

Color as Metaphor—A Study of Joyce’s Use of “Black” and “Green” in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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Received: September 10, 2015 Accepted: September 27, 2015 Online Published: November 29, 2015

doi:10.5539/ells.v5n4p61 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ells.v5n4p61>

Abstract

In a literary work, color is often employed to create a certain atmosphere, portray the characters or convey the author’s emotions. The eleven basic colors frequently appear in James Joyce’s two early works, *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, carrying with them rich metaphorical implications. This reveals Joyce’s expert use of color as metaphor.

From the perspective of the theory of conceptual metaphor, this thesis analyzes the complicated metaphorical meanings of the color black in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, which is the keynote in the two works and also the color green, which is the national color of Ireland, mainly endowed with a metaphorical meaning of rottenness. In these two works, “black” and “green” are found to be endowed with both positive and negative metaphorical meanings, producing an ironic effect, which in some way, reveals Joyce’s complicated feelings about his motherland. His use of the colors black and green as metaphors draws our attention to the fact that when he was writing these two works, he intended to express his detestation of the evilness of the Irish Catholic church, the decay of Irish politics, the corruption of Irish education and the decline of Irish society, though at the same time, he was still emotionally attached to his motherland, Ireland.

Keywords: Joyce, color, black, green, metaphor

1. Introduction

James Joyce regards color as one of the three basic elements of art. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he asserts through the mouth of Stephen Dedalus that “... often from sound and shape and color which are the prison gates of our soul, an image of the beauty we have come to understand” (1992, p. 201). His two early works *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* abound in color words. A few critics have noticed his expert use of colors in his early fiction. Brian Phillips says, “Stephen associates the two colors (Note 1) with the way Irish politics are played out among the members of his own family” (1992, p. 43). The Chinese scholar, Guo Jun talks briefly about the green eyes of the queer old man in “Encounter” (2005, pp. 52-59). However, very few critics have conducted a systematic study of Joyce’s use of any color as metaphor in his two early works, and its underlying meanings and significant functions remain to be clarified.

2. Color as Conceptual Metaphor

A careful reading of *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* helps us to see that Joyce uses color as conceptual metaphor, which is viewed as the cross-domain mapping between the source and the target domains based on human experiences. Through the process of mapping, the target domain is understood by the source domain based on people’s physical experiences and cultural environments. Lakoff and Johnson point out, “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” (1980, p. 3) Conceptual metaphor is a product of the way human beings are and the way they interact with their physical and cultural environments. In the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor, metaphor is viewed as a stable and systematic relationship between the two conceptual domains.

Color, as an essential element of art, and an indispensable part of life, is closely related to man’s way of knowing the world. In *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, Joyce consciously uses a large number of words related to the eleven basic colors, and they all have their metaphorical meanings. Like a painter, he captures and renders different colors in order to present a colorful social vista. Actually what kind of color metaphor a writer uses is

determined either by his perception of color and his physical and cultural environments. Based on his own perceptions of different colors and his physical and cultural environments, Joyce often adopts color codes to construct a certain atmosphere, to portray the special feature of a character or to convey his own emotions.

In *A Portrait*, Stephen often uses colors as metaphors. When raising his eyes to look at the drifting clouds, he contemplates:

“Words. Was it their colors ... No, it was not their colors: it was the poise and balance of the period itself... was it that ... he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language many colored and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose.” (Joyce, 1992, pp. 160-161)

Through Stephen’s meditation, Joyce suggests that the colors in his works are not just colors but carry with them emotional implications.

Joyce is greatly influenced by Giordano Bruno’s theory of an ultimate unity and its terrestrial division into contraries. Therefore, his writings often seem to unify various oppositions. “One of his unexpected fusions takes place between beauty and its opposite... To Joyce, the juxtaposition is easy and natural. The river is lovely and filthy; Dublin is dear and dirty; so are the mind and body...” (1959, p. 4) This is also the case with the colors in these two works. His frequently used color metaphors are often endowed with both positive meanings and negative meanings, which implicitly shows Joyce’s complicated and contradictory feelings about Ireland: his discontent with the country’s status quo and his subtle emotional attachment to it.

