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Silence and Fractals in “The Sisters”

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Mike and Vicki agreed to write two independent ten-page essays on “The Sisters” and to exchange them. They met in a Pizza Express in the Bloomsbury section of London to comment on one another’s drafts. Vicki liked Mike’s essay, but Mike had reservations about Vicki’s: she had outlined a way of understanding the damage that the story alludes to but does not identify, which is exactly what Mike discouraged readers from doing. Moreover, Vicki’s tone was passionate, in sharp contrast to the dispassionate observational acuity that Mike appreciated in the boy and believed the critic should emulate. Vicki ruminated over Mike’s comments for several months, trying to find a way of approaching the story that might accommodate both their perspectives. This essay is the result of that process.

At the gateway of *Dubliners* we find this spare, narratively uneventful story about death and damage told from the sharply perceptive yet uncomprehending perspective of a young boy. We may well look for a Dantean inscription above this “door” to a collection of stories about Dublin:

*Per me si va ne la città dolente.
Per me si va ne l’eterno dolore
Per me si va tra la perduta gente.
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore
fecemi la divina podestate,
la somma sapienza e’l primo amore.*

Through me you go to the grief-wracked city.
 Through me to everlasting pain you go.
 Through me you go and pass among lost souls.
 Justice inspired my exalted Creator.
 I am a creature of the Holiest Power,
 of Wisdom in the Highest and Primal Love.

The inscription ends with the famous words “*Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate*,” which is usually translated, “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here” (Alighieri 2006, 20–21).¹ The reader of “The Sisters” is indeed entering a “grief-wracked city,” the hopelessness of which is marked in the first sentence: “There was no hope for him this time.” In order to explore this urban underworld of stagnation and despair with the requisite sympathy and clarity of mind (with what Dante calls Love as well as Justice), its readers, like its characters, must be willing to postpone the consolation of meaning, defined as a conceptual framework that arranges isolated perceptions into larger patterns. If this hope for immediate apprehension of meaning is not left at the door, readers will be effectively barred from entering the collection of stories, for “The Sisters” is its portal.

Although meaning has been banished from the consciousness of both characters and narrators, the narrator’s responses to sensual stimuli are almost preternaturally acute, and readers would do well to imitate that heightened sensitivity to sight and hearing. Joyce’s underworld is not just the city of Dublin at the turn of the century, but the unconscious minds of his characters. In order to see beneath the textual surface, readers must sharpen their perceptions and delay judgment, reading the silences as well as the words and looking for the geometries of fact and feeling that subtend what is consciously expressed.

Readers of “The Sisters” are immediately confronted with a dilemma, then: given the reluctance of the narrator to explain what is going on, whether to himself or to an imagined audience, is the reader being prompted to generate explanations or to resist them (remembering that to resist explanation

1. Kirkpatrick translates the last line of the inscription differently: “Surrender as you enter every hope you have.”

is to accept the almost surgical delineation of irreparably damaged lives)? Alternatively, if we are prompted to do both, to understand and accept the inevitability of such damage under the prevailing conditions, how might we—with the equal measures of justice and love that characterized the creator of Dante's hell—scrupulously create a context for passing through and beyond the specter of characters hopelessly trapped in their ordinary lives? This interpretive crux is mirrored by what might be called an affective one concerning our reaction to the priest in the story: to what extent do we respect and even admire the priest's fatherly "wish" for the boy, his willingness to mentor him, and to what extent do we interrogate and perhaps deplore the implications of what he has communicated?

The two authors of this essay initially took opposite approaches. Mike underscored the story's insistence on tracing—both in itself and in the figure of the dead priest—what Euclid called a "gnomon." He pointed out that this geometrical figure of a parallelogram that has had a smaller parallelogram removed from one of its corners can be described as either "incomplete" (a parallelogram is "missing," requiring the reader to complete it)² or "damaged" (with the emphasis falling on the figure that remains, requiring only that the reader register the damage and acknowledge its irreparability).³ Mike offers the example of how the boy in the story, alone in his bedroom after listening to Old Cotter utter several pronouncements that trail off without conclusion (indicated in the printed text by ellipses), "puzzled [his] head to extract meaning from his unfinished sentences" (*D*, 11). The boy does not

2. Margot Norris refers to what she calls the "familiar notion of gnomonic interpretation" of the stories in *Dubliners*: "The stories are incomplete and require interpretative activity to complete them" (2003, 2–3).

3. Mike cites two different formulas for defining a gnomon: the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of it as incomplete ("the geometric figure that remains after a parallelogram has been removed from a similar but larger parallelogram with which it shares a corner," cited in Herring 1982, 134), and J. Cirlot's characterization of the gnomon as "damaged" in his *Dictionary of Symbols* (quoted in Jackson and McGinley 1993, 11). This second view is underscored by the way the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *gnomon*, as "the geometric figure that remains after a parallelogram has been removed from a similar but larger parallelogram with which it shares a corner."

try to complete the sentences but merely attempts to draw out—extract—a meaning from the fragments he heard. Here, the text offers one model for how we might go about interpreting it, one that respects its status as a “gnomon” and accords with Derek Attridge’s argument that “there is sometimes a virtue in not interpreting”; “responding fully to a text can mean allowing its otherness to remain other, unassimilable, unconceptualizable, irreducible, resistant” (Attridge 2000, 51). Accepting the priest as simply damaged allows us to temper our expectations of him, thereby leaving us freer to sympathize with the boy, who has just lost the only “father” the story suggests that he has.

Mike also proposed reading the story through the boy’s silences, his refusals to speak or to explain, to fill in the “missing corner” of a gnomon, his uncompromising insistence on seeing “nothing that is not there” and “the nothing that is” (Stevens 1990). Jean-Michel Rabaté underscores the difference between the boy who observes and the adult who narrates when he argues that the boy is not a narrator but an interpreter (the implication being that it is only the adult who narrates [1982, 21]), in contrast to his adult counterpart, whose narration is marked by a “refusal to interpret” this story from his childhood (Norris 2003, 20). In order to note the changing quality of the boy’s silences, it is helpful to separate the story into six scenes: in three of the scenes he is alone (the first scene, in which he stands before Father Flynn’s house looking for a sign that the priest has died; the third scene, when he is in his bedroom after listening to Old Cotter and his aunt and uncle discussing the priest’s death; and the fourth scene, the next morning returning to Father Flynn’s house and reading the sign announcing his death). In the other three, he is with other people (the second scene, in his home with his aunt, uncle, and Old Cotter, when he learns about the priest’s death; the fifth scene, in Father Flynn’s room with his aunt and the priest’s sister Nannie as they observe the corpse in the coffin; and the sixth scene, downstairs in the Flynns’ home with his aunt, Nannie, and the priest’s other sister, Eliza). Two of the scenes in which he is with other people (the second and sixth) are presented as quoted conversations interspersed with the narrator’s observations and comments, whereas the fifth scene, like the three in which the boy is alone, consists entirely of narration.

In the scenes where the boy is with other people, he is, as has often been noted, almost completely silent. Except for two questions near the beginning

of the scene with Old Cotter—"Who?" and "Is he dead?" (*D*, 10)—the boy says nothing aloud anywhere in the story. His silence seems to change as the story progresses: in the first scene it is angry; in the second it becomes more bewildered and conflicted; and finally in the third it is opaque as the narration offers a neutral chronicle, a Joycean epiphany, without any clues to the boy's mental state at the time.

If we note the shifts in the boy's silences, from anger to the awkwardness born of bewilderment, to oblique refusal to comment, we see the boy change. The silences progress, and at the end of the story the boy has become an observer and reporter, a narrator without comment who can become, like Stephen Daedalus in *Stephen Hero*, an objective recorder of epiphanies, what *he* calls "the most delicate and evanescent of moments" (213). As "The Sisters" moves from one scene to the next, the focalization remains constant (everything is seen through the boy's eyes), as do the narrative voice and person (the first-person voice of the older man narrating an event from his childhood). Unexpectedly, though, the relation between the perceiver and what he is recounting does change, gradually growing more distant, even clinical. The final scene of the story resembles Stephen's description of "dramatic" art.⁴ We have the rudiments of Stephen Dedalus's personality here—his precision, his analytical clarity, perhaps also his aloofness—even if only the rudiments. (A detail from the version of the story first published in the *Irish Homestead* is pertinent here: "The Sisters" as it was published there was attributed to "Stephen Daedalus," with Joyce spelling the surname as it was spelled in *Stephen Hero*.)⁵

The boy's gradual change from a reactive participant to a detached observer is clear if we examine the three scenes in which he is silent in the company of others more closely. In the first scene, we see the boy's increasing

4. "The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak" (*P*, 180–81).

5. "The *Irish Homestead* Version of 'The Sisters,'" in J. Joyce 2000a, 190. All subsequent quotations from the *Irish Homestead* will be from this edition.

silent anger as Old Cotter utters his opinions—"I think it was one of those . . . peculiar cases. . . . But it's hard to say . . ."; "It's bad for children. My idea is: let a young lad run about and play with young lads of his own age and not be . . ."; "When children see things like that, you know, it has an effect . . ." (*D*, 10–11). The boy relates, "I knew that I was under observation so I continued eating as if the news had not interested me"; "I felt that his little beady black eyes were examining me"; "I crammed my mouth with stirabout for fear I might give utterance to my anger. Tiresome old red-nosed imbecile!" (*D*, 11). He attributes his anger to Old Cotter's "alluding to me as a child" (*D*, 11), but he has been caught off guard by hearing about the priest's death from adults after he spent days walking by the priest's window to find it out for himself.⁶ The anger is partly annoyance, then, but it is also a finely calibrated and psychologically realistic response to the fact that he has lost a "father."

In the next scene in which the boy is silent before others (the fifth scene of the story, when he, his aunt, and Nannie enter the room where the priest's body is lying), his silence is attributable to discomfort and the requirements of propriety; he is overwhelmed by the solemnity of the occasion. Silent because "it would have been unseemly to have shouted" at the presumably deaf Nannie (*D*, 15), the boy kneels with the women at the foot of the bed but is unable to pray. The narrator states that he was distracted by "the old woman's mutterings" as she prayed and that he noticed "how clumsily her skirt was hooked at the back and how the heels of her cloth boots were trodden down all to one side" (*D*, 16), but a larger distraction is the presence of the corpse of this man who made such a strong and ambivalent impression on him while he was alive and whose death has filled him with such powerfully conflicting feelings, not to mention the presence of death itself. The boy's anger at Old Cotter from the first scene does not seem to carry over here, even though some critics have read the boy's remarks about Nannie's

6. In the *Irish Homestead* version, the narrator explicitly attributes his anger to the fact that Old Cotter learned about the priest's death before he did: "It is often annoying the way people will blunder on what you have elaborately planned for. I was sure he would die at night" (*ibid.*, 191).

clumsily hooked skirt and worn-down boots as an indication that it has. Rather, in an awkward situation, full of implied ritual and solemnity that make him uncomfortable, the boy seems to follow the lead of the adults around him: his aunt "shook hands" with Nannie "for all" instead of talking to her (*D*, 15);⁷ and he enters the room where the priest's body is laid "on tip-toe" (*D*, 15), an unnecessary precaution with a dead body and a deaf sister. As Hugh Kenner has noted, the boy seems to focus on the skirt and boots because "everything that is not of the order of boot-heels is vague, suggestive, and a little frightening"; as with the priest's teachings, which seem confined to facts and details and to rote answers to questions, "everything beyond the level of reality represented by boot-heels is vaguely dangerous: for a grown-up too dangerous to bear thinking about, though a child may feel the fascination of evil, and if unusually tenacious may grow up capable of recording it" (1955, 51–52).

In the third "social" scene (the last scene of the story, in which the boy's aunt converses with Father Flynn's other sister, Eliza), both the boy and Nannie are silent. The boy has become detached without losing any of his capacity for sharp observation; like his mentor, he has become "scrupulous" in his narration. As in the first scene, the conversation is full of gnomonic ellipses, with the aunt unable or unwilling to say "die"—"Did he . . . peacefully?" (*D*, 17)—and Eliza repeatedly offering her own "unfinished sentences" as she tells about Father Flynn's breakdown after the chalice broke: "It was that chalice he broke . . ."; "But still . . ."; "wide-awake and laughing-like softly to himself. . . . So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him . . ." (*D*, 20). The boy reports Eliza's mistaken word choices—"Freeman's General" instead of "Journal" (*D*, 18), "the rheumatic wheels" instead of "pneumatic" (*D*, 19)—as well as her accidental double entendre when she says that her brother's "life was, you might say, crossed" (*D*, 19). All these mistakes, and Eliza's generally poorly educated talk, are reported without comment. The narrator notes that he accepted the offer of sherry but did not eat any

7. In the *Irish Homestead* version, Nannie is described as "almost stone deaf," and "it was no use saying anything to her" (*ibid.*, 192).

of the crackers Nannie offered to him “because I thought I would make too much noise eating them,” a refusal that he feels made Nannie “somewhat disappointed” (*D*, 16; Nannie, like the priest, is “disappointed” and hence “crossed,” both in the Christian sense of bearing a cross or burden but also in the sense that her desires have been crossed or resisted). Later, the boy walks again to the table with the sherry and crackers and “tasted my sherry and then returned quietly to my chair in the corner,” where, with his aunt, he “waited respectfully” for Eliza to resume speaking (*D*, 19).⁸

Mike modeled his own interpretive methodology on that of the boy at the end of the story: he refused to fill in the blanks, to diagnose or heal the damage to priest or text. Instead, he uncompromisingly registers the fact of imperfection and does not allow that fact to obscure the boy’s gratitude to the priest, however ambivalent that gratitude may be. That same method—of registering what is missing, without using it to reconfigure the story as it stands—can be applied to an examination of the textual history of “The Sisters.” It is often said that “The Sisters” is gnomonic in its ellipses, but it is also gnomonic in lacking such other missing elements as narrative connections and explanatory or directive remarks. Joyce’s revisions to the story between its appearance in the *Irish Homestead* and its final form show that, although much was added to the story, some things were, gnomonically, taken away. Joyce added the three words the boy obsesses over (*paralysis*, *gnomon*, *simony*), the dream, the details about what the priest taught him, and the sense of freedom he feels following the priest’s death. But he also removed a great deal: the boy’s feeling that some kind of Providence was directing him to the priest’s house each night (“Three nights in succession I had found myself in Great Britain-street at that hour, as if by Providence” [J. Joyce 2000a, 190]), the priest’s misogynistic dismissal of women and his own silence in relation to them (“He had an egoistic contempt for all women-folk, and suffered all their services to him in polite silence” [ibid., 192]), a fuller picture of Old Cotter (“Old Cotter is the old distiller who owns the batch of prize setters” [ibid., 190]), Nannie’s deafness, and the boy’s explanation

8. As in the other two cases, the *Irish Homestead* offers a fuller explanation: Nannie was silent, and “I said nothing either, being too young” (ibid.).

that he stayed silent at the end because he was a boy. These details that Joyce removed, once known, cannot be forgotten (Jerome McGann has remarked that if you know the thirty-line version of Marianne Moore's poem "Poetry," you supply the rejected version as an virtual alternative, a "close encounter of a third kind," when you read the revised three-line version [1988, 87]), but they also cannot be put back in to the extent that they serve as explanations, or fill in the missing corner. They may be compatible with the details in the finished story (the priest's apparent neglect of his serving sisters, the need to speak very loudly to Nannie), but they are not the only possible explanations.

In this sense J. E. Cirlot's definition of a "gnomon" as a "damaged rectangle" is intriguing and appropriate. "The Sisters" is full of damaged characters, the priest especially but also the sisters and the boy, and even the story itself may be seen as damaged. The impulse is to try to heal, to cure, and understandably much criticism of the story tries to restore the missing corner, to turn the gnomon back into the parallelogram. But it seems to Mike that there is no "answer" to the gaps in "The Sisters"; to provide one is the equivalent of filling in the corner of the gnomon. Rather, reading is a process of understanding the nature of the gap, the wound, the damage. Father Flynn suffered a breakdown, and its nature—physical, mental, moral, or a combination of two or more of these—remains unspecified. His sisters experienced the breakdown of a brother who had honored the family by entering the priesthood but whose collapse and neglect probably disappointed them, just as he had been disappointed by his life and the church. The boy faces the death of an older man who was obviously extremely important to him as a father figure and an authority who had introduced him to church mysteries, but who had also filled him with ambivalence toward both his teachings and his very being. "The Sisters" presents these situations with a combination of compassion and objective clarity, even coldness (Joyce referred to the stories in *Dubliners* as "my nicely polished looking-glass" [*Letters I*, 64]). The narrative point of view is similar to the perspective in the first chapters of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (specifically, the final scene in "The Sisters" resembles the three "He was sitting" vignettes in chapter 2 of *Portrait* [*P*, 56–57]). Mike agrees with Kenner that the boy's emphasis on the importance of mundane details like dresses and boots is a safe alternative to impenetrable and inscrutably dangerous mysteries. Out of respect for the

stringency of Joyce's realism, it is crucial that readers not restore the gnomon to the parallelogram it once was.

VICKI'S INITIAL APPROACH was at odds with Mike's: she aimed to design an interpretive context that illuminates the nature of the damage the story registers, drawing that context not only from the details of the story but also from its similarity to the one that follows ("An Encounter"). Constructing a heuristic solution to the textual puzzle allows the reader (not the characters) to imagine possible ways out of the "maze" of textual or quotidian experience without denying the configuration of frustrating events on the page.⁹ Although "The Sisters" seems to focus on the informal, parochial tutoring of a young boy by a "retired" priest, it actually provides a broader prototype of a typical Irish Catholic education and its effects, which may even be extended to any kind of education designed to socialize as it instructs. The story's effect on readers is utterly predictable: very few readers win meaningful independence from the boy's confused perspective because they unconsciously rely on the habit of identifying themselves with the narrator. Most readers, then, will feel ambivalent about the priest: they know that he seems strange and that he did some things (such as breaking a chalice and being found laughing in a confession box in the middle of the night) that may have hastened his retirement from active duty to his parish. But many readers also empathize with what they perceive to be the priest's crisis of faith, his situation as "a disappointed man" who was "crossed," and they respect his determination to help the boy learn. Few first-time readers see the eponymous sisters as important; on the contrary, many (like the boy) dismiss them as poorly dressed and ignorant, in light of their verbal errors. Most readers respond to Old Cotter with the boy's impatience, and they finish the story as puzzled as their guide, the boy narrator. Everything feels unfinished or incomplete, like the "gnomon" itself.¹⁰

9. Paulo Freire refers to such heuristic "solutions" as probing the "untested feasibility" that lies beyond a situation that limits individuals (2000, 113).

10. For Vicki's initial approach to "The Sisters," see Mahaffey 2007. The description of her initial reading is an elaboration of what was printed there.

Like Mike, Vicki views the story as a kind of mystery, with some “wrong” or “crime” or even “sin” lying at the heart of it. The main indication that the priest has somehow wronged the boy comes from the boy’s sensation when he is on the threshold of sleep that the priest is trying to confess something to him; the two have exchanged roles, and the priest is asking the boy for absolution:

In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralytic. I drew the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. It murmured; and I understood that it desired to confess something. I felt my soul receding into some pleasant and vicious region; and there again I found it waiting for me. It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist with spittle. But then I remembered that it had died of paralysis and I felt that I too was smiling feebly as if to absolve the simoniac of his sin. (*D*, 11–12)

The boy identifies the priest’s sin as simony, a worldly trafficking in sacred things, and his disease as paralysis, an immobility of the body that results from lack of local muscle control. Instead of facilitating a sacramental transformation of the ordinary into the divine, as in the celebration of the Eucharist, the priest as simoniac is guilty of the opposite transformation: he has taken holy mysteries—such as grace or absolution—and made them into ordinary (and marketable) indulgences.

Paralysis is meaningful as the disease that killed the priest because of the way it weakens an individual’s physical power: it designates a loss of control over the local muscles on which larger movements depend. Loss of local control is not only a bodily ill, however; it is also a mental and psychological problem that affects readers when they disregard specific details in an effort to affirm some intuitive or expected meaning. One example of a detail easily overlooked is the name of the street where the priest lives—Great Britain Street. If an Irish priest is said to live on Great Britain Street, it would seem to imply that the Catholic establishment in Ireland is complicit with Britain’s imperial authority. It is likewise easy to forget that the priest lives over a shop registered as selling “drapery,” although what is sold there are primarily umbrellas and children’s bootees (*D*, 12). In ordinary usage, “drapery”

simply designates cloth and dry goods, but the word also connotes concealment, and the goods in the shop are primarily protective items (umbrellas and boots, like the “Wellingtons” Gabriel advocates in “The Dead”). Drapery in another sense appears in the boy’s dream as the long velvet curtains he associates with Persia. What might the priest be hiding or protecting, and why? How might Joyce’s purpose be related to the purpose of the other James, the Reverend James Flynn in the story?

In order to understand the boy’s unconscious feeling that the priest has wronged him, it is necessary to analyze the effect that the priest’s lessons have had on the boy: they have simultaneously enlarged and constrained his relation to the world of knowledge. Some of the stories the priest told him were romantic—stories about the catacombs and Napoleon Bonaparte. But most of what he teaches the boy is technical, even scrupulous: Flynn teaches him to pronounce Latin properly, to recite responses to the Mass, to discern fine, even hairsplitting, distinctions between mortal and venial sins. Father Flynn is teaching the boy about the letter (rather than the spirit) of the law, which according to Saint Paul in 2 Corinthians “killeth.”¹¹ That Joyce seems to be associating this kind of exegesis with death is indicated by the inadvertently morbid puns with which the boy’s language is sprinkled: “The duties of the priest towards the Eucharist and towards the secrecy of the confessional seemed so *grave* to me that I wondered how anybody had ever found in himself the courage to *undertake* them” (*D*, 14; emphasis added). Father Flynn has also taught the boy not to try to understand the mystery of faith for himself, but to rely on the interpretations of others, especially the ones found in canon law. He has taught him obedience, in the form of deference to his superiors and contempt for those individuals he considers inferior. The price of this obedience is a kind of muteness; the boy has lost confidence in his own ability to interpret or understand ideas in relation to his own experience. He recalls, “I was not surprised when he [the priest] told me that the fathers of the Church had written books as thick as the *Post Office Directory* and as closely printed as the law notices in the newspaper, elucidating all these intricate questions. Often when I thought of this I could

11. “The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

make no answer or only a very foolish and halting one upon which he used to smile and nod his head twice or thrice" (*D*, 14). The labyrinthine complexity of the law that this priest enforces makes the boy feel stupid, and the priest smiles and nods in apparent approval of the boy's insecure, hesitant responses. Readers often fail to remark this fact because it seems normal to feel helpless before the immense scholarly knowledge of a given subject, but the story suggests that the priest has injured the boy by making him feel that his inadequacy is a cause for shame (rather than an opportunity to learn) and by encouraging him—through his own example—to feel better about this shameful inadequacy by registering the greater inadequacy of others, such as the inferiority of the eponymous sisters. The boy learns to think of all the knowledge he cannot hope to comprehend as proof of his own shortcomings, when it could just as easily be regarded as an exciting frontier.

Such a reading suggests that the priest has wronged the boy by teaching him that he knows nothing, which in turn makes him *feel* less. We see it first in the boy's recollection of the priest's teachings, especially when the boy learns to relinquish his "simple" understanding of the tenets of the church, replacing it with awe at "complex mysteries" that he could not hope to fathom (*D*, 14). His answers become "foolish and halting," and the priest smiles and nods at the boy's new hesitancy. The effect of his education on his emotions is apparent in his realization that, strangely, he is not "in a mourning mood" when he sees the actual evidence of the priest's death on the door knocker of his house. Instead, he feels "a sensation of freedom" (*D*, 13). We see further evidence of the boy's emotional vacuity when he cannot pray at the foot of the priest's bed because he cannot "gather [his] thoughts"; "the old woman's mutterings" distracted him (*D*, 15). Nannie can pray, but the boy cannot focus or even feel, and once again he imagines his mentor smiling at this fact (*D*, 16). Something—and Vicki argues that it is the tutelage of Father Flynn—has caused the boy to change; he no longer feels excited interest in Old Cotter's stories, registering instead only contempt for his nose, reddened by drinking (*D*, 10–11). We see in him no sign of wonder or gratitude. He exhibits none of the caring devotion that characterizes the eponymous sisters. Although they are exhausted and bereft, the boy shows no sympathy for them; instead, he regards Nannie merely as a distraction, her prayers an "old woman's mutterings" and her skirt "clumsily" hooked

(*D*, 16). “The Sisters” shows—through the contrast between the boy and the sisters—how individuals are often “educated” to give up individual interpretive agency and submit to the judgment of others, and it reveals how the acceptance of interpretive helplessness can initiate the educated into a culture of isolation, injustice (for which we compensate by being petty in turn), and finally apathy.

The lesson of “The Sisters” is further illuminated by the story that follows it in *Dubliners*, “An Encounter.” Both stories are dominated by “teachers”: one a priest, the other commonly identified as a pederast. It is tempting to dismiss or condemn these two men as deviant (“there was something gone wrong with” them [*D*, 20]). However, by deploring the emptiness of the priest’s faith (his chalice “empty” and “broken,” his confession box the site of private laughter), or by stressing the potentially threatening queerness of the “old jossler” in “An Encounter,” one may overlook the immense power of both men as normative representations of cultural authority in general, and of cultural education in particular. Both men have a profound impact on the boy, an impact he fails to understand but nonetheless acutely registers. The priest and the pederast are both father figures and teachers, representing two sides of the same Oedipal-cultural configuration: the priest is the one who forbids access to enjoyment and self-enlightenment by demonstrating the great difficulty of understanding the mysteries of church doctrine and discouraging the boy from trying. Instead of appreciation, he teaches denigration, meanness: the boy learns from him to look down on others such as Old Cotter and the sisters. The pederast in “An Encounter,” who encourages the boys to recognize and indulge in the eroticism of fighting boys and touching girls, embodies the other side of the Father. Vicki’s contention is that these two men personify the same apparently contradictory but actually unified cultural and patriarchal directive, which the boy accordingly learns: you can compensate for your own inadequacies by focusing on the weaknesses of others, alternately deprecating them and enjoying them, punishing them and taking advantage of them. This directive is powerful, made even more so by the priest’s death, because a dead authority figure may be more fully internalized.

The connection between the priest and the pederast in the two stories is drawn carefully through the similarity in their garments, their love of books,

and the suggestion that their interiors are rotten. Both men are older and dressed in black with a greenish cast. The boy accounts for the patina of the priest's coat as an effect of snuff: "It may have been these constant showers of snuff which gave his ancient priestly garments their green faded look" (*D*, 13). The pederast, too, is "shabbily dressed in a suit of greenish-black" (*D*, 27). Both are bookworms whose smiles disclose a decayed mouth. As the boy says of the priest, "When he smiled he used to uncover his big discoloured teeth and let his tongue lie upon his lower lip—a habit which had made me feel uneasy in the beginning of our acquaintance" (*D*, 14). Similarly, when the pederast smiles, the boy sees "that he had great gaps in his mouth between his yellow teeth" (*D*, 29). Even when the man makes comments that the boy considers "reasonable," the boy admits that he "disliked the words in his mouth" (*D*, 29). Joyce's focus on the men's decaying mouths provides a visual image of internal corruption;¹² moreover, by making the mouth the site of that corruption, Joyce associates it not only with their own internal state but also with what they are unconsciously communicating to the boy about themselves: their desire for superiority and their fear of inadequacy. There are *two* boys in "An Encounter"—the narrator and Mahony—and they react very differently to the pederast. Mahony gets distracted and runs off after a cat, but the narrator is riveted as well as frightened by the man's monologues. The older man tells the boy narrator that he and the boy are alike—both are bookworms, whereas Mahony "goes in for games" (*D*, 28). By implication, the boy's thirst for knowledge makes him more susceptible to the kind of corruption he associates with the man's rotten mouth. Together, these stories prompt us to wonder whether there is another, more ethical, way of teaching desire than the ones utilized by these two men. They teach simony (in the language of the church, we would call it materialism, the desire to *possess* knowledge, people, and things) and paralysis, which we know better as the hopelessness or apathy that Dante associated with hell.

12. Compare the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, where Bloom gets a glimpse of the inside of Zoe's mouth and it appears to him as a graveyard full of gold and rotting bones (fillings and decaying teeth): "*The roses [her lips] draw apart, disclose a sepulchre of the gold of kings and their mouldering bones*" (*U*, 15.1340–41).

The teaching methods used by both priest and pederast either require or demonstrate a mechanical form of response: the priest teaches the boy to memorize and to learn by rote; the pederast recites his erotic, perhaps even “literary,” fantasies about the pleasures of touching girls and whipping boys as if by heart. But what is the desire that they are simultaneously (and automatically) prohibiting and licensing in such repetitive ways? The underside of this desire is a fear: it is the pleasure/anxiety at seeing both self and others as inescapably inadequate or, to use the language of religion, irredeemably sinful. The priest teaches the boy to give up hope of understanding the mysteries of the Eucharist, and the story implies that as he learns to despair at the possibility of learning *wisdom* (the merciful or caring version of knowledge), he confirms his own sense of inadequacy and at the same time learns to focus on the inadequacies and limitations of others: the poor grammar and shoddy dress of the sisters, to take the most obvious example. Similarly, the pederast is sexually *excited* by the badness of boys and girls, which gives him the license to touch them in ways that are hurtful to them but pleasurable to himself (he imagines whipping bad boys and stroking girls who “were not so good as they seemed to be if one only knew” [*D*, 29]). In different ways, both men practice a punitive pedagogy that perpetuates itself by insisting upon the psychological incapacity rather than the worth of the individual. Here, the main effect of this teaching on the boy is that it diminishes his pleasure: the pleasure of learning (in “The Sisters”) and the pleasure of disobeying (in “An Encounter”) are both tarnished, and he learns to replace the pleasures of adventure and novelty with a compensatory pleasure in the shortcomings of others. As the example of the pederast shows, the habit of pleasuring oneself at the expense of others is the root of abuse.

In “The Sisters,” we can see how the priest has altered the boy’s way of thinking and feeling by observing how the boy reacts to others: he looks down on them now, and he does so with impatience, irritation, and sometimes anger. As we mentioned above, he used to regard Old Cotter as “rather interesting,” but he has grown “tired of him,” dismissing him as a “tiresome old fool” with “little beady black eyes” (*D*, 10). The boy’s attitude toward his faith has also changed; he now views its tenets as requiring scrupulous exegesis rather than as simple exhortations to love and to sustain hope (*D*, 14). The boy notes small instances of ignorance and shabbiness in the priest’s

sisters. Instead of sympathizing with their straitened circumstances ("as poor as we are—we wouldn't see him want anything" [*D*, 17]), he dispassionately reproduces all Eliza's grammatical errors: her references to "them flowers and them two candlesticks" (*D*, 18), her claim that "the duties of the priesthood was too much for him" (*D*, 19).

We might compare the boy's lack of affect when listening to the dead priest's sisters with the evidence of how the priest himself treated them. Although he spent time and effort educating the boy, his sisters' errors show that he made no such effort with them, despite the fact that they fed him and cared for him for years; the boy's aunt refers to all their "kindness to him" (*D*, 18). They seem more like servants than sisters, and one of them is even called "Nannie," as if to underscore her role as nurselike caretaker. The sisters' long and faithful nurturing of their brother is as invisible to the priest and the boy as it is to most first-time readers.¹³

Reasoning backward from these observations, we are able to construct a different story than the one the boy relates. We see a priest who had been acting strangely for an unspecified period of time, who is no longer "of S. Catherine's Church, Meath Street" (*D*, 12), who has been tutoring a young boy in a way that changes the boy's attitude not only toward the "simplest acts" of the church, but also toward other people. The boy has learned to doubt his own ability to fathom the central tenets of his religion, and simultaneously he has learned to be scrupulous and "mean" in his observation of others. Every time he notices something that demeans someone who is in other respects caring or faithful, he fancies that the dead priest is smiling his approval (*D*, 16). In short, the priest has passed on to the boy not only precision but also smallness of mind, which has interfered with the boy's ability to

13. Margot Norris suggests a reading of "The Sisters" as "a naturalistic tale of poverty, ignorance, and sadness that betrays the politics of gender differences. The story of Nannie and Eliza Flynn may well concern two very poor women from the slums of Irishtown . . . who never married and rose to little more than a meager draper's business in Dublin. . . . Meanwhile, their brother managed to receive an education and travel to Rome to attend the Irish college there. . . . Yet instead of transferring the respectability and benefits of this vocation to his sisters, the outcome of their brother's ecclesiastical career was unhappiness, disappointment, and a final dementia that now threatens to further cloud their lives" (2003, 24).

feel grief or compassion. The teacher has infected his pupil with the “original sin” of feeling unworthy and incapable, which makes him quick to note and disdain the ignorance and shoddiness of even the most devoted caretakers. (Compare Gabriel’s attitude to two other sisters in “The Dead,” whom he mentally refers to as “only two ignorant old women” [*D*, 238].)

In “An Encounter,” the pederast addresses human “sin” in a way that justifies not emotional detachment but invasive physical touch. Instead of alienating the boy from others, from his own emotions, and from the lessons of his own experience, all in the name of “education,” the pederast uses an assumption of the children’s innate depravity to justify touching them: stroking or whipping them so as to give himself pleasure. The boy narrator responds in different ways to the two modes of intervening in a child’s education. The boy *accepts* Father Flynn’s interpretations; he might even be said to learn from him a new way of seeing the world, one that has made him newly impatient with Old Cotter and allows him to forget, like his mentor, the diurnal constancy of the sisters’ devotion. He has “learned” from the priest to secure a place for himself above others by perceiving them to be less capable of technical precision than he. In the language of Dante, he has learned justice, but forgotten love.

In “An Encounter,” the boy learns the same lesson from a less respectable teacher—that if he can establish himself as superior he may claim the right to interpret, judge, and punish others—although the pederast imagines expressing his power in physical terms, as the privilege to stroke and whip. Listening to the pederast enjoy his superiority over bad boys and girls, the boy catches a brief glimpse of a similar tendency in himself of which he was previously unaware: he has always condescended to his friend Mahony as his inferior. At the end of the story, when he is eager to get away from the pederast, he calls for Mahony. Mahony runs as if to bring him aid, and the narrator is conscience pricked, “for in [his] heart [he] had always despised him a little” (*D*, 32).

If Joyce yokes the priest and the pederast as using a comparable pedagogy, what can we learn from the narrator’s apparent approval of (or at least ambivalence toward) that pedagogy when it is presented as a way of thinking (in “The Sisters”) instead of a way of touching (in “An Encounter”)? Joyce’s decision to place “An Encounter” directly after “The Sisters”

allows the fantasy of physical touch to illustrate some of the more disturbing implications of Father Flynn's teaching by making them tangible: not only is it potentially abusive, but there is also a masturbatory pleasure in the contemplation of other people's worthlessness. Readers and critics have historically had trouble understanding the relation between these two stories, interpreting the priest as someone who may have sexually abused the boy.¹⁴ Such a reading registers the kinship between priest and pederast; however, to understand Father Flynn as a pederast is to overlook the subtlety of his theology by misreading his social and theological indoctrination as *physical* abuse. There is no evidence that the priest has physically abused the boy—and this point is crucial, because physical abuse is easier to recognize and deplore than indoctrination in the hallowed guise of education. "The Sisters" focuses on the abuse of indoctrination, which is notoriously hard to identify because most socialized individuals—including the priest himself—have been similarly indoctrinated.¹⁵ "Doctrinal" abuse is not identical with sexual abuse, but Joyce's stories suggest that—by stressing the unworthiness of the uninitiated—it may be used to license more physically abusive forms of punishment and reward.

