

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO JOYCE'S SHORT STORY *CLAY*

INTRODUCTION

In the present article I intend to interpret Joyce's short story 'Clay' from a pragmatic point of view, specifically by applying the notion of 'Implicature'. The main reason for choosing this approach for my analysis is because I think that it can be very helpful to untangle the complex density of any literary text.

My hypothesis is that the 'fresh' reader who has no previous knowledge of the characteristics either of the text or of the author, can perfectly achieve a good understanding of the literary discourse through this kind of pragmatic approach.

In the present article I will try to follow the mind of the reader who approaches 'Clay' for the first time, assuming that this hypothetical reader just relies on his knowledge of the language, and on his ability to make implicatures out of his reading. Another important feature of this article is that I will not use any help from literary criticism, which is obviously abundant in the case of Joyce, because the average reader does not usually resort to this kind of outside knowledge. In one word, I will try to see if the text under study fulfills the feature that is ascribed to well written literary texts which states that they are self-contained in the message that they convey.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The notion of 'Implicature' can be defined as 'the information that the addressee infers from the addresser's utterance in a linguistic exchange'. As opposed to 'presupposition', the information that implicatures convey is not overtly marked in a linguistic way, therefore, we can say that implicatures have to do with meaning rather than with form. Levinson (1983: 97) points out that it is because of implicatures that we understand why 'it is possible to mean ... more than it is actually said'. According to this view we could deduce that the communicative function that language plays in the case of implicatures is merely a supportive one. We could also deduce, as Brown and Yule (1983) suggest, that implicatures create a relationship between speaker and hearer, rather than between sentences or utterances themselves.

Another important issue to consider is that implicatures are context-bound (Brown and Yule, 1983); that is, we cannot completely understand the meaning of an implicature unless we observe and study the surrounding discourse and situation; in one word, they have unique discourse reference. In this way it is also very important to have some information regarding the background knowledge of the participants in the linguistic exchange (Stubbs, 1983).

Once the meaning and the essential features of implicatures are explained, I will try to account for the reasons why implicatures arise in any piece of discourse. According to several authors (Brown and Yule, 1983; Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; and Stubbs, 1983), implicatures arise because the addressee attempts to overcome any possible ambiguity in the discourse. This idea is related to the belief that all the sentences / utterances in an ideal instance of communication should convey meaningful information for the addressee. Grice was the first author who tried to account for the notion of meaningful conversational interaction in his description of the 'Maxims of Conversation'. These maxims are the following (Levinson, 1983: 101-102):

- Maxim of Quality: try to make your contribution one that is true. Specifically:
 - i. Do not say what you believe to be false
 - ii. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
- Maxim of Quantity:
 - i. Make your contribution as informative as is required
 - ii. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required
- Maxim of Relevance: make your contribution relevant
- Maxim of Manner: be perspicuous, and specifically:
 - i. Avoid obscurity
 - ii. Avoid ambiguity
 - iii. Be brief
 - iv. Be orderly.

We could say that these four maxims are subsumed within what Grice calls the 'Cooperative Principle' which says: 'Make your contribution such as is required, at the stages at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged'. (Levinson, 1983: 101).

On the whole, we can say that implicatures emerge when some of the maxims explained above are not present, or are in some way violated in the discourse and, as a result, the addressee has to make inferences regarding the missing information according to the data he is presented with.

The properties of implicatures are the following:

- Defeasible, they can be cancelled if additional premises which deny the information are provided.
 - Non-Detachable: they are attached to a precise context and do not entirely depend on syntax
 - Calculable, the addressee can always infer them to preserve the Cooperative Principle.
 - Non-conventional, the language has complete freedom to convey new meanings in accordance with the context.
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To sum up, I think that implicatures constitute an excellent example of the connection between linguistic and non-linguistic information. Due to the fact that each reader has a different perception of the world and of the language, literature uses implicatures as a means to create many different imaginary worlds out of the same written text.

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

My main assumption when approaching Joyce's text from a Pragmatic point of view is that the reader is immediately overwhelmed by a great deal of information which may or may not be relevant for the understanding of the story. Joyce's technique in 'Clay' is based upon focusing the narrative action both backwards, by present*ting the characters and situations as if they formed part of a certain background knowledge which the reader is supposed to share; as well as by drawing the attention of the narrative forwards, forcing the reader to search for the missing information in the forthcoming discourse. Therefore, the text itself is a kind of vacuum in time, to which the reader is launched without any specific aid.

I will analyse the text step by step, following all the implicatures that the reader should make in order to make full sense of the story.

The first sentence says: 'The matron had given her leave to go out as soon as the women's tea was over and Maria looked forward to her evening out'. At this stage the reader has to infer several concepts in order to locate the 'possible world' of the narrative. Let's take 'the matron'; who is she? We might suppose that she is the only matron in the place, at least at the moment of utterance, because of the definite article. The subsequent doubt is the place where this matron is. According to the 'Cobuild Dictionary' there are three different meanings for the word 'Matron':

- A very senior nurse who is usually in charge of all the nursing staff in a hospital.
- A middle-aged married woman, especially one who is solemn and rather fat, often a humorous usage.
- A woman who looks after the health and hygiene of children in boarding schools.