On 29 August 1904, he wrote to Nora and expressed his dissatisfaction with the country:

“My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity-home, the recognized virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines...I cursed the system which had made her (Note 2) a victim... Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do. I cannot enter the social order except as a vagabond...” (Joyce, 1975, p. 25-27)

However, Joyce was emotionally attached to his motherland. When he was in Trieste, “he had often considered returning to Ireland” (p. 38); and later in his life, when people asked him if he would go back to Ireland, he replied, “Have I ever left it?” (Ellmann, 1959, p. 415) Richard Ellmann, the famous biographer of James Joyce, points out that one of Joyce’s themes is “his bond to Dublin”, and he says, “If he came to terms with absence, it was by bringing Ireland with him, in his memories, and in the persons of his wife, his brother, his sister.” (p. 302)

This kind of complex feelings is mainly a result of Joyce’s life experience in Ireland in the early twentieth-century. At that time Ireland was still a colony of the British Empire, and the Roman Catholic Church still had an enormous impact on its religious, social and political life. Joyce believed that the Irish were “foolish, comic, motionless and corrupted” (Joyce, 1975, p. 328) under the control of both the British Empire and the Roman Catholic Church. His father was an ardent nationalist, while his mother was a devoted Catholic. The two prevalent trends in the Irish society - the narrow-minded nationalism and the ossified religion - constituted a dismal atmosphere of an awful environment in which Joyce was brought up. As a result, he often uses color as metaphor to create a gloomy atmosphere in his works.

Does it mean that Joyce has his contract with the colors of the time when he is writing? Philip Ball points out that “Before we can gain a clear understanding of where technological considerations enter the decision, we must appreciate the social and cultural factors at work on the artist’s attitudes. In the end, each artist makes his or her own contract with the colors of the time.” (Ball, 2001, p. 5)

3. Metaphorical Interpretation of the Colors Black and Green

3.1 The Color Black as a Metaphor

Joyce holds that the dismal atmosphere of Dublin at that time severely restricted his talent, and he regards Ireland as “a place which threatened the artist’s freedom and integrity, in which gifts were wasted and language was used as a deadly weapon” (Deane, 2000, p. 39). Therefore, in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* he uses the color black as a metaphor to construct a gloomy and depressing atmosphere of the city and to express his idea about the distasteful social environment. The words and phrases related to the color black, such as “dark”, “pitch dark”, “somber”, “dusky”, “blackened”, “darkened”, “dull” and “soutane”, help to present the keynote of these two works. In *Dubliners*, almost all the rooms are dark, while in *A Portrait* most of the streets and corridors are dark. Moreover, most of the colors used in the two works are mixtures of black and another color, such as grey, maroon, blue, purple and terra-cotta.

The major way in which metaphor is grounded is perceptual or biological, linguistic or cultural. And the way in which people react to color is affected by a mixture of physiological and sociological factors, thus, the two-domains of color metaphor derive from people's biological and cultural root. Mainly due to the perceptual basis, the color black is usually associated with something negative or unfavorable. In Joyce's two works, most of the words and phrases related with black have negative connotations and often imply things like "corruption", "death", "stagnation" or "depression" because Joyce's intention is to express his detestation of the corruption of Irish religion, politics, education and social life. But sometimes these words carry with them favorable implications like "attractiveness" and "freedom", because he wants to express the other side of his mixed feelings about his motherland.