Indoctrination is powerful precisely because it has been dissociated from anything we can readily see through and condemn, such as physical abuse. When the priest insists on teaching the boy the uselessness of trying to interpret sacred mysteries, not only is he seducing the boy to cede his interpretive authority to him, as priest, but he is also gutting the boy's agency and his spirituality in the process. The priest's corruption is that he knows he is "sinning" by simultaneously teaching the boy vanity (that the boy is more special than other people) and dependence upon male authority. In the boy's dream, the priest's attempted confession to him suggests that the boy is unconsciously aware that the priest has somehow wronged him, since the priest is asking

14. See *ibid.*, 26, for an account of these readings.

15. Michael A. Williams, in "The Rubrics of Guilt in 'The Sisters,'" presents an utterly persuasive case that the priest teaches the boy in the way that he himself was trained: scrupulously. He gives examples of that training by quoting from the 1880 *Missale Romanum*. This paper was presented at the Twenty-Second International James Joyce Symposium in Prague on June 15, 2010.

him for absolution. The episode in which he is found laughing to himself in the confession box reinforces the suggestion that he has something to confess. Why is this man laughing? What is he laughing at?

The image of an authority figure named James laughing to himself over others' bewilderment at a complex system of ideas exemplifies many people's vision of Joyce himself (Mahaffey 1988, 26–32). Many who read "The Sisters" have approached Joyce as akin to Father Flynn, a dead authority figure whose determination to make an impact on the lives of others grotesquely extends beyond the grave. But in fact "The Sisters" is Joyce's repudiation of that model. Readers who make an *a priori* assumption that understanding and caring are beyond them will have that assumption confirmed by their experience of reading the story, a confirmation they may find unexpectedly disquieting.

The title of "The Sisters" is a clue not only to the priest's blind spot, but also to a blindness that readers may well share with him. The title identifies what the priest takes for granted: his sisters' steady care and silent support that allowed him to rise above his class, in return for which they received no apparent recognition or reward. The story presents a quite literal microcosm of a patriarchal society or church, complete with a father and the faithful but neglected nuns who minister to him, who can never be ordained themselves. The sisters, like the unexamined assumptions upon which reading is often based, provide a foundation for development, but are too often overlooked as the precondition on which everything else depends. In Joyce's story, the sisters exhibit a very different kind of faith than the faith of their brother: it is simpler, more loving, more tiring, and less rewarding and mysterious. It expresses itself through actions, not words. Which kind of faith is closer to the teachings of the religion that the priest claims to understand and represent?

IF WE APPROACH "The Sisters" in light of these two different but perhaps not incompatible approaches, it may prompt us to take another look at the "gnomon." Perhaps it should be seen not only as an incomplete or damaged figure, but also as it was defined by Hero of Alexandria: "that figure (a number or a geometric figure) which, when added to another figure, results in a figure similar to the original" (Gazalé 1999, xii). As Midhat Gazalé

beautifully explains, a gnomon is a unit of growth or reproduction that ensures or demonstrates self-similarity. He is expanding the use of the gnomon, adapting its Euclidian definition and applying it to the more irregular forms of incremental self-similarity found in fractals (snowflakes being one memorable example of the irregular formations of self-similar parts). Fractal geometry postdates Joyce, since it was named by Benoit Mandelbrot in 1975 to designate "monstrous" geometrical figures that eluded Euclidian and Newtonian categories. Mandelbrot defined a fractal as a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (approximately or irregularly) a reduced-size copy of the whole (1983, 4). In order to understand how such a conception of the gnomon might work, and how it might illuminate what Joyce is suggesting about the relation between the boy and the priest in "The Sisters," we should briefly retrace the history of the gnomon from its origin in ancient Egypt. Then it becomes clearer how a gnomon can designate the indicator on a sundial, a damaged parallelogram, and also be metaphorically applied to the growth of fractals, in which "each successive increment is said to constitute a *gnomon* to the entire structure" (Gazalé 1999, 4). Ultimately, we will see that the gnomon served Joyce as a metaphor for the relation of "father" to son, showing how knowledge (which comes packaged with damage and incompleteness) is transmitted from one generation to the next, ensuring a "progression" marked by self-similarity. To put it another way, the shadow cast by the sun on the "dial" of time is the shadow of the (dead) father; the father is the "instrument of knowledge" that makes it possible to "know" both time and the heavens, but at a price.

In the eighteenth dynasty of ancient Egypt (1479–1425 BCE), the solar clock that was used to tell time was shaped like an *L*, and that *L* would more than a millennium later be identified with a geometrical gnomon. As Gazalé explains, "An L-shaped object with a short vertical arm and a long graduated horizontal arm . . . was rotated in such a manner that the shadow of the vertical arm fell on the graduations of the horizontal arm. That instrument was called *setchat*, or *merkhet*, literally meaning 'instrument of knowledge'" (1999, 6). Much later, around 575 BCE, the sundial was attributed to the Greek Anaximander (ca. 610 BCE–ca. 546 BCE) and the L-shaped indicator was given the Greek name "gnomon," which literally means "that which

allows one to know” (Gazalé 1999, 7). Euclid, who lived around 300 BCE, called the portion of a parallelogram that remains after a smaller parallelogram has been taken away a gnomon, and we can see why if we picture a parallelogram constructed with right angles: the portion that remains after the smaller parallelogram has been removed has an L-shape, like a carpenter’s square (Hall and Stevens 1893, 120). When Gazalé uses the gnomon as the principle of self-similar growth, he can do so because every “increment is similar to its predecessor, and the whole, after every spurt of growth, is just like it was before” (1999, 4, citing Thomson 1966). This statement is an apt description of how the priest in “The Sisters” was himself educated, as well as how he educates the next generation: he “reproduces” or “re-creates” the boy in his own image by the way he teaches him to interpret. The shadow of the gnomon, like a priest or an interpreter, can be understood as that which falls between the heavens and the earth, connecting the great and the small: “A gnomon’s shadow is the tangible manifestation on earth, nay, literally on the dust, of celestial events of cosmic magnitude” (ibid., 10). It also provides us with a natural image of fractal growth—as in a shell or a galactic nebula or a spider web—that can be used to describe the perpetuation and expansion of social roles across generations. Here, the emphasis is not on subtraction—the parallelogram that has been taken away—but on accretion: the gnomon that when added to two sides of a parallelogram produces a bigger parallelogram. In this sense, it is the boy who is the gnomon and who will, by having been joined to the figure of the priest, create a future that can only be an enlarged version of the past. Joyce’s collection of stories is also designed in this way: it grows by increments, in which each story is a gnomon or partial figure that adds new facets while failing to change the shape of the whole.

With the incremental growth of the gnomon (as a fractal unit) in mind, let us return to the first version of “The Sisters” published in the *Irish Homestead*. In that version, the priest was closely associated with mental illness: Old Cotter remarked that the priest’s “upper storey” was gone, and the church where he officiated was identified as St. Ita’s. In the later version, Joyce changed “St. Ita’s” to “St. Catherine’s,” presumably because he discovered that St. Ita’s was not built until 1902 and the priest died in 1895. St. Ita’s was in Portrane (Port Reachrainn), and it is the church of a well-known

psychiatric hospital.¹⁶ Joyce seemed to be trying to correlate intellectual ability and mental (or emotional) deficiency, especially since he was careful to emphasize that "neither of his [Father Flynn's] sisters were very intelligent" (J. Joyce 2000a, 192).

When Joyce revised the story for publication in the collection, he changed the emphasis on the priest's shortcomings from mental illness to a repression rooted in emotional and material deprivation that produces silence. Instead of being associated with St. Ita's mental hospital, the priest is linked with St. Catherine's Meath Street. St. Catherine's is a Gothic Revival Catholic church designed by J. J. McCarthy in 1852 that in Joyce's time had an unfinished tower (the tower has since been completed). It is located in an area defined not by madness but by poverty: in 1796 more than two thousand people had been found in a starving condition in only three streets of the parish. James Connolly remarked, "Evidently 'prosperity' had not much meaning to the people of St. Catherine's" (1910, 56).

The figure of St. Catherine of Alexandria (fourth century), to whom the chapel is dedicated, stands as the antithesis of both the priest and the sisters. Unlike the sisters Flynn, she was a beautiful, articulate, and confident young woman who was accomplished in philosophy, theology, and oratory. She never married, and she became the patron saint of theologians, preachers, and unmarried women. Preachers would pray to her for eloquence, because she epitomized the expressive potential that could be achieved by learning and openness to inspiration. When she was condemned to death on a breaking wheel (thereafter known as a "Catherine wheel"), the wheel broke when she touched it. This point is significant in view of the fact that "to die by the wheel" has become slang for keeping silent about something, especially in Spanish, where *morir en la rueda* idiomatically means to refuse to speak. Catherine, in contrast, refused to be silent, appearing before Emperor Maximinus at the age of eighteen to challenge his policy of cruelly persecuting Christians. He called all the scholars of the land to trick her into apostasy,

16. Saint Ita herself forms an interesting contrast to Father Flynn the simoniac, because she once told Saint Brendan, who was in her foster care, that the thing that was most displeasing to God is the worship of material things.

and she not only prevailed against them but also converted many of them with her eloquence, including the empress herself (see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*). When the emperor failed to break Catherine, he consigned her to the wheel. It was broken by her touch, whereupon he had her beheaded.

When read against the legend of Saint Catherine, the silence in “The Sisters” takes on a more sinister implication. The boy’s growing capacity for silence emerges as part of the legacy of his tutor, who never confessed the doubts or conflicts or even (possibly) the illness that was incapacitating him (the confession box in which he was found contained no auditor). The exercise of silence emerges as a self-discipline, and perhaps also a torture; it is a response to being “crossed” (or obstructed) that turns the observer into an acute recorder of events, but one who is potentially blind to his own repressed feelings. Silence is the self-subtraction that configures a pupil as a gnomon; the boy here takes over the priest’s role of valorizing “that which allows us to know,” participating in the fractal growth of an attentive and abusive pedagogy. *Fractal*, after all, comes from the same root as *fractured*: growth is produced by incremental breakings. In this silent struggle of fathers to shape and break their sons, women do not figure at all.

“The Sisters,” then, is a portal into *Dubliners*; the world into which it beckons us, if not a hell, is nonetheless a Dantean limbo of diametrically opposed possibilities. Like the boy, we are invited into a region that is both “pleasant and vicious” (*D*, 12); that “viciousness” suggests not only “vice” but also the root of *vice*, *vitium*, which is *fault*. We meet a boy who has grown silent and dispassionately observant (which cost him his former curiosity and enthusiasm) under the tutelage of a man. That man, however, formerly of “S. Catherine’s Meath Street,” worked in memory of a woman who embodied—and was martyred for—the opposite virtue of speaking out, of refusing to remain silent. “The Sisters” leaves us suspended between these two differently unsatisfactory options. If learning to remain silent promotes increased observational acuity dogged by hopelessness, speaking out may cost the speaker his or her life. One possible response to this double bind is to learn to speak differently, in a kind of code that will be meaningful only to listeners who are actively curious and committed to new modes of understanding. The stories of *Dubliners* are written in such a code: clear but oblique, detailed but apparently pointless.

With the priest's encouragement, the boy of "The Sisters" has become a kind of living gnomon, a damaged figure whose damage replicates the wound of his tutor on a smaller scale. The gnomonic shape of the boy and the priest also describes the condition of the characters we will meet in the rest of the volume, predicting its larger, irregular fractal design. As readers, do we fill the gaps in these gnomons with explanations? If we do so, how can we hope to accurately register the damage to which the gaps testify, to diagnose an endemic paralysis that we may perhaps share, and to "look upon its deadly work" (*D*, 9)? Our joint conclusion is that the task and privilege of interpretation are to imagine ways that this gap may have been produced; if we fill in the gap, we should do so provisionally, with dotted lines, thereby preserving the openness of the figure even while tracing the outlines of the corner that was lost. Our wish is to preserve the holes in the text while actively participating in its imaginative restoration. The "wounds" that damage these characters are also potential portals of discovery, both for them and for the readers they mirror.

3



Lighted Squares

Framing “Araby”

KATHRYN CONRAD AND MARK OSTEEN

Our essay began as two discrete perspectives on the story “Araby.” Mark’s focus was initially trained on the imagery of light and darkness, and Katie’s on the concept of vanity introduced in the final lines. Each writer wrote his or her own draft separately and then read the other writer’s contribution. In an early correspondence, Mark suggested that the accounts be integrated as two observers “watching and making notes on the same set of scenes. We could do this by setting them off with actual frames on the page. The idea would be to create a sense of binocular vision, thereby demonstrating the ideas about multiple frames and competing visions discussed in the essay(s).” Mark interspersed Katie’s reflections into his essay, and then Katie revised and commented further on Mark’s essay.

The framed insertions comprise an array of responses: in some cases, Katie expands upon Mark’s interpretation; in others, she qualifies or disagrees with it; in others, she proposes a different vision or focus entirely. The strategy yields a result appropriate for the essay’s visual theme: one critic reads the story as a self-reflexive commentary on readerly vision, while a second critic reframes the first critic’s commentary in light of her vision of the text. The effect, we hope, is of frames or panes sliding across one another, sometimes converging in a single view, sometimes superimposing two views upon each other, sometimes presenting two different perspectives. Rarely have the critical terms “intervention” and “revision” seemed more apt!

In the last double-framed paragraph, the two sets of eyes finally converge—almost. Indeed, the conclusion argues that such a truly binocular vision never occurs, that critical responses, even responses created in tandem such as ours

were, never display—and should not display—convergence, but instead generate the kind of superimpositions and multiple visions that we find in the critical history of “Dubliners” and indeed throughout this volume of essays.

Joyce’s *Dubliners* opens with a scene of watching, as the unnamed narrator of “The Sisters” studies a “lighted square of window,” seeking a sign of Father Flynn’s condition (*D*, 9). Gazing at the window night by night, he repeats the word *paralysis* softly to himself, as if the combination of word and vision produces a paralytic condition in the boy. Similar self-referential visual episodes—in which a character gazes into or through a mirror or window—reappear with remarkable frequency in *Dubliners*; in almost every case, the watcher’s vision freezes a dynamic process into a static scene.¹

Dubliners is filled with frames: windows, mirrors, photos, and portraits.² Mirror scenes often appear—as in “Clay”—when characters’ self-satisfaction veils their self-delusion. Window scenes, in contrast, stage characters’ feelings of longing or imprisonment, producing what film critics call internal frames, where a figure appears to be trapped in a box. And when characters gaze through windows at dusk, as they so often do in *Dubliners*, they invariably see both inwardly and outwardly, looking both backward into the past and forward into the future. Inner and outer visions merge to produce double exposures or superimpositions. It is fitting that most of these double visions occur at twilight—the time of two lights—when a person looking out a window can, in fact, see him- or herself superimposed upon the outside world. In *Dubliners* windows become pictures become mirrors.

These visual phenomena are perhaps most evident in “Araby,” which even a cursory reading reveals to be a tale of watching. The boy narrator’s complex

1. Peter de Voogd has recently remarked that the opening scene of “The Sisters” (a young man looks into a window, envisioning a dead older man), coupled with the final tableau in “The Dead” (an older man looks out a window, imagining a dead youth), frames the entire volume (2000, 42).

2. Laurent Milesi has noted the prevalence of mirrors in *Dubliners*, of “windows and (barred) perspectives, as well as an insistence on gazing,” and likewise links the first and last stories in the collection through motifs of mirrored gazes (1997, 91).

framing of Mangan's sister epitomizes a process that, we propose, occurs repeatedly in the volume: he first *sees* her, then *pictures* her—initially grabbing a sight of her, then freezing her into a portrait, thereby transferring her from his external to his internal vision. Eloise Knowlton's distinction between discursive and figural photographs helps to clarify this process. Discursive photographs, she writes, resemble symbolic paintings arranged to signify something specific through pose, decor, and *mise en scène*. Figural photos, in contrast, are “image first and signif[y] only secondarily” (2005, 140). Spontaneous and unposed, they partake of what John Szarkowski has called a “snapshot aesthetic” (1988, 31). We suggest that the “tension between the artistic and the documentary” that Knowlton discovers in *Dubliners* (2005, 142) manifests itself explicitly in the “Araby” narrator's movement from the figural to the discursive: after taking mental snapshots of Mangan's sister, he turns these passing moments into static portraits of her as ideal woman and of himself as ideal lover.³

Just as important as the portrait, however, is the frame. The text itself generates multiple frames, from the boy's literal observations to the narrative observations provided after the fact to our own interpretive frames. The “glass” through which we as readers look is not only potentially reflective, depending on the “light” by which we read, but also (de)limited by the frame around it. And, of course, a frame is not merely a boundary. It forms, fits, fashions the very thing it frames. By superimposing multiple frames, Joyce allows us to ask whether the result is the unification of views that might lead to a clearer binocular vision or merely layer upon layer of obscurity and distortion.

In this binocular essay, we propose to frame “Araby” in a number of ways: first, by tracing the narrator's framing of himself and his idealized female

3. Knowlton points out that while Joyce was writing the early *Dubliners* tales, photographic practice was shifting from the discursive to the figural (in part because of the availability of portable cameras). She argues that “Eveline” is the story where “the incidental photographic moment” shifts to “the heavily symbolic, meaning-laden space of painting” (2005, 146), but it seems likely that this movement actually occurs within “Araby” itself.

within his mental theater; second, by juxtaposing it with other stories in which Joyce's characters create framed, static pictures from their experiences in order to glorify or diminish themselves (or both). Finally, through our dual perspectives on the story, we both consider and dramatize how employing multiple frames affects critical reading by transforming the page—which appears to be a window onto a world—into a mirror that reflects readers' own biases and frameworks. Seen this way, *Dubliners* becomes a gallery of self-referential portraits presaging Joyce's first novel and an album of pictures in which readers watch themselves watching.⁴ Such self-reflexive framing is fitting, for Joyce aimed these portraits at a specific group of readers—his fellow Dubliners—in order, as he stated to publisher Grant Richards, that they might obtain a “good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass” (*SL*, 90).

THE INSISTENCE ON OBSERVATION in “Araby” begins with its opening description of houses on North Richmond Street gazing “at one another with brown imperturbable faces” (*D*, 33). The young male protagonist seems to imitate these houses when, in the failing light of winter dusk, he watches Mangan's sister “peer up and down the street,” apparently looking for him and her brother. He then approaches where she waits, “her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. . . . Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side” (*D*, 34). Attentive readers may recall a scene depicted just a few pages earlier, in “An Encounter,” when the “queer old jossler” tells that story's young narrator that he likes nothing better than “looking at a nice young girl, at her nice white hands and her beautiful soft hair” (*D*, 29): it is as though the “Araby” narrator, having overheard the old man, is now emulating his habits, just as the young narrator of “The Sisters” emulates *his* mentor, Father Flynn. In succeeding days, the “Araby” boy regards Mangan's sister from behind his nearly closed window blind, which serves as a frame, transforming the living girl into a peepshow “figure” (*D*, 34–35).⁵ From this point on, he keeps her

4. That James Joyce imagined his stories in such visual terms is borne out by the series of prose sketches he composed as a teenager under the title *Silhouettes*. See *BK*, 90.

5. Knowlton remarks that the boy is here enacting a specific use of photographic (that is, “figural”) realism: pornography, with its unseen “detective” camera (2005, 145).

“brown figure always in [his] eye,” so that her “image” accompanies him even to the noisy, unromantic marketplace (*D*, 35).

It is worth noting here that the boy’s vision, as seen through the frame of the more mature narrator, inevitably shapes the reader’s response to the narrative: his observations, in other words, inevitably frame our own. As Margot Norris points out, for instance, critics have tended to accept the boy’s own estimation of the street life of Dublin as “hostile to romance,” even though the street life of Dublin and its “indigenous bazaar” (2003, 52) environment may provide a more vibrant possibility than the Araby bazaar, which in the story is, literally and figuratively, closed.

The boy now views Mangan’s sister through a kind of twilight—the combined lights of imagination and bodily reality—superimposing his fantasy figure upon the actual girl, to whom he has not yet even spoken.⁶ She is forever an “image”—whether chalice or harp player (*D*, 35)—to which he plays a complementary role as celebrant or harp: he pictures himself as her other half.⁷ To complete this process of internalization, the boy retreats on a dark, rainy evening to a back drawing room; below, a “distant lamp or lighted window” gleams, creating a chiaroscuro effect appropriate for his imaginary exhibition (*D*, 36).

Then she speaks to him, in an encounter that shapes both the story’s later events and our framing of those events. Mangan’s sister asks if the boy intends to visit the bazaar and says she would love to go but cannot, meanwhile turning “a silver bracelet round and round her wrist” (*D*, 36). Why does she toy with the bracelet? Is she, as a student of mine once proposed, bored and distracted? Perhaps, rather, she is as anxious about his interest as he is about hers. Or perhaps she is attempting, as Garry Leonard argues, to

6. According to Tanja Vesala-Varttala, a similar superimposition affects the story’s narrative voice, which juxtaposes and occasionally fuses the perspectives of the adult narrator and the boy protagonist (1999, 129).

7. Garry Leonard likewise writes that the harp image suggests a “mirror response,” in which “every movement of the girl generates a reflective movement in the boy” (1989, 466).

“direct the boy’s gaze” (1989, 463), as if to say, “Here’s the kind of thing I like.” The boy promises to bring her something—as well he might, for the tableau seems designed to entice him: “She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease” (*D*, 36). The fortuitous arrangement of light, the hands on the phallic rail, the coyly exposed petticoat—these details not only display the boy’s eroticizing vision, but also suggest that she is posing for him.⁸ If so, his roving gaze and fetishizing vision merely respond to her self-presented portrait of alluring young womanhood. She is, after all, the one who initiates the conversation. And how better to appeal to the young man who has been spying on her than to exhibit herself as the image he desires to see? She may wish to be part of *his* scene, to project her idealized image upon the boy’s external and internal eyes, and thus see herself elevated. The two are, in short, becoming counterparts, each one generating an ideal self through the (imagined) eyes of the other.

Of course, we cannot know what Mangan’s sister intends; the narration frames and shapes our vision much as it does our vision of other women in *Dubliners* whose stories are framed by those of other characters: Polly Mooney, for instance, or Gretta Conroy.⁹ We cannot help

8. Keith Williams observes that in holding the phallic rail, she simultaneously arouses sexuality and denies it (2004, 158).

9. Leonard claims that “Mangan’s sister exists alongside the boy’s narration and in fact can be glimpsed through those gaps in the text where the boy’s story falters. In fact, her desire *is* the subject of the story because it is the subject of the boy’s unconscious where it directs—right alongside but outside his awareness—his conscious intentions which he misrecognizes as a call to destiny” (1989, 464). I would suggest, however, that the version of Mangan’s sister who exists “alongside the boy’s narration” still remains the Mangan’s sister *of* the boy’s narration; as tempting as it is to construct her as having some sort of agency, she most certainly exists only through the framed lens or mirror of the narrator.

but see Mangan's sister as a secondary character in our narrator's tale. And she has already become an aestheticized object here, presaging the image of Polly on the landing with the "white instep," which "shone in the opening of her furry slippers" (*D*, 80), or Gretta, whom Gabriel sees at one point standing with "grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something" (*D*, 260), both mental portraits captured in single static poses.

What we see in this scene is itself framed, for our vision of such encounters is never innocent; it is inevitably conditioned by our own experience as well as by other stories we have read, including those in *Dubliners*. How else does Joyce frame the scene within the gallery of Dublin gazers? Let us juxtapose this scene with a similar optical evaluation depicted later in the volume. When, in "Two Gallants," Lenehan runs his eyes over the body of his pal Corley's "slavey," the narrator's language betrays none of the "Araby" narrator's rhapsodizing. Instead, Lenehan's eyes visually penetrate the woman, first coldly assessing her clothing, then frankly scrutinizing her "fat red cheeks," "blunt" features, "unabashed" blue eyes, "broad nostrils," and leering, "straggling" mouth (*D*, 66). Whereas the "Araby" boy's vision incorporates only tantalizing hints of sexual allure (hand, neck, undergarment), Lenehan crassly sizes up the woman like a slab of meat. The first vision is erotic; the second is, at best, pornographic. Yet Lenehan's optical ravishment prompts us to reconsider the boy's visual delectation. The earlier encounter may at first appear all the more innocent by contrast. But upon a second glance, we wonder: Is this where such juvenile voyeurism leads? Is the "Araby" narrator's elevated diction merely drapery for prurient gaping? Will his innocent peeping inevitably devolve into Corleyian pimping? And is this unnamed woman merely offering a more direct version of Mangan's sister's ingenuous attractions? Juxtaposing "Two Gallants" with "Araby" bathes the first encounter in a spectrum of disturbing lights. Such proleptic reading encourages us to superimpose this story's encounter upon the tale of the boy and Mangan's sister. But should we? In such a twilight reading—where we see what is in front of us in terms of what lies ahead—the page becomes a mirror, a half-lit rectangle revealing readers' multiple frameworks, as well as the frames of the volume as a whole.

I would suggest that the “Araby” narrator’s visual and geographical routes through Dublin mirror the paths of Lenehan and Corley in “Two Gallants”; this mirroring provides a glimpse of an alternative to the direct and driven narrative vision of romance that the former idealizes and the latter parodies, albeit unself-consciously. Norris points to Joyce’s recognition of the alternatives to high modernist elitism by invoking the possibilities opened up by the marketplace—the very possibilities embraced by Bloom in *Ulysses* and rejected by Stephen Dedalus (who himself is reflected in *Dubliners* by the “Araby” narrator and Gabriel Conroy). The possibilities of the marketplace, offered to the reader here only through the narrator’s distorted lenses, stand in opposition to the stasis of aestheticization that takes place both when the boy attempts to fix Mangan’s sister as an object of devotion and when the more mature narrator “frames” his experiences, thereby turning them into art. The marketplace, unlike the process of aestheticization, includes circulation *and* exchange and gestures toward the complexities of human interaction that aestheticization can never fully transcend: the kinesis that so bothers Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait*, or, more generally, the give-and-take that troubles the unidirectional subject-object economy of vision, a phrase I employ deliberately, echoing Vicki Mahaffey’s construction of the “subject/object economy of privilege” that shapes critical analysis (1991, 667).

Joyce implies that those characters locked into a single vision of romance, whether idealized or denigrated—and by extension, the readers who follow their gaze—are entranced by the power of their own vision, to their own detriment. Corley, for instance, exploits the narrative of romance, offering his “palaver,” to quote Lily of “The Dead” (herself a “slavey” of the sort Corley pursues), in exchange for “what they can get out of you”—in his case, the coin on which the story ends (*D*, 219, 72). The boy of “Araby” hopes to exchange money for a gift, and the gift for the affection of Mangan’s sister, who is unable to go to the bazaar; these exchanges are predicated on a particular vision, figuratively speaking, of women’s roles. In “Araby” vision is more than figurative, operating as a prod to his adolescent desires and framing, literally and figuratively, his notion of Mangan’s sister, his quest, and his failure, the latter signaled by

the darkened bazaar building and his new and unwelcome view of himself as “derided by vanity,” which is both self-love and futility (*D*, 41). In short, the failures of “Araby” and the failures elsewhere in the collection—the “blind spots” Norris notes in the story (2003, 50)—inhere in the subject-object economy of vision itself.

After the boy makes his promise to Mangan’s sister, her “image” insistently imposes itself between his eyes and the pages he tries to read (*D*, 37). But he does not yet fully “possess” her as a wrought image of desire. Such possession can occur only in solitude. And so, on the night of the bazaar, he retires to upper rooms, where he leans his forehead against the window and gazes at her house, “seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress” (*D*, 38). That is, he superimposes a stored page showing Mangan’s sister upon the window pane (K. Williams 2004, 158).¹⁰ She is at once diminished and glorified as the boy frames her body—or, rather, body parts—in a two- or perhaps trilight vision: looking through the window, he beholds a reified version of Mangan’s sister as she once appeared to him, shorn of unnecessary words and accoutrements; only her neck, hand, and petticoat remain. He has thus altered his figural photograph into a framed, discursive portrait of her as romantic icon and himself as her chivalrous lover: the window is a portrait is a mirror of the boy’s aesthetic desire.¹¹

10. Specific meteorological conditions make this visual effect possible: the scene takes place between eight and nine o’clock, and assuming that “Araby” takes place in May (when the real-life Araby Bazaar did), the dusky light would enable the narrator to see both outside and inside simultaneously.

11. Gerald Doherty likewise finds here a conventionalized “art-image” of Mangan’s sister and remarks on how the window functions as a framing device that enables the portrait to move from one site to another and permits the boy to edit the picture (2004, 52). But his claim that the “textual blank” that follows the scene indicates its status as a “mild, non-self-shattering reverie” fails to grasp what the lacuna clearly indicates: a masturbatory fantasy whose outcome could not be depicted, or at least not published, at this point in Joyce’s career.

This process recurs numerous times in *Dubliners* when characters gaze through windows. For example, the next story, “Eveline,” commences with the protagonist staring out her window at dusk, the twilight again prompting visions of future and past that merge when her eyes light on a (framed) print of the promises to the Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque—an exemplum of self-sacrificial womanhood she has emulated (*D*, 43). Both window and print become Eveline’s mirrors, as do the ship’s “illuminated portholes,” the lights of which, like the eyes of Eveline at story’s end, show “no sign” of anything (*D*, 47–48). Likewise, in “A Little Cloud,” the old men and children Little Chandler observes from his office window at twilight seem to show him how “useless it [is] to struggle against fortune” and foreshadow night falling on his dreams (*D*, 85). When, near the end of that story, he regards a photograph of his wife “enclosed in a frame of crumpled horn,” her “thin tight” lips, undesired expensive blouse, and “cold eyes” seem to signify his entrapment in the “narrow cell” of domesticity (*D*, 102, 100). Similarly, as James Duffy, near the conclusion of “A Painful Case,” reads and rereads, by a window in the failing November twilight, the account of Emily Sinico’s death, the “cheerless evening landscape” mirrors his own loneliness (*D*, 140). Conjuring up “two images” of Mrs. Sinico (*D*, 142)—inebriated accident victim and yearning, passionate woman—he foresees his own future as an unremembered corpse. In each case, a twilit window inspires the character to superimpose her- or himself upon the outdoor scene, behold future and past, and consider an empty life. These dusky reflections generate static portraits—discursive paintings denoting paralysis—that the characters overlay on events past and future. The internalization of vision renders it symbolic, thereby producing the very paralysis the characters lament. Thus framed, the boy’s disappointment at “Araby”’s conclusion seems inevitable—another silhouette in a dark gallery of loss. It becomes, indeed, a crucial snapshot in the volume’s chronological arrangement (from youth to adolescence to maturity): the moment when disillusionment becomes destiny.

Still unaware of this destiny, the boy belatedly makes his way to the bazaar, arriving at 9:50—a moment when, as Heyward Ehrlich points out, the two hands of the clock’s “lighted dial” (*D*, 39) would be “perfectly superimposed” upon each other (2006, 282), as if time has momentarily stopped. But night falls swiftly upon the nearly closed bazaar, accompanied by the

symbolic sound of falling coins, as the boy's desultory examination of "porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets" (*D*, 40), his timid approach to the saleswoman, and her flirtatious conversation with the two men yield the famous final sentence: "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (*D*, 40). Presumably, he sees himself in the leering men, now realizing that Mangan's sister and his own visual fantasies have enticed him into making a futile trip. Ehrlich, however, argues that the boy's inflated rhetoric merely permits him to "play the Manganian hero one more time, alternately inventing, effacing, and enlarging himself, now in the Araby of his own memory" (2006, 283). As Norris puts it, the narrator turns "an empty space into a dark mirror" (2003, 47). But this mirror is strangely framed: the boy packages his knowledge into a pat sentence, a suspiciously well-polished self-portrait.

Indeed, as Norris comments, this ending offers a "variety of interpretive options" that range from a "straight" acceptance of the boy's self-estimation as a vain figure to "sympathy with the idealist's victimization by vulgar philistinism," to "a critique of the narrator's exploitations of the juvenile experience by turning it into an aestheticized social parable" (*ibid.*, 46). Yet most readers tend to see the ending of "Araby" as an epiphanic moment of illumination and insight—a portrait of the boy in disillusioned apprehension in which he recognizes the foolishness of his behavior after his anticlimactic visit to Araby. This reading hinges on the notion that the boy is driven and derided by his *own* vanity, that is, by his own high opinion of himself, perhaps even his vision of himself as a figure in a romance, which has presumably been deflated by his experience at the bazaar.¹² But what is the nature of the "vanity" that leads his eyes to "burn with anguish and anger"? The answer provides yet another frame for interpretation.

12. See, for instance, Norris 2003, 54, although she suggests that "the narrative urges us to disbelieve" his declaration; Flynn 1983, 242–44; Mandel 1984, 53; and Russell 1966, 171.

The definitions of “vanity” evoke more than its common synonym of “conceit” or solipsism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) offers up definitions of *vanity* that hinge on value: “that which is vain, unprofitable, or worthless,” “a vain and unprofitable conduct or employment of time,” “a vain, idle, or worthless thing; a thing or action of no value.” The vanity that turns on him could thus be the journey itself, which is unprofitable insofar as it yields no gift for Mangan’s sister. But does his epiphany extend beyond this narrow interpretation? The ending does nothing to suggest that the boy has challenged the notion of value on which his failure at the bazaar depends. He has fallen from his self-portrait as a noble Grail knight and ends the story envisioning himself as a “creature” “derided” by “anguish and anger”—a response as self-abasing as his previous vision was self-inflating. But the passive voice constructs these visions as entities outside himself: vanity pursues him like a person driving a beast of burden or a hunter pursuing prey. By projecting the image of vanity outside of himself, the boy removes responsibility for his own behavior, taking responsibility instead for the vision—“I saw myself.” The boy, in other words, is an agent of the vision, but the final lines do not ensure that the epiphany is more than an aestheticized response to his failed and unprofitable quest.