At this point of the story we cannot obviously deduce to which of these three standard meanings the word 'matron' refers. If we proceed with our reading we will find 'had given her leave'. From these words we can only infer that 'the matron' exerts some sort of authority on 'her', as it was obvious from the definitions. The pronoun 'her' refers to the second unknown participant in the situation, and, according to the discourse knowledge that the reader has so far, any of the three definitions of the word 'matron' presented above can still apply. 'Her' could refer to a junior nurse, to a teenage daughter or to a school-girl, all of these discourse entities would be under the matron's orders.

The third unknown participant in the situation appears when we read that this 'leave' will be granted as soon as 'the woman's tea is over', this time the entity being a collective one. The reference to the constraint that affects the granting of the permission to leave would have to

be justified in the context according to the three definitions. With regard to the first meaning of the word: a senior nurse, perhaps only two plausible explanations would account for it; either the nominal phrase 'the women' refers to the ill patients at a hospital, or it refers to some nurses or members of staff working at the hospital. A third possibility might creep into the context supposing that 'the women' having tea are the members of a kind of charity association which meets in the hospital, and therefore, 'the matron' has to take care of all the proceedings. However, this latter explanation has a very clear pitfall: it is very likely that these charity women would have been referred to by the matron as 'ladies', because of their status, unless the matron had talked about them in private and with a clearly derogatory meaning.

With regard to the second and third definitions that were presented above, no evident support can be stated either to accept or to exclude them. Any of them might also work in the narrative discourse developed so far.

At this point of the text the reader is presented with the fourth personal referent of the story: 'And Maria looked forward to her evening out'. Now some of the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle can start to fit together. Maria refers anaphorically to 'her'. This is not overtly stated in the text, but in terms of linguistic cohesion we know that, from the three personal referents introduced in the text, one of them is plural and the other two are singular. The plural element 'the women' cannot be picked up in the subsequent discourse by 'her'. Therefore, it seems obvious that Maria is the one who will enjoy the evening out. If the element 'the matron' grants the permission, only the other personal referent 'her' can co-refer to Maria. Apart from the linguistic evidence, there is the implication that 'her evening out' co-refers anaphorically to 'give her leave'. The reader supposes that the beneficiary entity of both actions is the same person: Maria.

The reader also infers through the nominal phrase 'her evening out' that Maria, whoever she is, depends very much upon the matron's instructions that only allows her to leave once. There is no clue as to know whether the frequency of such leaves is once a week, a fortnight, a month, a year ...

At the beginning of the following sentence we read something which could be illuminating: 'the kitchen was spick and span'. At this point the reader might feel that Joyce is breaking the Maxim of Relevance, because the kitchen has apparently nothing to do with Maria 'prima facie'. However, the introduction of this element in the discourse, which can be co-referent to 'tea', makes the reader infer that there is perhaps some hidden relationship. It seems obvious that she is not the cook, as we read: 'the cook said you could see yourself in the copper boilers'. If the cook is presented as a unique element in the context by means of the definite article, the bridging assumption implies that Maria's role in the place (in the kitchen perhaps?) is not that of a cook.

In the subsequent sentences we are offered an extensive description of the kitchen. Once more the reader may question the relevance of this description and may think that there is an apparent failure of informativeness on the part of the addresser. The narrative technique through which the reader is introduced into the kitchen resembles the way in which a camera zooms a

particular scene in a film. The narrator focalizes the 'four very big barmbracks' by narrowing down the context of situation. There also seems to be a flouting of the Maxim of Relevance when the narrator explains that these barmbracks have been cut into slices. It is not until line nine that we are told that Maria has cut the slices herself. Now the reader can positively infer without almost any shade of a doubt that Maria works in the kitchen, possibly preparing food.

We have seen so far that the narrator introduces Maria in this text as if she were in the background. Maria seems to be an element which is manipulated by the matron and the kitchen itself.

As a matter of fact, we do not know yet if Maria is going to be the main character or, if not, to what extent will she share the main role with the other characters introduced so far. Joyce exploits the presentation of definite referring expressions which are unknown to the reader in a cataphoric relationship with their counterparts and, therefore, the reader has to make use of implicatures in order to figure out how the different pieces of the discourse are interrelated.