3.1.1 Black as a Metaphor for the Evilness of the Irish Roman Catholic Church

In *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, almost all the priests are dressed in black or red copes with "soutane sleeves". Most of the chapels are "dark"; and the prayer books are "blackened". The frequent occurrence of "black copes", "soutane sleeves", "dark chapels" and "blackened prayer books" metaphorically suggests the evilness of Catholicism. *Dubliners* begins with the death of Father Flynn, and Joyce makes the priest's actual paralysis "a symptom of the general paralysis with which Ireland was afflicted" (Ellmann, 1959, p. 169). He says in a letter to his brother, Stanislaus, "I quite see, of course, that the church is still, as it was in the time of Adrian IV, the enemy of Ireland: but I think her time is almost up." (Joyce, 1975, p. 125)

As the perceptual way is one of the two major ways in which metaphor is grounded. Joyce seems to intentionally stress the priests' "soutane sleeves", which occur ten times in his two works, with the purpose of inspiring his readers to associate them with the evilness and corruption of the priests. Moreover, the pronunciation of "soutane" is similar to that of "Satan", by which Joyce implicitly suggests that the priests are as evil as Satan. At the beginning of *A Portrait*, when Stephen is sent to Clongowes Wood College, he says goodbye to his parents, and at the door of the castle, he sees the rector's "soutane fluttering in the breeze". (Joyce, 1992, p. 4) And then he is wrongly pandyated by the "soutane sleeve" of Father Dolan. From that moment on, he is very nervous to see the "soutane" or to hear the "swish of the soutane".

Joyce's description of the "blackened prayer book", "dark silent sacristy" and "dark wooden presses where the crimped surplices lay quietly folded" (Joyce, 1992, p. 4) implies that not only the priests but the whole Roman Catholic Church is evil and corrupted. In the story "Grace", he boldly reveals that the Irish religion has become a respectable disguise for mammonism: Father Purdon calls himself a "spiritual accountant" and asks his listeners to "open his (own) books, the books of his spiritual life, and see if they tallied accurately with conscience" (Joyce, 1990, p. 141).

3.1.2 Black as a Metaphor for the Decay of Irish Politics

In Joyce's time, Ireland was a British colony, where after the failure of the Irish liberation and death of its leader Charles Stewart Parnell, its politics was in a mess and the Irish people's hope for a free and independent nation was crashed. In the story "Ivy Day in the Committee Room", Joyce describes Irish politics as mercenary triviality. "Mr. O'Connor tore a strip off the card and, lighting it, lit his cigarette. As he did so the flame lit up a leaf of dark glossy ivy in the lapel of his coat." (Joyce, 1990, p. 94) The ivy leaf Mr. O'Connor wears is a dark symbol of Parnell, which suggests the decay of Irish politics, because it is believed that Parnell's death is ascribed to the treachery and blindness of Irishmen. In the story, none of the characters have energy or animation for the election. They just come and go, talk and drink in the committee room. Most of their conversations are concerned with drinks or with getting paid by the candidate rather than the election. The debate over whether the proposed visit of the English King, Edward VII to Ireland is welcomed or not ironically ends in an argument over whether the visit would be good for trade or it would bring "an influx of money into this country" (Joyce, 1990, p. 104).

Greatly embittered by the death of Parnell, Joyce implicitly expresses his anxiety about the decay of Irish politics. He regards Ireland as "the old sow that eats her fallow". (Joyce, 1992, p. 198) In an attempt to use his art as a means to reclaim autonomy for Ireland, he proclaims that the artist should "like the God of the creation, remain within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (p. 209). He could not help yelling out, "Welcome, O life, I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." (p. 247) He sees Ireland as a colony slumped into a state of embarrassment: it could not cast off British rule in its politics, and the control of the Roman Catholic Church in its religion. His use of black as a metaphor reveals his worry about the decay of his country's politics.