“Vanity” itself evokes the visual, and more specifically the relationship between artist and object, between the power of spectatorship and the objectification of what is seen. Norris connects the vanity of the end of the story with Vanitas: “The boy has been transformed by his own narrative voice into a figure of fable or parable, of the mirrored emptiness that is Vanitas” (ibid.). This evocation of Vanitas refers us to a specific genre of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, discursive still-lives that remind their viewers of life’s impermanence through their representation of perishable objects, human skulls, and other images of death and decay. I would argue that this genre also simultaneously undercuts that notion of impermanence, however, through the process of *poesis* that the painters enact. This notion of vanity as Vanitas can be further connected to another meaning of *vanity*, a seventeenth-century usage that refers to a vanity fair: “a place or scene where all is frivolity and empty show; the world or a section of it as a scene of idle amusement and unsubstantial

display.” These allusions trigger recognition of the particularity of the boy’s epiphany: as much as he may be sobered by his experience at the “vanity fair”—and arguably, it is the fair itself, an external rather than internal vanity, that pursues him—nonetheless, by eventually narrating the story, he makes something new out of the experience. In so doing, he provides both a pessimistic reflection about life’s impermanence and superficiality (as in *vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*, “vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” from Ecclesiastes 1:2 of the Vulgate) and a reasonably permanent, aestheticized story that elevates, like the basket in Stephen’s aesthetic exercise in *Portrait* (179; earlier in the novel associated with young, attractive women selling their wares, 118), whatever is associated with commerce, desire, women, and the body to the level of art, thereby placing the artist himself “within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork” (*P*, 181). We can thus see the boy’s epiphany as his attempt to glorify the “artist” and to transform the objects of his gaze into worthy subjects of art—to transform “vanity” into “epiphany,” perhaps. In this sense, the boy’s final vision as narrated reinforces the notion that the artist must separate himself from whatever is “hostile to romance”—in this case, by idealizing and thereby transforming it into something worthy of contemplation—rather than questioning the logic and economy of the “romantic” vision that drives him to the bazaar in the first place.

The story, Norris suggests, “offers the beauty of its art as compensation to the frustrations that are thematized in [it]” (2003, 45), but destabilizes its own “compensatory gesture” by emptying its rhetoric to restore it to the “idiomatic, ‘marketplace’ sense of elaborate but insubstantial speech. ‘Araby’ the story, the ornate but empty narration, doubles ‘Araby,’ the ornate but empty bazaar” (*ibid.*, 46). Two elements of the ending encourage this reading. First, the narrative perspective, as Norris notes, is a limited one, containing the very “blind spots and solipsisms” that “mirror the closed psychic system of the boy” (*ibid.*, 50). An obscure usage of *vanity* as “an idle tale or matter; an idea or statement of a worthless or unfounded nature” (*OED*) allows the possibility that the boy recognizes the insufficiency of his own story by depicting it as the entity that hounds him; nonetheless, the past tense

indicates that the idle tale that pursues him may not be the story he has *told* but the “story” he experienced, that is, the events preceding the epiphany that lead him to “anguish and anger.” Second, the image of burning eyes not only suggests that the boy ends up with the blindness with which the story begins, but, coupled with the pain of “anguish and anger,” further points to the failure of his attempt to transcend the physical. The more mature narrator attempts to turn the physicality of the boy’s eye pain into a beautiful phrase, but without a challenge to the operations of the boy’s (and narrator’s) vision, the aesthetic gesture merely repeats the cycle of blindness, rather than offering an alternative to that vision.

In other words, the boy’s visual-linguistic presentation *frames* his recognition: it blows it up, and then freezes it forever. A passing instant again becomes a posed picture, as the boy’s conclusion does not correct his vision so much as overcorrect it, as if he has donned an ill-fitting pair of magnifying spectacles.

Other mirror scenes in *Dubliners* shed further light on this one by exposing the characters’ distorted vision. For example, Polly Mooney of “The Boarding House” also enjoys and invites the male gaze, and as her mother prepares to confront poor Bob Doran for doing more than gazing at Polly, Mrs. Mooney feels “satisfied” with the “decisive expression” she beholds in her pier-glass (*D*, 78). Polly imitates her mother: making ready to meet Bob, she appraises herself complacently in the mirror, then falls into a reverie of plans and “secret amiable memories” (*D*, 82). Her mother has, in effect, superimposed her face over her daughter’s. As for the would-be groom, his misted glasses (perspiration? incipient tears?) reveal one-dimensional portraits of his adversaries (glowering boss, young seductress, harpy mother, bulldog brother) and of himself, the victimized suitor at the center of this gallery, peering meekly around. Yet his vision cannot compete with the empowered eyes of Mrs. Mooney, and, as with the boy in “Araby,” this “lover’s eyes” (*D*, 82) fail to penetrate the surface.

Nor can our own vision easily be drawn away from the image of Mrs. Mooney and Bob Doran. The narrative that precedes the focus on Polly’s

thoughts and actions shapes our reading of them to such a degree that it is easy to overlook the fact that her own vision is not contiguous with her mother's. The mirror frame is replaced by the pillows that frame her thoughts. But soon her "hopes and visions" break free of the constraints of mirror and bed and become "so intricate that she no longer saw the white pillows on which her gaze was fixed or remembered that she was waiting for anything" (*D*, 83). The latter is potentially the only moment when Polly might be imagining a future unconstrained by Bob Doran or her mother's machinations. Yet our vision of Polly is so circumscribed by the framing narrative that it is easier to accept Bob Doran's vision of her as manipulative or her mother's view of her as wholly complicit than to imagine her otherwise, even when given the textual opportunity to do so.

Likewise, in "Clay," Maria's self-satisfied tone as she regards her "nice tidy little body" in the mirror fails to compensate for her unconscious diminution of her own importance (*D*, 123). Appropriately, at the story's key moment she wears a blindfold. In retrospect, we must wonder whether the "Araby" boy's eyes are, even at his moment of insight, as misted as Doran's or as blind as Maria's. Does he, like the Mooney women, see only what he wants to see in his self-created mirror? And has Mangan's sister, like Polly Mooney, exhibited herself to manipulate him?

The boy's burning eyes also presage a gallery of male weepers in *Dubliners*.¹³ "Clay," for example, concludes with Joe Donnelly's eyes so fogged with tears that he is unable to find a corkscrew. Though his tears seem sentimental, they may also indicate remorse over his estrangement from brother Alph. More significantly, his blurred vision mirrors that of Maria, whose simplicity masks both vanity and a desperate loneliness that emerges in unconscious acts of "forgetting": like the gift that the boy in "Araby"

13. The boy's tears also reenact two songs alluded to in the story. In "The Arab's Farewell to His Steed," the speaker asks what the steed's master will do "When the dim distance cheats mine eye, and, through the gathering tears, / Thy bright form, for a moment, like the false mirage appears?" And in the song "Araby," music is said to "Bring tears, bright tears to their brink, / And rainbow visions rise, And all my soul shall strive to wake, / Sweet wonder in thine eyes . . . To cheat thee of a sigh, / Or charm thee to a tear!" (Norton 2006).

hopes to find at the bazaar, her intended gift—the lost plumcake—never reaches its recipient. Thus, Joe may also be crying *for* her. Similarly, at the conclusion of “A Little Cloud,” after Chandler has angrily shouted at his infant son, his eyes meet the “hatred” in his wife’s (*D*, 103); as he retreats from the light, he feels “tears of remorse” rise to his eyes (*D*, 103)—remorse for making his son cry and for embarrassing himself with Ignatius Gallaher, but mostly for his lifelong timidity. Derided by vanity—he thought himself a poet!—his eyes burn with anguish and anger. But do those eyes see accurately? Why should Chandler—a man with a solid job, competent, attractive wife, and new baby and, therefore, compared to most of Joyce’s Dubliners, lucky indeed—feel such regret? His dissatisfaction derives, like the “Araby” boy’s, from his fantasies: of an exciting life in Europe, of the voluptuous “rich Jewesses” whose eyes he superimposes over those in his wife’s photo. “Why,” he asks, “had he married the eyes in the photograph?” (*D*, 101). But, of course, he has married neither the eyes nor the photograph: like the “Araby” narrator, Chandler transforms a woman into body parts, then assembles them into a static portrait of unfulfilled promise. Her photo becomes a mirror onto which he projects his own dissatisfaction and self-loathing—which, like that of the “Araby” narrator, is as self-glorifying as it is self-mortifying.

These visual motifs culminate, like so much else in *Dubliners*, in “The Dead.” Gabriel Conroy, though smarter and more self-aware than Bob Doran, wears similar spectacles, the “bright gilt rims” of which “[screen] his delicate and restless eyes” (*D*, 220). To screen is to protect, but also to block or inhibit. Thus, Gabriel’s glasses do not simply correct his impaired vision; they also permit him to hide his real feelings—at least from himself. The glasses also seem to magnify his self-consciousness, as if Gabriel, constantly fiddling with his clothes and fretting over his appearance, carries an internal mirror at every moment. He thus feels the need to escape, and just before supper gazes from the window of his aunts’ house, taps its cold pane, and imagines himself outside (*D*, 237). A little later he pictures the people outdoors gazing “up at the lighted windows” (*D*, 251) and wishes he were among them. Once again a window grants to the person looking through it the ability to exist imaginatively in two places and times at once.

“The Dead” also provides another moment that frames the movement from self-deprecation to self-aggrandizement—from being “driven by vanity” to becoming an artist of a Vanitas painting. At the end of the party, throughout which Gabriel has been wracked with self-doubt, he encounters Gretta on the stairs, listening to Bartell D’Arcy singing “The Lass of Aughrim,” a mournful tune that, in most versions, suggests a sexual relationship that ends in misunderstanding and ultimately the death of its titular character. The tune, we later discover, reminds Gretta of the long-dead Michael Furey’s passionate attachment to her. But Gabriel distances himself from the music and its grim content—and from his wife—choosing instead to frame the moment as an artist would and make the figural image into a discursive one: “He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. . . . *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter” (*D*, 261).

Only in the concluding episode in the Gresham Hotel does Gabriel achieve a full superimposition of vision, when he sees himself projected out upon the landscape. As the sobbing Gretta tells him of Michael Furey, Gabriel catches sight of himself in the cheval glass, feeling puzzled by the expression behind his “glimmering gilt-rimmed eyeglasses” (*D*, 271). He sees, that is, not his eyes but his eyeglasses: his screened vision perceives only more frames. A few minutes later, when Gabriel hears of Furey’s dark eyes, his mirror becomes metaphorical: “He saw himself as a ludicrous figure . . . a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror” (*D*, 273). Juxtaposing his image with Furey’s, he feels inadequate. Upon seeing himself as a creature driven and derided by vanity—by the idle matter in his postdinner speech, by the vanity fair of his aunts’ party—his forehead burns with anguish and anger (shame “burned upon his forehead” [*D*, 273]). Yet the vanity remains: he feels fatuous for believing that “vulgarians” could possibly understand him and angry at himself for

stooping to serve his ignorant aunts. If Gabriel, in some sense, reenacts the “Araby” boy’s concluding vision, Michael Furey lived out the boy’s romantic fantasy: after gazing at Gretta longingly from outside her window, Furey gave the gift, not of a bracelet, but of his life. “The Dead” thus divorces the “Araby” boy’s two self-portraits, in so doing perhaps permitting clearer self-reflections.

Or perhaps not: after all, Gabriel sees Michael Furey—and his wife’s own tears—through a single distorted lens of “romance.” We learn, “He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love” (*D*, 277), but there is little in Gretta’s own brief story to suggest that Michael Furey was anything more than infatuated; only his death frames his story for Gabriel as one of ideal romantic love rather than, for instance, naive infatuation or dangerous obsession.

The volume’s climactic scene offers another image of tear-misted eyes, as the weeping Gabriel envisions Michael standing in the cold rain, then turns to the window and watches the flakes fall, mentally traveling across the Irish landscape to the young man’s grave. The outdoor lamplight shining obliquely into the room creates the now familiar twilight effect: Gabriel sees himself magnified and projected out upon the world. A window again becomes a mirror, as Gabriel, gazing up into the darkness and then out the window, mentally roams from past to present to future; “fading out into a grey impalpable world,” he superimposes himself upon the imaginary outdoor scene (*D*, 225). *Dubliners* ends with Gabriel’s self-framing as one of the dead. Yet this vision carries him beyond Joyce’s other Dubliners: like Stephen Dedalus’s artist-god, he seems to dwell “within or behind or beyond or above” the other dead (*P*, 181). Watching the snowflakes fall, he projects himself across Ireland—from the Bog of Allen, westward to the central plain, then to the River Shannon, ending at the graveyard where Furey lies (*D*, 225). Gabriel’s frames at first constrain but may ultimately lift him above the limited, self-serving, or self-pitying perceptions of the earlier characters. Although this monumental vision—window-cum-mirror-cum-portrait-cum-montage or swooping aerial shot—may seem to render the “Araby”

boy's insight insignificant, in fact Gabriel's vision evolves from the boy's insight, as in a chronological arrangement of silhouettes.

Still, does framing "Araby" this way tell us whether the boy's final recognition evinces clarity or more self-delusion? Not really, for the volume's other portraits offer contradictory visions. Joyce's *Dubliners* habitually project their desire and despair upon the world around them, seeing neither for what it is, yet their perceived entrapment is real. Indeed, as I have noted, exposing that entrapment was one of Joyce's stated aims—to hold up that "nicely polished looking-glass" so *Dubliners* might see themselves. His book is thus both a window onto an imaginary world and a mirror that facilitates self-reflection. Such self-reflection may help to remedy the paralysis that the characters' self-framing induces.

I, on the other hand, would argue that the frames provided by the other stories—Little Chandler's story, for instance, or Gabriel Conroy's—offer us alternative reflections of the "Araby" narrator's failure to recognize the limitations of his own vision, the "limits of the diaphane," and indeed the failure of the "ineluctable modality of the visible," to borrow from Stephen in *Ulysses* (3.1–4). I agree that *Dubliners* provides a more open system of circulation of meanings if one can see beyond the single frame of each individual story and combine the lighted squares into a compound lens. Yet "Araby" remains another partial vision, exposing the seduction not only of the monoscopic but also of the narrative of progress and "development" that would lead us to trust the older voice of the boy of the story as somehow more "mature." Each story is a limited frame, but taken as a whole, Joyce's oeuvre offers alternatives for understanding and valuing human activity, interaction, and the production of meaning; the frames he provides indeed exceed the visual model on which the boy in "Araby" relies.

Setting "Araby" in relation to these other portraits of *Dubliners* thus engenders multiple frames, multiple superimpositions—a prism of lighted squares, perhaps, or a compound lens that, with each layer of glass, works to correct the distorted image provided by any single piece.

And as we move forward and backward through the volume, each page offering another piece of framed glass, the pages seem to regard each other, like those “Araby” houses, in a *mise en abyme*, like mirrors within mirrors. Yet they also gaze at us, inviting us to share their twilight visions and behold ourselves. Are we dewy-eyed romantics or hard-eyed realists? How much can we see in the “nicely polished looking-glass” of the pages, and do we recognize what we see? Ultimately, we indict or excuse the “Araby” boy and his fellow Dubliners according to our own frames. We are reminded again that all literary criticism is a kind of superimposition in which the critic overlays his or her story upon the author’s.¹⁴ Hence, our reading of “Araby”’s ending, like Gabriel’s culminating vision, ultimately encompasses all we have seen: not only the narrator’s framing of his experience, but also the frames offered by previous readers and other stories. Perhaps most of all, reading “Araby” tests our capacity to superimpose these visions upon each other. In framing “Araby,” then, we really frame ourselves.

14. Robert ApRoberts anticipates this insight as early as 1967 in his heated response to Harry Stone’s seminal essay on “Araby”: “The palimpsest Professor Stone sees in ‘Araby’ is not in the story but in Professor Stone’s mind, and what he takes for depths shimmering with rich, half-observed images is a mirror wherein the figures of his own perfervid fancy glimmer and shift” (1967, 488). Of course, he misses the point insofar as he fails to recognize the glimmerings of his own fancy in the eighteen pages of New Critical explication that precede this pithy comment.

4



“Eveline” at Home

Reflections on Language and Context

DEREK ATTRIDGE AND ANNE FOGARTY

We decided to work independently, to see if our responses to the story complemented or conflicted with one another. The plan was then to write responses to one another's pieces. In the event, our interpretations complemented one another so well that there was very little that needed to be appended.

The Words of “Eveline,” by Derek Attridge

Best and Worst

She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne. She was tired” (*D*, 42). The opening paragraph of “Eveline” shows Joyce at his characteristic best, achieving immense richness with the utmost economy of means. The second sentence, in particular, seems to me to epitomize his extraordinary skill. Eveline does not lean her head, but her head is leaned; she does not actively smell, but an odor is present in her nostrils. The syntax conveys a draining away of agency, her body parts functioning like independent, mechanical objects as her thoughts pursue a track they have pursued many times before.

Above all, it is “the odour of dusty cretonne” that has the distinctive Joycean signature on it. *Cretonne* is striking in its specificity: it names an

eminently practical fabric (the *OED* calls it “stout”) that nevertheless suggests an awareness of fashion, indicative of Eveline’s experience at “the stores”—the word is not recorded as an English import until 1887, and its evident Frenchness gives it a slightly exotic air. The adjective *dusty*, too, is redolent of a housekeeper’s pride, already hinting at a weariness with the daily grind of maintaining cleanliness, while providing the reader, whose consciousness of the sense of smell is already alert thanks to the slightly surprising word *nostrils*, with a vivid sensory image. Whereas the first sentence clearly gives us the words of an observing narrator, and we seem to remain with this narrator for a word like *odour*, the phrase *dusty cretonne* begins to reflect Eveline’s thought processes, which will soon take over the narrative.

The play of sound in this second sentence is less marked than in the previous sentence, in which the name of the story and its heroine is echoed in the phrasing—*Eveline*, *evening*, *invade*, *avenue*—but the controlled play of vowels and consonants continues, in, for instance, the chiming of *curtains* and *cretonne* and the redeployment of most of the sounds of *nostrils* in *dusty cretonne*. The last brief sentence—ambiguous as between a narrator’s observation and the character’s thoughts—is almost unnecessary after this sentence, though nothing explicit has been said about Eveline’s tiredness. Its brevity enacts its meaning.

Joyce wrote this paragraph (and the whole story, in something very close to the version he later published in *Dubliners*) in the summer of 1904, aged twenty-two, for the *Irish Homestead*, his second entry into print, following a few weeks after “The Sisters” (see J. Joyce 1993a, 2–3).¹ Only the phrase “window curtains” differs from the first version, which had “window-curtain.”² The attainment of this peak of stylistic subtlety and assurance at such an early point in a writing career has very few parallels.

1. The *Irish Homestead* version of the story is given in the 1993 Vintage edition of *Dubliners*, edited by Gabler with Hettche, 217–21; Gabler’s Garland edition gives the variants in footnotes.

2. Perhaps Joyce would have been well advised to delete *window* altogether from the second sentence, as he had already used the word in the first sentence and there is no doubt as to the location. He always liked repetition, however, using it for a number of different purposes.

"No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish" (*D*, 48). This short paragraph in the final section of the story, on the other hand, is a rare lapse in the story, as Joyce strives too hard to bring home the drama of his climax. The repeated *no*'s, the slightly excessive *frenzy*, and—especially—the overheated diction of the last sentence fail to register the particularity of the event, giving us instead the diction of a thousand popular fictions. *Amid* is falsely poetic, and although the phrase *the seas* is not as vague as the paragraph taken on its own might suggest, since we have already read, in a far more powerful sentence, at once metaphoric and somatic, "All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart," they remain damagingly unspecific. The *cry of anguish* is a cliché that prevents us from hearing imaginatively the sound a woman in Eveline's situation might have made. In Gabler's text, based on the 1910 late proofs, the story ends with a period; the version printed in the 1914 first edition of *Dubliners* and most editions since then has an exclamation mark after "anguish" that only makes matters worse (*D*, 48).

Paralysis

"Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis" (*D*, 9). Commentary on *Dubliners* has exploited to the full the hint given by this sentence in the collection's first paragraph, reinforced by Joyce's well-known letter to Grant Richards in 1906, in which he stated that he "chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed . . . the centre of paralysis" (*Letters II*, 134). In "Eveline" he wrote a story that does not use the word *paralysis* but is, in a sense, all about physical immobility, almost as if to set himself the challenge of treating his theme with literal fidelity. For 135 lines (in Gabler's edition), the eponymous character barely moves other than to look around the room; then at line 136 we encounter a short paragraph beginning "She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror." After a gap in time signaled by a break on the page, the following paragraph also begins with the words "She stood. . . ." She does not move from this position until the end of the story—and her not moving then is, of course, the climax.

Up to now, home has been Eveline's center of gravity, keeping her anchored through the trials of a mother's insanity and death, a father's

increasing drunkenness and violence, and the demands of parenting two younger children. (Her sailor lover, by contrast, has taken the world as his domain, leaving Ireland as a deck boy to sail to Canada, traversing the globe by ship, and choosing to settle in Argentina—if we are to believe his own account of his past, that is.) Her immobility in the first part of the story is emblematic of the more general stasis of her life, held in one place by a sense of duty as much as by any positive attachment.

It takes a spasm of terror—induced by memories of her mother’s mad behavior—to end Eveline’s immobility (which has gone on longer than it ought, as “her time was running out”). But Joyce omits all the actions that we know have followed this sudden movement, until we find her again stationary, being called by Frank to go with him on board the ship. The terror she experiences this time, however, has the opposite effect: she is rooted to the spot, clutching the railing. Between the impossibility of a home that represents unhappiness and physical danger and the impossibility of a leap into the unknown, Eveline has nowhere to go.

How does Joyce make a story out of these twin immobilities? What urges the reader onward, if there is virtually no action to respond to? Elsewhere I have tried to analyze the process whereby Joyce’s handling of literary style in “Eveline,” with its minute fluctuations and resonances, draws the reader in and on (see Attridge 2004, 4–8). The bulk of the story is presented as free-indirect discourse, or, more accurately free-indirect thought, as Eveline’s meditations are presented to us in the third person and past tense.³ In a practice typical of the stories of *Dubliners* from this point on, however, Joyce surprises us by moving occasionally into different stylistic modes. We have already noted how the first paragraph, although predominantly the narrator’s voice, has hints of Eveline’s thoughts; the second paragraph continues with what appears to be an objective account of what Eveline sees and hears, but again we are made aware that these sights and sounds are being perceived by a particular character: “Few people passed. The man out of the last house

3. It is not interior monologue, as John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley claim (1993, 34), but a quite different technique that retains the tense and syntactic completeness of the narrative context.

passed on his way home; she heard his footsteps clacking along the concrete pavement and afterwards crunching on the cinder path before the new red houses" (*D*, 42). After a sentence that could be a neutral observation but could equally be one made by Eveline, remarking to herself the paucity of passers-by, the phrase "man out of the last house" gives us her recognizable, Irish, diction identifying an individual in terms that relate specifically to her. The repetition of *passed* may seem a stylistic awkwardness, or it may be taken to represent the repetitiveness of Eveline's thoughts. But *clacking* is surely a Joycean narrator's word, unusual and vivid, registering not so much Eveline's mental processes as her un verbalized perception and contrasting with the different sound of *crunching*. *The new red houses*, however, could well be Eveline's own somewhat condescending phrase, as bare in its expression as the objects being described.

Home

Central to many of the *Dubliners* stories is the question of *home*: how is it constituted, what is its value, what demands does it make?⁴ The homes we see are almost all unsatisfactory. The boy narrator in the first three stories is uneasy at home and finds excitement in leaving it. The boarding house in the story of that name is a travesty of a home; Little Chandler and Farrington in "A Little Cloud" and "Counterparts" return to their homes but not to domestic happiness; Maria in "Clay" moves between two establishments, neither of which offers the true comforts of home. Mr. Duffy's home in "A Painful Case" lacks homeyness, and the Kernan residence in "Grace" holds an erring husband and a long-suffering wife. Only "The Dead" celebrates the generosity, tolerance, and hospitality a home can give—and then not without a number of ambiguities.⁵

4. For an illuminating essay on the importance of "home" in *Dubliners*, with particular attention to its significance in post-Famine Ireland, see Gibbons 2000. Law (1987) valuably traces some of the complexities of the notion in *Ulysses*.

5. There is no need to elaborate on the importance of home in *A Portrait of the Artist* (in which *home* is one of the three words that, to Stephen, sound different on the Dean of Studies'

The word *home* occurs ten times in the story. (Interestingly, the first occurrence is in the passage quoted earlier describing the sound of “the man out of the last house” as he passes “on his way home”; another subterranean suggestion in this sentence is that Eveline feels that her house offers a more homey environment than the new houses with their bright red brick and their cinder paths.) Eveline’s meditation is largely an exploration of the meaning and the force (mental, emotional, bodily) of home: her thought that she is about to “leave home” prompts her to focus on the word with an internal exclamation, “Home!” (*D*, 43). This impassioned thought is followed by a survey of the room she is sitting in while she examines the significance of home to her. Familiarity is one of its key components, and it is what she first feels the attraction of—yet she is soon pointing out to herself that strangeness is also present, in the photograph of the unknown priest. As she goes on to “weigh each side of the question,” the sheer drudgery of her existence is set against the “shelter and food” that home implies (*D*, 43).

Like many of the homes in *Dubliners*, this one is a place of alcoholism and violence; the young woman’s desire to leave is in part out of sheer fear: “Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father’s violence. She knew it was that that had given her the palpitations. When they were growing up he had never gone for her, like he used to go for Harry and Ernest, because she was a girl; but latterly he had begun to threaten her and say what he would do to her only for her dead mother’s sake” (*D*, 44).⁶ The sequence of thoughts begins with the suggestion that her age is some protection from her father’s physical attacks—*even now* and *sometimes* signal that in the past, these fears had been more persistent than they are at present. Yet the thought quickly reverses itself, so that it is the very fact of her being grown up that has rendered her a potential victim, no longer protected by her sex. And later she recalls happier times with her father—though their very uncommonness is a silent counterargument. But

tongue) or *Ulysses* (where even Plumtree’s Potted Meat fails to make every home complete), and *Finnegans Wake* revolves around a family often glimpsed in a domestic setting.

6. Joyce changed “were it not for her dead mother’s sake” (in the *Irish Homestead* version) to the Hiberno-English Irish locution “only for her dead mother’s sake.”

it is the memory of her mother's descent into madness and the fear that the same fate awaits her that bring about the end of her reflections.

Home as a magnetic force represents not only the familiar, food and shelter, and the pleasures of family relations (however rare), but also obligations.⁷ Although the responsibility of keeping house for her father is described in predominantly negative terms, it is clearly a major factor in her deliberations. Added to it is the somewhat mysterious fact that she is caring for two young children. And, to cap it all, there is her promise to her dying mother "to keep the home together as long as she could" (*D*, 46–47)—again the word *home*, here perhaps more forcefully than anywhere else.

It is highly significant, then, that Frank, her sailor lover, has "a home waiting for her" in Buenos Aires (*D*, 45).⁸ *Home* here is vague but attractive—one of the many hints that Eveline has been gullible in her acceptance of Frank's tales, perhaps, though it is easy to see why she has fallen for them. She herself thinks of "her new home" (*D*, 44). There is no sign at the end that her paralysis is owing to her mistrust of Frank; it is rather the result of the complexity of her own relation to her home. What she prays for as she clutches the railing is not that God should help her decide what is best for her, what home with Frank will mean in comparison to her home with her father and the two children, but what is her duty. In the balance are her promise to the man who has courted her (not "the man she loves"; the word she uses is *like* [*D*, 45]) and her promise to her mother, a promise that serves to heighten the responsibility that a sole daughter has for her aging father ("Her father was becoming old lately, she noticed") and as a surrogate mother for her two children.

7. The *Irish Homestead* text has Eveline wondering not only whether it is wise to leave home, but whether it would be "honourable"—in revising, perhaps Joyce felt he should not raise the question of duty too early in the story.

8. Margot Norris points out that Hugh Kenner, in an article in the *James Joyce Quarterly* in the fall of 1972, misquotes this sentence as "he had a house waiting for her" (2003, 242). This wording would be a significant alternative, providing greater solidity than the more nebulous but more romantic notion of "a home," but Gabler lists no such variant in his edition.

Decision

Eveline makes two decisions in the story, to go with Frank and not to go. The first, as we have seen, prompts her to stand up; the second prevents her from moving. Neither is a decision in the sense of a thoughtful, considered preference for *a* rather than *b*; both exemplify the conception of decision analyzed by Derrida, following Kierkegaard: a moment of madness in which rationality is left behind (though careful, rational calculation is what brings one to this point).⁹ Eveline assembles powerful reasons for going and equally powerful reasons for staying; then the memory of her mother's madness—specifically, the aural memory of her mother's unintelligible, repetitive utterances—produces not a rational affirmation but a physical act and an emotional charge: “She stood up on a sudden impulse of terror.” What follows sounds more like rationalization of a decision now taken than a further stage in the process of weighing pros and cons: “Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her” (*D*, 47). The repetitions here, which would be clumsy in the narrator's discourse, are the reflex of the character's desperation as she clings to the decision she finds she has made.

The second moment of decision is also more physical than it is mental. Eveline is again immobile, again torn between alternatives. This time the painfulness of the dilemma compels her into prayer, as she wrestles with the question of her double, contradictory duties. But at the final moment, when the bell clangs (“upon her heart” [*D*, 48]—another Joycean master-stroke of economic phrasing) and Frank urges her to accompany him, Eveline feels that she is drowning, drawn by her lover into “all the seas of the world,” and her paralysis is like that of “a helpless animal.” Her face registers no emotion whatsoever. The parallel with the earlier moment of decision is obvious, and we are left with the question: has Eveline descended,

9. See, for example, Derrida 1992, 26. The literary exemplification of Derrida's understanding of decision making is fully explored through Henry James's fiction in J. H. Miller 2005.

not gradually like her mother but in one instant of impossible mental and emotional conflict, into madness?

"Dusty Cretonne": Rereading "Eveline," by Anne Fogarty

By contrast with Derek Attridge's interpretation that illustrates how an attentive reading of the language and style of Joyce's story can excavate its ambiguities, my analysis will concentrate on several of the social and historical dimensions of "Eveline" in order further to explicate Joyce's peculiar positioning of his seemingly passive protagonist. In this tale we are presented with a protagonist the details of whose life do not cohere. She is, on one level, presented as powerless to save herself from a foreordained fate, whether as unwilling carer for her violent father or as sexual victim of her tale-spinning boyfriend. Yet, on another level, she is seemingly an independent city girl who has a job in one of the quintessential domains of modernity, a shop, and readily pursues her fantasies and desires in seeking out and acting upon the liaison with Frank. As Derek Attridge's analysis has shown, "Eveline" is a slippery tale because it veers between an unstable and artful narrative voice and the unreliable and attenuated consciousness of the heroine. In what follows, I shall consider how an investigation of the ways in which concepts of femininity and domesticity were politicized in early-twentieth-century Ireland allows us further to probe why Eveline is hopelessly trapped between tradition and modernity and why the protofeminist impulses in the story are obliterated and rendered null. Above all, I shall examine the contradictory ideological values with which the activity of housework and the notion of the home were freighted in the pages of the pointedly titled *Irish Homestead*. These buried social and political contexts illuminate why Eveline is faced with an unappealing and self-canceling choice between two forms of domesticity, either in Dublin with her father or in Buenos Aires with her lover. Before undertaking this exploration, I shall first briefly survey the critical reception of "Eveline" that has often falsely condemned the heroine and anachronistically assumed that she possesses an agency that was not a given in the period and the social milieu in which Joyce sets his story.

As previously noted, "Eveline" was first published in the *Irish Homestead*, on September 10, 1904. This newspaper was the organ of the Irish

Agricultural Organisation Society, one of the key bodies that sought to galvanize Irish society and to awaken a spirit of enterprise and self-help in the country that would aid in the achievement of national independence. The circumstances of its first publication and their import, albeit well known, are often glossed over. Instead, even though it shares the cryptic and elusive qualities of the other stories in *Dubliners*, “Eveline” is often seen as definitively encapsulating the pivotal themes and concerns of the collection as a whole, above all the issue of paralysis, and starkly typifying the moral outrage about Dublin life that supposedly fuels the entire volume. In particular, Joyce’s polemical and defensive comments in his letters to friends and to hostile publishers have been used as a means of deducing the hidden intentions believed to underlie this story and to shed light on its elusive design.

These authorial pronouncements have become so familiar and have acquired such currency as a basis for analyzing *Dubliners* that they have lost the rhetorical bravado and provisionality with which they were once uttered. The contingency of letter writing is frequently ignored as Joyce’s views about his own text are pressed into service to sanction and support interpretations of his stories. Thus, his famous declaration to Grant Richards in 1906 is regularly seen as a summa of *Dubliners* and as voicing an unalterable bass line sounded throughout these tales: “My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because the city seemed to me the centre of paralysis” (*Letters II*, 134). On closer inspection, it must be recognized that Joyce’s confidences to his would-be publisher were tactical, monitory, and deliberately self-aggrandizing. In declaring that he was writing the moral history of his country, he echoed Gustave Flaubert’s similar avowal in a letter to Mademoiselle Leroyer de Chantepie in 1864 that his purpose in composing *A Sentimental Education* was to write “the moral history—or rather the sentimental history—of the men of my generation” (“l’histoire morale des hommes de ma génération, «sentimentale» serait plus vrai” [1924, 24]). In suggesting such a strategic alliance with Flaubert’s novel, Joyce emphasized the weightiness and timeliness of his own creation. Furthermore, by asserting the existence of a unifying purpose in his text, he strategically deflected attention from its more scandalous aspects. Despite their persuasiveness and their usefulness as props for critical discussion, we need to approach Joyce’s piecemeal

and polemical epistolary comments on *Dubliners* with caution. The seeming cohesiveness that he invokes to vindicate *Dubliners* is belied by its diverse political objectives and stances and roving historical points of view. Furthermore, any assumption of an easily discernible univocality is vitiated by the structural complexity of these stories and by the opacity of their plots and symbolic scaffolding.

Early criticism of *Dubliners* assumed that the theme of paralysis both was a *clou* to the individual tales and provided a unifying framework for the overall collection. As Derek Attridge has shown, such assumptions have tended above all to color views of "Eveline" and to ground assessments of its heroine. However, often, a concentration on the stagnation of Irish society has been used to castigate the protagonist of this story for her lack of freedom and to hold her to account for the ideological conditions that bind her. Hugh Kenner's commentaries on the centripetal theme of paralysis in *Dublin's Joyce* and *The Pound Era* may be seen to typify such analysis, even though they also constitute a particularly adept elucidation of this grand Joycean preoccupation with Irish social and political stagnation. Kenner dexterously teases out the complexities of "Eveline" while insisting that they are always organized around the central thematic moment of paralysis that he sees the story as staging. In *Dublin's Joyce*, he contends that "Eveline is the book's second thematic image of paralysis" (1956, 54). Further, he argues that she is not a protagonist in the manner of Father Flynn in "The Sisters" but rather a mirror. Hence, her lack of agency is more thoroughgoing than the reduced dynamism of the figures in the other stories. Kenner, however, complicates and revises his view of the story in *The Pound Era* but still insists that the theme of paralysis and, by extension, Eveline's lack of agency are key facets of Joyce's bafflingly compressed fiction. He presents his altered view of the story as a corrective of received accounts of the text:

"The heroine of 'Eveline' longs to escape from her drab Dublin life and she has her chance. But, on the very point of embarking for Buenos Aires with the man who loves her . . ." (Anthony Burgess 1965, *Re Joyce*). So runs a handbook summary, typical of dozens. In missing half Joyce's point they still speak truth. Eveline has rejected that home in South America, though as an act of choice, not of judgment. Her refusal remains refusal whether

or not there is any home there for her. We are to imagine the rest of her life (“of commonplace sacrifices,” like her mother’s) embittered by the remembered panic. She refused, though not from insight. . . . She will never so much as know that Frank may have been less than Frank, but will live out her life in the consciousness of her onetime immobilizing terror. (1972, 38)

Kenner here construes a paradoxical portrait of Eveline as a figure who is castigated for a choice that, in effect, she has never been in a position to make, owing to her lack of autonomy and independent insight. He later contends that Joyce set out to maximize her “ignorance and her pathos” (ibid., 39) and complicates this assessment of her even further by also averring that she lives inside a fiction and that her world is structured around “a febrile unreal story” (ibid.), that is, the romance hinging on Frank. This secondary set of considerations that sees Eveline not simply as an object lesson in cowardice or of myopia but also as an instance of the human capacity for fiction making permits a more nuanced and differentiated take on her plight.