From line ten to line fifteen there is a change in the narrative technique by which the narrator describes Maria from the outside. We learn about her physical appearance, and also about her relationship with 'the women'. It is important to notice that the process of reading in this part of the text is much simpler and more straight-forward. This is so because the narrator shifts his point of view from Maria's inner conception of the world to the other participants' view of reality. It is an alternation from the subjective to the objective perception of the micro-cosmos of the narrative discourse, which is often easier to understand when we deal with facts, than when we deal with impressions. The only piece of information that may remain obscure for the reader is whether 'the women' referred to in line thirteen are the same ones as those mentioned in line two or not. As a matter of fact, it would be too uncooperative on the part of the narrator to mention with the same expression two entities which have not been properly defined. Supposing that both occurrences of 'the women' refer to the same entity, the inference that the reader draws is that these women must work in something related to washing-up, as we read that they sometimes 'quarrel over their tubs'.

From line seventeen to line twenty-one we can observe the introduction of new characters in the universe of discourse: the sub-matron, two of the Board ladies, Ginger Mooney and the dummy. Once more these new characters are introduced with the definite article 'the'. As I commented above, this introduction of new characters in a cataphoric mode always puzzles the reader, firstly because it means having to pay more attention to the role that these new entities play in the discourse; and secondly because it means having to remember more data about people which has not been 'properly introduced' as new information. Another important feature of this passage is that it depicts some of the features of the social structure of the place where these characters are. The sub-matron and the Board-ladies share a higher status than the other members of the micro-cosmos, that is why when the matron praises Maria for being a 'veritable peace-maker' the Board-ladies and the sub-matron are presented together after their immediate superior, the matron.

We can say on the whole that Maria is highly esteemed in her working place, both by the managing and by the working staff. It is important to point out that the fact that the great majority of the people in the place are women is reflected in the syntax of the construction 'so fond of Maria', which is mainly an expression used by women.

From line twenty-two to line twenty-six we learn more about 'the evening'. Apart from the reference made in the first line of the text we do not have any more information with regard to the importance of that evening for Maria. We know that the tea starts at six o'clock, and that this tea will last for an hour more or less, as she will not be able to leave the place until around seven. Therefore, there is a narrative lapse of almost twenty lines since the reader firstly knows about the existence of that tea, and obtains some more details about its circumstances.

The narrator describes the itinerary that Maria is likely to follow that evening. We can deduce that these streets belong to a town, and not to a village, because it takes a long time to get from one place to the other, almost an hour. There are two important features in the purpose of the journey that Maria will accomplish. She is going to buy 'the things', and she is going 'there' (line 26). Maria has about one hour to fulfil two activities: the purchase of 'the things', and the arrival at an indeterminate place. Below, in line thirty-two, we read that she will travel by tram from one place to the other. This confirms our earlier implicature that the place where the action is placed is a town.

The topic of her evening out and of all the things that she is going to do is left aside by the narrator, who focuses again on the present situation of Maria. At this moment she is looking at the purse with the 'silver clasps' (line 27), which she highly appreciates. She is reading the inscription attached to it which says 'a present from Belfast' (line 28). Our knowledge of the world allows us to infer that, on the first hand, it is very likely that she is not in Belfast, and, on the other hand, that someone else bought it for her. The reason for formulating these implicatures is that one does not usually buy this kind of souvenirs for oneself and later reads the words as if under a spell; and also that, if you are presented with one of these souvenirs they are not typically from the place where you live.

In line number twenty-nine we are offered the explanation of her being so fond of that purse. Joe, whom we do not know yet, had bought it for her. Therefore, the implicature made above about the source of the purse was correct. We are told that this event took place five years before the time of utterance, which is a piece of information meaningful to Maria, but not to the reader who cannot place the discourse in any definite time. At that time, five years before, Joe had gone to Belfast; that is, Joe did not live in Belfast at the time of the journey. We can also read that Alphy, whom we do not know either, had gone with him. This information could be relevant for the ulterior discourse, although we are not sure yet, in the sense that apparently, the present was only Joe's. If this is so we do not know if Alphy had also bought something for Maria, as she does not mention anything about it. This visit to Belfast was 'on a Whit-Monday trip' (line 30), and this suggests that Joe's and Alphy's place of residence was not

too far away to be able to travel to Belfast just for a day. We can infer that the place they used to live in was somewhere in Ireland.

From line thirty-four to line forty-two we have some information about Maria's personal life unveiled. Maria herself is reported to have exclaimed in her mind: 'What a nice evening they would have all the children singing!' (line 32). This is the first time in the text in which Maria expresses any of her feelings in any way. Before this moment all the information about herself comes from other people's views of the situation. This mental utterance implies that it is 'they' whom she is going to meet, and it also implies that she will take part in the general joy of the group formed by 'they'. The reference to 'the children singing' is again new information for the reader. We do not know who these children are or why they are going to sing. The previous reference to Joe and Alphy might suggest that they will be singing as well. The possibility that only Joe and Alphy will be singing does seem grammatically impossible, because the mention of 'all' suggests that the number of children will be more than a couple. It still remains uncertain if these singers are informally organized, that is, if they are a group of friends; or if on the contrary they belong to any kind of organized choir singing regularly. The inference that we may draw is that Maria's enthusiasm for the actual performance seems to imply that she more or less knows 'all the children'. In this sense it seems more plausible the idea that these children are not formally organized to give recitals of any kind.