3.1.3 Black as a Metaphor for the Corruption of Irish Education

In Joyce's two works, Irish educational institutions, represented by the Clongowes Wood College, Belvedere and the University College of Dublin, are shrouded by the depressing atmosphere of religious and nationalist extremism. The former suffers from the double oppression of Britain intruders and Protestant asceticism while the latter shows its resistance to imperial cultural constitutions and its narrow cultural enclosure. Joyce believes that these factors cause the two schools to become inanimate and suffocating. "Sometimes he talked with Maria Jolas about education, and attacked Catholic method ... that in Ireland Catholicism is black magic." (Ellmann, 1959, p. 743) He uses the color black as a metaphor to express his indignation at the corruption of Irish education. The dark narrow corridors of the schools in *A Portrait* are symbolic descriptive details that bear similar emotional suggestions. At the Clongowes Wood College, the corridors to the chapel are "darkly lit"; the "corridor that led to the castle" is "low dark narrow" and the corridor that led to the rector's room is also dark. At the University College of Dublin, "the corridor which led to the physics theatre" is "dark and silent" (Joyce, 1992, p. 178).

When Stephen is wrongly punished by Father Dolan and ridiculed by his classmates, he decides to denounce Father Dolan to the rector. After succeeding in reporting on Dolan, he is very excited at his own heroic act. However, he is "again in the low narrow dark corridor and he began to walk faster and faster" (Joyce, 1992, p. 51). What makes Stephen frustrated and angry is that he later finds out that the rector has never taken his report seriously but regards it as a joke. Joyce shows his disgust with the rotten Irish educational system by describing the atmosphere of the Clongowes Wood College and its effect on Stephen in *Stephen Hero*: "the deadly chill of the atmosphere of the college paralyzed Stephen's heart. In a stupor of powerlessness, he reviewed the plague of Catholicism." (Deane, 2000, p. 31) The college is described as being filled with "the troubling odour" (p. 154).

3.1.4 Black as a Metaphor for the Decline of Irish Society

In Joyce's two works, he wields a sharp pen against the decline of Irish society, which is epitomized by the city Dublin, where not only the corridors in the schools are dark but the rooms, stairs, streets, land and sea are dark or blackened. Even the Dubliners' eyes are dark. The frequent metaphorical use of the color helps to present his emotion about Irish society, which, as he witnesses, is on the decline.

In *Dubliners*, we see that almost all the characters live, stay or move in dark places. Father Flynn lives in a "little dark room"; Maggan's sister whom the little boy loves stays "at the dark house"; Eveline is "in the close, dark room" thinking about eloping; Farrington feels safe "in the dark snug of O' Neill's shop" (Joyce, 1990, p. 67); Mrs Sinico dates Mr. Duffy in a "dark discreet room"; Stephen often passes the dark hall in Clongowes. At the beginning of the story "Araby", Joyce uses the word "dark" three times in the following description:

"The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses...to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables ..." (Joyce, 1990, p. 15)

This is obviously an effort to render a depressing atmosphere of the Irish society of Joyce's time and also to gloss a sense of heaviness. This sets the basic keynote for the whole book, and mirrors the "darkness" of the Irish people's spiritual world. It implies that their society is lifeless and decadent like a desert. The desolate garden in "Araby" is presumably a symbol of the desolation of their spiritual Eden where their morality has been deteriorating. When the hero in the story arrives at Araby, the sacred temple of love in his heart, "the greater part of the hall is in darkness", and then, he "hears a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light is out. The upper part of the hall is completely dark" (Joyce, 1990, p. 23). Realizing that his hope has been crushed, the boy plunges into despair, saying "gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (p. 24).

The "dark and dirty street", which frequently appears in the two books, implicitly suggests the decline of the Irish social environment, which hinders the Dubliners from going further. It also mirrors Stephen's disconsolation and despair in the process of growing up. The image of Dublin's dark and dirty street is deeply-rooted in Stephen's heart, so much that whenever he is lonely or feels gloomy, he would wander alone in the street. What he sees in the street makes a substantially negative impact on his personality and his psychological growth is severely hampered: "He bore cynically with the shameful details of his secret riots in which he exulted to defile with patience whatever image had attracted his eyes. By day and by night he moved among distorted images of the outer world." (Joyce, 1992, p. 92) In Stephen's eyes, the society like Dublin's streets is a kind of trap, bond or burden, which produces an adverse effect on his growth into maturity in a normal way.