Despite Kenner’s attempt to counter the routine and often simplistic moralizing that comes into play in evaluating “Eveline,” such approaches to the text remain difficult to circumvent. The crux above all appears to be the uncertainty posed by the ending: “He rushed beyond the barrier and called to her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but he still called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (*D*, 48). Interpretations frequently attempt to fill out the omissions in this narration and to produce the consequential and well-turned plot that Joyce pointedly withholds from us. The summary of “Eveline” in *The Critical Companion to James Joyce* may serve as a further example of the traps that this text sets for us as readers and the degree to which it lures us into ironing out its ambiguities and substituting faintly self-righteous moral pronouncements for its elisions, puzzles, and subtleties. A. Nicholas Fagnoli and Michael Gillespie (2006), in the synopsis that they provide, comment on the “listless title figure” and conclude that “Frank is forced to leave without Eveline because of her incapacitating fear of change.” They also contend that Eveline is “seized with an overwhelming terror that paralyzes her and saps her will to leave.” The effort to summarize the tale demonstrates, in fact, how much remains unstated and unexplained.

One could speculate that a condemnatory account of Eveline that takes her to task for her moral dereliction becomes a means of mollifying the reader's unease with a story that refuses to editorialize and appears willfully to call to a halt all the impulses for romance and escape that it had so explicitly toyed with at its opening.

It must be noted, however, that many recent readings of "Eveline" have been at pains to foreground its complexities and to avoid the urge to make the figure of Eveline a scapegoat for the bedeviling social and political circumstances that define her in large part. Margot Norris's (2003) suggestive reexamination of *Dubliners* demonstrates the extent to which these stories abound in silences, omissions, and inexplicable allusions. She advocates that we practice what she has dubbed a method of suspicious reading that allows us at once to accept the ambiguities of *Dubliners* and to question our own assumptions and critical impositions. In a similar vein, Vicki Mahaffey (2007) has contended that the tales of *Dubliners* might be seen as analogous to the detective tales of Arthur Conan Doyle. Just as the latter author encourages his readers to adopt several competing vantage points and to view the world alternatively from the perspective of Sherlock Holmes and of Doctor Watson, so too Joyce urges us in *Dubliners* to see things from the opposing stances of the victim and the perpetrator of a crime and also to adopt the more objective and distancing position of an investigative reporter (see Mahaffey 2007, 73–123; and Norris 2003, 55–67).

In the interpretation that follows, I would like to consider how this new attentiveness to the cryptic nature and multifacetedness of *Dubliners* might also be extended to the social and historical contexts of "Eveline." Instead of viewing this text as providing a unitary and cohesive view of the political undercurrents of Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century and merely satirizing the abjection and degradation of Irish society, I will track how Joyce alerts us to the moral and political intricacies of the worlds inhabited by his protagonist. To this end, I will consider one of the primary contexts referenced in the story, female labor and the domestic sphere.

Recent Irish feminist historiography has provided fresh insight into the position of women in late-nineteenth-century Ireland. Joanna Burke in *Husbandry to Housewifery* (1993) has demonstrated that there was a large-scale shift in female employment at the end of the nineteenth century that was

of a piece with the domestication of women's roles elsewhere in the world. Increasingly, women moved from labor in the fields to full-time housework. The *Irish Homestead*, which was the weekly publication of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society founded by Sir Horace Plunkett, has generally been seen as focusing on the ethos of a male-centered cooperative movement and concentrating on their economic activities and concerns. However, as Leeann Lane (2004) has shown, it also developed distinct notions of female identity during the period 1896–1912 that track and reflect on the changed responsibilities and status of women in rural Ireland. From the outset, the *Irish Homestead* published columns designed for a specifically female readership. These columns were titled successively “The Fireside,” “The Predominant Partner,” “Household Hints,” and “Pages for Irish Country Women.” The early columns that simply relayed society gossip quickly ceded to more practical interventions that were entirely different in tenor and gave advice about daily household chores while also occasionally debating the value of domesticity. The *Irish Homestead* particularly aimed at articulating and translating into action the self-help ideals of Horace Plunkett, who had founded the cooperative movement not only to restore economic vitality to the Irish countryside but also thereby to awaken a new spirit of independence and of national esteem. Central to Plunkett's social revolution were the principles of self-aid, economic enterprise, improved living, and rural regeneration. Above all, the notion of the home was a keystone of his philosophy. An excerpt from one of his speeches reprinted in 1899 makes clear the extent to which he proposed a renovated notion of home as a counter to the negative aspects of modernity and to the deleterious effects of emigration: “We have in Ireland a rare field for hopeful experiment upon the problems of rural life. There, without the rival attractions of great and growing cities, we may try our hands at securing a comfortable and even enjoyable home life among a people anxious to stop at home” (*Irish Homestead*, February 18, 1899, 125). The renegotiation of the roles of women and the formulation of a notion of the domestic sphere were crucial to this project of economic and social renewal.

The cooperative movement furthered not only all manner of agricultural development from beekeeping to dairy farming but also cottage industries. In this way, women who were encouraged to move into the domestic sphere could still play a part in augmenting the economy and also promote the

pursuit of self-renewal and self-sufficiency. The inauguration of the "Household Hints" column in the spring of 1899 was one of the many ways in which the *Irish Homestead* voiced these new principles of a renovated Ireland. The Irish housewife was seen as a linchpin of this revived rural life and the new spirit of national self-regard. The contributors to the column were anonymous and variously used the noms de plume "Haus Frau," "Keilam," and "A Working Woman." Jointly, they articulated this ideal of a new Irish social order whose fulcrum was the home, the female domestic sphere. Housewifery and female domestic labor were presented not as drudgery or a form of enslavement but as an active political mission. Haus Frau firmly enunciates this philosophy of an all-sustaining home life: "The home is, or ought to be, the woman's kingdom, and that she may rule it wisely, she must serve it well. . . . The very foundation of a nation's strength is its home life, and the complete fitness of this rests with women. The intellectual life of a family ought to grow on a foundation of comfort, and comfort must come from health, cleanliness and beauty" (ibid., March 4, 1899, 173). The vast preponderance of the "Household Hints" columns was concerned with hygiene and the niceties of domestic management. Such advice chimed with editorial discussions of rural decay and the disorderly nature of Irish peasant life. An intervention on the Irish cottage unfavorably contrasted the condition of local dwellings with the Comte de Ségur's descriptions of villages in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century. The innate integrity of Irish peasant culture was contrasted with the primitivism exhibited by most cottages: "We have got the much desired vote, fixity of tenure and the number of peasant proprietors is gradually increasing. But it must be confessed that our Irish villages and cabins in many districts retain their primitive characteristics of untidiness and dirt. . . . It is amusing, no doubt, to see Biddy's old flannel petticoat or Mickey's trousers—inserted to fill the gap of a broken pane—fluttering in the breeze and otherwise flaunting about, but we ought to cease furnishing 'copy' for the professional humourist" (ibid., April 29, 1899, 311). Here national stereotypes and the specter of an indigenous atavism are brandished as threats. Dirt becomes symbolic of a degraded past that needs to be abandoned.

Consequently, much advice was dispensed in the *Irish Homestead* about how Irish cottages could be transformed and cleaned up. Animals were to be removed from indoors, and manure heaps were to be banished from their

traditional location on the doorstep, as Lady Gregory indicates in her analysis of rural slovenliness: “We who live in the West are apt to give in to the sleepy influence of damp and of mists and to give up on the fight against dirt and disorder and dilapidation. . . . Our neighbour’s house has an unmended window pane, and a leak in the thatch, and a heap of manure for a doorstep; and our eye grows used to this, and we take it as an excuse for the neglect of our own house” (ibid., May 27, 1899, 368–69). Haus Frau echoes Gregory’s sentiments with regard to the necessity for active intervention in her brisk account of dusting: “It should be an imperative duty with Irish housekeepers to do battle with might and main against dust” (ibid., October 6, 1900, 651). Even though the *Irish Homestead* in its weekly installments continued to promote these ideals of national regeneration and of a cleansed and restored rural civilization predicated on the ordering governance and labor of women, it also occasionally permitted dissenting views to emerge. A contributor using the sobriquet of “Queen Bee” demurred against the imposition of these ideals of order and cleanliness and the regime of housework that they entailed: “[Women who obsessively manage their houses] are apt to forget a truth which was this forcibly expressed by a pleasant Mrs Willing-to-Please not long ago: ‘Houses are really places to live in, not to be kept clean.’” The writer further complained about a fastidious approach to housecleaning and argued that life should not “simply be a perpetual struggle against dirt, dust, and disorder.” She concluded her intervention with the forthright declaration that a single-minded devotion to housecleaning led to “rustiness of heart and mind” (ibid., December 22, 1900, 717).

This survey of the ideological debates in the *Irish Homestead* centering on issues of communal morale, hygiene, female labor, and the strategic role of the home in the process of nation building in the years preceding the publication of “Eveline” in 1904 reveals the degree to which Joyce finessed and cleverly trumped George Russell’s invitation to write something “simple, rural? livemaking? pathos? . . . not to shock the readers” (*Letters II*, 43). His story of Eveline with its glancing references at her prolonged battle against dust and the ever-renewing specter of domestic disorder in Dublin suburbia neatly mimics and intervenes in the discussions in the “Household Hints” columns. Further, her quest for independence and her enterprising search for a lover and an alternative life elsewhere are in keeping with the

principles of self-help advocated by the *Irish Homestead*. However, they also crucially subvert them by pointing to the gap between personal happiness and social ideals. In showing the struggle that Eveline undergoes in reconciling her clashing roles as a modern urban worker, a keeper and manager of the house and family, a desiring subject, and a self-sacrificing maternal steward of domestic values, Joyce opens up the fissures in the ideological ideals held sacrosanct by the *Irish Homestead* and the cooperative movement. He brings to light contradictions that could be only vaguely gestured at by the female columnists engaged in promulgating and reflecting on the newfound virtues of domesticity in this idealist and partisan publication.

His story reveals the extent to which the aspiration to a sanitized feminine private sphere as a salve to Irish political demoralization and as the grounds for national self-renewal was bound to founder in reality. Eveline, it might be noted, apparently chooses domestic struggle and home life at the end of the story in keeping with the explicit ethos of the *Irish Homestead* and the utopian ideals of national regeneration that motivated so many of the cultural and social movements in late-nineteenth-century Ireland. Yet the tale intimates that the trade-off in such a decision is as much debilitating as empowering for Eveline. She may have escaped the sexual entrapment that Frank represents, but in lieu she succumbs to the violent predation of her father's house. Her actions are ultimately and inevitably nullified by the ongoing and irresolvable clashes between public ideals and private desires in the Irish political arena. Moreover, the description of Eveline's lapse into animal-like passivity at the end of the tale intimates the problems with the Irish campaign to revivify and cleanse the social order in the hopes of holding primitivism at bay: it can produce another kind of devolution. Political activism that demands communal rectitude at the expense of personal happiness, while combating the alleged "laziness" of the disenfranchised classes, can produce paralysis. Eveline is caught between two imperatives: the imperative to keep cleaning her house and taking care of her family and the imperative to explore, to learn, and to pursue her dreams of romantic fulfillment. The result is an impasse. The *Irish Homestead* viewed the activity of housework as part of the larger political project of renewing the country and laying to rest the specter of a savage, primitive, and demoralized Ireland. Cleanliness and domestic efficiency were to become the hallmarks of a renovated

and modernized nation. Joyce, in “Eveline,” intimates that his heroine is caught in a stalemate produced by the different visions of modernity and tradition that define and underwrite her. On the one hand, she is trapped by the nationalist propaganda that persuasively urges her to stay at home and to assist in the development of a new political order, but, on the other, she is ensnared by the temptations of a commodified modernity and the wish to become a fulfilled subject. Either in perpetuating her mother’s role, and thus contributing to a vision of a new national order, or in leaving the country and pursuing her desires, she is faced with a lack of freedom. In sum, because of her gender, she is consigned to servitude by her social environment.

In Conversation: Reconsiderations

DA: Our two approaches to the story, it seems to me, complement one another admirably, and as a result there is not much more to add. Anne’s characteristically scrupulous account of the complex demands being made on Irish housewives by the moralists of the *Irish Homestead* gives depth to our understanding of the plight being dramatized by Joyce. What I have described as the two “decisions” made by Eveline, to go and not to go (or not to stay and to stay), signaled, or perhaps even performed, by action and then by inaction, come as moments of Kierkegaardian madness that cap a deliberative process, part conscious and part unconscious, reflecting a set of complex cultural demands to which there is no “logical” answer. Anne’s analysis helps us see that the dilemma Eveline faces is not just a personal predicament but also a deep conflict within metropolitan Irish society in its attitude to married women; or, to put it differently, Joyce is not writing about a single woman’s weakness (or lucky escape) but about a cultural aporia. In a way, what Anne gives us is a female counterpart to Joseph Valente’s (2000) brilliant account of the “double-bind of Irish manhood” in *Semicolonial Joyce*. The emphasis on “home” that I stressed is enriched by Anne’s reading of the *Irish Homestead*, which in its very title pointed to the growing importance of the domestic scene as a site of ideological investment. Most readers will not have access to this information, but Joyce’s achievement is being able to convey to such readers, in the most concrete manner, the irresolvable predicament his heroine finds herself in as she sits at the window.

AF: In fastening on the overdetermined symbolism of the home and on the problem of the seeming choice that Eveline makes and then abandons, Derek's painstaking and nuanced analysis draws out the extent to which Joyce's language encapsulates and is buoyed by the political and social debates in Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century and also indicates how it resolutely commandeers and overwrites them. Even though inquiry into these often remote contexts may seem to take us on prolonged detours, the text appears in some ways to trump any knowledge that we might bring to it by showing that it has already embedded that knowledge and transformed it into artistry. Both our readings, I think, concur in uncovering the psychological intricacies of the story and in underscoring that its unraveling or nonexistent plot evades easy summary. Try as we will, Eveline's predicament cannot fully be circumscribed or explicated. Indeed, the figure of this faltering heroine is an illusion projected by various insinuating and persuasive means. In effect, as Derek's careful teasing out of the narrative stances and points of view has shown, we never quite see her, either from within or from without. She is both withheld and kept at bay. To this extent, I agree that to explain her impasse in terms of a drama of rational choice is to miss many of the dimensions of this endlessly mystifying narrative. Unlike the resourceful heroine in traditional folktales such as "Donkeyskin" by Charles Perrault, "Eveline" nightmarishly throws the fairy-tale plot into reverse as the daughter apparently succumbs to, rather than evading or outwitting, the incestuous father. Joyce succeeds in revealing Eveline to us as a subject in abeyance or a self that falls through the net of narrative. Derek's suggestion that she may well have descended into a vortex of madness in the interval between the two disproportionate halves of the story is very suggestive. Such a denouement, of course, aptly captures Eveline's fate. But it also points to a reluctance at this point in Joyce's career to conjure with female difference other than in archetypal or stereotypical terms. Moreover, there is a sense in which the ending of "Eveline," as intimated in Derek's observant interpretation, is a nicely orchestrated deflection. The devastating plots of sexual abuse, female oppression, and the misery of emigration remain buried deep in the substratum of the artful tale that we have read.

7



“The Instinct of the Celibate”

Boarding and Borderlines in “The Boarding House”

RICHARD BROWN AND GREGORY CASTLE

Both Gregory and Richard were new to the idea of this kind of collaboration, with no preconceptions about how to proceed with it. We wrote brief statements and then exchanged longer, independently conceived pieces of around two thousand words—Richard on boards, boarding, and boarders and Joyce’s references to the popular press and song, Gregory on the culture of confession as it impinges upon Bob’s masculinity. Since we found much to agree with in each other’s starting positions, we merged the independent approaches rather than staging a dialogue or debate between them. As this eminently Hegelian process of dialectical synthesis developed, it became apparent that we both shared an interest in the cultural politics of Bob Doran’s situation, and Foucault as well as Žižek emerged as vital points of reference. We both found that the independent sections reflected on each other in unanticipated ways, allowing new insights and associations to come about. The collaborative aspect of the essay might therefore be characterized as being a “laboratory” as well as a “shop window,” to borrow two terms of reference offered by Jonathan Arac in a 1997 essay on collaborative work in the humanities. But neither term would completely define the process or the essay that resulted from it, which is in its own way a “third thing,” one that has been produced from our two separate contributions but would hardly have come into its present final form if it had been written by either one of us without the other.

Collaborative writing is a fascinating exercise, and it has produced some extraordinary results that call many apparently unshakable, established ideas

about writing and selfhood into question. One of the best known of all recent collaborations was between Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, coauthors of "Anti-Oedipus" and "A Thousand Plateaus." At the start of "A Thousand Plateaus" they write, "The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. . . . We have been aided, inspired, multiplied" (1987). That passage gets to the heart of the matter—that the ideal collaboration can emerge as more than the sum of its parts.

Boarding," which Joyce's title announces as being prominent among the concerns of the story, is a widespread condition of habitation in modern urban societies, which, we propose, governs the relation of the characters in Joyce's story to sexual pleasure, economic power, and ideology, pointing up those ambiguities of meaning that Joyce's narrative scrupulously preserves. The boarder or lodger, in the primary sense of the word used here, is someone who "has his . . . food and lodging, at the house of another for compensation"; the *OED* traces this usage back to the early sixteenth century. Through the analyses of modernity in Freud and Marx, we might see boarders, like Bob Doran in the story, as being located in a liminal condition, on the uncanny "borders" of the domestic economies in which they lodge. On the one hand, they lack the empowerment implied in the full rights of domestic property ownership that are important in bourgeois societies. On the other hand, they are yet to be constrained by its obligations and responsibilities. In modern societies, residence in owned domestic property is closely connected to the legitimation of heterosexuality through marriage. The sex life of the boardinghouse becomes an object of fascination, illicit and unstable, excluded from legitimation but potentially open to a certain wildness or freedom from constraint. No wonder that the term *boarding house* gets so tangled up with connected terms like *bawdry* (prostitution) and *bawdy* (sexual innuendo or licentiousness) in the boozy pub culture of Dublin to which Joyce exposes us in returning to the story of Bob Doran in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses* or in references to the "boardelhouse" in *Finnegans Wake* (186.31). Here the erotic and the economic are entangled in problematic ways. No less a figure than Shakespeare, as Joyce knew, lived in a boardinghouse in London and uses the word *boarding* in ambiguous

sexual and nautical senses in, for example, the Falstaffian comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (II.i.79–80). Doran best exemplifies the boardinghouse condition of single men in Dublin: cloistered but not celibate, the new urban dweller with just enough resources to survive, but only “at the board” with others at his stage of social development. This condition signals not so much a liminal space, where one is challenged and changed, as a borderline zone, hemmed in by implicit or explicit legislation, where one may have to wait for permission to go on.

One of the most important borders depicted in the story is that which separates Bob Doran’s sense of what it means to be an Irishman (or, better, what it means to be a man in Catholic Ireland) from that sense of him derived from Mrs. Mooney’s and Polly’s limited experience with men and masculinity. Doran’s attempt to reason out his predicament takes on the character of a confession. He confesses himself in a way no less calculated than does the priest who had heard his confession the night before, and his deliberation over his own sin has all the earmarks of Father Purdon’s brand of “practical” Christianity designed for “those whose lot it was to lead the life of the world and who yet wished to lead that life not in the manner of worldlings” (*D*, 214).

But is it a sin to be overtaken by the sins of others? To be engulfed in hostile waters (in hostile discourse), to be accosted, seized, taken over? Doran may have moved into Mrs. Mooney’s establishment, but in the end, it is he, his life, that is irrevocably *boarded*. It is this sense of the word (related, by the way, to the sense of providing with meals and lodging) that colors Doran’s long wait in his room, “sitting helplessly on the side of the bed” (*D*, 80). There is some potential freedom in the boardinghouse but also the danger of exploitation, and his awareness of this fact places him on the ideological borders of a society where compulsory theology, celibacy, and marriage are intertwined and where a kind of confessional despair opens up: a desire to speak, to disburden, *a desire to confess desire* that is overwhelmed by an authority that curtails desire and brings shame and guilt in the wake of curtailment. To be sure, in this sense, Mrs. Mooney functions as the phallic mother, whose conference with Doran clearly awakens in him castration anxiety and does so to such a degree that he capitulates to the rule of Law, to the cruel drama of a boardinghouse economy in which desire—both his

and Polly's—is "cleaved," in which the very blow that separates desire from a hoped-for object prompts the unhappy lovers to "cleave" together in mutual disappointment and moral befuddlement.¹

In Joyce, the shifting terrain of language—principally along semantic and etymological axes—inevitably invites the reader to focus on wordplay as an entrée to the text. The word *boardinghouse* would have invoked in a late-Victorian or Edwardian reader a fairly wide range of images and meanings, many of them modeled by figures in "The Boarding House." *Boarding* in one sense derives from traditional ship construction, specifically the creation of decks from wooden boards; another, perhaps more relevant sense, derives from the nautical practice of lodging "on board" for long sea journeys. Going, or taking people, things and by extension eventually also ideas "on board" implies the acceptance (or relinquishing) of obligation and commitment. Consider, for example, the reluctance of Joyce's character Eveline, in the story of that name, to undertake the act of embarkation. However, for a reader born since the 1980s at least, the word *boarding* may be just as likely to refer to the libidinal activities of contemporary leisure culture—"skateboarding," "snowboarding," and even "wakeboarding," all with their basis in the sport and lifestyle of surfing—that have also held a certain position in global branded leisure-wear retailing for a number of years in brand names from *Free Spirit* and *O'Neill* to the frankly libidinal *Porn Star*. Such a reader, struck with vertigo at the commodification of desire, confronted with a seemingly endless array of choices for cathexis, cannot help but be struck by the obstacles put into the path of Doran and Polly and the ease with which Mrs. Mooney orchestrates what for Doran must seem like grim fate. It is no wonder that Doran wishes to escape, to perform the inverse of that aggressive "piratical" boarding he now awaits with such anxiety, that is to say, to board *life*, to take off from present circumstances into an arena that would effectively be without board (the table of the law), and borderless, an arena in which desire can be expended without fear of the cleaver, in which confessional despair (or the kind of blithe unknowingness—or is it boredom?—that

1. There is something of Paolo and Francesca in these two, Dublin style. They are not quite so bad as the Bradford millionaire and his consort, with her automatic hand, in *The Waste Land*.

has Polly in her thrall at the end of the story) can give way to self-knowledge (*Bildung*) or to Foucauldian pleasure and care of the self.

To follow this series of associations might risk our being accused of “surfboarding” associatively through the polysemantics of Joyce’s text rather than grounding our readings in the demonstrable evidence of historical and cultural contexts. But such an accusation fails to take into account how etymological stratification indexes historical and cultural conditions of language production. The linguistic richness of *boardinghouse*—*board*, *boarder*, *border*, *borderline*, *boarding*, *boredom*—corresponds in many ways to an underlying ambiguity, contingency, and open-endedness, one that is frequently attributed to Doran’s moral or even physical cowardice. The socioeconomic habitus in which his desire for Polly plays out is disturbingly *public*. There is something of Kafka’s K. in Doran, who has found himself saddled for good with a docile, forgetful Leni. The point is that Joyce, like Kafka, presents an erotics of social difference in which contemporary class struggle is exemplified in the daily attractions and interactions within the *boardinghouse* constellation. Joyce astutely locates Mrs. Mooney’s turn-of-the-century boardinghouse in Dublin’s Hardwicke Street, which would have a “resident population” of “clerks from the city” as well as a “floating population” of tourists and “*artistes* from the music halls” (*D*, 74). Theatrical performers who take to the stage, we might recall, are also said to “tread the boards.”

The boardinghouse was for many young men a way station on the road to marriage and family, to a home of one’s own. The ideal of marriage, the amorphous possibility of which is signified to Polly in her “hopes and visions of the future” (*D*, 83), might well be summed up in Gerty MacDowell’s phantasmatic life with the darkly mysterious Leopold Bloom: “a nice snug and cosy little homely house” (*U*, 13.239). The “homely house,” overdetermined ideologically, is the habitation of desire under the delusion of an ideal. The boardinghouse presents, more starkly, the social structure behind the ideal. It is nothing if not a model of capitalist family formation; nor should the absence of the father fail to remind us that the position of Father structures relations among all the inhabitants. For many lodgers, this relation is not translated out of its paternalistic, mercantile frame, but for Doran, and who knows how many other “resident young men” (*D*, 74), the mercantile

frame falls away. In one sense, Mrs. Mooney occupies the position of Father, but the position had already been carved out by Mr. Mooney, ineffectual though he may now be ("a shabby stooped little drunkard" [*D*, 73]). His surrogates, especially Polly's brother, keep alive within the boardinghouse the tables of the law. Polly and Doran behave much as any young couple might, given the furtive intimacy that characterizes their contrempts: they are trapped within a confessional culture in which their desire and, more to the point, the consequences of desire are *proscribed*, but it is a culture too in which the confession of desire is desire *reinscribed*.² It is the guilty pleasure enjoyed again and again. Indeed, as Foucault and others have shown, confession, in modern times at least, is precisely the repetition of desire in a ritualized speech act; the discursive pleasures of atonement put into play, as part of this speech activity, the very desire, or substitutes for it, that has been proscribed (Foucault 1988, 61ff). Doran understands this fact, since what he does as he waits patiently, anxiously, is go over in his mind the very thing he has already confessed. Self-confession thus becomes a form of repetition compulsion, a form of ritualistic memory associated with the *affect* of anxiety: a way of feeling the complex core of which is the "repetition of some particular significant previous experience"—part of a "prehistory not of the individual but of the species." Memory and prehistory cohere in this "heritage" form of anxiety, which yields not the substance of a memory but the "precipitate of a reminiscence" (Freud 1989, 491–92). Doran's anxiety is focused not on what may or may not have happened, which is vague enough anyway, but rather on a purely formal memory, not his exactly but born in his unconscious, of trauma. What he turns to in his lonely room is this "empty" memory of himself.

2. *Confessional culture* used in this sense refers to a country or territory dominated by the church and the sacrament of penance, of which confession is a chief element (*confessional identity* would thus refer to self-formation under conditions of a specific "confession"). On the sacrament of penance, see the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618c.htm>. Another sense of these terms, derived in part from Michel Foucault's work, refers to a more generic phenomenon, in which the world becomes one's confidant: we thus see the emergence of secularized and highly mediated (and mediatized) forms of the traditional confessional culture.

In Joyce's fiction, confession flows into channels governed by the imperatives of juridical disclosure: "to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (Foucault 1988, 62). It is a masculine discourse in the service of patriarchal authority, quite different in form and content from the discursive styles we find in Gerty MacDowell's portion of "Nausicaa" or Molly's soliloquy. Stephen Dedalus voices a desire for freedom and wholeness, but he does so in the language of confession, of disburdenment and, at least residually, clings to the promise of absolution—though the end of *A Portrait* strongly suggests that absolution will be sought outside the confines of the confessional dialectic. When he "confesses himself," he *reveals* himself, even *betrays* himself, in the face of cultural imperatives that would otherwise forbid such revelations and betrayals.³ This space of discursive freedom provides an opportunity to try on, to amend, to subvert, to exaggerate the protocols of masculinity and masculine sexual identities. In this profane space, he is able to overcome the consciousness of sin precisely because the *confession* of sin enables the *profession* of the self. In *Dubliners*, a text that might well be regarded as a proving ground for attitudes that are brought to a greater maturity in *A Portrait*, the power to overcome the consciousness of sin is not yet developed; the subversive force of a secularized confession is, to borrow a phrase from Stephen, "almosting it" (*U*, 3.366–67). From the young boy in "The Sisters" to Gabriel Conroy in "The Dead," Joyce's protagonists pit themselves against themselves in a confessional discourse that retains much of the moral authority that the church and contemporary theorists like Foucault ascribe to it.

Bob Doran best exemplifies the cloistered quality of confessionality, the closed circuit of sin and absolution that becomes internalized and thus operates with greater force and subtlety than it does in the confession box. These are the conditions for a failure not only to achieve *Bildung* but even to aspire toward it. Trapped in a bare boardinghouse room, Doran falls upon his own sinfulness with the skill of a surgeon. He is the type of the Joycean penitent, suffering and sinning outside the boundaries of the church, yet committed, almost unconsciously, to the forms and a good deal of the substance of the

3. On Stephen's "confessional identity," see Castle 2006, chap. 3.

sacrament of penance.⁴ He possesses, perhaps more than any other character in Joyce's canon, the "instinct of the celibate," an instinct characterized by both a "curious patient memory" (*D*, 80) and a consciousness of sin that cannot be overcome.⁵ The structures of feeling that govern Doran's life make it impossible for him ever to forget. He does not repudiate confession as Stephen does; he has instead fearful memories of "acute pain" in which "the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair" (*D*, 78). There is no breaching this closed circuit, except by way of a "reparation" (ad)ministered by a priest substitute, who holds out, as a last resort, the possibility of marriage, a simoniacal arrangement cut to order with a cleaver. Doran surrenders to a phallic mother-wife who places him in the position of embattled, subordinate partner in an arranged marriage. Yet in another sense, he is a victim of an arrangement that his own behavior has put into play, but only if we accept that he did indeed seduce Polly in her "combing-jacket" (*D*, 80) and that there was at least some element of deception in that seduction.

Because his memories of Polly are mixed up with anxiety that is rooted in losses he has not yet learned to recognize, Doran's entire situation becomes vulnerable to even slight misinterpretations. His self-consciousness lends even his genuine feelings an air of theatricality, as if he were reading for a part in his own life. This is especially true of the story he tells himself of his own desire. He seems to accept the arrangements being made in his name, not because he is forced into it (though one easily gets the sense of a deal that Doran could not refuse); rather, he recognizes it as a socially sanctioned choice, perfect for an "incomplete" man like himself. Unable to live up to other ideals of masculinity, he falls into the passive role of husband to the offended Polly. Her mother's intervention subverts a masculinist system of sexual relationships by doubling the deception: Doran may have deceived Polly into sex, but not into marriage; her mother arranges for the marriage by a more open deception, one that traps him more decisively.

4. Confession is a principal element of the sacrament of penance, another being absolution. See the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618c.htm>.

5. Stephen, by comparison, is able to overcome the consciousness of sin in the deliberate fusion of priest and artist: the priesthood of the imagination and a eucharistic aesthetics make of sin a luscious kind of deviance in language and thought.

Joyce undermines both nationalist and continental ideals of masculinity by dramatizing—with this sad little vignette of a man beaten down by his own social mistakes with women, unmanned by his own “manliness”—the gap between gender ideals and stereotypes and the heterogeneity of men’s lives, between Mrs. Mooney’s and his own sense of himself. Every unpleasant element in his life repeats itself in his confessional reminiscences.

In the social space of the boardinghouse, monkish single men sit in their rooms, their stark confessionals, chewing the cud of their transgressions, suffering the shame of their lost aspirations, unaware any longer of when the downward slide began. In colonial Dublin in the late nineteenth century, men like Doran were not scarce on the ground. The cast of characters in “The Boarding House”—the mother and brother, the artistes, the other lodgers, Doran’s boss, and so on—constitute something like a cross-section, making Mrs. Mooney’s house a model not only of the family but of a certain parvenu element of the rising Catholic middle classes. Thus, the activities of “boarding” and all those “boarders” and “borders” sketch social relations in their materiality. To speak of Mrs. Mooney “piratically” boarding young Doran is only to put an “apt” image to a particular form of coercive social control, from *within* the local community.

Mrs. Mooney’s boardinghouse, then, ought to be seen as modeling what actual boardinghouses at the time more than probably were: halfway houses for a population moving from the countryside to the city; way stations for the established members of the “clerking class,” as they moved up and down the ladders in the city’s colonial and commercial bureaucracies; and hotels for traveling performers and artistes, whose professions limited them to short-term and humble habitation. The denizens of such places would be largely Catholic and mostly male, though women would have their role to play on the fringes of boardinghouse life. Doran, it must be remembered, was presented with a rare opportunity: a young, flirtatious woman *on the premises*, in a “loose open combing-jacket of printed flannel” (*D*, 80).⁶ Surely, this

6. An affectation, perhaps, for a girl with Polly’s social profile. The combing jacket was commonly worn by Victorian ladies to protect their clothing while combing or brushing their hair. They are short and flimsy, meant to be worn in the privacy of one’s boudoir.

circumstance would overpower any young Catholic Irishman of little experience, especially one like Doran who, while not afraid of priests, certainly fears the wrath of a social world dominated by the church and Catholic morality. He "remembered well, with the curious memory of the celibate, the first casual caresses her dress, her breath, her fingers had given him" (*D*, 80); he remembered how "she had tapped at his door" and stood there in her combing jacket, and he "remember[s] well" their kisses and "her eyes, the touch of her hand and his delirium" (*D*, 80–81). Now, the delirium having passed, he fears what lies beyond the fantasy environment he has made of Mrs. Mooney's establishment. He fears the greater powers at work in the world, represented by his employer, "Mr Leonard," who, in the young man's "excited imagination," "call[s] out in his rasping voice: 'Send Mr Doran here, please'" (*D*, 79). This summons anticipates, in his memory, the one he will shortly receive from Mrs. Mooney. Everything he does adumbrates this summons, for on the proffered "reparation" of marriage hangs every other aspect of his future life. It serves proleptically the function of traumatic "kernel" that has been jettisoned from his knowledge of the past.⁷

But is it primarily spiritual punishments and loss of spiritual rewards that underwrite Doran's despair as he anxiously and patiently waits for the other shoe to drop? Indeed, what sort of despair results in both anxiety and patience, if not the despair of the Catholic Dubliner at the turn of the century, whose social ambitions and attitudes have an increasingly wider arena for their growth and development, but whose self-image and sense of self-formation are still powerfully shaped and driven by sacramental and, more specifically, confessional demands? That punishment for which Doran waits

7. For Freud, the dream-work constructs a "new and transitory concept" out of disparate and heterogeneous images, all of which have a common element, the unknown and unknowable nucleus (1989, 211). Joan Riviere uses the term *kernel* in her translation, rather than *nucleus*, and speaks of a "new and *fugitive* concept" (1963, 180). Žižek is clearly drawing on Freud as well as Lacan when he refers to the "kernel" as a fundamental *antagonism*, a point of resistance against the Symbolic, an "original trauma," an "impossible kernel which resists symbolization, totalization, symbolic integration" (1989, 6). The "real, impossible kernel" lies outside what we can know (*ibid.*, 45). But it is also the symptom of our enjoy-meant (our *jouissance*) of the Real.

anxiously can result only in forgiveness—so long as he pays his penance, makes his reparation “for the loss of [Polly’s] honour: marriage” (*D*, 77)—but it is not really God’s forgiveness he seeks. Reparation is, for him, a social obligation that issues in a social bond. Certainly, Mrs. Mooney works out her advantage by considering precisely Doran’s social and economic vulnerability *as a Catholic*: “He had been employed for thirteen years in a great Catholic wine-merchant’s office and publicity would mean for him, perhaps, the loss of his job. Whereas if he agreed all might be well. She knew he had a good screw for one thing and she suspected he had a bit of stuff put by” (*D*, 78). This demand for reparation incontestably links marriage and money, libidinal and monetary economies, and it neatly echoes Doran’s own feelings on the matter, for the priest to whom he had confessed the night before “had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation” (*D*, 79). Doran and Mrs. Mooney misrecognize the nature of expiation, the atonement demanded of the sacrament of penance; they see it in the pragmatic way of the men in “Grace,” for whom Christ is a “spiritual accountant” (*D*, 215). They see in expiation not the disburdenment of confession and the atonement through penance for sinful action and knowledge, but rather a reparation in which the sacrament of marriage all too easily slides into a form of economic stabilization. To make reparation is to repair, to make amends, to offer expiation, to give satisfaction for a wrong or injury.⁸ The reparation the mother demands is what Doran sought in confession, which was “a cause of acute pain to him” (*D*, 78). It is, of course, significant that Doran invokes the language of contracts to describe reparation as a “loophole,” a legal or permissible reneging on the terms of an obligation. For Doran, this loophole means avoiding the social humiliation of putting the madam’s daughter in the “family way” and the economic devastation of offending his Catholic boss.