In relation to the previous idea, there is another crucial implicature that we can make referring to the relationship between 'the children' and herself. The immediate supposition is that all these children are not of her own, otherwise she would have called them 'her children'; however, we do not know if perhaps any of her children, if she has any, might be singing with the others. In this case our knowledge of the world and of social life would find it very difficult to account for the fact of her having children, presumably very young, with her working at a place from that she cannot usually leave. This situation has not been stated in the preceding discourse, but it is something to keep in mind in order to understand the story completely.

Another important aspect to mention at this stage is that up till now, except for the purse, nothing has been referred to as belonging to Maria. This fact gives the impression that she does not possess anything. Even the money she carries in her purse is presented with a prepositional phrase, which confers complete anonymity to its owner: 'in the purse were ... (line 39).

Some of the doubts which have to do with relationship between Maria and Joe are cleared up when we read in line thirty: 'only she hoped that Joe wouldn't come in drunk'. From this sentence it seems obvious that Joe is not one of the singers; if he is likely to get drunk from time to time it means that he is a grown-up. Therefore, we can discard the possibility that Joe, and perhaps Alphy, are her little sons who have to live without her mother for some obscure reasons. However, we still do not know what is Maria's actual relationship with Joe and Alphy.

The sentence in line thirty-six: 'often he had wanted her to go and live with them', poses a lot of problems for the reader, because although we might infer through anaphoric reference that 'he' is Joe, and that 'her' is Maria, we do not fully understand the whole meaning of the sentence. The implicature might be that, on the one hand, 'them' refers back to the children, be-

cause there are not any other plural entities to apply 'them' to; and, on the other hand, that Joe and Maria are lovers. This last supposition, although plausible, seems not to be too well grounded in the actual text. If they were lovers, Joe would ask her to go and live with 'him'. However, we could accept this interpretation if we thought that perhaps Joe is a widower, and 'them' refers to his sons and daughters. Something that justifies their more or less close friendship is the present that he gave her five years before.

The following passage is very interesting: 'but she would have felt herself in the way' (line thirty-seven). The first question that perplexes the reader is: in which way?, or rather: in whose way? Nevertheless, and as it has become usual in this narrative, the question remains unanswered and even gets deeper when we read the bracketed statement in lines forty-seven and forty-eight ' (though Joe's wife was ever so nice with her)'. At this point the situation stands as follows: Joe is married to somebody whom we do not know; 'them' probably refers to his sons and daughters, who are perhaps the above mentioned children who are going to sing that evening. Maria is meeting all of 'them' that very evening after 'the women's tea' is over, and after buying 'the things'. Eventually Maria will arrive 'there' at about eight o'clock. Up to now everything makes sense, leaving out all the missing information that has to do with personal, time and place deixis. There remains a very important issue to discuss in order to organize a perfect portrait of the characters: we do not know yet what relationship exists between Maria and Joe, and jointly, we do not have any clue regarding Maria's age. Although this issue might seem irrelevant, I think that if Maria is a young woman, Joe's wife would not be too enthusiastic about allowing her to live with them for what I may call 'obvious reasons'. Furthermore, being Maria a friend of Joe's and not of his wife's, the relationship between Joe and Maria must be one that is not 'suspicious' for Joe's wife. This fact would also be related to Maria's fears of being 'in the way'. The only possible explanation is that between Joe and Maria there were some bonds of kinship, that is, she could be his sister, cousin, aunt etc ... The other explanation could be that Maria is older than Joe. In that case, the relevant question would be precisely what is the nature of their relationship. I suppose that she is not his mother, simply because we would have been told sometime ago in the story. We will have to make sense of the story without this piece of information because the narrator changes the topic of the discourse.

In line thirty-nine we discover where Maria works. It says: 'she had become accustomed to the life of the laundry'. The name of the laundry is revealed in line forty-four: 'the Dublin by Lamplight Laundry'. We also have some further reference to the work of the women in the laundry in line fifty-eight when we read that the women enter the room wiping 'their steaming hands'. We can see how this information fits with the idea of 'the women quarrelling over their tubs'. We must conclude in this aspect, that none of the definitions of the word 'nurse' apply well to the rank of the woman who is in charge of the laundry. Nevertheless, the status she has there might be similar to any of the ones described above.

The fact that the laundry is called by the name of a city implies that this city, Dublin, is the place where the action occurs. This refers back to the moment when Maria was looking at the

purse. I said that the place of utterance would not probably be in Belfast, but that the fact that Joe and Alphy had been day on a one-day trip implied that the whole action was taking place in Ireland. The only thing we do not know is whether Joe and Alphy lived in Dublin when the trip took place or not.

