the floor on which he had lain, face downwards." (p.255)

Despite depicting a degrading and hideous scene, this sentence retains objectivity and syntactic order. The passive construction "were smeared" highlights moral and spiritual inertia while

diverting attention away from agency and emotion. A consistent tone of irony is produced throughout the text by maintaining this detachment.

Joyce also prefers lengthy, well-coordinated, or paratactic structures:

"They shook hands. Mr Kernan was hoisted on to the car and, while Mr Power was giving directions to the carman, he expressed his gratitude..." (p.257). The emphasis on equal weight for banal actions is emphasized by the use of coordination rather than subordination, which again reflects a lack of moral guidance or spiritual hierarchy.

Figures of Speech: Tropes and Rhetorical Devices

Joyce's use of overt figurative language in *Grace* is remarkably restrained. He uses ironic, simple, and symbolic imagery often with subtly persuasive rhetoric instead of complex metaphors or lyrical similes. Irony is intricately woven into the figurative language, undermining spiritual ideals, especially those of grace, redemption, and moral transformation.

Metaphor: "A dark medal of blood"

"A dark medal of blood had formed itself near the man's head on the tessellated floor." (p.255)

Joyce describes a pool of blood left by a drunken man who has collapsed using the metaphor of a "medal" which is a representation of honour, success, or religious devotion. This metaphor is extremely ironic because the "medal" ironically commemorates Mr. Kernan's shame rather than paying tribute to him. Instead, it depicts a pitiful figure degraded by intemperance and hypocrisy, mocking the Catholic symbolism of martyrdom or sacrifice.

Symbolism: The "Silk Hat"

"He had never been seen in the city without a silk hat of some decency and a pair of gaiters." (p.258) The "silk hat" frequently represents social decorum, outward dignity, and middle-class pride. It did, however, first appear in a weakened form: "One of the gentlemen who had carried him upstairs held a dinged silk hat in his hand." Both figuratively and literally, the symbol is deflated. The once-proud hat has been "dinged," signifying Mr. Kernan's moral decline. It turns into a mocking representation of respectability that is unable to contain the reality of his fall, demonstrating how outward manifestations of propriety cannot conceal spiritual failure.

Rhetorical Contrast: Sacred vs. Profane

Joyce creates contrasts between sordid, everyday content and religious language or structure throughout the narrative. Both dialogue and narrative description make this clear. "We're all going to wash the pot." (p.265)

In this instance, Cunningham uses a humorous, vulgar, and domestic metaphor to describe a Catholic retreat. "Washing the pot" reduces spiritual rejuvenation to a domestic task. The group's shallow repentance and the demonisation of religious practice are parodied by this reductive metaphor.

Religious Allusion Turned Irony

Christian theology, the notion of unmerited divine favour or spiritual transformation, is centrally referenced in the title "Grace." But no true grace is shown throughout the narrative. Instead, the supposed convert (Kernan) is ignorant and uninvolved, and the retreat is planned by morally dubious men (Mr. Power, Mr. M'Coy), each of whom has their own shortcomings. "The proposal conveyed very little meaning to his mind..."

Joyce uses flat or ironic narration to subtly parody the religious endeavour, and the figures of speech further emphasise this disjunction between form and faith.

Litotes and Understatement

"Sha, 's nothing," said the injured man. (p.256)

Litotes, a type of understatement that ironically downplays serious conditions, are exemplified by this repeated phrase. Despite being seriously hurt, bleeding, and possibly concussed, Mr. Kernan brushes it off with a slurred statement. People in Joyce's Dublin are conditioned to

downplay the seriousness of their moral failings, which exposes both self-denial and societal denial.

Irony as the Dominant Rhetorical Device

Nearly all of Grace's rhetorical and figurative devices are ironic, meaning they express one thing while conveying another.

- The Catholic retreat originated with social manipulation rather than faith.
- The symbolic return to the Church is portrayed as unnatural and unconvincing.
- Even Mrs. Kernan's "her kitchen" bound practical faith is more habit than conviction.