The sexual politics of the story that center on the “affair” of Doran the boarder and Polly the landlady’s daughter are forcibly underlined by the logic of pleasure as a desired commodity that must be enjoyed but that incurs a debt requiring repayment: an economics of consumerism that, as

8. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “reparation.”

Jean Baudrillard's early analyses demonstrated, emphatically re-reinforce the commodification of the body (1970, 129–50). Doran's sad memorial, his "curious patient" accounting of pleasures, and his rush to "reparation" are driven by the intimidating voice of Mrs. Mooney. His moral conformity, his assumed guilt, and the threat of physical violence are all strongly present in his memories of a recent past with Polly. To be fair, Doran recognizes, in a way that Mrs. Mooney does not, the spiritual gravity of his situation, but any victory he might claim withers in the heat of his awareness that she will force a resolution of the only situation that matters to her. The strong "instinct of the celibate," an instinct of self-mystification rather than of self-preservation, prevents him from seeing his options sooner and more clearly, but he does at least recognize that he has sinned (unlike James Duffy in "A Painful Case," he cannot quite achieve the level of self-abstraction that would make his sins seem airy nothings). And he is quick to work out that the "option" of reparation—a shotgun wedding to Polly—can "compensate" for sin: "Even his sense of honour told him that reparation must be made for such a sin" (*D*, 81). The use of *even* here suggests that "honour" compels him toward reparation (understood as spiritual atonement or expiation) but only after a more fundamental kind of reparation (understood as compensation or marriage) has revealed itself as an option. He could marry Polly, and will have done the honorable thing, but more important, he will have saved his job, "all his long years of service," all his "industry and diligence" (*D*, 79). The fear his employer inspires is palpable, while the fear inspired by almighty God is barely discernible, save in his references to himself as a celibate, but in these fears we detect a diffidence, a sense of discomfort with himself that precludes intimacy of any kind ("Once you are married you are done for," his instinct urges him [*D*, 80]) rather than a sense of renunciation for the sake of God. In this situation, he resembles Duffy, who also has the "instinct of the celibate" and who also feels a crushing blow to his self-image upon the "intrusion" of a woman whose sexuality is loosened from its restraints.

Doran cannot escape the requirement of disburdening and reparation. Nor can he escape a conception of manhood in which confession forms an essential component. This "devotional manliness" requires fortitude in the face of sin and a willingness to commit oneself to "nurturing, domestic values," which Joanna Bourke links to the "devotional revolution" led by

Archbishop Cullen in the years following the Famine (1999, xxx). Doran quakes at the prospect of this manliness, in part because his instinctual celibacy urges him to “hold back” from the very matrimonial intimacy into which he now sees himself about to be forced. Joyce’s critique of confessionalism in “The Boarding House,” as elsewhere, is an indictment of the Irish manliness authorized and delimited within “a devoted, family-centered environment” (ibid.). Of course, as *Ulysses* demonstrates with cruel brevity, Doran is a mockery of the family man envisioned by the ideologues of the devotional revolution, a mockery of the idea that he and Polly ever had a shot at a wholesome family life. He does not measure up to Irish Catholic “devotional” masculinity or to other native models—for example, Irish republican masculinity—that could offer an ideal of virtuous manhood grounded in mythic heroism.⁹ His failure (if we want to call it a failure) to attain an ideal of masculinity becomes part of the overall critical design in *Dubliners*. It draws our attention to the gap between the *system* of hegemonic gender formations, where “social ideals” are generated, and the lives of individuals whose behavior is in some way determined by these ideals. Doran contemplates a future domestic life for which he feels no bonds of affection and remains perennially torn among the limited options available to him to “be a man,” all of which will, effectively, unman him. This castrating duplicity can be found in a wide spectrum of Irish modernist literature, but most preeminently in W. B. Yeats’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, in which the young Michael Gillane refuses the comforts of wife and family to follow, and die for, the very spirit of Ireland, an old hag who is transformed into “a young woman with the walk of a queen.” If we take Joyce at full parodic measure, Mrs. Mooney (like Mrs. Kearney, in “A Mother”), does double duty: she is a powerful woman who upsets the masculinist economy of Irish life, but she is also the icon of a debased idealism. No Mother Ireland here. Nor does she (or Polly) walk like a queen.

Polly is, in some ways, a “seaside girl,” a “New Woman,” who joins the artistes in the sexually suggestive performance of her song “*I’m a . . . naughty girl*” (*D*, 74). The ellipsis in the line shows Joyce reinforcing her

9. On “Irish republican masculinity,” see Curtin 1999.

flirtatiousness, one of several examples of the overlapping of eroticism and commodification that should have served as a warning to Doran, who in any case never had a chance. He is mired in an ethical quagmire the danger of which he realizes only when he has been drawn in beyond rescue. Mrs. Mooney's deft handling of the whole affair leaves Doran a single option: the charade of marriage and the grim reality of watching what little social capital he has accrued being transferred to the new women in his life. But, as we have suggested already, a man like Doran is not trapped by Mrs. Mooney or Polly alone; the trapping mechanism is primed in advance by his own feckless, half-conscious investments in a particular vision of Irish manhood that fails him. On Bourke's terms, Doran cannot get it right. Meeting Polly on her "bath night" (*D*, 80) and the new familiarity such a meeting entails: are these not the consequences of subtle shifts in the way domestic space accommodates men? The fluid public space of the boardinghouse subjects young men like Doran to the intimacies of others' lives at close quarters and leaves open the possibility of illicit encounters in the evening. But the very fluidity of the boardinghouse and the limited, public channels in which desire flows tend also to increase vigilance on the part of those individuals who disapprove or who see opportunities to enrich their own enjoyment. To seduce Polly in these circumstances would be churlish and unmanly; but more to the point, it would be dangerous.

Though they have offered several different approaches to and implicit or explicit judgments upon the rights and wrongs of Doran's situation, most careful readers are likely to be quite shocked by the stark juxtaposition of the economic and the erotic in the story and by the extent to which it stresses the entrapment and paralysis of the characters, especially Doran, in a world of conformity and constraint that cripples their sense of freedom and self-esteem and leaves confession the only viable outlet for the expression of disappointment or regret. Fresh from the freedom and warmth of his recent elopement with Nora to Trieste, Joyce comments on the story's "frigidities," writing that he was "uncommonly well pleased" with it and sending readers in search of a "neat phrase of five words" (*SL*, 86). Those words, "like a little perverse madonna" (*D*, 75), simply and powerfully indict the complicity between Polly's flirtatiousness and Roman Catholic morality. Joyce in fact expressed surprise in his letters to Grant Richards that the "theme" of

the story (along with the theme of “An Encounter”) was not more shocking to the printer than it was. Subsequent readers, though, have since been rather more alert to a reading in which (as John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley put it) “two women conspire to take advantage of a convention-bound man” (1993, 60). The story clearly “reflects badly on the venality of women”; however, if we follow Margot Norris (2003), the curious narrative “breadpudding” that brings disparate strands together—both recycled and clichéd attitudes toward desire and sin and a sustained critique of the “weight of social opinion”—actually works to reflect just as badly on the narrative voice that would appear to be passing judgment on Mrs. Mooney and her lovely daughter.¹⁰

Despite his desire to offer up a critique of Dublin paralysis, whether of the characters or of the narrative voice of opinion, Joyce writes in an oblique style that leaves much open to interpretation. There are, it might be observed, considerable hints that, with her “casual caresses,” her “white instep [that] shone in the opening of her furry slippers and the blood [that] glowed warmly behind her perfumed skin,” not to mention her capacity for “thoughtfulness,” Polly and Doran (again vividly communicated by the use of three dots for an ellipsis) “could be happy together . . .” (*D*, 81). Polly’s parallel train of thought at the close of the story—her “secret amiable memories” at the sight of his pillows, the “nape of her neck against the cool iron bed-rail” (*D*, 82)—confirms the exciting sexual potential of their marriage as something that may underpin her final recollection of “what she had been waiting for” (*D*, 83).

A key feature of this sexual promise is that their memories remain private to the couple. But everyone seems to assume a knowledge about their “affair.” For Mrs. Mooney, “things were as she had suspected” (*D*, 76), and the priest, as we have seen, has “drawn out every ridiculous detail” (*D*, 78). Doran might want to condemn Polly for “what she had done,” but “he had done it too” (*D*, 79). “It had happened,” we are told, though the more

10. See also the classic discussion of “The Fear of Marriage” in Cixous 1972, 51–87; and Kershner, who argues that Doran is “caught at the point of intersection of two conflicting ideologies, that of gallantry and that of bourgeois Christianity” (1989, 89–93).

the rumors and assumptions are confirmed by such pronouns, the more we might be entitled to ask what the "it" that has happened actually is. (Joyce never tells us what "it" is; as in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants," the unsaid is clamorous.) "All the lodgers in the house knew something of the affair," we are told, though "details had been invented by some" (*D*, 78). The word *affair* suggests sexual intercourse to a modern reader but not necessarily to one of the time, and we might note too the use of the phrases *a good screw* (apparently meaning a good salary) and *a bit of stuff* (meaning some savings) where the modern meaning is emergent in the way these phrases are used by Mrs. Mooney. In one rather revealing classic early debate on the inexplicit discourse of the story, Florence Walzl claims that Polly was pregnant, while Fritz Senn maintains that there is no evidence that they had even had full sex (see Senn 1986).¹¹ It is not always clear that Polly herself is aware of what has happened to her. Is it not a painful, almost punishing irony that Polly, that "perverse madonna," at the moment Doran accepts the terms of his reparation, "no longer . . . remembered that she was waiting for anything" (*D*, 83)?

Social and clerical attitudes conspire to produce guilt and remorse even if Polly and Doran have not had sex. The mechanism by which these attitudes are conjoined and by which they determine Doran's reactions to Mrs. Mooney's demand for reparation, is, as we have noted, the profane practice of "confessing oneself." Like so many of Joyce's protagonists, Doran doubles as his own antagonist, framing his self-doubt and self-awareness within the context of a confessional discourse that has become privatized while retaining all of the force of its institutional, sacramental form: unlike Stephen Dedalus, for whom profane confession becomes the instrument of artistic self-knowledge, Doran experiences in confession a profound melancholy caused by a lack of self-knowledge. His desire to "fly away to another country" (*D*, 81), again unlike Stephen's, is frustrated by the sheer weight of a mysterious force that urges him to accept reparation cloaked as absolution rather than a risky and lonely escape. This force, associated with "the

11. A further discussion of the silences of the story can be found in Leonard 1993, 132–48.

implacable faces of his employer and of the Madam" (*D*, 81), is an attribute of a confessional culture that expresses itself in every aspect of Doran's life and propels him toward a fate he has courted without knowing it. In "The Boarding House," as in other *Dubliners* stories, it is this lack of self-knowledge, which the artist Stephen possesses, that hobbles the free and satisfying formation of character.

In fact, we might say that any chance for self-knowledge is canceled in the face of the violence offered by nearly everyone in the social habitus Doran occupies—Mr. Leonard, Mrs. Mooney, Polly's brother—and canceled chance emblemizes his position, in large part because it is the primary cause of despair, even though he may never realize it. As with self-knowledge, so with any instinct for self-preservation or self-interest (his instincts are the same as the celibate's, we must recall): Doran simply succumbs to an environment in which desire and economics, sex and money, are tied in ways he cannot (or refuses to) understand. Contemporary readers of this story and others in *Dubliners* will recognize the combination of seductive sexiness and meticulous economics, for Doran's and Polly's response to the all too human moral dilemma they find themselves confronting might well serve as a prototype for our contemporary libidinally driven consumer societies with their heavy reliance on desire, consumer debt, and the promise of reparation.¹² Whereas late capitalism is sometimes said to thrive (however precariously) on the ultimate deferment of the promise to "pay the bearer" of its promissory notes, Dublin society at the time depicted in the story seems to depend upon the frequent threat and actual deployment of the intimidating physical violence of the "sheriff's man" (*D*, 75) or, presumably, bullying "clerk," roles that Mr. Mooney and Jack Mooney take on. No doubt we should not miss how close the name *Mooney* is to the word *money*, as the Mooney family increasingly and with increasing violence comes to be identified with and to do the bidding of the "money" system in its raw ideological form. We may recall that, as Slavoj Žižek points out in a rare discussion of Joyce, hegemonic ideologies pretend to operate by pleasurable consensus,

12. On the link between debt and moral obligation, between debt and guilt, see Nietzsche 1998, second treatise.

but when their rules are transgressed, then they may reveal the true nature of their power (1997, 12–35). Elsewhere, Žižek writes that the bureaucracy in Kafka's work signifies "obedience to the Command in so far as it is 'incomprehensible,'" adding that "brutish" Law, the Law understood as violent force, is repressed under the cover of the idea of the Law as Truth (1989, 38–39). Ironically, the "enjoyment" (*jouissance*) of ideology is tied precisely to "the non-integrated surplus of senseless traumatism" at the heart of the Law, which confers on it "its unconditional authority" (ibid., 43). Perhaps Doran submits so willingly to Mrs. Mooney because he perversely enjoys the very force that is otherwise well hidden. In this case, enjoyment displaces pleasure in the "full submission" to the Law as the call of the big Other.

However we read this point, the relations in "The Boarding House" between crime and punishment, error and its redress, psychosocial debt and reparation, are disturbing. Along with the all-important "weight of social opinion," there seems to be more self-incriminating guilty feeling than actual guilt on Doran's and Polly's parts, especially on Doran's. Indeed, Doran may at times resemble another famous "boarder" from European literature, Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, who also suffers from an acquisitive and "imposing" landlady. Doran is hardly identical with Dostoyevsky's murderer. In Joyce, it is Mrs. Mooney's husband who "went for his wife with the cleaver" (*D*, 73), and it is she who comes to control the epistemic violence of the "cleaver" of moralistic opinion. There is one other thing, though, that the two texts have in common. Dostoyevsky, in playing with the meaning of his characters' names, reminds us of the prerevolutionary alienation of Raskolnikov, his dissent from the social norm, in the echo of the word *raskol*, or split. Similarly, Doran (or *Deoradhain*) in Irish Gaelic means "exile" or "wanderer." So in this respect—having significant names and names whose significance points to a kind of social alienation—they may be similar.

That Joyce also wants to show up his Doran as a figure who is to some extent self-conscious in his apparent ideological detachment is evident in the typically suggestive detail that Doran is a onetime reader of a contemporary weekly paper called *Reynolds's Newspaper*. Set up by the Chartist George Reynolds in the 1850s, *Reynolds's Newspaper* declared itself in favor of "Government of the People, by the People, for the People," and it enjoyed a wide circulation throughout the next half century, especially in northern

and provincial England, becoming the more or less official voice of political liberalism in the 1890s and socialism in the new century. Even by today's standards, it was quite an advanced and politically explicit radical socialistic paper, full of critical examinations of society; indeed, toward the turn of the century, it began to respond to discussions of the New Woman movement and the marriage system from a radical materialist point of view. Making Doran a reader of it might suggest that Joyce wishes to present him as a self-confident radical intellectual with a well-developed and -articulated critical perspective on the entrapping bourgeois norms of his society, including those standards that governed marriage and sexual relations—or at least a man who longed for the freedom such radicalism so tantalizingly suggests.

However, rather than depicting Doran as a revolutionary hero empowered by the liberatory potential of this critical perspective to reject the hegemonic Catholic, capitalistic, marital system of Dublin society, Joyce shows him in retreat from it, however reluctantly returning to a “regular life,” and perhaps permanently unable to free himself by using the very intellectual tools that have enabled him to see that he is entrapped. Only the reader gains the liberating self-consciousness provided by this level of dramatic irony.

On the other hand, we may argue that the implicitness of the story's manner fails to provide us with a clear view of whether Doran and Polly will ultimately be happy together. There is a tendency to argue that they will suffer the unhappy fate of their parents' generation or that to which Joyce consigns them in *Ulysses*. The few brief details Joyce gives us of their sexual intimacies hint that they may be able to continue their boarding lifestyle into the future with the full endorsement of marital legitimacy to back them up and with every prospect of becoming the owners of the boardinghouse in due course.

In this respect, the critical picture of society that Joyce presents in “The Boarding House” may be one that is prescient of more recent consumer societies, where power over the subject is confirmed and defined by a pleasurable excess that works to resist its being questioned or opposed or undermined or “confessed.” Whatever fate that it holds in store for its characters, Joyce's story exposes the “borders” in the boardinghouse, as well as the “boardings” that have violently changed the lives and futures of those persons within it. The weblike structure of the bordering house indexes an ideology

that governs social actions through the hidden menace of complicity, which guarantees that only a critical self-awareness can mount an effective resistance against co-optation and despair. The very structure of the story, as of *Dubliners* generally, requires that it is the reader who supplies this guarantee, coming "to the board" or "treading the boards" in the performance of his or her own act of reading, providing a borderline for Joyce's meanings to cross.

10



Working with Clay

GABRIELLE CAREY AND BARBARA LONNQUIST

Our title, “Working with Clay,” which conjures the image of an artist with his or her materials gradually giving shape to a whole, is an apt representation of the collaboration between a fiction writer, Gabrielle Carey, who creates with words, and an academic, Barbara Lonnquist, whose creative pursuit lies in trying to plumb their often secret life. The process of reading this story in a dialogue, which occurred in various stages, with some long breaks, and across continents and time zones, seems a fitting response to Joyce’s project in “Dubliners” of inspiring reading as a cycle of interrogation and rereading. Gabrielle’s “celebration of the naive reading” pointed to the timelessness of “Dubliners,” which, although culturally specific and grounded in the historical context of turn-of-the-last-century Ireland, had the power to speak to a young woman in Australia many decades later. With the eye of a creative writer, she was quick to catch the luminous detail or quirk of character that gave the story its human appeal. The academic reader, drawn in by Joyce’s verbal play, which opens up multiple possible readings, found liberation in the doubling of “Dubliners.” The process of balancing these two approaches has led to a mutual interrogation of not only Maria’s story within “Clay” but our own preconceptions about her plight.

In Celebration of the Naive Reading, by Gabrielle Carey

I first read *Dubliners* at the age of twenty-two, seven years after I had dropped out of high school, and a year after the publication of my first book. I knew

immediately that I had come across something extraordinary. But why and how did a collection of stories about Dublin at the turn of the century have such an impact on a young Australian so many decades after its publication? What meaning could it have for a reader who had never been to Ireland, who was raised in an atheist family, and from a country where there is no tradition of Halloween?

“Clay” has been critiqued much in terms of its symbolism, clay itself being a symbol of death as well as the earth that surrounds a corpse upon burial. Clay also reflects the nature of the main character, Maria, dun-colored and malleable. But can we read this story without the symbols? As I read it all those years ago?

On reading “Clay” for the first time, I found the experience of the Catholic mass utterly foreign. I therefore had no way of interpreting the symbolism of the barmbrack as the host, or the tea among the laundry ladies as communion. Neither did I understand the significance of a Catholic woman working in a Protestant laundry; only recently did I become aware of the history of the Dublin laundries as a despository for fallen women and spinsters. And I completely missed the symbolism of “Dublin by Lamplight,” failing to apprehend the withholding of light as a metaphor for the withholding of life, arguably the theme of the entire collection. Yet even though I was blind to all these cultural, historical, and religious references, the story was stubbornly poignant and powerful.

I suspect I am not alone in my first ignorant reading of “Clay.” If I were to teach this story to Australian undergraduates now, they too would find the symbolism difficult to read. But the beauty of Joyce is that even an ignorant reading can be rewarding. Indeed, I wonder if we free ourselves of symbolism whether we can experience the story in a less abstract, far more concrete, and therefore more human way. What happens, for example, if we just consider the narrative in terms of character and nothing else? What sort of person is Maria?

If I asked my eighteen-year-old daughter to describe the character of Maria, she would offer one word: *loser*. Maria is a middle-aged, unmarried menial worker with few friends outside the laundry. Nervous, fearful, and unadventurous, she is clearly not much *craic*. But neither is she unlikable.

“Everyone was so fond of Maria” (*D*, 120). This statement comes early in the story and could be interpreted as a kind of establishing shot. But like so

many of the statements in *Dubliners*, the reader is uncertain as to its source and veracity. Is everyone so fond of Maria really? Or is it how Maria herself wants to be thought of? Not passionately, not erotically; not as intriguing or cunning, or mysterious, but fondly.

Fond is the word one uses to describe a relationship that is friendly but not intimate, affectionate but not passionate. We are fond of great aunts and small dogs. There is a stability to the word that implies a constant and respectable distance, a relationship that has no risk of falling into either intimacy or adversity. It is, above all, a *safe* emotion.

The word *fond* has its roots in the word *foolish*, and it is hard to imagine that Joyce was not aware of this derivation. Were people fond of Maria in the way one might be fond of a fool? Maria certainly goes on in the story to make a fool of herself various times—while dithering indecisively in the cake shop, when getting flushed by the merest conversational exchange with a man, and then later in the evening, when she unconsciously omits a stanza from her song.

What else do we know of Maria's character? We are told that her role in the laundry is that of "peace-maker" (*D*, 120). Maria does not add heat or tension to a room; rather, she cools down quarrels by pouring soothing, cool counseling onto overheated washerwomen with "steaming hands" and "red steaming arms" (*D*, 122). But as she lowers the temperature by draining the situation of conflict, there is a sense that Maria also drains it of excitement. Her ability lies in *repressing* rather than expressing, and it is indicative of her entire life. Maria has repressed her attraction to men, repressed her sexuality, repressed her anger. It is the other washerwomen who fight, not she; she is not given to passion or rage. Ultimately, she has repressed all her deepest desires—emotional, physical, and spiritual—and she has done so, presumably, because she is modeling herself on her namesake, Mary, mother of Jesus.

At church every Sunday morning, which Maria attends unfailingly, Mary is portrayed without any individual, personal desires—certainly without sexual desires; she is merely a vessel through which the spirit enacts God's intentions. Mary is passive, the one who brings consolation, just as Maria does in the laundry when she speaks so "soothingly" to her agitated washerwomen.

Maria likes order. She also likes ordering. She enjoys her perfectly ordered barmbrack, so neatly cut that they "seemed uncut" (*D*, 120). She also likes

overseeing the perfect distribution of the barmbrack, divided evenly among the laundry women. She even enjoys the orderliness of her own flesh, finding it “a nice tidy little body” (*D*, 123). Maria orders her own life, down to the smallest detail: “She arranged in her mind all she was going to do” (*D*, 123). Here is a woman who likes predictability, and when the unpredicted, unrehearsed meeting with a gentleman in the tram ruptures her well-laid plans, Maria is so flustered that she forgets the special gift for her hosts. If only the unruliness of life did not have to intrude on her well-ordered arrangements!

Maria’s sense of self is negligible. Above all, she does not want to impose or be a bother. She particularly does not want to display any desires or tastes that might lead to such sins as lust or gluttony. When the nutcracker cannot be found, Maria immediately claims she does not like nuts, although we know from earlier in the story that when she is considering buying something “really nice” for the party, the idea of nuts crosses her mind and is then discounted because “They would be sure to have plenty of apples and nuts” (*D*, 124). “Something nice” therefore is associated with nuts; we might even assume she was quietly looking forward to nuts. But rather than express an appetite for something tasty, sensual, and nourishing, she instructs her host “that they weren’t to bother about her” (*D*, 126), as though, because she is so small and insignificant, she is barely there at all.

Maria does not want anyone bothering about her because this might imply she has *needs*. Maria is proud of the fact that she has no needs—either financial (she has her “own money” [*D*, 123] in her pocket) or emotional (people go to *her* for consolation; she does not need to seek consolation in anyone else) or physical (she does not want nuts, and “she would rather they didn’t ask her to take anything” [*D*, 126] in the way of liquor). The only point in the story where there is a semblance of human desire is when we learn that Joe had “often” “wanted her to go and live with them” (*D*, 121). And we strongly get the impression that Maria wants this too. Yet for some reason she cannot admit or perhaps permit herself such a desire. Is it because wanting, at least in a woman, is the equivalent to sin?

Maria cannot entertain going to live with Joe and his family because her fear in life, which is so much greater than her desire, is the thought that she might get “in the way” (*D*, 121). Getting in the way would be contrary to her self-image as independent, ordered, and self-sufficient. Her lack of

self-knowledge and repression of desire are most poignantly demonstrated when she “forgets” the verse of the song that most expresses desire.

Maria is joined by Joe in her idealization of the past, particularly of the period when she played mother to Joe and Alphy. She and Joe sit “by the fire talking over old times” (*D*, 126). And Joe states that “there was no time like the long ago” (*D*, 129), which is, in a sense, literally true. The “long ago” that Joe remembers is indeed “no time” because it never existed. Rather, the long ago that he looks back to so affectionately is a fiction that he has imaginatively and selectively constructed.

Joe

Although Maria wants to think well of Joe—at the party she thinks she “had never seen Joe so nice to her as he was that night” (*D*, 128)—it seems that, in reality, Joe’s behavior ranges from boastful to cantankerous. The first anecdote he tells Maria is how he got one over on the manager in his workplace. This story can have very little interest or amusement for Maria, who presumably does not know the manager or the office. Indeed, it seems that Joe is not telling the story for her sake but rather for his. In his public life, Joe evidently feels oppressed by his superior, which means that in his private life he needs to bolster himself, even to someone as unimportant as Maria. But when Maria sympathizes with him for having to work under such an “overbearing person” (*D*, 126), Joe wants to impress on her that he is, in fact, managing his manager, and he can do so because he “knew how to take him” and understood how to avoid “rub[bing] him the wrong way.” In other words, Joe wants to assure Maria (and himself) that he is *in control*.

Joe’s need to feel in control results in his being quickly irritated when the world behaves in a way that is clearly not under his control. Even his immediate family surroundings are disordered and beyond his control, as evidenced by the many things that go missing. When the nutcracker cannot be found, it is reported that “Joe was nearly getting cross over it” (*D*, 126), but then that “he would not lose his temper on account of the night it was” (*D*, 127). However, it is clear that the special night does not prevent him from losing his temper because when the name Alphy is mentioned, it is reported that “Joe cried that God might strike him stone dead if ever he

spoke a word to his brother again” (*D*, 127). At this point in the party the spirit of celebration and goodwill turns to a moment of raw bitterness and resentment. We also learn that Joe and his wife argue when she criticizes him for speaking “that way of his own flesh and blood” (*D*, 127). Again, the account of what happened tells us that there was “nearly a row” (*D*, 127) when the evidence seems to suggest that there definitely *was* a row.

The exclamatory claim at the beginning of the story that Maria is “a veritable peace-maker” (*D*, 120) is unhappily contradicted at the party when she “thought she would put in a good word for Alphy” (*D*, 126). This decisive opinion offering from Maria is one of the very few moments when she acts rather than reacts and is almost out of character. (Was she slightly inebriated by the drink that Joe insisted she imbibe—port, wine, or stout? Again, we don’t know for certain.) Maria is poorly recompensed for her well-meaning intervention. Instead of promoting peace between the brothers, she inspires violent curses.

Joe is clearly deeply disturbed by the thought of his brother, and the anger that is so easily aroused is obviously still warm. The fight between Joe and Alphy, which has led to the loss of his only sibling, must be a source of terrible grief. And the brother’s absence at a family gathering like Halloween, particularly with Maria present, must be palpable. Maria may represent happier times when the brothers played together. One cannot help suspecting that Joe uses the sentimentality of the song as a cover-up, yet another blindfold, to conceal the real cause of his tears. The apparent irreconcilable nature of the division is yet another unknown story, a story so repressed and unspeakable that when Maria invokes Alphy’s name, Joe cries out to God to strike him down. The “long ago” that Joe yearns for is a censored time; some memories are to be remembered, others erased.

Which brings us to the question of *who* exactly is giving this account. Whose version of the evening are we hearing? Who is the narrator? And to whom is she or he narrating? It is tempting to think, at least at this point of the story, that we are being encouraged to see events from Maria’s point of view. She is so sympathetic with her surrogate son and so keen to maintain her prearranged vision of her much-anticipated evening that she does not want to admit to herself or her audience—perhaps the women back at the laundry who must be keen to hear the story of her night out?—that Joe lost

his temper, maybe even more than once, and possibly ruined the entire evening. If the story's narrator is indeed Maria, it is a narrator who is unaware of her tendency to retell the story in a way that conforms more with her ideal than the actual reality. (Events as retold by witnesses resulting in many different versions of the same event remind us of the many different tales about HCE's crime in *Finnegans Wake*.) Although it is reported that Joe is "full of pleasant talk and reminiscences" (*D*, 128), it is clear that he is also guilty of much unpleasant talk, not only about his brother but also about his manager, as well as a few cross words with his wife. Indeed, Joe's general manner appears to be quite irritable; he is irritated by the missing nutcracker and by his wife's comments, and the irritation then spreads to Mrs. Donnelly when she is annoyed by one of the girls from next door and says "something very cross" (*D*, 128).

All in all, despite the attempt to stage a happy Halloween evening, there have been disappointments, losses, fights, irritation, and, in the end, tears. Despite Joe's blustering and his need for control, it is he who, under the influence of alcohol, music, and melancholy, truly loses control. Blinded by sentiment as a result of Maria's rendition of "I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls," Joe cannot find what he is looking for. What he is looking for is much more than the corkscrew. Joe is looking for a happy family and an amiable reunion with his nanny. Instead, the evening has been marked by uneasiness, and Joe perhaps realizes that the place in which he really wants to dwell is not his home at all but some other, imagined, dreamed-up dwelling—a dwelling of desires realized, of riches and servants, of hope and status, and, most of all, love reciprocated.

Although the narrator may be attempting to give an honest account—why else include the embarrassing incident about losing the cake?—it is clear that the story is being told without Maria's genuine apprehension of the meaning of the events. Maria is blind, just as she is blindfolded, to the desperate sadness of her unrealized life, just as Joe is blinded by his own tears.

The true or higher consciousness of the story is, of course, Joyce's. He is painfully aware, just as he makes his readers aware, of both Maria's and Joe's stultified lives. But he has channeled that awareness through his character *despite* her lack of awareness.

In “Clay” Joyce has achieved his ambition of being the God-like, nail-paring artist. Yet this achievement does not equate with the total effacement of the narrator. Rather, the narrator has entirely assimilated Maria’s voice and point of view—and life—into his own. The commanding or controlling hand of the author is gone; instead, the author and the narrator are one. Critics might call this “free-indirect discourse”; a better word might be *transubstantiation*.

Joyce’s achievement is that while allowing himself to be subsumed into Maria’s consciousness, into Maria’s interior world, and while allowing the reader to see her repressions, her naïveté, and her self-conceit, he is simultaneously allowing us to see *through* them. The miracle is that we end up loving the character—not in spite of these failings, but because of them.

Reading Hints and Secrets, by *Barbara Lonnquist*

If reading *Dubliners* is, as Vicki Mahaffey and Michael Groden have suggested, a journey into a “grief-wracked city” (see “Silence and Fractals in ‘The Sisters’”), it seems that not only hope but feeling itself is an endangered commodity. Nowhere, perhaps, as Gabrielle has demonstrated above, does the sense of repressed emotion strike us more poignantly than in “Clay.” As we move from initial impressions of what the narrative tells us to questioning the elements elided by this “narration under a blindfold,” as Margot Norris has named it, we begin to appreciate the unspoken and seemingly unspeakable emotions repressed not only by a character all too easily dismissed as one of Dublin’s insignificant inhabitants who stand outside of history but by readers as well. Rereading “Clay,” we become more than simply curious about the enigmatic Maria: we are struck by the sense of namelessness pervading her narrative, from the clay that is never actually named in the story proper to the unsung second stanza of Maria’s song at the climax of the story. Such textual repressions hint at some larger emotion haunting the laughter that “nearly shook [Maria’s minute body] asunder” (*D*, 122), threatening the order with which she has, for years, regulated her life. Gabrielle saw in Maria’s need for order, from her skilled cutting of the barmbrack so that it seemed uncut to her careful planning of the minute details of the evening, a parallel to her need to regulate her own flesh. Mutual consideration of the

things that cannot be deciphered with certainty in this narrative, even with the arsenal of critical approaches now available to a reader, challenges us to reckon with what is ultimately the unknowable story beneath this “deceptively simple” Halloween tale (Norris 2003, 140).

From the start, Maria’s lack of a surname distinguishes her from the other adults in the collection. If it underscores the absence of a male protector (father or husband) and consequent lack of social significance in patriarchal, Catholic Ireland, it also portrays her as a ghostly figure, lacking the particularity of a personal history—which has provoked allegorical readings of Maria as a Celtic crone, Mother Ireland, or Virgin Mary. The narrative introduces us to Maria in the aftermath of a past life, the full contours of which we can never discern. She is an aging spinster who was formerly “a nurse” for an allegedly middle-class Dublin family. The term *nurse*, presumably indicating she was a “nanny,” recalls, not insignificantly perhaps, the name of one of Father Flynn’s similarly sepulchral sisters, “Nannie,” in the opening story of *Dubliners*. We meet Maria in her employment as a scullery maid in the “Dublin by Lamplight laundry,” a Protestant establishment for fallen women that was part of the Magdalen movement for the reform of prostitutes in Victorian England and Ireland.