In such a social environment many of the characters in these two books are not respectable normal people,

instead they are drunkards, cheats, child batterers, boasters, gossips, and schemers; and most of them are failures in life and are quite ignorant. These people usually have “dark eyes” or “black eyes”. In “Sisters”, Mr. Cotter has “little beady black eyes”; in *A Portrait*, Mr. Casey has “dark flaming eyes”; the Rector has “dark stern eyes”; the tall consumptive student Cranley and his schoolmate Temple have dark eyes. “Perhaps the secret of her race (Note 3) lay behind those dark eyes” (Joyce, 1992, p. 215), “Dark eyes”, hereupon, is a metaphor for the many Irish people’s “ignorance” of and their “blindness” to the decline of their society.

In Joyce’s works, Dublin is a city with dark rooms, corridors and streets, and a world of “squalor and noise and sloth” (Joyce, 1992, p. 171). It is just “a strait and dark and foul-smelling prison”. It is “a never ending storm of darkness, dark flames and dark smoke of burning brimstone” where people had “eyes with impenetrable utter darkness, nose with noisome odours, ears with yells and corruption” (Joyce, 1992, pp. 113-116). His repeated use of the color black as a metaphor suggests his depression, loneliness, anxiety, fear, and even despair when such a gloomy atmosphere arises against his country. Just like Stephen, he is unable to find a way out. Stephen regards Ireland as a place full of nets, which prevents him from escaping. He says, “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.” (p. 197) On 23 June, 1906, in a letter to Grant Richards, Joyce professed, “You will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.” (1975, p. 90)

With his color metaphor as an artistic technique, Joyce represents the true Ireland and the true Irishmen, who do not dare to face the social reality of their country and to acknowledge their own weaknesses. He expresses his strong dissatisfaction with the country’s status quo, and complains about the weakness of its people represented by the Dubliners, and “Dubliners are the most hopeless, useless and inconsistent race of charlatans I have ever come across.” (Ellmann, 1959, p. 225) However, no matter how critical Joyce is of the Irish people, he has a kind of sympathy and compassion with them. In a letter to Stanislaus, Joyce claimed, “I think the Irish are the most civilized people in Europe.” (1975, p. 139) Just as Dedalus smugly conceives, “I want puce gloves and green boots. Contradiction. Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself.” (Joyce, 1975, p. 17) In his works, Joyce also discloses his contradictory feelings about Ireland by using the color black as a metaphor with favorable implications like the pursuit of freedom and attractiveness.

3.1.5 Black as a Metaphor for Attractiveness or Pursuit of Freedom

“Black” in these two works also carries with it favorable meanings such as the pursuit of “freedom” and “attractiveness”. In the story “Eveline”, when the heroine arrives at the quay and plans to elope with her lover, she catches “a glimpse of the black mass of the boat” (Joyce, 1990, p. 28). At the end of *A Portrait*, when Stephen has decided to leave his home, he writes down in a diary about “the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations” (Joyce, 1992, p. 247). In their respective contexts, the black mass of the boat and the arms of tall ships are associated with the characters’ longing for “freedom”. They imply that both Eveline and Stephen struggle to escape from the bonds of family in Ireland and leave for another country to pursue their freedom.

In chapter five of *A Portrait*, when Stephen stands on the steps of the library, he sees “dark quivering bodies” which are metaphorically associated with “freedom”. Stephen watches the flying swallows and croons:

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel,

I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes

Upon the nest under the eave before

He wonders the loud waters. (Joyce, 1990, p. 5)

“Symbol of departure or of loneliness?” (p. 5) Stephen wonders. However, “the dark frail quivering bodies wheeling and fluttering and swerving round an airy temple of the tenuous sky soothed this eyes which still saw the image of his mother’s face” (p. 5). He intends to escape but he cannot forget his mother. As it is said that *A Portrait* is an autobiography of Joyce to some extent, hereon, Joyce implies his deep attachment to his mother, or rather, his motherland after he has left Ireland.