Mr Kernan's injured tongue symbolizes his inability to speak moral truth or articulate genuine redemption. Later, Mrs. Kernan notes ironically: "Mr Kernan's tongue would not suffer by being shortened." (p.261) Joyce also deploys bathos for comic effect, reducing solemn spiritual matters to absurd levels. For instance, the religious "retreat" becomes a mere "friendly talk" with Father Purdon, whom Mr Cunningham describes as "a man of the world like ourselves." (p.266)

Discourse Level: Narrative Structure, Voice, and Point of View

The third-person omniscient voice used to narrate James Joyce's *Grace* is notable for its emotional flatness, detached tone, and lack of authorial intrusion, even in the midst of scenes of extreme moral or physical collapse. The story's world is characterised by mechanical religiosity, spiritual decay, and hypocrisy, all of which are exposed and critiqued by this stylistic detachment.

Detached and Flat Narrative Tone

Joyce creates a reportorial, almost clinical narration by purposefully avoiding dramatic embellishment. For example: "A dark medal of blood had formed itself near the man's head on the tessellated floor." (p.255)

Without offering any sentimental commentary, the narrator presents a graphic scene in a matter-of-fact manner. Imagistic sharpness is provided by the use of precise detail ("dark medal," "tessellated floor"), but the reader is left to make the moral and emotional decisions due to the tone's flatness. The story's spiritual and societal numbness is highlighted by this objective distance, which stands in sharp contrast to the physical extreme of the moment.

Free Indirect Discourse and Shifting Perspective

Especially with Mr. Kernan and Mrs. Kernan, Joyce subtly uses free indirect discourse, a narrative technique in which third-person narration blends with a character's inner speech, to create a tone that ironically reflects their limited self-awareness. For instance, "It was nothing, he said: only a little accident" (p.256). According to Mr. Kernan, this internal viewpoint, conveyed in a straightforward, contemptuous manner, exposes Mr. Kernan's self-deception and denial. The narrator does not dispute his statements; instead, Joyce lets irony naturally arise from the contrast between the character's words and reality by repeating them so clearly.

Narrative Distance and Irony

The narrator keeps a neutral, detached posture even when characters are having ridiculous or emotionally charged conversations. For instance, "The proposal conveyed very little meaning to his mind..." (p.265) was said during the intervention to convert Mr. Kernan. This moment, which is supposed to symbolize a possible spiritual awakening, is made emotionally meaningless. The absence of commentary highlights the cynical, inauthentic nature of the religious act itself, rather than praising or criticizing the proposal.

Structural Irony through Narrative Juxtaposition

Joyce uses narrative irony to subvert the Catholic idea of fall and grace, which is reflected in the story's structure from physical collapse to religious "redemption." The redemption arc seems thematically and externally forced. The ultimate decision to go on a retreat, for example,

is presented through conversation full of euphemisms and humorous metaphors rather than as the culmination of moral or spiritual development: "We're all going to wash the pot" (p.265). Although the narrative structure in this instance resembles that of a moral parable, Joyce's disinterested narrator allows the ridiculousness of the dialogue and the moral blind spots of the characters to subvert the apparent spiritual resolution that the structure offers.

Narrative Ambiguity and the Illusion of Redemption

Joyce declines to provide a definitive conclusion. Whether Mr. Kernan actually changes is not confirmed by the narrator, who states that "...he thought he owed it to his dignity to show a stiff neck." (p.265) Even though Mr. Kernan is going to be "saved," his ego, rather than his soul, is his main worry. Thus, the discourse level reveals a profound irony: the narrator presents the story's spiritual journey with purposeful restraint, heightening the critical tone, but it is performative and lacks sincerity.