As the account of one evening opens, Maria anticipates her escape from her cloister, because “the matron had given her leave” (*D*, 120), a privilege that distinguishes her from the laundresses, actual “inmates” in such institutions, to journey across Dublin for the Hallows’ Eve festivities at the home of Joe Donnelly, one of her former charges, where she modestly imagines a “nice evening” with “all the children singing” (*D*, 121). The childlike, almost storybook quality of the narration, much of which is delivered in free-indirect discourse, miming Maria’s perspective, is at odds with Maria’s intimations of pride in her independence, her value to the Donnellys, and her esteemed position in the laundry, where she has been pronounced by the matron to be a “veritable peace-maker” (*D*, 120). The matron’s allusion to the gospel beatitude “Blessed are the peacemakers” provides the first ellipsis in the text: its unspoken response, “For they shall be called the children of God,” ironically underscores Maria’s status as one of Dublin’s “unchosen” and hints at an arrested emotional development, not unlike that of her “nice tidy little body” (*D*, 123).

The trope of littleness that acts as a verbal motif throughout the story (Maria is first described as a “very, very small person” [*D*, 120]) correlates with her social insignificance as an unmarried and thus surplus woman in Ireland, where women outnumbered men in the wake of the Famine and subsequent emigration. Margot Norris’s reading of “Clay” in “Narration under a Blindfold” focuses on Maria’s repeated attempts in the narrative to compensate for her feeling of invisibility and insignificance. Maria’s self-flattering belief “Everyone was so fond of Maria” (*D*, 120) seems overstated at best, planting seeds of doubt in the reliability of her testimony.

Gabrielle interrogated the irony in the word *fond* as signaling Maria’s desire to draw an emotional boundary of “respectable distance” around herself that precludes her from being viewed as passionate or erotic. The original meaning of *fond* as “foolish” could not only foreshadow the errors she will make in the story—but perhaps also imply an error she has made in the past. Such gaps in the text both invite the reader to delve beneath the veneer of respectability Maria works so hard to maintain and beg the very questions they tempt us to ask—as if the narrative were asking us to abstain from abject curiosity in order to comprehend the existential emptiness of the socially marginalized adult masked beneath her childlike discourse. The setting of All Hallows’ Eve (a revision of Joyce’s first draft set on Christmas Eve) mirrors Maria’s potential emptiness; as she ventures into the city outside her walls, she seems a hollowed rather than a hallowed Eve.

Maria’s childlike anticipation of the festivities, however, only barely masks the adult “note of sadness” that emerges from beneath her laughter throughout the evening. When, before leaving for the party, the laundry inmates tease her about “getting the ring,” a symbol of marriage in the divination games traditionally played on Halloween, “Maria had to laugh and say she didn’t want a ring or any man either; and when she laughed her eyes sparkled with *disappointed* shyness and the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin” (*D*, 127; emphasis added). Readers find themselves in a position similar to the situation of the young boy in “The Sisters” as he listens for coded meanings behind the ellipses in the adult conversations about a priest who we later discover was, like Maria, afflicted by disappointment (you could tell he was a “disappointed man” [*D*, 19]) and whose laughter, like hers, is the symptom that ultimately gave him away.

Gabrielle's first impression as a young woman in Australia encountering *Dubliners* chimes with my own "unannotated" introduction to *Dubliners* at about the same age, except that, prepared by a Catholic education, I was aware of the religious and liturgical codes operating in the text and particularly of Joyce's appropriation of the term *epiphany* for literary use; I thus approached the collection anticipating signature moments of realization even if they were fleeting or aborted, as in Eveline's recognition of her mother's "life of commonplace sacrifice ending in final craziness" (*D*, 31) or Mr. Duffy's rueful admission in "A Painful Case" that he had "withheld life" from Mrs. Sinico (*D*, 142). "Clay," however, stubbornly resisted the desire for revelation in a way that other narratives did not. It raised for me even then the possibility that the cover at work in the narrative (shielding character and reader alike) could be an unwonted form of authorial clemency on Joyce's part in an otherwise relentless exposure of Dublin's self-deluded. Was this "bandage" (as the blindfold is called in "Clay") shielding Maria from a realization, which, unaccompanied by the opportunity for change, could only prove devastating? And if so, why is the reader kept in the dark as well? In contrast with "Eveline," where, although the character is blinded by fear at the end, the narrative registers a perceivable verdict, "Clay" seems to collude with the silence of the other characters in the text who are reluctant to show Maria her mistakes.

Despite the valuable work of historicist criticism in recuperating the conditions in which Maria lives (the irony of a proper Catholic woman residing in a Protestant Magdalen house, for example, as an embarrassment that helps explain Maria's need for dignity) and of readings that deconstruct Maria's narrative strategies, the question of why this narrative perhaps more than others keeps the reader in the dark about the "real" Maria becomes an instructive one. The name of the laundry, "Dublin by Lamplight," based on historical reality, which Gabrielle reads as a metaphor for "the withholding of light" thematized throughout *Dubliners*, underscores the inscrutability at work within the narrative. If Joyce treats Maria as more than simply an allegorical figure, Gabrielle's reading asks precisely the right question: can we, by setting aside the symbolism that seems to "frame" her, recuperate a Maria who is less abstract, more complex, and thus more human?

Without ignoring the rich critical history of *Dubliners*, our reading investigates the possibilities raised by the “gnomonic” gaps in the text, which both “invite speculation and resist definite conclusions” (Bulson 2006, 37). We attempt to “work with” the narrative’s insistence on Maria’s right to privacy in “Clay” in a way that allows Maria’s “otherness to remain other,” as Derek Attridge has movingly advocated in “Touching Clay” (2000, 51).

Like many readers puzzled by the enigmatic Maria, Gabrielle asked if she is the boring spinster who evokes our pity, or is she *not* as dun-colored as she first appears in her “old brown raincloak” (*D*, 123)? (The raincloak is one of the many prophylactic images in *Dubliners* that shield its characters from life, as Zack Bowen has demonstrated.)¹ If Maria does in fact have something to hide, the narrative seems stubbornly resistant to exposing it, unlike other *Dubliners* stories, which gesture more noticeably toward their characters’ troubled or even scandalous pasts, even if those warning signals come from dubious sources: Old Cotter ruminates on the “queerness” of the priest as a “peculiar case” in “The Sisters” (*D*, 10); Mahoney in “An Encounter” reacts instinctively to the threat of sexual perversion in the “queer old jossler” (*D*, 30). Although “Clay,” as Attridge notes, “demands more insistently than most stories, intense interpretive activity” (2000, 51), the narrative makes us complicit not only in its process of signification, but in its repressions as well. Attributing to Maria, an oddly jejune, older woman, an innocence at odds with her years perhaps perpetuates the idea that her lack of a significant history is her greatest problem.

The narrative consistently identifies Maria through what she lacks: her physical lack of stature, as an adult whose “toes barely touch the floor” in the tram, the plumcakes she loses en route to the party, and ultimately her omission of the second stanza of the aria she sings at the end of the night recalling suitors on bended knee. The general assumption of Maria’s celibacy or her “sexually unmarked life,” as Margot Norris has discreetly put it

1. Zack Bowen (1982) discusses a range of prophylactic images—raincoats, boots, umbrellas, and so on—that not only protect characters from the elements in Dublin but shield them from a more direct (and vital) contact with life as well.

(2003, 143), derives logically enough from numerous signals throughout the narrative: her spinster status and shy demeanor, her confusion when chatted up by the “colonel-looking gentleman” on the tram, the image of the Virgin Mary invoked by her name. Even the species of plants she tends with pride in the conservatory carry a suggestion of asexuality: ferns, nonflowering plants that reproduce by the formation of asexual spores, and wax plants, whose cuttings she shares in another form of asexual reproduction (*D*, 121). The scientific names of these plants, however, caution against a monolithic reading. The fern, classified as a “vascular cryptogam,” a name derived from the Latin *cryptos* (hidden) and *gamia* (marriage), points to some kind of sexual secret. Similarly, the wax plant, a member of the *milkweed* family, bears the name *Hoya carnosa*, derived from the Latin root for *flesh* (*carn*) (Storn-month 1885).² And although the church maintains Mary’s virginity after giving birth, much of Joyce’s wordplay related to the dogma of the Virgin Mother (or heresies that deny it) undermines the notion of Maria’s carrying unequivocal significance.

In fact, student responses to the story over the past several years reflect a particular shift toward questioning Maria’s virginity; students almost routinely ask if Maria was Joe’s “wet nurse.” Their interrogation derives partly from the affectionate tone of Maria’s expression: “Joe was a good fellow. She had *nursed* him and Alphy too” (*D*, 121; emphasis added), as opposed to a more objective formulation, for example, had she been identified in the third person as the boys’ nanny or even in noun form as “their nurse.” The word *nursed* gains emotional nuance by its immediate juxtaposition with Maria’s memory: “Joe used often to say: Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother” (*D*, 121). One student, in fact, questioned what seemed a special bond between Maria and Joe, indicated by his use of the singular pronoun *my* (as opposed to *our*) followed by his later denial of Alphy as his brother. Joe’s distancing of Alphy echoes Maria’s way of mentioning Alphy almost as an afterthought when she recalls how she “nursed [Joe], and Alphy too” (*D*, 121).

2. The “hidden marriage” suggested by the classification “cryptogam” stems literally from the fern’s hidden sexual parts (spores). I am indebted to my student Jessica Fisher for first pointing out the significance of the plant species in “Clay.”

Joe's phrase *proper mother*, standard in British or Irish parlance in which *proper* signifies the real or actual, could suggest the depth of Joe's affection toward his surrogate mother or—if it is rendered in free-indirect discourse—Maria's need to see herself within a female economy of production, as indicated by her satisfaction with her indoor garden. In class, I have argued for leaving the door open on the question, while nonetheless acknowledging its sexual implications for our reading of Maria's "story" if she did literally nurse Joe, or Alphy.

The term *proper mother*, which occurs within a political discourse regarding wet nursing in European history, heightens its presence as a charged term in Joyce's narrative. The English Renaissance poet Edmund Spenser, for example, expressed fears that the milk of Irish wet nurses would contaminate British babies with "Irishness." According to Julie Kipp, "The Irish wet nurse has long been the victim of British prejudice." Spenser suggested that "fostered children might be corrupted by the love they received from the nurse" (quoted in Kipp 2003, 107).³ The French philosopher Rousseau duplicated this abhorrence of the hiring of wet nurses and waged, as Rebecca Kukla has demonstrated, "a vitriolic attack" against the practice. Kukla notes that in postrevolutionary France, "the image of the nursing mother was the *proper mother* of the Republic" (2005, 50; emphasis added). Revolutionary France, in fact, employed the iconography of bare-breasted women as allegorical representations of the Republic in paintings and statues of the time (*ibid.*).⁴

Related readings of Maria within the frame of political allegory as the "Poor Old Woman or Kathleen ni Houlihan," as noted by Terence Brown (1992, xxiv), do so, however, at the peril of privileging allegory over fact in Joyce's realistic depiction of Maria as one of many "wronged women"

3. Kipp's discussion of British anxieties about the Irish foster system and particularly Spenser's fear of the corruption of the child who would internalize the language and the nature of the Irish foster mother seems prescient of the odd similarity between Maria and Joe, mentioned also by Bulson (2003, 41).

4. In Kukla's overall argument, this turn away from the wet nurse is the beginning of the movement toward mothering as a "private" as opposed to a "public" economic function (as it was with the wet nurse). Her emphasis on a private versus public opposition has relevance for "Clay."

in *Dubliners*. Gabrielle's interrogation of my more "suspicious" reading of Maria's secret life provides caution and ballast against a tendency to overread what she calls "the unknowable story within the story" of "Clay." The important convergence in our dialogue on this point lies in a mutual awareness—of the narrative's power to "seduce" us not only with its "storybook" quality but also with its hint of the covert. The narrative's childlike tone reminds us that stories involving children are often notorious for mistaken impressions and elliptical truths, as the opening three stories of *Dubliners* demonstrate.

Belief in Maria's absolute purity or untouched past, however, is complicated by her own ambiguous point of view, as when standing before the mirror she recalled "how she used to dress for Mass on Sunday morning" and "looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often *adorned*" (*D*, 123; emphasis added). Given the fact that for Irish Catholic girls, Sunday mass was the one place they could legitimately exhibit their physical charms, one wonders what memories lie beneath Maria's barely suppressed pride in her "nice tidy little body" (*D*, 123). Her obvious pleasure at the sight of her own body in the mirror, furthermore, seems extraordinary for a woman conditioned by Irish Catholic denial of the body.

We are not reading "Clay" as if it might be a "shilling shocker" or a piece of investigative journalism, the goal of which is to expose or "dig up the dirt"—the "clay," if you will—on its subject. Rather, our reading is an effort to consider the wider possible arc traced by Joyce's narrative about an obscure character whom we are challenged to *realize* with critical attention as well as with imaginative sympathy in order to appreciate the "clay" of Maria's humanity. The central, if equivocal, image of clay in the narration (evoked only by associating the "soft wet substance" in the story with the title, as Attridge and others have demonstrated) serves not only as an element within a "divination" game foretelling death, but also as a reminder of Maria's existential human condition, with its potential for both innocence and a fall. Read in this context, the "clay" becomes an extension of the image of "dust" in "Eveline" that also functions doubly as an archetypal image of "death in life" and as a trope for the stifling culture of domesticity regulating the lives of women in turn-of-the-century Dublin.

One of Derek Attridge's subheadings in his essay on "Clay," "A Woman of No Importance," an allusion to an Oscar Wilde play, is an ironic reminder

of the cost of reading Maria as a nonsignifier both socially and sexually. Wilde's play, produced in 1893, is about a woman who has a sexual secret in her own past that returns to haunt her. The potential shadow of Wilde as an intertext in Joyce's story of a spinster, one whom we hardly imagine walking on the wild side (or "crossing" the rails, as Mrs. Sinico does in her nocturnal perambulations in the following story), complicates our impression of Maria's innocence. Her denial of sexual desire when she brushes off the teasing of the laundresses about her prospects of "getting the ring" that evening invites some disbelief, undercut as it is by her laughing gray-green eyes that "sparkled with disappointed shyness" and, more emphatically, by her second, somewhat hysterical laugh that "nearly shook [her minute body] asunder" (*D*, 122). This mark of violence registering almost seismically through her small frame further arouses our suspicions about Maria's contentedness with her "nice," tidy life. The verbal motif created by the repetition of the word *nice*, ostensibly by Maria, twelve times throughout the narrative also plays against the Irish usage of the word, as seen in the ending of "A Mother" when Mr. Holohan remarks with biting irony of Mrs. Kearney, "That's a nice lady. . . . O, she's a nice lady" (*D*, 183).

If we do not immediately doubt Maria's verbal claims to respectability, her appropriation of social autonomy linked with the New Woman of the 1890s clearly arouses some suspicion. When preparing for the evening out, she thinks "how much better it was to be independent and have your own money in your pocket" (*D*, 123). The "two half-crowns and some coppers" (*D*, 121) amounting to five shillings and some pennies in her purse hardly support this inflated sense of independence. The image of Maria's alleged freedom is metonymically represented by her purse with the silver clasps that reads "A Present from Belfast," bought for her five years ago by Joe when he and his now estranged brother, Alphy, had gone on a "Whit-Monday trip" (*D*, 121). The image of the purse links her again with Eveline, a younger version of Maria in *Dubliners*, whose narrative, when read as a counterpart to "Clay," amplifies their shared sense of economic dependence and even servitude. Eveline, a young working woman who lives at home with her widowed father, hands over her entire salary to him and then has to wait until his generally inebriated return on a Saturday market night for him to grudgingly hand over the money (or what is left of it) so she can run out to buy provisions for

the house. In the story she recalls going out, not unlike Maria, “holding her black leather purse tightly in her hands as she elbowed her way through the crowds” (*D*, 45–46). The female inversion of the heroic self-construction of the narrator in “Araby” who imagines bearing “his chalice” bravely through the noisy market crowds (*D*, 35) in Eveline’s defensive guarding of her purse in the marketplace foreshadows Maria’s social timidity on alighting from the tram at Nelson’s Pillar, as she “*ferreted* her way quickly through the crowds” to buy treats for the Donnelllys (*D*, 123; emphasis added). The mark of naturalism implied in the animalistic verb is hard to miss; unlike Chandler in “A Little Cloud,” who combats his disabling sense of smallness by deeming himself above the “vermin-like” life of Dublin (*D*, 87), Maria’s bent posture expresses her feeling of inferiority and, perhaps more ominously, her fear of being hunted or found out.

The shopping interlude between the two trams heightens the sense of Maria’s vulnerability in public, and particularly in mixed company, as her inability to win respect from the young men on the tram suggests. This point is reinforced when the stylish young clerk in the shop on Henry Street, impatient with Maria’s dithering over her purchase of the plumcake, rudely asks “is it a wedding cake she wants to buy” (*D*, 124), which evokes from Maria another telltale blush. It is this same plumcake that Maria later “loses,” and her recollection upon that discovery of “how confused the gentleman with the gray moustache had made her,” at which she again “*coloured* with shame and vexation and disappointment” (*D*, 126), a physical reaction that silently approximates an epiphany in the narrative. The emphasis produced by the elongated grammatical arrangement of “shame *and* vexation *and* disappointment” reaches its climax in the uncharacteristic eruption of pain in the next sentence: “At the thought of the failure of her little surprise and of the two and fourpence she had thrown away for nothing she nearly cried outright” (*D*, 126), signaling the deflation of her mood as well as her purse. Maria’s loss of the plumcake seems more than simply an economic or imaginative failure. The role of the plumcake in traditional Christmas divination games where guests vie for the piece of cake with the plum or in some cases for a coin or a ring hidden in the cake, auguring wealth or a marriage in the new year, deepens the sexual significance of the plumcake and helps explain the piqued shopgirl’s reference to a wedding cake. The sexual overtone

suggested by Maria's losing her "plum" cake because she was "confused" by a dubious gentleman seems obvious even without recourse to folklore or cultural tradition.

The presence of the "purse" as a sartorial accessory robbed of any economic power in both "Eveline" and "Clay" points to the thematic linking of these characters as politically and sexually colonized women. The Belfast source of Maria's purse recalls Eveline's evocation of the businessman from Belfast who bought the field outside her house. Both narratives associate Belfast with an economy of change. The "bright brick houses" that now dominate the field that used to stand outside Eveline's house advertise the entrepreneurial spirit of the prosperous northern Anglo-Irish and recall the traditional metaphor of Britain's stealing Ireland's "green fields." Joe and Alphy's trip on "Whit-Monday," which is a "bank" holiday in England and Ireland, heightens the association.

The female purse, as Freud would later demonstrate, can also be read as an object "containing erotic information," an idea developed at length in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (see chapter 6). Freud saw the purse, like other objects that act as receptacles, as symbolic of female genitalia. Although Joyce's composition of "Clay" predates Freud's clothing analysis, the sexual symbolism of the purse was a common trope in Victorian iconography. Coins and purses functioned within a discourse of female sexuality in much Victorian literature and recur especially in the Pre-Raphaelite treatment of the fallen woman. Imagery of coins and the purse recurs throughout Dante Gabriel Rossetti's dramatic monologue "Jenny" about a prostitute. Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* ends with the secret of Jack's birth (and rightful name, Ernest) being revealed when his former nanny identifies her lost purse in which she had mistakenly left the baby. ("Joe and Alphy" in "Clay" bear a phonetic, even parodic resemblance to Jack and Algy in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The nickname Alphy, suggesting the Catholic saint Alphonsus Liguori, known for his *scrupulousness*, is in direct opposition to Algy, an evocation of Wilde's fellow aesthete and decadent poet Algernon Swinburne.) The musical reworking of Wilde's comedy as *Ernest in Love* (1960), furthermore, features a hit comic song titled "A Handbag Is Not a Proper Mother," which combines the sexual innuendo implied in the purse and Joe's epithet for Maria as his "proper mother" in "Clay."

One Freudian reading of the sexual significance of the purse in contemporary consumer behavior theory provides a fitting gloss on Maria, who regards with pride the “silver clasps” of her purse: “A lightly snapped, zipped and buckled purse suggests a woman who guards her physical and emotional privacy closely, one whom it will be difficult to get to know, in either the common or the biblical sense. An open topped tote bag suggests an open trusting nature: someone who is emotionally and sexually accessible” (Lurie, quoted in Webb 1999, 140).⁵ The recovered purse in *The Importance of Being Earnest* furthermore points to the theme of the changeling that is inscribed in Balfe’s opera *The Bohemian Girl*, another intertextual presence that directly links “Clay” and “Eveline.” The opera, about a young girl stolen by the Gypsies, to which Frank takes Eveline, is also the source of the aria that Maria sings at the end of “Clay” about a heroine’s dream or memory of a happier past. It has not been uncommon for readers who perceive the dialogic relation between “Eveline” and “Clay” to view Maria’s fate as a retrospective warning of the emptiness that could face Eveline after refusing the invitation to follow “her lover” to Buenos Aires. This reading of Maria as a future version of Eveline is also supported by the biblical linkage between their names—the Hebrew Eve is replaced in Christian typology by Mary. Joyce’s deconstruction of the binary opposition between virgin and whore in other works points to the potential irony of Joyce’s cautionary tales in “Eveline” and “Clay,” ones that subvert, however, Victorian warnings to young women against following Eve’s desire.

“Clay” might be more properly understood as warning against Eveline’s failure to claim her freedom, dramatized by her inability to follow “Frank,” who despite his potential as a rake in disguise bears a name that signifies honesty and freedom. The questions her story raises cast an important light on Maria’s failure to sing the second stanza of the aria from *The Bohemian Girl*, “I Dreamt That I Dwelt.”

Maria’s repression of the second stanza is consistent with her repressions, denials, and euphemisms—especially with regard to men—throughout the

5. Lurie’s reading of the clasped purse versus the open tote replicates the distinction between Maria’s protected purse and her more exposed and ultimately vulnerable parcel.

narrative. Maria's euphemistic description of the "colonel-looking gentleman" who "had a drop taken" (reminiscent of Eveline's description of her father as "fairly bad of a Saturday night" [*D*, 44]) and Maria's denial of Joe's anger when she mentions Alphy—the most she can admit is that he "was *nearly* getting cross" (*D*, 126)—emerge within a pattern of submission and denial regarding men. By contrast, she does hear Mrs. Donnelly say "something very cross" to the next-door girls who planted the clay in the saucer (*D*, 128). Maria's defensive strategy with men invites the reader to question what she fears—is it the expression of strong or violent emotion or the memory of having been "crossed" by men in the past?⁶ Her equivocations are followed by Maria's acquiescence when Joe "insists that she take a drink"; the narration tells us she "let him have his way" (*D*, 126), a phrasing suggestive of sexual surrender. Again the text reports Joe "made Maria take a glass of wine," after which he prevails upon her to sing: "and so Maria had to get up and stand beside the piano" (*D*, 128).

As Francine Masiello reveals in "Joyce in Buenos Aires: Talking Sexuality Through Translation," being "obliged to sing" is, in that city, "a trope for sexual favors demanded of women" (2004, 65). Masiello offers this point within an explication of Joyce's Latinate pun "Buellas Arias" in *Finnegans Wake* (435.01).⁷ And although Masiello does not address Maria's being made to sing in "Clay," she does link the trope with the expression "going to Buenos Aires" as taking up a life of prostitution that Katherine Mullin and others have identified as a potential allusion to the white slave trade in "Eveline" (Masiello 2004, 65; Mullin 2000).

6. Vicki Mahaffey and Michael Groden explicate the word *crossed* in "Silence and Fractals" in this collection.

7. The pun "Buellas Arias" in *Finnegans Wake*, furthermore, not only evokes singing an aria within the context of a sexual favor but is also situated in a passage that assembles a constellation of images relevant to my discussion. The passage gathers Wilde's Algy and Joyce's Eveline and Maria. "Autist Algy" (decadent artist), known to the "vice crusaders," takes a young woman (echoes Eveline) "to the playguese" (theater and brothel, house of disease) to see *The Smirching of Venus*, where he asks her "with a *nice tiny little* manner and in a *very nice little tony way*" (Maria's diction and nasal intonation in "Clay"; emphasis added), "Won't you be an artist's moral and pose in your nudies" (artist's moral as model exposed in the nude) (*FW*, 434.35–435.5).

Joe's overwrought response is also part of an alcoholic bipolarity seen throughout *Dubliners*. Joe's emotional overdrive makes one suspect, with Eric Bulson, that "even though Joe attributes his tears to the nostalgic song and 'the long ago' we might also venture a guess that he is hiding something," that he "like Maria is repressing something that bothers him" (2006, 41).

Masiello's provocative claim for the role of the secret in modernist writing has relevance for "Clay": "High modernism works through the secret. . . . [I]t is part of the strategy of difficult writing that elevates the value of the puzzle and perpetuates its claims on institutional power." This strategy, she argues, divides readers into "those in the know" and those "who remain on the margins" (2004, 55). Furthermore, she adds, "The private flow of information is not without purposeful leaks" (*ibid.*). The questions raised by hints and silences in "Clay" regarding Maria's sexual or nonsexual past are prompted by language both within ("leaked by") and beyond the text (for example, the unsung second stanza of the aria); at the same time, they remain unanswered and seemingly unanswerable—as if the text itself crosses our own desire to have truth exposed.

If Joyce's narrative suggests that interpretation has ethical limits, it does not necessarily follow, however, that we cannot or should not consider the implications of why Joyce might have chosen the path of inscrutability. It is possible to perform such an interrogation without violating Maria's or the narrative's right to remain "other"; moreover, can we do so in a way that holds our own voyeuristic impulses in check and tries instead to elucidate the social or ethical foundations of Joyce's determined secrecy? Asking why Joyce might have chosen "gnomonic" silence in "Clay" may not answer the questions projected by our natural curiosity as readers, but it can help to contextualize them within a framework of empathy.

Joyce's identified technique of "scrupulous meanness" in *Dubliners* developed in the opening years of the twentieth century concurs with an invitation by George Russell in 1904 to write a story for the *Irish Homestead* that "would not shock" the readers of the agricultural paper. After submitting three stories, "The Sisters," "Eveline," and "After the Race," Joyce was asked by the editor "not to submit any more because of complaints from shocked readers" (Manganiello 1980, 38). "Clay," the fourth story in order

of composition (appendix 1, J. Joyce 1992, 227), and thus the first to be written after Joyce's disappointing tangle with Russell, obeys the editorial injunction not to shock—but with a vengeance.

Joyce's interest in preserving the unknowable story in "Clay" could also stem from his personal experience of living through two sex scandals that dominated his youth: Charles Stewart Parnell's affair with Kitty O'Shea and the homosexual scandal of Oscar Wilde. Critical attention to the presence of Wilde in *Dubliners* has focused largely on the issue of homosexual panic at the turn of the last century, and thus concentrated on stories with sexually ambiguous male figures such as the priest in "The Sisters," the "queer old jossler" in "An Encounter," and the celibate Duffy in "A Painful Case." In these narratives, Joyce has mined both his own biography and his memory of the Parnell and Wilde cases. In "Clay," however, Joyce avoids any overt reference to the Wilde of public scandal and taps instead, even if obliquely, Wilde the playwright. Wilde's literary presence, which haunts "Clay" (and possibly "Eveline"),⁸ may help to illuminate the aesthetic strategies Joyce entertained as he imagined his own "woman of no importance," who finds herself, by sheer economic necessity, living in a house for fallen women, whom she views as "a cut" below her, as we see by her response when Ginger Mooney teases her: Maria "knew that Mooney meant well, though of course, she had the notions of a common woman" (*D*, 122).

Joyce's potential nod to *The Importance of Being Earnest* (its theater run aborted in 1895, in reaction to the Oscar Wilde trial) occurs, as noted above, in Joyce's evocation of the purse in relation to a "proper mother." It can also be seen in Maria's far from comic echo of Miss Prism's misplaced parcels (Prism puts, as many will recall, the baby in the handbag and her manuscript in the perambulator). The reunion of the brothers Jack and Algy, effected in Wilde's play by the discovery of the nanny's missing purse, is also tragically inverted in the fractured relationship of the brothers

8. In *A Woman of No Importance*, the "savage" Patagonians serve as an example of "modern" topics of conversation between the sexes in upper-class society. Thus, Wilde could be one source for Frank's entertaining Maria with "stories of the terrible Patagonians" in "Eveline" (2000, 32).

Joe and Alphy in “Clay.” The more allusive, and perhaps more significant, presence of Wilde’s play *A Woman of No Importance* in “Clay” underscores Maria’s status as a woman who, if not morally ruined, seems at least to have been tragically left behind. The play’s central theme of a sexual secret also seems to haunt Joyce’s representation of Maria in “Clay” and perhaps helps to explain Joyce’s aesthetics of silence about her past.

Although Joyce never identifies Maria as a fallen woman, his situating of her in the “Dublin by Lamplight laundry,” a name hinting at the potential exposure of dirty laundry, suggests the possibility that Maria may have a sexual history. Wilde’s experience of having his dirty laundry aired was painfully enacted at his trial in the “Savoy hotel evidence” when soiled bed-sheets were displayed by a chambermaid of the hotel. Margot Gayle Backus uses this event as an illustration of a “scandal fragment” that was a mainstay of the “new journalism” or “scandal journalism” circulating in London at the turn of the last century. Backus defines a scandal fragment as “a reference to or evidence of some private act that, owing to its reconstitution as evidence in a trial or other empirical investigation, becomes superlatively public” (2008, 107).

Backus’s argument that the Savoy incident provided the background for the excremental imagery in *Ulysses* (ibid.) perhaps offers some context for Margot Norris’s impression that the purpose of the children’s trick in “Clay” may have been “to make prim, ‘genteel’ Maria recoil in shock and disgust at the mistaken sensation of touching excrement” (2003, 152). Norris’s reading of the “clay incident” may be consoling to those readers who imagined something similar on their first reading but banished or censored the impression as somehow unworthy. The two extremes—exposing dirty laundry in a narrative and fearing to face the sexual or potentially debased content of a story or event—are rehearsed in “Clay,” which simultaneously displaces the possibility of Maria’s sexual past onto her residence in a Magdalen laundry and offers resistance to the questions this image invites. In Wilde’s play *A Woman of No Importance*, an aristocratic Lady Hunstanton dismisses the emotional pain of the ruined woman with an unfeeling response that similarly tries to place Mrs. Arbuthnot in the seemingly progressive shelter of a Magdalen house: “Ah those things are very sad no doubt, but I believe there are admirable homes where people of that kind are looked after and

reformed.” Lord Illingworth, the secret father of the ruined woman’s son, similarly dismisses her as “a woman of no importance”; Illingworth depends throughout the play on the snappy turn of phrase to displace true emotion and undermine middle-class (and by extension Irish) notions of morality. Not until the creation of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* would Joyce find a more humanly calibrated comedy that includes sympathy for the fallen woman. In “Eumaeus,” Bloom, seeing the prostitute through the window, is nervous regarding his own complicity in underwriting her profession: “Unfortunate creature!” Bloom thinks. “Of course I suppose some man is ultimately responsible for her condition” (*U*, 16.731–32). Still distancing himself, as the phrase *some man* suggests, Bloom’s sympathy nevertheless exceeds the sympathy of Stephen Dedalus, whose ironic detachment in defining the prostitute as a “bad merchant”—“one who buys dear and sells cheap” (*U*, 16.738)—retains the mordant wit of fin-de-siècle Wilde.

Wilde’s aestheticism, it should be noted, evolves not only from Pater’s celebrated dictum of “art for art’s sake” but from Keatsian and Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic practice as well. Stephen’s image of the merchant calls to mind the Pre-Raphaelite fallen-woman poem “Goblin Market,” by Christina Rossetti, the sister of Dante Gabriel, who was forced by her gender to disguise the adult theme of her tale in a children’s allegory. Rossetti’s awareness of the reality of prostitution is demonstrated by her social work among fallen women in London’s Magdalen houses. Her poem’s relevance to “Clay” is suggested by Joyce’s adoption of a storybook tone. “Goblin Market” is a retelling of the sin in the Garden of Eden. Joyce subverts, however, its formulaic Victorian opposition between the good sister and the bad sister (Laura who buys the fruit of the Goblin Men is the Eve and must be redeemed by the virtuous Lizzie, a type of Christ or the Virgin Mary, who resists their offer).

Joyce’s awareness of the aesthetic trajectory in nineteenth-century Britain from Keats through the Pre-Raphaelites to Wilde becomes apparent from images deployed in *Dubliners*: “Eveline” mirrors Keats’s “The Eve of St. Agnes” except that Keats’s “Madeline” (a name cognate with Magdalen) trusts the suitor who promises (like Frank) that “over the southern moors I / have a home for thee” (lines 351–52). In Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “Jenny,” the sleeping prostitute in the poem, robbed of a voice, anticipates Eveline and Maria who are effectually silenced in their narratives. Beside her

inarticulate, “demure nods and hems” to the gentleman on the tram (*D*, 125), and her submissions to Joe, Maria’s discourse of domestic contentment within the prison of a “nice” life in a “nice” Magdalen house suggests that she has learned to ventriloquize a conditioned set of responses expected of a woman dependent upon the kindness of society. “Discontent,” as Wilde’s Illingworth quips, “is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation”; such discontent is the unspeakable truth that Maria cannot utter.

To probe too insistently into Maria’s silence with the intention of catching Maria out risks violating her privacy. (Wilde once criticized a biographer of Keats for exactly that transgression, asserting that the biographer showed “neither tact in the selection [of facts] nor sympathy in the use to which they are put” [quoted in Stokes 1999, 75].) The line between public and private that Joyce negotiates in “Clay,” complicated by free-indirect discourse, parallels possible narrative options Joyce confronted in writing “Clay”: oppositions between unfeeling irony satirized by Wilde and Irish sentimentality embodied in Joe, between romantic mythologizing of the Celtic past and a naturalist critique of his city, between the censoring silence of the *Irish Homestead* and the fascination with scandal in modern “new journalism,” among others.

What Joyce chose was an empathetic as opposed to a censoring silence, challenging the reader to a Keatsian sense of “negative capability” that can live with uncertainty and doubt without overreaching for fact. Keats’s “The Eve of St. Agnes” demonstrates this aesthetics of silence. Ironically, it is the “nurse” in the poem who acts as the agent for the young lovers, who “hides [Porphyro] in a closet of . . . secrecy” (line 165), a stratagem that enables the lovers (modeled on Romeo and Juliet) to escape scrutiny and overcome the social obstacles to their love.

Like Keats, Joyce frustrates the voyeuristic desires of his readers. Instead, he uses a gnomonic silence to create a space of narrative empathy around Maria’s unknowable story, whether it be of the utter lack of a sexual drama in her past or of a secret trauma too painful to be resurrected. The presence of Keats and Wilde in “Clay” suggests the motif of “peeping through keyholes,” to quote Wilde himself (Stokes 1999, 75). Perhaps Wilde’s Mrs. Arbuthnot, the “woman of no importance,” foreshadows Maria’s own need for privacy as a way to avoid the verdict of insignificance or the rush to

judgment by a scandalmongering readership when she pleads, “Leave me the little vineyard of my life; leave me the walled-in garden and the well of water; the ewe lamb God sent me in pity or in wrath.” The lesson of Wilde’s trial may well stand behind Joyce’s unusual reticence in “Clay.” If no one in Joyce’s story “tried to show [Maria] her mistakes,” perhaps it is a sign to the readers that we should refrain from exposing her as well.