In *A Portrait*, Joyce describes Emma’s dark eyes several times, which are so beautiful and attractive that they “invite and unnerve” (Joyce, 1990, p. 62) Stephen. And when Little Chandler looks into the eyes of his wife on a photograph, “He thought of what Gallaher had said about rich Jewesses. Those dark Oriental eyes, he thought, how full they are of passion, of voluptuous longing” (p. 62). Little Chandler begins to show his discontentment with his wife’s cold eyes after he hears about the attractive “dark Oriental eyes”. When Gretta, Gabriel’s wife thinks of her first lover, she passionately exclaims, “Such eyes as he had: big, dark eyes! And such an expression

in them—an expression!” (p. 178) Gretta still cannot forget the expressive “dark eyes” though her first lover is dead and she has become Gabriel’s wife. All the “dark” images mentioned above carry with them the favorable implications of the pursuit of “freedom” or “attractiveness”. And Joyce’s use of the color black as a metaphor with these favorable implications reveals his recognition of the merits of his people in spite of the corruption and decadence of his country.

3.2 *The Color Green as a Metaphor*

According to Ellmann, Joyce once complained that Ireland was “an untilled field. The government sowed hunger, syphilis, superstition and alcoholism there; puritans, Jesuits and bigots have sprung up” (1959, p. 225). And in 1905 Joyce said to Grant Richards that the book (*Dubliners*) was written “for the most part, in a style of scrupulous meanness” (p. 79).

Joyce’s use of colors in his works is determined by his perception of color, Irish culture and his own experience. “Green” is the national color of Ireland, which is called the Emerald Isle. Thomas Moore (1779-1852), Ireland’s national poet, calls it “green isle” in his collection of “Irish Melodies”. However, Joyce’s use of the color green is much more sophisticated.

In *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, there are many examples to show Joyce’s recognition of green as the national color of Ireland. In the story “Ivy Day in the Committee Room”, the Irish nationalists wear the green “ivy leaf” to commemorate Charles Stewart Parnell, the famous leader of the Irish independence movement; “the street in Ireland is full of green buses”; (Boll, 2005, p. 94) and even the uniform of the Celtics football team is green. However, when Joyce’s mother was dying, “by her bedside on the table was a china bowl filled with the green bile torn from her rotting liver.” (Costello, 1992, p. 211) The green bile made him feel nauseated and haunted him for the rest of his lifetime. According to Peter Costello, even the green sea could stir Joyce to “recall to his memory the bowl of green bile torn from his mother’s rotting liver” (p. 225). This is also mentioned in his later work, *Ulysses*. In Joyce’s eyes, a rotten thing often looks green. The repeated appearance of the foul “turf-coloured bogwater” and the green eyes in *A Portrait* and *Dubliners* reveals his intention to expose the corruption and decadence of the Irish society. However, green, the color of plants in their prime, can be seen everywhere especially in spring, and it is also a symbol of “rebirth”, “vitality” or “hope”. Cognitive linguistics lays emphasis on the fact that conventional metaphors are usually unconscious mappings, pervasive in everyday language while literary metaphors are normally just creative extensions and elaborations of these conventional mappings (Lakoff & Turner, 1989, pp. 67-72). In other words, literary metaphors are more creative than conventional metaphors. Although the contradictory metaphorical meanings of the color green in Joyce’s works produce an effect of irony, this color metaphor reveals his unexpected fusing of contradictory feelings about Ireland.

