

Student Essay on Mr. Duffy in James Joyce's "A Painful Case"

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Contents

Student Essay on Mr. Duffy in James Joyce's "A Painful Case"	1
Contents.....	2
Essay.....	3

Essay

"Mr Duffy abhorred anything which betokened physical or mental disorder." This is notion is quite evident when examining Mr. Duffy's living arrangements, occupation, and daily routine.

It is quickly evident that Mr. Duffy is a very independent sort, he seems the type that requires order and structure in everything aspect of his life. When examining Mr. Duffy's room we learn that his furniture is minimal, ranging from a bed, washstand, chairs, clothes rack, and a table with a desk on top of it. His room is not colorful or cluttered; rather it is made of white bedding, a white lamp shade, white book case, and lofty walls with no pictures. The only splash of color is a scarlet and black rug on the foot of his bed. We see more evidence of his attention to order when we learn the arrangement of books on his book shelf are "arranged from below upwards according to bulk." (p. 103) Even his desk is orderly with writing materials, a manuscript, stage directions, written specifically in purple ink, and a sheaf of papers organized by a brass pin.

Learning about Mr. Duffy's occupation, we discover that he has been in the same position for many years, thus providing consistency as a form of order. He works as a cashier in a private bank, a very predictable, day-in-day-out position to support his need for regulation. As we read further into the story, Mr. Duffy stays in this position for four more years, continuing his same occupational routine.

There is no question Mr. Duffy is routine in nature. Nothing seems to vary from day to day. Each morning he travels to the bank by tram, eats lunch at Dan Burke's consisting of a lager beer and arrowroot biscuits, upon the end of his workday, which ends promptly at four o'clock, he dines at George Street. His evenings too were predictable; they "were spent either at his landlady's piano or roaming about the outskirts of the city." The only exception to this rule was an occasional visit to the opera or a concert.

Had Mr. Duffy been a colorful sort, able to manage change in environment and schedules he would have been a very different man. Instead, we learn that based on Mr. Duffy's daily routines, occupation and living arrangements, he is not only mentally orderly, but also physically orderly.