It is not until line forty that we learn more about the relationship between Maria, Joe and Alphy: 'she had nursed him and Alphy too'. The implicature here is that Maria is much older than Joe and Alphy. Now we are able to understand why Joe's wife would not mind if Maria lives with them. Probably Maria's fears of being 'in the way' only relate to her desire of not interfering in Joe's marital life. We can also assume that there is a close relationship between Joe and Alphy, the obvious one is that they are brothers.

We still do not completely know what the relationship between Joe and Maria is. The text does not help us very much though, because at the moment in which we are supposed to get all the information there is a flouting of the Maxim of Quantity when Joe says: 'Mamma is Mamma, but Maria is my proper mother' (line forty-two). We only appreciate the great love that Joe has for Maria, but we are not told anything about 'Mamma', what happened to her, and we are not explained either why Maria is not her 'proper mother'.

I will try to compile all the details that we already know about the story. Maria works (and lives?) at the Dublin by Lamplight Laundry where she apparently works as a waiter. She has nursed Joe and Alphy, who are probably brothers, and she is going to spend the evening at Joe's home with his wife and children. This is the only free evening that she can enjoy and she feels very happy about it. We assume that Joe and his family also live in Dublin because Maria just crosses the city to visit them.

As we proceed with our reading we learn more about Maria's inner beliefs. We infer that she is a Catholic because 'she used to have such a bad opinion of Protestants' (line forty-five). Obviously she could also be a Hinduist or a Muslim, but our knowledge of the world tells us that these religions are not so widespread in Europe. We might also assume that the usual religious dichotomy in accidental Europe usually refers to the dualism between Protestants and Catholics. As she thinks in line forty-seven that 'they (the protestants) are nice people to live with', we can infer that some people of the place where she lives, perhaps in the laundry, are protestants in fact. We can read below that the laundry is full of tracts on the wall, which are apparently put up by the matron. This is highly relevant in the sense that the implicature could be that the laundry is run by protestants. The fact that there are many of these tracts everywhere suggests that the managing staff of the place is very religious. In a way this is in conflict with the idea of a working place, which is not supposed to have religious messages all around. It gives the impression of being a parishional place, rather than a usual laundry.

We move on now to line sixty-five, in which further comments about that evening are provided. Lizzie Fleming, a new character in the story, says that Maria 'is sure to get the ring'. The reader wonders about the meaning of this sentence, because there is no mention of any definite ring that she is likely to get, either on that day, or on another day. Apparently Lizzie has repeated the same thing for many Hallow Eves. It is at this moment when we learn that

the action takes place on a thirty-first of October. The obvious implicature is that Maria has been working at the laundry for many years, as she always gets the same prophesy.

In line sixty-eight we are explained what the mention to the ring means. Maria relates it to the notion of a 'man'. Therefore, 'obtaining the ring means getting the man., that is, getting married. The implicature is that Maria is either single or a widow. However, it remains unclear what the relationship is between Hallow Eve's day and getting married. Typically Hallow Eves are days in which all christians remember the deceased members of their families, or their friends. In a way the concept of getting a ring as a symbol of a future marriage seems to be a pagan idea related to the notion of fecundity.

After Maria's consideration of what getting the ring means, we can read that Mooney proposes a toast to Maria's health. This moment is important because all the women agree very happily with the idea. This corroborates our earlier implicature which implied that Maria was highly appreciated at her place of work. In a sense all these women would be very happy if Maria could get the ring. It is important to notice that Maria describes Mooney's ideas as those of a 'common woman' (lines 78 and 79). There seems to be a classification of the status of 'womanhood' in the laundry. The range would be as follows: matron, sub-matron / Board-ladies, women, and finally common women. It is difficult to draw the distinction between the last two, because they seem to be subjectively designed by Maria. The immediate reaction would be to relate the idea of a common woman to that of a whore. If this is the case, we could think of Maria's description of this woman as tremendously impolite, what is more, according to the knowledge that we have about Maria's personality, it seems highly unlikely that she be capable of saying these things without any reason. Besides she does not treat Mooney's gesture of proposing a toast to her as a bad sign, she actually thinks that 'she knew that Mooney meant well' (lines 77 and 78).

In line eighty-two we read that she goes to her little bedroom, we can now confirm the implicature that we had explained above: she definitely lives at the laundry. The fact that the following morning is a 'mass morning' is redundant because we know that the day after Hallow-Eve is always All Saints' Day, which is a mass day in the Catholic tradition. My impression is that the narrator wants to stress her being a good catholic, as well as to introduce the possessions which are kept in her bedroom. She has two different kinds of clothes, the good ones and the bad ones. We are described how carefully she prepares her best clothes for the next morning. It is the first thing that she does before leaving. In this action we can perceive that the attention she pays to anything that relates to her faith is very high. Going to mass for her almost implies a sacrifice as she has to get up earlier than usual, at six instead of at seven, I think that it is very interesting how much she values those clothes, even more than her diminutive body. There seems to be a complete dichotomy between her body and her soul. Her body's reflection in the mirror reveals her age although she does not even pay attention to that, however her soul is young and fresh. The only thing that matters to her is her recollection of how well she used to adorn her body in the earlier days. She feels great affection

towards herself and that is why she still tries to look as nice as possible by using her best clothes in the way she used to do it when she was young.