3.2.1 Green as a Metaphor for the Evilness of the Irish Roman Catholic Church

In the story “Grace”, when Mr. Kernan, who intends to convert to Catholicism, arrives with his friends at the church to hear Father Purdon preach, “The light of the lamps of the church fell...on dark mottled pillars of green marble and on lugubrious canvases.” (Joyce, 1990, p. 139) The dark mottled pillar of “green marble” is symbolic evilness of the Irish Roman Catholic Church. What Mr. Kernan hears in the church is the priests’ misinterpretation of the Catholic doctrines. The priests’ comparing Christ to an accountant implies that in a commercialized society, even a priest does not have proper respect for his religion. Mr. Kernan is one of these people who go to church as a habit, not because of his religious belief. In *A Portrait*, green is also used as a metaphor for people’s disgust with the doctrines of the rotten Irish religion. After hearing the rector’s terrifying sermon about hell, Stephen sees “a faint marshlight struggling upwards from all the ordure through the bristling grey-green weeds,” and smells “an evil smell, faint and foul as the light, curled upwards sluggishly out of the canisters and from the stale crusted dung” (Joyce, 1992, p. 131). The image of the “grey-green weeds” metaphorically conveys Stephen’s disgust with the rigid religious doctrines which place great burdens and bonds on the young people in Ireland.

3.2.2 Green as a Metaphor for the Corruption of Irish Education

The University College where Joyce studied in 1898 is sometimes used in his works as a symbol of Irish education. “Founded in 1854 by John Henry Newman for the Irish Catholic hierarchy and placed in the hands of the Jesuits in the early 1880s,” the school was “heady with ambition and rising of nationalist fervor in which the arts and literature came second to the practical affairs of man and nation” (Costello, 1992, pp. 158-159). However, Joyce dislikes its education system which pays more attention to politics rather than arts and literature and he reveals the corruption of this kind of education system in his fictions. Here the color green is often associated with “rotteness”. A case in point is the “turf-coloured bogwater” in Clongowes Wood College. Joyce

presents this image to show his condemnation of the staleness and rottenness of Irish education under the control of the Roman Catholic Church when Ireland was reduced to a colony of Britain. The memory of the “turf-coloured bogwater” stirs Stephen “with a vague fear” (Joyce, 1992, p. 17). When the director asks him to consider whether he would accept the position of priest at the college, “the troubling odour of the long corridors of Clongowes came back to him ... He smelt again the moist warm air which hung in the bath in Clongowes above the sluggish turf-coloured water.” (p. 155) The disgusting smell of the “turf-coloured bogwater” impels him to stoutly turn down the offer. He believes that the whole school is filled with “a faint mortal odour rising from the earth”, and “he knew that in a moment when he entered the sombre college he would be conscious of a corruption other than that of Buck Egan and Burnchapel Whaley” (p. 178).

3.2.3 Green as a Metaphor for the Moral Decline of Irish Society

In *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, Joyce uses the color green as a metaphor to reveal the decline of Irish society. His description of Maria, a self-deceptive and pretentious character, in the story “Clay”, exemplifies this function of the “green” metaphor.

Maria is an Irish spinster with “grey-green eyes”. Although she knows clearly that she is not comfortable with her life and the people around her, she still pretends to live in harmony with them. After a considerable making-up, she goes to her brother’s party, and she is rather disappointed when she fails to attract people’s attention on the tram to Joe’s home, and “none of the young men seemed to notice her but an elderly gentleman made room for her” (Joyce, 1990, p. 37). She pretends never to care about her marriage, but in fact she cares a lot about it, and often indulges herself in some fantasies. When a shopping assistant asks her whether she wants a wedding cake, she blushes; before the Hallow eve, her colleagues make jokes about whether she would get married, she laughs with shyness in her “grey-green” eyes. This shows that she actually cares much about marriage, but still she deceives herself and pretends not to care about it. “This kind of self-deception that we often see around us is exactly one symptom of spiritual paralysis.” (Wang, 2002, p. 127) The characterization of green-eyed Maria shows Joyce’s idea about the moral decline of Irish society.