“Working with Clay,” by Gabrielle Carey
in Response to Barbara Lonnquist

When I read Barbara’s essay on “Clay,” my responses were immediate and definite. First, the last line was so brilliant I could not possibly add anything; she had summed up the sense of the story. Second, I felt overwhelmingly inadequate, underread, and uneducated (readers would know *immediately* that I was not a *real* academic). Then third, I felt, perhaps as self-consolation, that Barbara’s analysis, in a way, proved the point I set out to make in the first place: that “Clay,” along with all the other stories in *Dubliners*, can be read, enjoyed, marveled at by everyone, from the mildly dyslexic dropout to the insightful, learned scholar.

Even amid Barbara’s precise mining of “Clay,” as she manages to bring to the surface all sorts of treasures I had not previously noticed, Barbara is humble enough to remind us of Attridge’s comment about the virtue in not interpreting. In other words, my first rather blind and naive reading of “Clay” at the age of twenty-two might still have value, in much the same way that the first draft of a writer’s story is valuable. It may be rough and without the layers of meaning, texture, and subtext required for the final draft, but it *is* the first layer, and, therefore, fundamental.

Finally, one last point about Maria’s character, specifically about sexuality. There has been a suggestion that when she is blindfolded and touches the clay, the sensation on her fingers could be likened to a person touching human feces. But if she had thought that, surely she would have recoiled. My response to this part of the story was completely different. I imagined that the feel of wet clay might well have suggested moist human flesh, in particular, perhaps, female labia. I wonder if the key difference between my Australian response to that scene in “Clay” and a European reader’s response

is that, for me, clay is *warm* and wet, like aroused genitalia, rather than cold and wet.

In the Northern Hemisphere clay is nearly always cold, often freezing. In the Southern Hemisphere, especially in my part of it, clay is warm. As a child, I spent much of my summer holidays playing on a beach that was lined with clay deposits. When I got tired of making sand castles, I scooped handfuls of warm, damp, squidgy clay from the eroded earth along the shoreline. Wet and malleable, it was ideal for sculpting, and many tiny sculptures molded by tiny hands were left to dry on the rocks that jutted out of the shallows. So whereas for people growing up in Europe, clay might represent cold and death and burial, for me it represents warmth and play and creativity. I grew up with a love for the feeling of clay in my hands, for its potential to be so many things—pots, bowls, figurines. At home we even had a potter's wheel where my father threw lumps of brown poo-like substance onto a spinning surface and then shaped them into vases or plates that would later be fired in a kiln. I remember watching how the clay was miraculously shaped under his hands: broadening, flattening, smoothing, rising, and falling, as the wheel spun 'round and 'round.

Another important difference between a Southern and a Northern Hemispheric reading might be the fact that, in Australia, the driest continent in the world, being wet is a *good* thing. In a country of deserts that is permanently in a crisis of droughts, even the smallest source of water means life. On the other hand, in Europe, particularly in Ireland, and even more particularly in Joyce's time, water, rain, and wet mean Frank McCourt-style ill health—bronchitis and damp, infant mortality and tuberculosis. In the opening to McCourt's famous memoir, he sets the dismal scene of poverty-stricken Limerick, ending the passage with the line, "Most of all it was wet." Wet in Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century meant danger and impending death. Wet in Australia means survival.

How does this background relate to Maria's blindfolded response to a lump of clay? (Or, should I say, my response to Maria's blindfolded response to a lump of clay?) Simply, that I imagine she touches something pleasant and inviting, rather than repellent. And the fact that she does not recoil suggests that the experience (and the enjoyment possibly) of touching the wet, warm, and fleshy is not foreign to her, confirmed perhaps by the fact that

she admires, rather than recoils at, the sight of her own body. Yes, her story is still inscrutable and there is no proof or even real suggestion that she has any kind of sexual history, but my bet is that she is not a virgin. Surely, Joyce would not be so blatant and unsubtle as to name a virgin Maria?

But in the end, such a line of inquiry is not to be explored too far. It is too probing and too private, a bit like asking your own mother about her sexual habits. So I can only reiterate Barbara's beautiful conclusion—which should really be an adage that we all take through life when dealing with people: "If no one in Joyce's story 'tried to show [Maria] her mistakes,' perhaps it is a sign to the readers that we should refrain from exposing her as well." After all, why should we insist on correcting people we consider to be making errors? Why can't we, instead, marvel in their fallenness? In the *felix culpa* of all beings and existence? Why not, rather than showing our fellows' mistakes, refrain from exposing their faults and frailties? If there is one thing that I have learned after all these years of reading Joyce, it is that his principal subject is love. Perhaps this aspect of human love—the willingness to accept the "mistakes" in others, not to mention the mistakes in ourselves—is the most difficult of all. Because what Joyce is asking of us is not just to accept the mistakes and the errors, but to see them as beautiful and meaningful, even lovable.

15



Dead Again

MARGOT NORRIS AND VINCENT P. PECORA

Our essays reflect the new theoretical perspectives we have acquired in the years since we each first published work on Joyce's story "The Dead" some decades ago. However, we approached these new readings in slightly different ways. Vincent Pecora responded in a revisionist spirit to his own 1986 "PMLA" essay on the story, attempting to come to terms both with certain lacunae in that reading and with his own change in perspective after more than twenty-five years of teaching and reflection. Margot Norris began by specifically engaging with Pecora's 1986 piece as a point of departure—and putting it into dialogue with her own early discussions of the intersection of aesthetics and gender in the work. Here she brings "Possible World Theory," a branch of narratology, to bear on the question of Gabriel and Gretta's relationship to narration and writing in order to address the figures' motives and sensibilities insofar as they shape the reader's engagement with the conundrum of their marriage. The conversation that ensued after we exchanged essays was very much a product of the Internet era: the authors began to correspond via e-mail, quite informally at first, and what is included here as an appendix is more or less the entirety of their dialogue. What is striking in retrospect is the degree to which the e-mail conversation, albeit accidentally, reproduces some of the characteristics of pretelephonic intellectual life, a life once recorded in voluminous epistolary debate. Of course, what was once true about such correspondence—the fact that it was often preserved in "hard copy" for decades, even for centuries—is generally speaking no longer the case. Today we routinely purge servers and hard drives of our written dialogues in ways that would make Samuel Richardson's "Clarissa" an

unimaginable work of art. Perhaps, though, we need to reconsider the enormous potential hidden in once again “writing,” rather than speaking, to one another, a “semantic potential,” as Jürgen Habermas might say, that for many years would seem to have been lost.

The Inkbottle and the Paraclete, by Vincent P. Pecora

The invitation to reconsider a story about which I first wrote more than twenty-five years ago has been an occasion for some personal reflection on the whole business of literary criticism, and especially on what I might call the irreducible vicissitudes of interpretation. That the things from which we derive meaning seem to change with time because *we* have changed is of course a truism, and this point applies to places and people just as much as to stories and poems. But at least on this occasion, I found it to be an interesting truism, full of possibilities. And so, like Wordsworth returned to Tintern Abbey, I found myself looking back on what I had written about “The Dead,” “with gleams of half extinguished thought, / With many recognitions dim and faint, / And somewhat of a sad perplexity.” It is the perplexity I felt on rereading both the story and what I wrote about it that I want to share in what follows—a perplexity much less sad than Wordsworth’s, but the consequence of recognitions dim and faint all the same.

The story unfolds with the same nonjudgmental “scrupulous meanness” of Flaubertian realism that distinguishes the earlier tales in the collection, with a heavy use of free-indirect discourse, though many have felt that it also marks a sort of departure for Joyce: it is a deeper, more developed piece of work; it points us toward the mature novels; and it seems to represent a reconciliation of sorts on Joyce’s part with an Ireland toward which, throughout the earlier stories, he had shown mostly bitterness and disdain. This last point, best argued by Joyce’s great biographer Richard Ellmann, albeit largely on the strength of a partial reading of one of Joyce’s letters, has been especially relevant for many critics, since Gabriel Conroy and his wife, Gretta, share characteristics of Joyce and his eventual wife, Nora, and since the narrative pattern of initial bitterness and disdain toward Ireland leading toward a kindlier acceptance seems to be repeated in Joyce’s subsequent

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and *Ulysses*. Moreover, the larger political journey taking us from youthful angry shame about one's colonized nation to a more complex and nuance-laden relationship with it would be later elaborated by critics like Declan Kiberd and Vincent Cheng as the sign of the postcolonial condition in Joyce. To be sure, there had already been a long and lively debate about the story's conclusion, defined largely by whether you believed Gabriel's humbled acknowledgment of his mortality at the end was a redemptive triumph of self-awareness and fellow feeling or a sobering, tragic, existential confrontation with death in an uncaring universe. But in either case, what Ellmann called a renewed sense of the "mutuality" with others that comes with being humanly vulnerable was the largely accepted reading of the ending, and no one (at least in print, as far as I could tell) had concluded that Joyce might be treating Gabriel with cruel irony. But to me, back in 1985, it appeared obvious that we should see Gretta at the end as self-deluded about her erstwhile hero, Michael Furey, and Gabriel as equally self-deluded about both Gretta and himself. And that was more or less what I claimed, decades ago.

Now, I did not originally present my argument in such bald terms, but clothed it in the rather thick and heavy folds of literary theory—vaguely deconstructive theory—so that the story seemed to be less about Joyce's ironic intentions than about the illusion of what Derrida had called "self-presence," exemplified by the misguided belief that we could ever make our intentions fully transparent to others, or even to ourselves (see, among many examples, Derrida 1973, 75–77). I thus drew less on earlier critics of Joyce's often-slippery irony, such as Wayne Booth, than on Derrida's more thoroughgoing critique of any notion of intentional consciousness unmediated by preexisting traces of language (see Booth 1961, 323–36). (The omission of Booth was something I tried to correct in the version of the argument that appeared in my first book, where, to the dismay of some of my more theoretically astute reviewers, Booth's older moralistic concerns over unanchored irony were brought back into the discussion; see Pecora 1989, 103–7.) I also borrowed heavily from Nietzsche's critique of Christian asceticism and altruism, which were prime examples for me of the illusion of self-presence. But most of all, I drew on Joyce's stated suspicions both of heroic Christ-like self-sacrifice and of the degree to which his own authorial intentions might be either just "old

phrases, sweet only with a disinterred sweetness" (*P*, 233)—that is, sentimental narrative or moral clichés—or perhaps forms of literary plagiarism, that is, unconscious forgeries of someone *else's* language and intentions. This entire problem of language haunted by intentions not one's own, and intentions haunted by language not one's own—which was for me central also to the free-indirect discourse that was Joyce's favorite narrative device—was symbolized most trenchantly by Joyce's later figure of "the Haunted Inkbottle" used by the "pelagiarist" Shem the Penman in *Finnegans Wake* (182). (As Joyce's pun suggests, acknowledging that we are all plagiarists of sorts is, in a sense, a Pelagian release from the taint of primal guilt, from the "original sin" supposedly incurred by betraying our originality, our origins.) The question Stephen Dedalus puts to himself in *A Portrait*—"Could his mind then not trust itself?" (*P*, 233)—was, I argued, precisely the question Joyce was articulating throughout his fiction. And the key to my argument about all this in "The Dead," as the title of my original essay, "'The Dead' and the Generosity of the Word," implied, lay in the word *generosity*.

In brief, I argued that the concept "generosity" had been thoroughly corrupted by numerous earlier moments in the text where it was either a false front for ulterior motives or the sign of a willing self-victimization on the part of the Irish nation as a whole (Ireland being, as Joyce wrote nastily in an earlier story, filled with the "gratefully oppressed"). Thus, when I came to the story's penultimate paragraph, which follows Gabriel's realization that his love for Gretta was trivial by comparison to the love of the heroic Michael Furey and which dramatizes the sudden appearance within Gabriel of a new self-awareness and acceptance of others earned through humiliation, my argument was that the attentive reader could not read the line "Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes" without feeling that it rang false, or, in simpler terms, that Joyce was being thoroughly ironic about Gabriel's presumed emotional awakening. In my view, the gas worker, Michael Furey, was himself a gaseous creature etherealized by Gretta's overwrought romantic sensibility. Here, my real guide was Hugh Kenner's brilliant reading of the story "Eveline," in which the title character is seen as unable even to comprehend how much she had fictionalized all that she thought she had lost when she decided not to leave Ireland with her suitor, whom Joyce ironically (so Kenner claimed) named Frank (see Kenner 1972, 38). But Gabriel seemed to

me even more of a sentimental fool at the end of the story than he was at the beginning, since he was in effect buying into a set of eminently Gaelic folk myths, largely originating in Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*, which celebrated self-sacrifice, heroic romantic loss, and (last but not least) the saving virtue of a generosity that depended upon, indeed fetishized, one's own victimhood.

That is, Gabriel seemed to be passively and unthinkingly accepting all the cultural stereotypes that Joyce more than once indicated he believed were both the products and the enablers of Ireland's self-induced political and cultural victimization. I thus suggested that Joyce had constructed the story as a sort of narrative trap, one that would demonstrate to the reader just how easy it was to fall prey to such political and cultural clichés. Instead of making his peace with Ireland's unsought failings, and demonstrating a more generous understanding of the tragedy that had so often been Irish life, as Ellmann had argued, I suggested instead that "The Dead" was actually one more rotten egg hurled at the stereotypes of an Irish self-regard that found metaphysical comfort in its ability to endure humiliation, and then make redemptive music from it. The only problem in my reading, of course, was that most other readers did not think it accurately reflected what Joyce was doing, which meant either that in my interpretation Joyce's readers were on the whole as foolish as Gabriel and Gretta, since they so often took those characters at face value at the end rather than as figures of ridicule, or that the story was something of a failure. I opted for the former alternative, thereby earning some praise, but also a fair amount of enmity from a number of my colleagues in turn. Some, like Dennis Taylor, wrote immediately in a letter to *PMLA*'s "Forum" that my account absurdly presented Joyce's story as embodying "a gigantic cultural trap sprung by Christ." In a book published in 2003, Desmond Howard wrote that "reading Pecora reading 'The Dead' is both exciting and unnerving," noting with some irritation that my "menacingly articulate analysis . . . races beyond the borders of Joyce's fiction and into the very act of reading and interpretation" (Harding 2003, 65). The main problem for most of those scholars who objected to my interpretation was understandable enough, however, and it was a consequence of the sort of paradox that Paul de Man once upon a time liked to exploit. If Joyce had designed a story about seemingly hard-won insight that turned out to be just one more version of being duped, and moreover had done so

in such a hermetic and obscure fashion that one could never be sure where the joke stopped, then what would ever count as genuine insight, and how would we ever know when we had it, including insight about the story itself? Why wouldn't my own insight into the story then go up in smoke along with Gabriel's awakening? As Taylor cleverly (and I now think correctly) put it, my version of the story actually refused ambiguity, presenting Joycean modernism as "oddly puritanical: it excoriates Gabriel and denies that he has any choice." Nevertheless, for many years I was satisfied that it was enough to have made people nervous about the story. On rereading both the story and my essay, however, I was less satisfied (and this dissatisfaction also embraced the longer book-chapter version, which grounded the text's "cultural trap" in the "iron cage" of Max Weber's modern, administered society). It was not so much that I now feel that I had been wrong about the story, but rather that my own early account fell short in conveying just how perplexing this story really is.

Searching for the key to my perplexity, I began to reflect on the large amount of scholarship over the past forty years or so that has been devoted to the role of the reader in producing the meaning of literary texts. And, not surprisingly, I found that I agreed more fully than I once had with Hans Robert Jauss that an interpretation is a function of a historically defined "horizon of expectations," and with Stanley Fish (or at least with one of his various avatars) that an interpretation is a function of the "interpretative community" that validates it, and even with David Bleich and Norman Holland that an interpretation is a function of the individual reader's "personality," and ultimately the reader's unconscious thought processes, including everything from gender to the effects of trauma. My reading, I decided, was very much of its theoretical time and place, shaped by Derrida's deconstruction, by Foucault's critique of a panoptic modern social order, and by a more broadly based critical obsession, built on figures like Lacan and Althusser, with the various ways by which we had all been interpellated as manageable subjects by a given social order (see Althusser 1971, 170–83; Althusser in fact highlights "Christian Religious Ideology" as his prime example). To a degree, such ideas, like those ideas of reader-response criticism itself, have been quietly absorbed into much critical practice at this point. And although I cannot agree with the strong version of reader-response theory—Wordsworth's

“half-create” already seems more than sufficient—I also cannot ignore the large degree to which the rather formalistic notion of an “implied reader” and deconstruction itself played significant roles in my earlier interpretation of Joyce’s story, roles that they would not play today.

At the same time, both Wordsworth and Bleich helped me see that my reception of the story was in no sense simply a function of a historical moment or theoretical model, but was also a deeply personal response. Gabriel’s sense of superiority and humiliation, and especially Joyce’s angry frustration with the religious, national, and familial nets trying to keep him from fleeing everything that (he felt) oppressed him, as recounted in *A Portrait*, had uncanny parallels in my own life: an educated, formerly Catholic son of uneducated working-class parents, one who had been introduced to Joyce in a Jesuit secondary school. If I could not accept that Joyce was being sincere in portraying a fictional version of himself as learning to accept what he most desired to escape, then perhaps the roots of my critical approach could be found in my own unresolved refusal to make a separate peace with my family and its expectations. Moreover, it now seems eminently plausible that if I saw unflinching irony in Joyce’s narratives as the mark of the vigilant critical intelligence resisting the lure of unthinking sentimentality, it might be because something similar had become a kind of defense mechanism for me too—that is, aggressive irony as a psychic defense against messy emotional attachments. I began to wonder whether my elaboration of the story’s meaning was “menacingly articulate” precisely because articulating unwanted human ties in a menacing fashion was the best way I had at the time to keep them at bay.

Yet on further consideration, nothing in the archive of research into the role of the reader promised true explanatory comfort for my sad Wordsworthian perplexity. And none of it proved adequately explanatory for the simple reason that my predicament was, in fact, not really commensurate with Wordsworth’s. That is, I was responding not simply emotionally to a mute landscape, one that (as far as anyone knew) had no intentions embodied in it, but rather to language that had been deliberately organized by a human intelligence like my own and that actually seemed to be trying to communicate something to me. It was surely not all my fault that, having arrived once again at the famously hyperventilated purple prose of the story’s

conclusion, I no longer had a clear sense of what this piece of literature was finally supposed to *mean*. No matter how much I tried to convince myself that the problem was in *me*, and that any new reading of the story I might produce would be just as personally or historically determined as the old reading had been, I could not quite relinquish my sense that the story itself *did* matter a great deal, and that the difficulties of interpretation finally had to be traceable, in some fashion, back to particulars of the text and not simply explained away by characteristics of the reader or the epoch. If the latter premise were as true as the strong version of reader-response theory implied, then the confusion of daily life on this planet would be far more profound than it already is.

And so I turned to a critic who has been, and still is, rather hostile toward all this Wordsworthian (or deconstructive) talk of a reader's role in creating the meaning of a text, especially when that text is threatened with being reduced to little more than a chain of empty material signifiers resting lifelessly on the page. As it happens, for quite different reasons I had also been reading Walter Benn Michaels's book *The Shape of the Signifier*. Michaels has now combined two of his earlier arguments—that the meaning of any literary work is, and can only ever be, identical with the intention of the author and that the belief in cultural identity is at bottom no different from racism—into one grand unified theory. Not to put too fine a point on it, Michaels now claims that belief in the independence, or at least inevitably errant quality, of the signifier, of the sort that we associate with deconstruction and creative reading, logically entails cultural essentialism, and ultimately racism. "I am arguing," he writes, "that anyone who thinks the text consists of its physical features (of what Derrida calls its marks) will be required also to think that the meaning of the text is crucially determined by the experience of its readers, and so the question of who the reader is—and the commitment to the primacy of identity as such—is built into the commitment to the materiality of signifier" (2004, 13). That is, if you don't believe that authorial intention is the same thing as textual meaning, then you don't believe that people are defined by what they say and by their beliefs, and you must believe that people (not just readers) are defined by what they are, by a cultural essence (that is, something independent of rational beliefs), which effectively makes you a racist.

I do not want to get into the business of parsing Michaels's argument here. It is perhaps enough to say that I do not see why being suspicious of what people claim or think they mean by a given utterance, or wondering whether they really do believe what they say and imagine they believe, or recognizing along with Joyce that our inkbottles are often haunted, and that we often unconsciously plagiarize (which is really all that is technically required to make you a creative reader of some sort, even if not in consciously deconstructive terms)—I do not see why any of these claims necessarily mean that I must also believe that people have a specific and essential cultural or racial identity. Even Michaels himself seems to believe that people do not really always understand what they say they mean; otherwise, deconstructionists who say they are not essentialists could not make the logical error Michaels says they are making. That is, I do not see why Joyce's haunted inkbottle should entail cultural essentialism, though Michaels's argument points in that direction. Still, while I was dismayed by this latest turn in Michaels's larger antitheoretical project, reading his eminently persuasive ridicule of strong versions of creative reading reminded me just how much I agreed with him on certain key points. Indeed, despite my appropriation of strategies borrowed from deconstruction and reader-response theory, my earlier interpretation of "The Dead" was based squarely (as I indicated in my response to Dennis Taylor's *PMLA* letter) on my belief that I had more accurately discerned what Joyce meant us to understand than previous criticism had. Nothing in my original interpretation, I felt, contradicted the idea that, just as Michaels has long argued, the meaning of the story and the author's intention were one and the same. Today I would simply say, minus the theoretical jargon, that I believed then that Joyce was intentionally being far more ironic about his principal characters than most other readers were willing to credit. But it was never easy to square my underlying belief that I could better grasp Joyce's intentions—they were to me, at the time, clearly ironic—with my argument in the essay itself, which was that we should be thoroughly, deconstructively, suspicious about the nature of all intentions, Joyce's as well as Gabriel's, and that this suspicion was a logical consequence of Joyce's own (Pelagian) views of language and society.

As with my turn to Jauss and company for help, I found that Michaels's bracing certainty about the necessary identity of authorial intentions and

textual meaning did little to aid my perplexity, for as I have already indicated, my problem today is not that I have discovered a clearer set of intentions in the story different from the ones I found earlier. It is that I am far less certain today what the intended meaning of this story might be, especially of the ending, than I once was, and that this uncertainty is not the consequence of its being badly constructed. Moreover, I think I can also say that I have begun to wonder all over again what these words *intention* and *meaning* are actually supposed to represent where literature is concerned, whether they are in fact adequate concepts when faced with the literary object. I found myself recalling F. R. Leavis's witty dictum about Joseph Conrad's wanting to make "a virtue out of not knowing what he means" (1963, 180), and I have come to believe that it has more to recommend it than we generally are willing to admit. In any case, I have long wondered whether the claims put forward in Michaels and Steven Knapp's original essay, "Against Theory," were of much help in dealing with a situation in which an author foregrounds the necessity of what Conrad calls "singleness of intention," and then proceeds quite deliberately to undermine the phrase's coherence, perhaps getting lost along the way in the thickets of his own rhetorical fancy. I must admit that I am just as perplexed these days when I return, usually in preparation for a class, to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which grows somehow murkier, more incoherent, and more perplexing every time I read it. And don't even begin to talk to me about *Nostromo*!

So where does my perplexity finally leave me? I want to avoid, if I can, descending into a complete textual skepticism, for in fact I believe we know a great many things about texts and how they work. Instead, I want to return to the final paragraphs of Joyce's story, and see if all this reflection and rumination on readers and intentions might not point, just because of the perplexity, to a more adequate response. Above all, I want to address more deliberately now the question of the sentimental in Joyce, an element of his work that I had more or less denied in my earlier reading, and ask how it should be squared with Joyce's radically unsentimental technique. From Stephen Dedalus's overwrought, but very earnestly portrayed, pangs of conscience—his "agenbite of inwit" (*U*, 1.481)—over failing to pray with his sick mother, to Leopold Bloom's sincere belief that "love," as "everybody knows," is "really life" (*U*, 12.1482–85), to Molly Bloom's ingenuous,

uninhibited, final “Yes” aimed less at her suitor than at life itself, we have an author who may have learned most of what he knew about narrative from the French (he claimed at one point that he learned nothing from the English novel) but seems to have kept, where sentiment is concerned, a kind of hidden filial allegiance to Charles Dickens, a writer to whom he was at best overtly ambivalent (see Ellmann 1983, 233, 320–21). One simply cannot imagine, for example, Joyce’s great stylistic precursor Flaubert earnestly ending a novel with a woman earnestly exclaiming yes to a marriage proposal (even if she does quietly admit “well as well him as another” [*U*, 18.1604–5]), or (worse) seriously portraying her response as the triumph of the life force. From Balzac to Zola, the great French realists simply did not imagine that good novels could do the latter with a straight face.

Yet there are places in French fiction presenting similar interpretive dilemmas where sentimental endings are concerned. I am thinking especially of Flaubert’s well-known story “Un cœur simple,” written near the end of his alternately successful and disappointing career, a story Joyce knew and was perhaps a bit jealous of. It is a story that, as many have noted, repeats motifs found earlier in *Madame Bovary*, but in a somewhat less obviously ironic key. The ending is especially relevant to my ruminations about “The Dead,” for “A Simple Heart” is either one of the very few instances in Flaubert’s work where the reader is expected to be overcome with out-and-out tear-filled sentiment, or it is one of the cruelest endings in his entire corpus, one not sublime, but bitingly ridiculous. The “simple heart” of the title is Félicité, an obscure, pious, loyal, and trusting maidservant in the Normandy countryside of Flaubert’s birth. She is a character who, had she been Irish, would have been very much at home in *Dubliners*. Her most enduring affection is for her parrot, Loulou, at once a kind of surrogate son and lover, which she has stuffed and mounted when he dies. All of this information is related with the same economy and scrupulous lack of affect that Joyce admiringly imitated in his early writing. Depending on how one reads events like the stuffing of Loulou, however, the story is either dripping with sentiment or dripping with irony.

At the end, after many years of unrequited faith and faithfulness, Félicité, now blind, deaf, and addled, is dying of pneumonia. She enters her death agony with the same vomiting, throaty rattles, and bloody froth at

the corners of her mouth, and in the same religious delirium, as had Emma before her. But here, everything has been softened, made more obviously sentimental. As Flaubert ends the tale, his heroine lies dying with the worm-eaten mounted parrot now sitting on an outdoor processional altar set up near her room for the feast of Corpus Christi: “A blue cloud of incense was wafted up into Félicité’s room. She opened her nostrils wide and breathed it in with a mystical, sensuous fervor. Then she closed her eyes. Her lips smiled. Her heart-beats grew slower and slower, each a little fainter and gentler, like a fountain running dry, an echo fading away. And as she breathed her last, she thought she could see, in the opening heavens, a gigantic parrot hovering above her head” (Flaubert 1961, 56). Despite the fact that this story quickly became one of Flaubert’s most popular works, in which the pathos of Félicité’s demise, as well as her Holy Ghost of a parrot, were taken with great earnestness, some critics could not help but note the similarity to Emma Bovary’s end, which surely was infused with irony, and they pointed to the bathos, rather than the pathos, of Loulou’s dramatic apotheosis. Moreover, we know not only that Flaubert had strong anticlerical feelings, but also that he had a few years earlier read with great enthusiasm Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*, a book that might be said to have laid the foundations for seeing Christianity from the critical perspective of the anthropologist, so that his story might even be understood as subtly demonstrating the confused anthropological basis of religious illusions like the feathery Christian Paraclete. Or perhaps it is a purely linguistic confusion—a Holy Ghost of the inkbottle, as Joyce might say—that most amused him. After all, Flaubert’s elegant, sentimental *conte* is at bottom a long, meandering setup for a pun that is evident only in French: in her confusion, Félicité ends up mistaking her *Perroquet* for *le Paraclet*.

Yet, as Robert Baldick notes, Flaubert is also reported to have said that the story “is not at all ironical as you may suppose, but on the contrary very serious and very sad. I want to move tender hearts to pity and tears, for I am tender-hearted myself” (ibid., 15). In fact, there is an uncanny resemblance, or repetition, between the situation prompting Flaubert to write “A Simple Heart” and the one that prompted Joyce to write “The Dead.” Flaubert had often been disappointed by the negative response of those readers who understood the point of his irony, and by the misunderstanding praise of

those on whom the irony had been lost. George Sand, an old and close friend, had reproached him for “spreading unhappiness” with his books, and there is some evidence Flaubert wrote “A Simple Heart,” which is very much a biographically based homage to the narrow, ignorant, provincial environment of his youth, as a way of showing Sand that he could be more generous and accepting of the backwater French national life he had so bitterly satirized in previous novels (see *ibid.*, 12). Even if there were not good reasons to doubt Flaubert’s assertions of tenderheartedness, the story itself remains a wonderful example of a sort of narrative split personality. Flaubert’s stated hope that “now, surely, no one will accuse me of being inhuman anymore” (*ibid.*, 15), so similar to Joyce’s statement in the oft-quoted letter to his brother about wanting to be kinder to Ireland in his final story, itself betrays a certain repressed bitterness. It is as if Flaubert somehow resented having to write a more generously sentimental story in the first place, even as he felt he should. There is certainly something moving about Félicité’s miserable fate, with one humiliation following another as she declines, increasingly withdrawn into what is left of her memory. Yet I cannot help laughing when she begins to kneel down and pray to her badly taxidermied parrot as if it were the Holy Ghost, and when, in the last lines, the decrepit, worm-eaten Loulou descends from on high. This fusion of the sublime and ridiculous, this curious admixture of authorial generosity and cutting black humor, is (I am convinced) precisely what Flaubert intended, and one might say it is this deep equivocation between pathos and bathos that becomes one of the distinguishing marks of modernist literature, exemplified most spectacularly by Kafka’s hysterical laughter as he read his seemingly tragic novels to his puzzled friends. Beckett too would draw on this particularly unstable rhetorical tone, as if he had figured out how to pare down the story of Félicité’s obscure life to nothing but the skeletal structure of the unrelieved, yet mundane, and ultimately somehow ridiculous miseries that punctuate all such obscure lives. One could say too that Julian Barnes’s Nabokovian *Flaubert’s Parrot* is an obvious postmodern inheritor of this generic mutation.

So the question I want to pose is as follows: should we perhaps see the ending of “The Dead” as similarly structured by an equivocation between pathos and bathos? On the one hand, I am now willing to acknowledge that Gabriel’s implied final reverie is a sublime Homeric or Dantean vision of “that

region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead,” symbolically defined by powerful Christian imagery of “crooked crosses and headstones,” “the spears on the little gate,” and “the barren thorns” and by that snow lying “on all the living and the dead.” But on the other hand, it still seems to me somehow pretentious that Gabriel should think “the time had come for him to set out on his journey westward.” That swoon is still vaguely ridiculous, too alliterative, hyperbolic—“his soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe”—a self-induced romantic delirium, not unlike Emma Bovary’s at her suicidal death, haunted by ghosts that Gabriel can only glimpse through his self-pitying tears. Thinking of the young Michael Furey, destroyed by a powerful yet thwarted passion, Gabriel’s acknowledgment that “he had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love” does, I now am willing to admit, have a certain poignancy. Yet I wonder whether Gabriel’s delirious meditation on the putative sublimity of a love he has never felt is also a subtle parody of the romantic sublime—and we should recall that Stephen Dedalus “swoons” in the same way over his exaggerated sense of his sinfulness in *A Portrait*. We know from earlier stories just how satirical Joyce (like Flaubert) could be about such religiously amorous swoons. (Just a few months before beginning work on “The Dead,” for example, Joyce wrote to his brother, “Perhaps my view of life is too cynical but it seems to me that a lot of talk about love is nonsense” [letter to Stanislaus Joyce, November 13, 1906, *Letters II*, 189].) There is, I now recognize, something deeply human and moving about Gretta and her sorrow, and about her sense of a lost chance for passion in an otherwise dreary existence. But I cannot shake the feeling that, throughout *Dubliners*, it is precisely this preoccupation with the lost or missed passions of the past that is meant to be seen as paralyzing, as usurping the chance for passion in the present—as if we are meant to see Gretta, like Eveline, getting more pleasure out of what she thinks she lost than out of her real husband. And I cannot avoid thinking that Gabriel is somehow repeating the motif, lamenting all that he *could* have had with Gretta, had he only known what he was missing. There is now for me even real pathos in the figure of Michael Furey. Yet I still cannot dismiss the sense that he winds up being not only someone who once *sang* a romantic Irish ballad about unrequited passion, “The Lass of Aughrim,” but a quasi-legendary figure in his own right who

has stepped right out of the ballad into Gretta's memory. I am more willing now to accept that the word *generous* as applied to Gabriel's tears could be taken at face value, or perhaps simply as meaning "copious." But it still for me reverberates with irony in the context of the story as a whole.

I will not, that is, any longer deny the affecting poignancy of the conclusion, as John Huston's movie captured it. But what, finally, *are* Joyce's intentions, and did he know what they were before or after he wrote those final elevated paragraphs? A story like "Araby" clearly shows that Joyce, who liked thinking of himself as Luciferian, could be every bit as ironic as Flaubert about the power of religiously induced emotion to supply the passion that was missing in the obscure lives of oppressed (and repressed) people. Is something like that going on at the end of "The Dead," too, or is this story one case in Joyce's work where the cross and thorns of Christ's passion, and men angelically named Gabriel and Michael, are to be seen (as Ellmann and many others see them) as the real thing? And if all of it remains unclear, does the obscurity I feel mean that the strong claims of Bleich and Holland about the reader's role inevitably trump the claims of Michaels's pragmatism? I am not sure how to answer such questions. But I would like to conclude by asking you to imagine that "A Simple Heart," with its scrupulously ambiguous ending, might provide a kind of guide. And to illustrate why, I want to cite the thoroughly ambiguous letter Joyce wrote to his brother Stanislaus in 1906 that, in my view, has so often been misread in evaluating the meaning of "The Dead":

I have often confessed to you surprise that there should be anything exceptional in my writing and it is only at moments when I leave down somebody else's book that it seems to me not so unlikely after all. Sometimes thinking of Ireland it seems to me that I have been unnecessarily harsh. I have reproduced (in *Dubliners* at least) none of the attraction of the city for I have never felt at my ease in any city since I left it except in Paris. I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality. The latter "virtue" so far as I can see does not exist elsewhere in Europe. I have not been just to its beauty: for it is more beautiful naturally in my opinion than what I have seen of England, Switzerland, France, Austria or Italy. And yet I know how useless these reflections are. For were I to rewrite the book as G. R.

[Grant Richards] suggests “in another sense” (where the hell does he get the meaningless phrases he uses) I am sure I would find again what you call the Holy Ghost sitting in the ink-bottle and the perverse devil of my literary conscience sitting on the hump of my pen. And after all *Two Gallants*—with the Sunday crowds and the harp in Kildare street and Lenehan—is an Irish landscape. (September 25, 1906, *Letters II*, 164, quoted in Ellmann 1983, 231)

It is remarkable how often the first part of this letter has been either cited alone or unduly emphasized in Joyce criticism to explain the significance of the story it describes. Written some months before Joyce began work on “The Dead,” the letter has been used by Ellmann and many others (even very astute contemporary critics like Michael Levenson a few years ago [1996, 426]) to suggest Gabriel’s, and by implication Joyce’s, decision to grant (in Ellmann’s words) “a kind of bondage, of acceptance, even of admiration to a part of the country and a way of life that are most Irish” (1983, 250). In my earlier reading of the story, I responded with a frankly oppositional critique that overemphasized the second part of the letter and focused on the passages that I felt proved that Joyce’s story was anything but the generous reconciliation with family and nation that most of his readers thought it was.