From this moment onwards the narrative pace slows down, and the influx of new information decays. The text coils up trying to fill all the informative gaps that have appeared in the previous discourse. In line number ninety-eight we are confirmed indirectly again about her being unmarried: 'how much better it was to be independent and to have your own money in your pocket'. At this point, once she is out of the laundry, she thinks again about the wonderful evening she expects to have. It seems as if she were not sure whether this hope of hers will become true. In a way she does not feel confident about the kind of life people lead outside the laundry in the 'real' world. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why she would rather stay and live in the laundry instead of living at Joe's house. From what we have seen so far the laundry constitutes a nice place to live, a real home, even though the material space allocated to her is minute, and even though some of the people who live there seem to be the 'outcasts' of society: the common women.

At this point she also makes a reference to the fact that the relationship between Joe and Alphy is not a good one: 'she could not help thinking what a pity it was Alphy and Joe were not speaking. They were always failing out now but when they were boys together they used to be the best of friends: but such was life' (lines 101 to 104). From this statement we can finally know a bit more about the relationship between Joe and Alphy. They must certainly be of the same age, and must have spent their childhood together, as we already knew from the fact that Maria nursed both of them. What the narrator does not say is the real relationship that binds them. As there is another flouting of the Maxim of Quantity, we cannot state that they are real brothers, although the immediate implicature might suggest that they are. We can also see that she fulfils the itinerary that she had planned in her mind as she walks 'ferreting' her way through the crowds. The narrator uses this verb to express the kind of body she has and the inner activity that she shows in all her actions.

In this 'closing up' of the story we can read how Maria also buys the 'things'. We see now that the things she buys are for Joe and his family, and these are: 'a dozen of mixed penny cakes' (line 99), and some other kind of cakes that they are sure to like. When she is buying these cakes the shop assistant makes reference to a wedding-cake. This mention 'made Maria blush' (lines 119 and 120). Her embarrassment obviously refers to her being unmarried. It seems as if the narrator were preparing everything to finish the story. Finally there are no more difficult intricacies or obscure details that puzzle the reader. Although all the details seem to be reasonably clear, the most important part of the story is still to come.

Maria is on the Drumconda tram on the way to Joe's home. She keeps thinking that she will have to stand all the way because nobody would let her a seat, however, an elderly gentleman makes room for her, (lines 124 and 125). I would like to analyse this passage in depth because it represents a radical change in the evolution of the whole story.

The first linguistic detail that surprises the reader is that this gentleman on the tram is the only person introduced in the narrative as a piece of new information. The narrator does not treat

him as a piece of shared knowledge either for Maria or for the reader. He is introduced in the text as 'an elderly gentleman', (line 126). This fact is very important because it means that for Maria this was the only event in the evening which was really new to her. All the other participants and actions presented throughout the narrative seem to belong to Maria's well-known micro-cosmos. This notion of predetermined events that happen before Maria's eyes are even extended to the presentation of 'the young men' who are on the tram, (line 125) or to 'the stylish young lady' which sells cakes behind the counter, (line 117). This mode of presentation of new characters does not necessarily mean that all the other referring expressions introduced alongside the text were part of Maria's background knowledge. The only suggestion that the narrator wants to put forward is that Maria sees all the events and entities in her life as part of a routine that follows her everywhere, that is why this gentleman is introduced with the indefinite article.

The presence of this gentleman on the Drumcondra tram as well as his deferent attitude towards her represent a change in her monotonous existence. We might also say that this casual encounter with a gentleman (who can be socially categorised at the same level as the Board ladies) probably represents for Maria the ring that she was sure to get. It is important to notice that Maria 'favours him' with her looks. The use of this verb correlates with her belief of being still attractive, as I commented above.

The whole communicative exchange between Maria and 'the gentleman' reflects the only natural conversation she has in the whole narrative. They converse about 'usual' topics, like the weather, the lost youth ... On the whole, it seems as if Maria had reached reality by abandoning the enclastered life she leads at the laundry. It seems that one of the consequences of leaving the laundry is that 'getting the ring' is not so difficult as it seems at first sight. She even thought 'how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he has a drop taken' (line 141 and 142). From this utterance we can infer that meeting gentlemen is something that has not often happened to her in the past. In this way it is very significant that she always refers to him as a gentleman, despite the fact that he was 'with a drop taken'.