In the story “Two Gallants”, two young tramps, Corley and Lenehan, connive to entrap a gold coin from Corley’s girlfriend. This mean fraudulence happens is at Stephen’s Green, which appears five times in the story. In this context, green is not simply part of the name of a place but it suggests metaphorically the moral decadence of the Irish society, as “the shaded walk around the Green was a well-known haunt of prostitutes.” (Costello, 1992, p. 226)

3.2.4 Green as a Metaphor for the Irish Hope for Peace and the Pursuit of Freedom

Generally speaking, the color green is associated with the hope for peace and freedom. Although Joyce often uses green as a metaphor to express his detestation of the evilness of the Irish Roman Catholic Church, the corruption of Irish education, and the moral decline of Irish society, the images related with this color sometimes bears the positive metaphorical implications of the Irish hope for peace.

At the beginning of *A Portrait*, Little Stephen sings a song as below, which foreshadows his hope for the end of the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants, and between Ireland and Britain.

O, the wild rose blossoms

On the little green place (Joyce, 1992, p. 1)

Aunt Dante swashes that Little Stephen must apologize or the eagles will pull out his eyes, only because he says he is going to marry Eileen, a daughter of a Protestant. Later, in a class for the competition of sums, Stephen stands for the York team with a white rose, while his classmate Jack Lawton stands for the Lancaster team with a red rose (Note 4). During the class, Stephen wonders, “You could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could” (p. 160). This suggests that Stephen hopes to find peace in this complicated world. The boy’s hope is the Irish people’s hope. By using a green rose as a metaphor, Joyce expresses Irish people’s hope for the end of the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants, between Ireland and Britain.

When the Director offers Stephen the position of a priest in the church, he turns it down, because he wishes to be an artist, and hopes to have the freedom to do what he wants to do rather than to be controlled by the church. Then he goes to a beach where he can move freely and sees a girl whose long slender bare legs are delicate “as a crane’s and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh” (p. 162). Stephen’s sudden vision of the “emerald trail of seaweed” metaphorically implies his hope for freedom and suggests that he is finally able to throw off the bonds of Catholicism, freely devoting himself to his pursuit of art. So in his works, Joyce has used color as a metaphor to pluck the strings of the emotions: “Generally speaking,

color directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, and the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key after another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.” (Ball, 2001, p. 23)

4. Conclusion

Color words to a literary work are like color paints to a painting. The application of proper tint, chroma and hue is the key to the success of a painting and the skillful use of color words contributes to the success of a literary work. Joyce exerts great effort to choose appropriate colors to paint his “pictures” of Ireland and its people. Through the analysis of Joyce’s use of the colors black and green as metaphors in his two early works, it is found that Joyce’s use of the black or green images successfully constructs a gloomy and depressing atmosphere of Ireland, presents a vivid picture of the evilness of the Irish Catholic church, the decay of Irish politics, the corruption of Irish education and the decline of Irish society, and at the same time reveals his complex feelings about his country and his countrymen: he is still emotionally attached to his motherland while he keeps expressing his detestation of it and its people.

Lakoff and Johnson suggest that when we live by the metaphors as we do in our culture, we tend not to see them as metaphors at all. However, we would get unexpected insight if we pay enough attention to the metaphorical concepts already internalized and entrenched in our life as well as in literature. This thesis discusses only a small part of Joyce’s expertise in using colour as metaphor, which enriches the whole picture of Ireland and its people.

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Notes

Note 1. The two colors refer to green and maroon.

Note 2. Her refers to Joyce’s mother

Note 3. Her race refers to the Irish nation.

Note 4. The civil war between the house of York and Lancaster in England that lasted from 1455-1487 is well-known as the War of the Roses.

Note 5. List of abbreviations: *A Portrait: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man; Letters: Selected Letters of James Joyce*.

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