

1 *My father and mother should have stayed in New York where they met and married and where I was born. Instead, they returned to Ireland when I was four, my brother, Malachy, three, the twins, Oliver and Eugene, barely one, and my sister, Margaret, dead and gone.*

5 *When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood.*

10 *People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years.*

Paragraph 1 (l. 1-4)

1. List the members of the family

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2. Say what the narrator regrets

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Paragraph 2 (l. 5-8)

3. What is, according to the narrator, the worse childhood possible ?

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Paragraph 3 (l. 9-12)

4. Find the equivalents of the following words (in the order of the text)

se vanter		geindre/gémir	
malheurs/ infortunes		apathique	
pieuse		qui pleurniche	

5. What adjectives qualify the father ? the mother ?

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Now, use the information you found to sum up the situation :

- Who is the narrator ? what do you learn about his family , his childhood and the cause of his misery ?
- Can you imagine how he felt about the whole situation ?

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Above all-we were wet.

15 Out in the Atlantic Ocean great sheets of rain gathered to drift slowly up
the River Shannon and settle forever in Limerick. The rain dampened the
city from the Feast of the Circumcision to New Year's Eve. It created a
cacophony of hacking coughs, bronchial rattles, asthmatic wheezes,
20 consumptive croaks. It turned noses into fountains, lungs into bacterial
sponges. It provoked cures galore; to ease the catarrh you boiled onions
in milk blackened with pepper; for the congested passages you made a
paste of boiled flour and nettles, wrapped it in a rag, and slapped it,
sizzling, on the chest.

25 From October to April the walls of Limerick glistened with the damp.
Clothes never dried: tweed and woolen coats housed living things,
sometimes sprouted mysterious vegetations. In pubs, steam rose from
damp bodies and garments to be inhaled with cigarette and pipe smoke
laced with the stale fumes of spilled stout and whiskey and tinged with the
odor of piss wafting in from the outdoor jakes where many a man puked
up his week's wages.

30 The rain drove us into the church-our refuge, our strength, our only dry
place. At Mass, Benediction, novenas, we huddled in great damp clumps,
dozing through priest drone, while steam rose again from our clothes to
mingle with the sweetness of incense, flowers and candles.

Limerick gained a reputation for piety, but we knew it was only the rain.

Paragraph 4 (l. 14-22)

6. Find the English equivalents of the following words

des trombes d'eau		s'accumuler	
dérivé		rendre humide	

7. What were the consequences for the health? (4 answers)

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8. What did you (= people) do to 'cure' the sick ? Quote then comment.

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Paragraph 5 (l.23-29)

9. Pick out words all the words and expressions connected to dampness.

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10. What did people breathe in in pubs ? Pick up the words and expression then comment.

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Paragraph 6 (l. 30-34)

11. Did people go to church out of piety (because they were believers) ?

Answer with your own words then quote the text to make your point.

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