After this brief encounter has finished, Maria arrives at Joe's home, where everybody greets her. We can notice again the indefinite reference of 'everybody', which accounts for Joe's family and for two neighbour girls who are also present. We know that Joe's eldest son is called Alphy, like Joe's brother, and we also learn that Joe's surname is 'Donnelly', because his wife is referred to as 'Mrs. Donnelly'. It is curious, though, that Joe's wife is never called by her first name, as we would expect in such a familiar situation. It looks as if she were just fulfilling a role in the whole story, like the matron or the Board-ladies. We might even say that the gentleman is also playing a kind of role in the development of the story. In these cases, the real personality of the character does not add anything new to the story; it does not matter the real face, but the narrative function that they perform.

Another essential moment in this part of the story is when Maria realizes that she has left the special present she had bought for 'papa and mamma', that is, for Joe and his wife. She thinks that she probably had dropped it in the tram. She feels really ashamed because she remembers

how confused she was while talking to 'the gentleman with the greyish moustache'. In a way, it is as if she were ashamed of having been happy for a while. She takes the loss of the present as a sort of punishment for her behaviour, almost in a puritan way: she has thrown twenty-four pence 'for nothing'.

In order to make Maria forget about the incident, Joe tries to cheer her up telling her stories and some gossip about his office while Mrs. Donnelly plays the piano. Life seems to flow smoothly, calmly, while Maria enjoys for the first time in the story the fruits of a real familiar atmosphere. We could interpret this scene as the epitome of familiar life that Maria cannot enjoy at the laundry.

This familiar closing-up of the story adds some more pieces of relevant information to the whole situation. We are confirmed in the assumption made earlier that the relationship between Joe and Alphy is not good at all: 'Maria thought she would put in a good word for Alphy. But Joe cried that God might strike him stone dead if ever he spoke a word to his brother again' (lines 189 and 191). At this point of the story we are finally told that Joe and Alphy are brothers. What we do not know yet is the relationship that Maria has with both of them, and also if Maria still sees Alphy sometimes although Joe does not like him anymore. We can perceive that the figure of Alphy is excluded from the whole narrative from the moment in which Maria looks at the purse that Joe bought for her.

With regard to the breaking up of the communication between the two brothers, the implicature is that this situation is not an old one, as they had been together in Belfast only five years before. It is also significant that Joe's eldest son is called after his uncle, which could mean that when he was *baptised* they were still in good terms, unless the child had been named after another Alphy who is unknown to us.

The bad relationship between the two brothers does not please Joe's wife, who says that: 'it was a great shame for him to speak that way of his own flesh and blood', however Joe replies that 'Alphy was not brother of his'. This statement complicates the whole basis of the implicature that we made above. We do not really know if the meaning of this assertion is only metaphorical. If it is really true, we should infer that the relationship between the three characters, Maria, Joe and Alphy, took place at an institution for orphan children or some other place of that kind, as that can be the most feasible explanation for the situation of Maria's nursing two children who do not share any common kinship. After this tense moment, the next door girls organize a kind of game in which apparently one chooses his own fate. It seems that everyone in the place who still has some chances to change his situation in life has to pick up an object out of a saucer while being blindfold. In this case the ones who are to choose their fate are the six children and Maria. She is treated as if she had not still chosen his path in life, precisely like the six children. The objects to be eligible are a prayer-book, some water and a ring. Obviously the ring in this case refers back to 'the ring' which Maria was sure to get.

At this point of the story the narrator finally allows us to understand why that afternoon is so important for the future: the object that one chooses predicts the fate awaiting ahead in life.

The symbolism behind the prayer-book and of the ring seems to be very clear: the former represents a kind of religious life, and the latter invariably represents marriage. We can notice Maria's earlier association between the ring and a man. Both the ring and the prayer-book represent the traditional dichotomy between the religious and the mundane life, the separation between the soul and the flesh which already was in Maria's thoughts when she saw herself reflected in the mirror. Despite religious life is thought to be more appreciated by the christians, the implicatures arising from the beginning of the story imply that 'getting the ring' is the most desirable choice in the game. We might wonder if the women, the children and Maria consider religious life as a kind of way-out when the chances of marriage dwindle. This above presented dichotomy, which is traditionally a very stable one, seems to be unbalanced in this case by the introduction of a new variable to be considered: the water. The only possible meaning for this symbol has to do with the fact that, being Ireland an island and therefore, surrounded by water, its choice in the game might refer to the sea. If this is the case choosing the water might mean migration.

In this particular game three of Joe's children obtain the water, and the other one the prayer-book. One of the neighbours gets the ring and there is no mention at all about the other one. Maria is the last one to play the game and, in the first try, she gets something which seems not to be appropriate and is soon thrown away. What she takes is 'a soft wet substance with her fingers'. This object is not predicted in the game: 'nobody spoke or took off her bandage'. It is a mystery what she selected, although somebody mentioned the garden. The only previous reference which could be used is the title of the story: 'clay'. What would be the meaning of the clay? Could it be perhaps a sign of death? In her second try she gets the prayer-book and she seems to be quite pleased anyhow. It is important that Maria is offered the possibility to choose twice, as if she had a second chance in life to choose her way to happiness. Despite Lizzies' premonition, it seems that she will not be able to get the ring this time either. Mrs. Donnelly makes the second prediction in the day for her: 'Maria would enter a convent before the year was out because she had got the prayer-book' (lines 227 and 228). We are confirmed at this point that getting the prayer-book means entering a convent. What we ignore is the objects that she had chosen the previous years, and therefore, if the choice of a particular object really means anything in real life.