The story is omniscient in the third person but emotionally detached. Even in grotesque or pathetic situations, events are described without moral judgement or commentary:

"A dark medal of blood had formed itself near the man's head on the tessellated floor." (p.255)

The contrast between the scene's vulgarity and the elaborate diction of "medal" and "tessellated" is where the irony is hidden rather than explicitly expressed. The flat, reportorial tone emphasises the ridiculousness of human suffering reduced to clinical observation by imitating official or medical discourse. The discourse structure relies heavily on dialogue. Characters frequently use euphemisms, avoid direct conflict, or talk over one another. For instance, Mr. Kernan uses statements like "Sha,'s nothing" to oppose moral reform, while Mr. Power refrains from overtly mentioning sin or alcohol. The men's discussion of religion is rife with clichés, nonsequiturs, and false information, mocking spiritual discourse: "Pope Leo, you know, was a great scholar and poet." "He had a strong face." (p. 268) Their conversation's banality highlights how shallow their religious feelings are. The final "retreat" is framed as a social gesture, planned like a friendly get-together, rather than as a moral turning point.

5. CONCLUSION

In *Grace*, James Joyce writes a powerful critique of Catholicism in early 20th-century Ireland, not through direct theological argument, but by the use of language that is at once subtle and incisive. Through this thesis, Joyce's representation of sin, repentance, and redemption has been shown not to be thematic alone, it is articulated in the stylistic decisions that order the narrative. Through the application of Leech and Short's stylistic model, the analysis demonstrates how Joyce's lexical, grammatical, rhetorical, and discourse-level strategies interact to expose the dichotomy between the external forms of religion and the internal condition of moral decay.

At the lexical level, Joyce's irony appears through the careful juxtaposition of elaborate religious and moral terminology with degradation and denial scenes. Terms such as "gentlemen," "grace," or "medal" occur in horrific or ridiculous situations, invalidating their conventional sense and revealing the hypocrisy of Dublin's middle class. Deflective and euphemistic speech characterizes the dialogue, mirroring the unwillingness of characters to admit their transgressions candidly. Such lexical options reflect a society that appreciates facade more than substance and where words are employed to cover up moral corruption instead of shedding light on it.

At the syntactic level, Joyce's employment of passive voice and paratactic sentence structures promotes affective detachment and diffusion of responsibility. The syntactic levelness and absence of hierarchical subordination symbolize the mechanical, unreflective character of religious observance in the narrative. Grammar, as the Church rituals, is formal and ordered, but absent of true spiritual involvement. Syntax serves as a conduit for irony, resonating with the disparity between spiritual discourse and real change.

By means of figures of speech, especially symbolism and irony, Joyce underlines the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The repeated image of the "silk hat," originally a symbol of dignity, is one of visual metaphors of moral vacuity. The metaphor of a "medal of blood" defies religious honor, reducing it to a symbol of shame. Irony pervades the figurative landscape, draining redemptive power out of sacred language and unmasking the emptiness of institutional grace.

At the discourse level, Joyce's affectively flat narration, judicious application of free indirect discourse, and aloof point of view reinforce the performative dimension of the men's religious actions. The unjudging narrator allows the reader to witness the disconnect between the form and substance of religious life in Dublin. Dialogue is replete with clichés, misinformation, and euphemisms, revealing the superficiality of the men's religious concerns. The retreat, presented as a moment of grace, is really brought down to a social occasion engineered by morally imperfect human beings.

The stylistic practices in *Grace* do not just follow the story's themes, they build them. Joyce's language is not only a medium but also a mode of critique. The irony of the narrative, sustained at every level of analysis, deconstructs the illusion of spiritual redemption by exposing it as a sham supported by linguistic and social conventions. Through close attention to stylistic detail, Joyce forces the reader to challenge the sincerity of redemption and the complicity of religious institutions in promoting moral shallowness.

By concentrating on style instead of theology in isolation, the research has helped fill an important lacuna in Joyce studies. It has shown how the very fabric of Joyce's prose; its vocabulary, sentence structure, tropes, and narrative design, enacts and sustains his conception of a spiritually immobilized society. In *Grace*, redemption is not bestowal through divine action, but ironically postponed through language that feigns to redeem but covers up.

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