The story finishes with the song 'I dreamt that I dwelt', which Maria sings for all of them. The main topic of the song is, the description of the wonderful and wealthy existence that somebody had during his lifetime. Nevertheless, the thing in life that the character of the song appreciates most is the love that somebody had for him or for her. The fact that Maria sings this song is very strange because it actually describes the kind of life she apparently never enjoyed. It represents in a sense the expression of all the dreams that she has always had, but could never materialize.

Something else which is also important at this moment is that all the audience seems to have notice 'her mistake'. We are not told the kind of mistake that she has made while singing, but the only thing that we can notice is that either the song or the mistake made Joe be sentiment-

tally moved. It is the only moment in the whole story in which Joe seems to have some of the human qualities that his 'proper mother' has. So far, Joe has proved to be a bit arrogant, prone to drinking, even a bit violent and rancorous. Here, though, his emotions emerge and the old times overwhelm his heart. It is not until this moment that some reference to the departed is made. All the evening had been too cheerful for the day it is, as if they did not have anybody to mourn.

It is also at this point of the narrative when we encounter the last personal reference introduced in the text: 'old Balfe'. Unlike all the previous instances of cataphoric presentation of characters, we are never told who 'old Baife' was, and what kind of relationship Maria and Joe had with him. We only know that his music, and especially this song, was very important for Joe: 'there was no time like the long ago and no music for him like poor old Balfe' (from line 251 to 253). Joe finally adds something that again shows his love for Old Baife: 'no matter what people might say', By this utterance he states a strong affection for this deceased person. It is very meaningful that the end of the story narrates how Joe is literally crying while he remembers 'old Baife' and the old times. It is as if in any person's life tears always follow joy and vice-versa. Although Joe is married and with children, he can also be unhappy sometimes. He drinks and cries and nor even his wife can make him feel better. We can see the similarity with Maria who is mostly alone; both of them have to struggle with life.

The saddest implicature of the whole afternoon is that Joe also knows that his children will also have to face an uncertain future according to the premonition. Coping with difficulties in life is something that not even the most loving parents can do for their children. Perhaps Joe drinks to forget how badly life has treated him, but also to become unaware of the fact that his children are not exempted from many of the bad moments that he has suffered. Both Maria and Joe seem to follow different paths in their live, but reality is common to both of them. The advantages that Maria might have by her not being married, are also against her happiness sometimes. Conversely, the satisfactions that Joe obtains through her wife and children are an immense source of worries for him. For both of them life is not the earthly paradise that they would like it to be.

To sum up, I would say that once the story is finished the readers feel more at ease about the circumstances surrounding Maria's life. We know how her life is, whom she loves and what her prospects in life might be. Apart from the reference to Old Balfe, all the other characters in the story are easily located by the reader in the textual universe of discourse. Eventually, the whole story makes sense and constitutes a perfect narratorial unit on its own. In this way, the readers do not need any reference either to future facts, or to previous ones in order to have complete understanding of the story.

CONCLUSIONS

In the present article I have tried to describe the pragmatic approach in terms of Implicature that can be applied to a literary text. This approach enables the reader to understand the

meaning that the author of a literary text tries to convey, just relying on the actual sentences, rather than on any previous background knowledge regarding the author, or the circumstances of composition of the text.

The technique that Joyce uses to make the reader work out implicatures along the text is mainly based upon the presentation of the several elements of discourse in a cataphoric way. Therefore, the new characters and situations are new to the reader, but apparently form part of the background knowledge of the imaginary world within the narrative. This mode of presentation forces the reader to look ahead in the discourse in order to make full sense of all the 'loose threads' that keep arising in the reading. In this way, implicatures are the only available resource that permits the reader to follow the evolution of the text, while his or her mind creates a universe of situation for the characters and their behaviour. These assumptions will be later confirmed or dismissed as the new information is presented in the text.

Summing up, I would say that this text by Joyce constitutes a very neat example of how all the information included in any piece of literary discourse is essential for the understanding of its meaning. Furthermore, it also shows how the reader has to be very attentive to all the minute details of the text, expecting their relevance in the subsequent discourse. In this way the writer makes the reader become involved in the development of the action.

On the whole, the final conclusion might be that a good literary text is a complete piece of art which can be self-explanatory. Some knowledge of the spatio-temporal circumstances of composition might be useful for the understanding of a literary text, but this knowledge need not be essential.

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