Today I want to take the letter as a contradictory whole, to come a bit closer to that binocular, rather than monocular, perspective that Joyce emphasized so trenchantly in the “Cyclops” episode of *Ulysses*. If I had to decide afresh what Joyce really did mean at the story’s end, I would say that I am not sure even he knew. Perhaps he tried to eat his cake and have it too, creating a character who finally gives in to the more generous impulses that Joyce himself obviously felt, all the while mischievously undermining that character, subtly parodying the larger spirit of reconciliation—which is, of course, what the Holy Ghost (the Paraclete, the Flaubertian Parrot) in his inkbottle is all about—with ambiguous details and rhetorical overkill. Joyce did not resort to the kitsch of a giant stuffed parrot welcoming his protagonist into the afterlife. But I believe that the author of *Dubliners* was somehow quietly at cross-purposes, if I can put it that way, with the beautiful, redemptive language of its finale, which even rhetorically occupies for me some strange middle ground between free-indirect discourse and

omniscient description. I think Joyce was finally so troubled and frustrated by the impossible morass of personal and political claims Ireland made on him that he could not decide whether he should reconcile with it or turn his back on it, and I think the end of the story with its swoon into the comforts of oblivion is the surest sign of Joyce's own deep and irresolvable ambivalence. Instead of deciding what he really felt about Ireland, I now believe, Joyce remained confused and uncertain and wrote an awfully good story about his perplexity. But perhaps that is just what all great storytellers do.

Art and Artlessness in the Possible Worlds
 of "The Dead," by *Margot Norris*

Vincent Pecora's reading of Joyce's "The Dead" offers us perhaps the most acute interrogation of the signal conundrum at the heart of the story: does Gabriel experience an authentic or inauthentic epiphany at its end? Instead of offering an easy answer, Pecora concludes with an explanation of why it may be so difficult for us to challenge the significance and grandeur of Gabriel's gestures of heroism, generosity, self-sacrifice, and spiritual transcendence at the end of story. "If Gabriel fools himself, if in the very process that we accept as self-discovery, he only reimplicates himself blindly in the cultural conditions he longs to transcend, then we may simply be doing the same thing, in our reading, in our lives" (1986, 243). I take this statement to suggest that Gabriel and the reader share similar stakes in seeking some escape from what Pecora calls the "metaphysical discontent" (*ibid.*) of ordinary life, and those stakes lie in the most deeply embedded institutions of culture. This highly sophisticated formulation of the issues and perils at the heart of the story has rightly become one of our interpretive norms for reading "The Dead," and I would neither wish nor be able to challenge it. Vincent Pecora's essay "'The Dead' and the Generosity of the Word" appeared in the March 1986 issue of *PMLA*. My own essay on "The Dead" first appeared under the title "Stifled Back Answers: The Gender Politics of Art in Joyce's 'The Dead'" in the Autumn 1989 issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* and was subsequently reprinted in revised form in my 1992 *Joyce's Web: The Social Unraveling of Modernism*. This early reading of mine concurs with Pecora's argument that the story clearly demonstrates that art is not above politics—although I locate Joyce's

critique of Gabriel's self-idealizing gestures in his relationship to the women in his life, including the seemingly insignificant Julia Morkan and her sister Kate. My strategy in these essays was to link Gabriel's valorization of poetry, music, and culture to his aesthetic objectification of women, and particularly of Gretta, at the same time that he contributes to the cultural conditions that mandate woman's domestic and artistic silencing. My revised title for this study asked the seemingly facetious question "Who killed Julia Morkan?" and provided a simple answer that sounded like a joke: "the pope." Specifically, I argued, Pope Pius X's November 1903 *Motu Proprio*, making women ineligible to sing in church choirs, destroyed Julia Morkan's career and possibly hastened her death within the next six months, since Leopold Bloom verifies in *Ulysses* that she is dead by June 16, 1904. Although Gabriel does not directly create oppressive institutional conditions for women, my reading would agree with Pecora that in his idealistic fatuity, Gabriel "reimplicates himself blindly in the cultural conditions he longs to transcend." I would further agree with Pecora that the reader too is implicated in Gabriel's blindness. But more than a decade and a half later, I am curious to explore how an alternative theoretical approach to the question of Gabriel's motives might address the issues—and sustain or challenge readerly discomfort and peril in joining Gabriel, or refusing to join him, in his escapist enterprise.

The approach to "The Dead" that I would like to test in this respect is situated in the field of narratology and goes by the name of "Possible Worlds" theory. I am intrigued by the possibility of recoding escapist impulses and desires for transcendence (such as the ones felt by Gabriel in the story) as inscribed in private or alternative worlds whose conflict with what might be called the actual worlds in the domain of fiction is constitutive of narrative plots. After first sketching out the premises and conceptual framework of Possible Worlds theory, I hope to apply them to "The Dead" with the aim of demonstrating their usefulness for providing an alternative formulation to Vincent Pecora's conclusion. Possible Worlds theory came to prominence in the 1990s in the work of three narratologists. Marie-Laure Ryan published *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* in 1991, followed in 1994 by Ruth Ronen's *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* and in 1998 by Lubomir Dolezel's *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*. Ruth Ronan explains the theory's aim: "The development of a conceptual

framework of possible worlds hence at first glance seems to offer a new outlook on the problem of fictionality, on the ontology of fictional worlds and fictional objects, and on generic problems such as realism” (1998, 21). Possible Worlds theory is therefore less a theory of fiction than a theory of *fictionality*, of what is nonactual, nontrue, pretended, made up, nonexistent, and the like, in narrative stories. But if fiction—as opposed to nonfiction—is by definition a domain composed of fictionality, its fictionality is nonetheless complicated by its tendency (especially in realism) to *pretend* that elements in its domain are true or actual. As Ronan points out, “Fiction poses a problem for philosophers because unlike other possible but non-actual occurrences, fictional states of affairs dissimulate their fictionality and may be presented as *facts*” (1994, 31). Thus, Joyce’s story “The Dead” is set in a fictional 1904 Dublin that with its references to Usher’s Island, Phoenix Park, the *Daily Express*, assorted statuary, and the Gresham Hotel *pretends* an actuality that can, presumably, be historically and geographically verified. Possible Worlds theory can address the phenomenon of a fictional Gresham Hotel and a historical Gresham Hotel by formulating criteria for what is called “trans-world identity” (*ibid.*, 57) between the actual world and fiction. But what interests me more than the relationship between our world and actual worlds in fiction is the ability of Possible Worlds theory to address what are sometimes referred to as modal operators. These are the factors of possibility, probability, necessity, and impossibility that not only underlie some taxonomies and distinctions of the fictional genre, but also make it possible to explore ontologies within a specific kind of literary mode, such as realism. For Marie-Laure Ryan, these modalities underlie the private worlds of human thought within the semantic domain of fiction—private worlds that she calls APWs, or Actual Possible Worlds.

But although Ruth Ronan implicitly suggests that Ryan’s unproblematic Textual Actual World may be naïve (*ibid.*, 69–70), this point is not an issue for me because I am much more interested in Ryan’s private or Alternative Possible Worlds. These worlds strike me as extremely useful for identifying a variety of ontological conditions that together play a role in the plot of “The Dead.” Ryan’s APWs (Alternative Possible Worlds in a modal system of reality) are “constructs of the human mind. The virtual in the narrative universe exists in the thoughts of characters” (1991, 110). Ryan divides

these possible worlds, existing in the minds of fictional characters, into such categories as Knowledge-worlds (knowledge, belief, and ignorance [ibid., 114]), Obligation-worlds (commitments and prohibitions defined by social rules and moral principles [ibid., 116]), and Wish-worlds (desired states and actions [ibid., 117]). If we consider the fictional universe of “The Dead,” all three of these possible worlds come quickly into view. The discussion of opera stars and musical performance around the Morkan dinner table brings into play the Knowledge-world of many of the secondary characters in the story. On the other hand, Kate Morkan’s bitter comments about the injustice of Pope Pius X’s *Motu Proprio* banning women from choirs voice her frustration with the implacability of the Obligation-world created and enforced by the Roman Catholic Church. And Gabriel Conroy’s romantic memories and yearnings—“He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy” (D, 265)—appear to express Gabriel’s Wish-world. “The Dead,” like any work of fiction, contains a posited empirical or Actual World that, in this case, is set in Dublin, Ireland, in January 1904, in the upstairs rooms of a house on Usher’s Island and, later, in a room at the Gresham Hotel. The played piano, the danced lancers, the sung aria, the consumed goose, and the exchanged conversations all belong to this Textual Actual World. But this Actual World is shot through with private worlds—most invisible, although they might be inferred, and some made manifest to us through the narration. These private worlds—the sources of Lily’s and Kate Morkan’s bitterness, Miss Ivors’s political convictions, Gabriel’s feelings about his wife—are themselves fictional (or nonfactual) within the context of the fictional domain of “The Dead,” although Ryan’s categories would allow us to differentiate them into a variety of modalities. Ryan’s Possible Worlds may therefore make it possible to explore one of the questions raised for me by Vincent Pecora’s reading of “The Dead”: namely, the ontological status of “the mythomania that so characterizes Dublin life” (1986, 241). This question is perhaps best tackled by first sorting out the roles that private or alternative worlds in fiction play in the constitution of the story plot.

Ryan writes, “For a move to occur and a plot to be started, there must be some sort of *conflict* in the textual universe. Plots originate in knots—and knots are created when the lines circumscribing the worlds of the narrative

universe, instead of coinciding, intersect each other. In order to disentangle the lines in their domain, characters resort to plotting, with the almost inevitable effect of creating new knots in some other domain" (1991, 120). This formulation runs into an immediate problem when it is tested in "The Dead" because of the distribution of external and internal focalization. We can certainly posit that there is some sort of tangle in the boundaries of their private worlds when Gabriel encounters Lily and Miss Ivors. In the case of Lily, the external focalization—describing only her actions and words rather than her thoughts—gives us no access to her private world except by inference. However, the implication of "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you" (*D*, 219) suggests that Lily's Knowledge-world has suffered what we nowadays call a "reality check." She seems to have experienced a shift in her belief in the truth-value of sweet or flattering language with a consequent shift in her esteem of seemingly gracious men. Given that Gabriel Conroy is an incorrigible producer of sweet and flattering language (*"Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?"* [*D*, 266]), the Knowledge-worlds of Lily and Gabriel not only will not coincide but will tangle. Pecora describes, "Gabriel's response to being caught so nakedly by a caretaker's daughter, to being so neatly unmasked, is to reaffirm the cultural, bourgeois vision he would like to project to the world" (1986, 238). Thus, Gabriel uses the gold coin, symbol of his generosity, to contradict Lily's cynicism and prove not only that he is not trying to get anything out of her, but that, on the contrary, he means to be her benefactor. Whether Gabriel's gesture produces a "knot" in Lily's Knowledge-world is again made unknowable by the external focalization. But the encounter establishes Gabriel's pattern of responding to "knots" created in his own Knowledge-domain by the beliefs of others with self-mythologizing maneuvers designed to restore his role as the steward of the "health, wealth, long life, happiness and prosperity" he wishes for everyone (*D*, 254).

Vincent Pecora analyzes this maneuver as Gabriel Conroy's need to continually transform the sense of victimization that afflicts the Dubliners of "The Dead" into a noble situation, a self-sacrifice that he can code as a "princely failing" (1986, 238). The feudal, fairy-tale trope resonates with Marie-Laure Ryan's description of the implicit end and goal of narrative striving: "The best of all possible states of affairs for a system of reality is one

in which the constitutive propositions of all private worlds are satisfied in the central world. In such a system, everybody's desires are fulfilled, all laws are respected, there is a consensus as to what is good for the group; what is good for the group is also good for every individual, everybody's actions respect these ideals, and everybody has epistemic access to all the worlds of the system" (1991, 120). Both Gabriel's efforts—to put galoshes on his wife and shore up the health of his children—and the narrator's determination to predict the total success of the Christmas party ("Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style as long as anyone could remember" [*D*, 216]) work in the service of this utopian goal. But Gabriel's failure to effect this best of all possible worlds can be traced to some extent to his refusal to take advantage of "epistemic access" to the Knowledge-, Obligation-, and Wish-worlds of others—a refusal enacted also by the narrative focalization. Both Kate Morkan's rage at the victimizing Obligation-world imposed on Ireland by Catholicism ("I suppose it is for the good of the church if the pope does it. But it's not just, Mary Jane, and it's not right" [*D*, 241]) and Molly Ivors's efforts to create a political Obligation-world of Irish nationalism remain impenetrable both to Gabriel and to the narrator whose character-bound focalization extends only to Gabriel's thoughts and feelings. And this blindness extends to such other private worlds as the Knowledge-world as well. No one at the party is interested in something that Freddy Malins knows and seeks desperately to communicate—namely, that there are black tenors whose voices might rival the voices of the "legitimate" white singers enshrined in the musical pantheon created at the dinner table. This double indifference, by Gabriel and the narrative perspective, could indeed be troped as a "princely failing"—though in a sense of moral hauteur rather than as an excess generosity, as Gabriel would have it. It further accounts for both the inauthenticity of the best of all possible worlds Gabriel seeks rhetorically to restore with his after-dinner speech and the inauthenticity of his epiphany at the end.

We might suggest, then, that Gabriel Conroy's attempt to create the best of all possible worlds for himself, his family, and his community is produced by his complex—if unconscious—manipulation of the relationships between his various private worlds and their intersection with the people around him. Marie-Laure Ryan's model does not fully address such manipulations, and

“The Dead” could therefore serve to introduce some complications into Possible Worlds theory. For example, Ryan concedes that Knowledge-worlds can be either incomplete or partial, and she makes a distinction between these two terms. “An incomplete K-world fits on its reference world like a cover with some holes in the middle; the location of the holes is determined, and the character knows where his or her knowledge is defective. A partial K-world is like a cover that is too small, the regions beyond the cover remaining unsurveyed” (1991, 115). Gabriel Conroy might be thought of as a consciousness that deliberately punches holes in the Knowledge-world—not intending to make it incomplete, but in order to improve it by patching the holes with elements imported from his Wish-world. This might be a way of explaining the operation of Gabriel’s mythologizing impulse, as a “private-world-exchange maneuver” that is most clearly visible in his dealings with Gretta. Her Galway life is one of the holes Gabriel punches into his Knowledge-world—presumably prompted by his mother’s denigration of the provincialism that makes her call her daughter-in-law “country cute” (*D*, 231). Although Gabriel mentally protests this characterization (“that was not true of Gretta at all” [*D*, 231]), he appears nonetheless to have exiled Gretta from her place of origin and—judging from his ignorance of her early romantic life—to have discouraged her from discussing it with him. “She’s from Connacht, isn’t she?” Miss Ivors asks about Gretta. “‘Her people are,’ said Gabriel shortly” (*D*, 234). Gretta’s own response to Miss Ivors’s suggestion that the Conroys take a trip to the West of Ireland betrays her longing for the place. “His wife clasped her hands excitedly and gave a little jump. ‘O, do go, Gabriel,’ she cried. ‘I’d love to see Galway again’” (*D*, 236–37). But instead of exploiting this opportunity to remedy a self-created hole in his Knowledge-world, Gabriel elects to paper it over with his Wish-world. His ignorance of Gretta’s actual past is rehabilitated with material from his own memories—or, at least, his imagined memories. “Like the tender fires of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illumined his memory. He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy” (*D*, 265).

Not until Gabriel seems to concede near the end that “he had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must

be love" (*D*, 277) are we free to wonder if that ecstatic memory might perhaps belong to what Ryan would call a "Pretended-world." She writes, "The complete semantic description of a character's domain thus includes both authentic and inauthentic constructs—beliefs and mock beliefs, desires and mock desires, true and faked obligations, as well as genuine and pretended intents" (1991, 118). Gabriel's desire for what I would characterize as a "lyrical" existence, an aesthetic construction of memories, sentiments, and values that allow themselves to be expressed in markedly beautiful language, appears sincere and appears to represent his true Wish-world. Yet his curious confession after Gretta's outburst opens the possibility that the narration, so thoroughly complicit with Gabriel's self-imaginings, has given his mental performances an aura of sincerity and genuineness without guaranteeing their authenticity. One could redeem the discrepancies and inconsistencies in Gabriel's Wish-world by arguing that the lyrical existence he covets is the Wish-world he *wishes* he could inhabit because it would remove him further from the Actual World of indelicately clacking heels and shuffling soles. Gabriel might therefore not only punch holes into his Knowledge-world and paper them over with pieces of his Wish-world, but do the same with his Wish-world: punching holes in it and papering them over with chunks of a Pretended Wish-world. This Pretended Wish-world, then, might be considered the source of Gabriel's mythomania, although I would find its inspiration in a different mythic arena than does Vincent Pecora. Pecora identifies the myth enacted by Gabriel's generosity and self-sacrifice as religious, that of Christ, while I see specifically aesthetic myths as shaping the lyrical Wish-world Gabriel creates as the ostensible object of his desire. I have discussed these intertextual models previously in my earlier work on "The Dead" and would continue to insist on the legitimacy they draw from either primary or secondary allusions in the text. The most notable is, of course, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, whose balcony scene is represented in Julia Morkan's embroidered picture (*D*, 230)—a scene Gabriel reenacts as he watches Gretta listening on the stairs. Another is the reverse of the myth of Pygmalion and Galathea—possibly embedded in the references to Robert Browning, author of "My Last Duchess," about a man whose princely failing is to turn a living wife into a work of art. These are not moral myths of saviors whose suffering and sacrifice redeem the world, but rather

aestheticizing myths about men who transform the women they ostensibly love into ecstatic lyrics or beautiful pictures—“*Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?*” (D, 265); “*Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter” (D, 260).

Pecora’s sense of the nature of Gabriel’s mythomania and my own are not unrelated, of course, since the myths we postulate as Gabriel’s models and inspirations deal—in a very general way—with the redemptive power of love. But my focus on the specifically dramatic or theatrical nature of the sources that inspire Gabriel’s enactments is useful for pointing up the way the theatrical or the aesthetic legitimates insincerity or inauthenticity as art and artifice. Ever since Aristotle exonerated drama and theater from charges of lying, artistic representation has enjoyed an ethical license presumably detached when acting moves off the stage and into ordinary behavior. Yet when ordinary behavior mimics art, as it does in Gabriel’s soliloquies, it seems to acquire some of art’s legitimacy as an expressive medium of emotion and value. This point may help to explain how Gabriel could fail to realize that he postures not only in his words and speeches but even in his most intimate thoughts—a realization that comes to him as an acutely mortifying *anagnorisis* after Gretta’s revelation. “He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous wellmeaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror” (D, 273). Gabriel’s Pretended Wish-world of a lyrical life conceals an actual Wish-world that we might characterize as one focused on patriarchal privilege and filled with desire for class, gender, and cultural superiority. The vulgarity of this Wish-world is one Gabriel shares with many of the other guests and one that consequently contributes to his “metaphysical need.” The dream of wishing for something finer, something higher, the kinds of longings and aspirations embodied in poetry and works of art, in turn shapes his Pretended Wish-world. And it allows him to replace the prosaic fictionality of his *actual* Wish-world, with its crude desire for prestige and superiority, with the pretended poetic fictionality of spiritually princely longings. Given the layering or imbrication of fictional constructs that constitute this secondary Pretended Wish-world, this complex and intensely private domain of Gabriel’s world should be immune to challenge. Yet it will be stunningly challenged in

“The Dead” when it becomes tangled and knotted with Gretta’s own layered and multidimensional private worlds.

When Gretta erupts with her Michael Furey story, Gabriel’s private worlds become assaulted with the force of another constellation of Possible Worlds not yet dreamed in his philosophy. The patches he had glued over the Galway portion of his Knowledge-world are ripped off, and he has to confront the existence of an actual provincial world in which boys toil in the gasworks, go out walking with young girls, contract tuberculosis, and die. It is a world in which galoshes, dumbbells, and stirabout would seem incapable of keeping disease, death, and tragedy at bay. But Gretta’s Knowledge-world appears itself to have been reworked in aesthetic wools, as it were, like Julia Morkan’s domestic appropriation of Shakespeare’s balcony scene, and is thereby also transformed into a poignant Wish-world. Both Gabriel and Vincent Pecora construe Gretta’s wish as the desire to transform herself into a romantic heroine. “So she had had that romance in her life: a man had died for her sake” (*D*, 276), Gabriel thinks. And Pecora writes, “Gretta transforms Michael Furey into the one grand passion of her life by idealizing both his death and her love: he dies—not, as Gabriel suggests, from consumption—but for her” (1986, 241). Pecora then attributes two fictional models for the “legend” Gretta builds around Michael Furey: “The Lass of Aughrim” and, once again, Christology. “The suggestion of Christ’s death in her phrase is only accented by his standing in a garden ‘where there was a tree,’ as if crucified for her sake” (*ibid.*, 241–42). In Pecora’s reading, Gabriel not only embraces Gretta’s romantic mythologizing of the story, but elaborates it, intensifies it, and appropriates it for his personal redemption. “In the name of Michael Furey, his legendary hero and personal saint, Gabriel sacrifices himself to the past, and to the dead, more profoundly than any of his compatriots does” (*ibid.*, 243). But perhaps Gretta’s private world—so long suppressed by Gabriel—should not be so quickly suppressed by our criticism. Gretta does appear to transform Michael Furey’s death from a prosaic event in the Actual World into a symbolic act or gesture: “I think he died for me” (*D*, 274). But does this sentiment belong to her Wish-world or to a Pretended Wish-world? Is her mythomania of the same order as Gabriel’s or different?

What does Gretta wish in her private Wish-world? The narration’s internal focalization on Gabriel, with its consequent lack of access to Gretta’s

thoughts, makes this question difficult to answer except by speculative inference. But one might hazard the possibility that Michael Furey offered Gretta something her husband does not: namely, love without palaver. We know only Gretta's verbal account of her courtship by Michael Furey, if we can even call it a courtship, and in it he speaks only once, the words that become her evidence that he died for her: "But he said he did not want to live" (*D*, 275). Without artful words of the kind Gabriel masters in abundance, Michael Furey conveyed to Gretta a world of lyrical expression, in his song, in his eyes, and in his simple final words. "'I can see him so plainly,' she said after a moment. 'Such eyes as he had, big dark eyes! And such an expression in them—an expression!'" (*D*, 272). Can eyes express anything other than sincerity? Gretta clearly construes them as incapable of the kind of palaver that a literary sensibility can construct rhetorically—"In one letter that he had written to her then he had said: *Why is it that words like these seem to me so dull and cold? Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?*" (*D*, 265). Gretta, unbeknownst to Gabriel, too knows something about love letters and, like him, is capable of remembering what she wrote to someone for whom she cared. But her letter is rendered poignantly expressive by what it does not say and by what she eschews in expression. "He was much worse and I wouldn't be let to see him so I wrote him a letter saying I was going up to Dublin and would be back in the summer and hoping he would be better then" (*D*, 274–75). This letter without palaver moves Michael Furey off his sickbed on a rainy night so that he can say good-bye to her. Neither Michael Furey nor Gretta appears to have suffered from princely longings, from desires to elevate their feelings to some loftier and spiritually weightier plane. We might therefore be forgiven to ask why the story might not have transpired as Gretta remembers and tells it, and why the dying Michael Furey's sentiment—that he did not wish to live without her—could not have been sincere.

What the story conveys of Gretta's Wish-world might be no more than that she wishes that the life she touched so many years ago not be forgotten by at least one person—by her. And it may be important to remember that it is Gabriel who turns her story into a love story ("he knew that such a feeling must be love" [*D*, 277]). Three times Gabriel asks her if she was in love with the person who used to sing the song. "'Someone you were in love with?' he

asked ironically" (*D*, 272); "'O then, you were in love with him?' said Gabriel" (*D*, 272); "'I suppose you were in love with this Michael Furey, Gretta,' he said" (*D*, 273). Gretta never concurs with his expression, conceding only that "I was great with him at that time" (*D*, 273). There is no evidence that Gretta's mythomania, if we can even call it such, is the desire to turn herself into the romantic heroine of a Pretended Wish-world. Her Michael Furey story may reflect merely a desire to remember, belonging to her Knowledge-world; a desire to grieve, belonging to her Wish-world; and a desire to memorialize, belonging to her Obligation-world. The story of Michael Furey is, after all, an effectively buried story, one never intended to be told or offered to an interlocutor—as the accidental events that force it into the open make clear. Gretta is caught off guard twice in the course of the late evening: by unexpectedly hearing "The Lass of Aughrim" and by Gabriel breaking into her melancholy with an amorous advance. The explanation that she must offer so that Gabriel will not produce a faulty interpretation of her mood ("Tell me what it is, Gretta. I think I know what is the matter. Do I know?" [*D*, 271]) is impromptu, artless, and uncontrived. In this matter I would disagree with Vincent Pecora, who characterizes the story as a fiction, "an unexpected fiction that dashes Gabriel's hopes for the evening" (1986, 241). It is precisely the artlessness of Gretta's story that ties Gabriel's private world into a knot, I would argue. What terrifies Gabriel in Gretta's story is his need to confront the possibility of a genuinely lyrical existence, a world of feeling and caring never elevated to self-consciousness or dressed in beautiful language designed to rebound to the greater glory of its producer. What Gabriel hears in Gretta's story are beautiful words that are *not* palaver—a discovery that confounds him, and, we might add, confounds the narrative voice as well. It is important to remember that the narrative voice gets no credit or share in either the sincerity or the style of Gretta's story that is conveyed entirely as reported speech. "I implored of him to go home at once and told him he would get his death in the rain. But he said he did not want to live. I can see his eyes as well as well! He was standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree" (*D*, 275).

Vincent Pecora construes this reference to reinforce Furey's religious function—"the suggestion of Christ's death in her phrase is only accented

by his standing in a garden ‘where there was a tree,’ as if crucified for her sake” (1986, 242). But perhaps it is precisely the imposition of myth to give meaning to the story that the reader is invited to resist. Unlike that of Christ, or even Romeo, Michael Furey’s death is not voluntary, and the power of his love may have failed as a redemptive gesture if it left Gretta chiefly with a feeling of the insufficiency of love to protect, heal, and save. Narratologically, Gretta’s story is itself about a knot produced by the tangle of two private worlds, and the knot it produced in hers may have had effects Gabriel cannot divine. Gretta’s glimpse into Michael Furey’s world may have prompted her to pursue a utopian progress of only the most prosaic kind: marriage to a man who provides galoshes, dumbbells, and stirabout to keep his wife and children healthy and safe. Gabriel may therefore totally misconstrue and underestimate his role in the plot of Gretta’s story when he thinks “how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life” (*D*, 276). In Gretta’s experience, love cannot save, except on the most prosaic level, and Gabriel’s role as a good man, a generous man in the most ordinary and nonheroic sense, may be the fulfillment of her highly realistic Wish-world. But Gabriel patently fails to see this possibility, and hence he remains confounded. What response can either Gabriel or the narrative voice possibly make to Gretta’s story—particularly in light of a plot pressure that requires Gabriel to restore a utopian equilibrium to all their worlds? My response coincides with Pecora’s, I believe, though I would formulate it in the language of Possible Worlds theory. Gabriel has glimpsed in his wife’s private worlds his own Pretended Wish-world but without the pretense—and he has no response to such a world of sincere feeling except an initial imitation, followed by a blizzard of palaver. His own humble memorialization of Julia Morkan’s proleptic death seems initially to concede the failure of his palaver—“He would cast about in his mind for some words that might console her and would find only lame and useless ones” (*D*, 277). But the pressure of his Pretended Wish-world is not long kept at bay, and soon his sentiments become loftier and grander, reaching cosmic proportions—“Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead” (*D*, 277). If Gretta memorializes one dead person, Gabriel memorializes hosts of dead persons—resorting to the metaphor of the snow to seal the universe with his

Pretended Wish-world. “His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead” (*D*, 278).

Like Pecora, I too believe it is risky and uncomfortable for the reader to resist joining Gabriel in his escapism from the humiliations of his Dublin life. But I would identify “the very institutions that produce and maintain the viability” of Gabriel’s motives at the end of the story (1986, 243), and that readers share, as the institution of art rather than religion. The social function of art as an “affirmative culture,” to use the Marxist term, that papers over our Actual World with a Pretended World of transcendence and utopian possibility is one I explored at length in *Joyce’s Web*. I would stand by the argument that Peter Buerger inspired in my thinking in that work—that, unlike many of the other modernists, the target of Joyce’s critique is not merely mass culture and popular art but the high art of modernism itself, including his own. If we accept this auto-critique, or self-critique of modernist art at its most powerful, disciplined, and beautiful, then our own relationship to high art becomes highly problematic. If the exquisite prose at the end of “The Dead” is to be equated with the most effective and seductive sort of palaver, then the reader risks becoming as imperiled and feminized as the victim of Flaubert’s critique of romantic novel consumption. To my mind it is the cultural ideology of high art—the subject of discussion around the Morkan dinner table, incidentally—that is much more critically important to the twentieth-century secular imagination than the religious ideology Pecora finds at base of the anchoring institution in “The Dead.” The reading I have attempted here, using Possible Worlds theory, illuminates for me *why* the critique of high art is so threatening to the story’s reader. Art—particularly the highest forms of art—represents a collective, secular, twentieth-century Wish-world, not only within poetry and literature, but also beyond. Art may still offer the best possibility for transcendence, for a loftier, more cosmic, more disinterested vision of the universe in our struggle with the metaphysical discontents of ordinary existence. The notion that it might function as a Pretended Wish-world—an affectation designed to merely confer social, intellectual, and cultural superiority to our impaired vanity—may be a bit-terer pill than we can swallow.

Dialogue on the Preceding Essays

VP: First, I would like to address the question of “sentiment.” This is perhaps more my terminology than yours, but I do think one of the important issues you raise is the (for you) authenticity of Michael’s and Gretta’s sentiments—that is, sentiment free from the distortions of “palaver,” or insincere rhetoric—and the inauthentic nature of Gabriel’s sentiment, that is, sentiment always already predetermined by rhetorical models. I think this is an issue that runs throughout Joyce’s subsequent work, and that has often been the underlying content of numerous arguments about what he is doing. As you have no doubt noticed, I am now closer to your point of view—or at least more on the fence, more willing to give Gretta her due—but I still think Joyce is deliberately treading on very thin ice where sentiment in the story is concerned, and I still think there is an almost inexorable tendency in his thinking and in his work to turn against his own authentic sentiments and perhaps see them, at a second glance, as no more than received wisdom, “palaver,” or rhetorical plagiarism.

Second, there may be a point of intersection between us about the French realism from which Joyce learned so much, or at least about Flaubert. You put your finger on something important at the end of your paper—that Flaubert (like others in the modern French intellectual tradition) generally saw sentiment, and religious belief too, as the weakness of women (in “Un cœur simple” as well as in *Madame Bovary*), and that this weakness extended for him to the desire for, and susceptibility to, sentiment in novels as well. I think you want to see Joyce as revising this tradition, as being more of a feminist than Flaubert ever was, in the sense that Joyce is allowing space for authentic sentiment on the part of women and innocent boys (and more “feminine” men, such as Leopold Bloom), and satirizing the lack of it in egoistic men, such as Gabriel Conroy. This is a cogent argument. But I think I will remain on the fence, and not only because of counterevidence such as the “Nausicaa” episode of *Ulysses* and the treatment of Molly Bloom in that novel, or because of the letter that I cite at the end of my essay, but because I still think the potentially irresolvable issue of the degree to which all authentic sentiments, all earnest intentions, are ultimately inseparable

from rhetorical coding is a rather salient one in Joyce's subsequent work—*A Portrait* would make no sense without this issue, I think.

But then, your notion of “possible worlds” may be a way around the problem. . . .

MN: I think your second observation, about Joyce's relation to French realism (or, perhaps, more broadly, Continental realism), offers us a particularly promising point of discussion. One of the points you made caused me to think back on some other earlier thoughts of mine on Joyce's stories. I do indeed think that Joyce was more feminist than Flaubert. In my Bedford series essay on “The Dead,” I try to argue that Joyce's Continental inspiration and intertext for “The Dead” was Ibsen's “A Doll's House.” We know from one of Joyce's conversations with Arthur Power that he regarded Ibsen's play as a kind of feminist manifesto. “The purpose of *The Doll's House*, for instance, was the emancipation of women, which has caused the greatest revolution in our time in the most important relationship there is—that between men and women; the revolt of women against the idea that they are the mere instruments of men” (1974, 35). “The Dead” and Ibsen's play have in common the seasonal setting: the climax occurring at a Christmas party set in January, with the husband's amorous advance on the wife disrupted by her disclosure of a secret from the past. Even small details like the husband's controlling solicitude toward the wife (Torvald barring macaroons for Nora and Gabriel pushing galoshes on Gretta) are paralleled. I would argue neither Ibsen nor Joyce fails to see the ironies in the husband's rather than the wife's fatuity about the marriage. My other quarrel with a thematic Flaubertian reading of Joyce came out in my challenge of Kenner's view of “Eveline” in my recent book, *Suspicious Readings of Joyce's “Dubliners.”* I join other critics (such as Katie Mullen) whose evidence disagrees with his conclusion. (My essay reads “Eveline” as a story about legitimate emigration anxieties rather than a girl's romantic delusion.) But this challenge certainly doesn't neutralize the other evidence of Flaubertian influence you mention, such as “Nausicaa,” and doesn't necessarily speak to Gretta's response to Michael Furey in “The Dead.”

VP: I certainly agree about Ibsen's role in Joyce's thinking—for me, as for others, Ibsen may indeed be the most important influence on Joyce—so your reading of the way “The Dead” is shadowed by *A Doll's House* makes

plenty of sense. But, as you indicate, there is no Michael Furey in *A Doll's House* (which is to say there is no “Lass of Aughrim” either); nor, I think, do most readers of Joyce feel that Gretta simply wants out of an oppressive marriage with Gabriel (Joyce is not quite, I think, Ibsen on this score). That is, you can reset *A Doll's House* in Ireland, but then it isn't exactly *A Doll's House* anymore. In any case, your reading still requires that we read the final narrative focus on Gabriel with irony—which most readers, and certainly most of my students, always find hard to do. Which brings us back to the big question of intent: if Joyce agreed with Ibsen as much as you say he did, then why would he confuse his readers by putting all the nice and moving poetry in the mind of the Torvald figure? It is authorial perversity, to my mind, at the very least.

MN: You're quite right to point out that *A Doll's House* doesn't map perfectly on to “The Dead.” It's not clear that Gretta—in spite of her “There's a nice husband for you, Mrs. Malins”—recognizes how controlling Gabriel is, and you're quite right that there's no suggestion that she finds the marriage intolerable, as Nora does. But the question of why Joyce would deliberately confuse the reader in the end is easier for me to consider. I think Joyce deliberately confuses the reader at the end of most—if not all—of the stories in *Dubliners*. (Is the priest in “The Sisters” guilty of something or not? Is Eveline caught in an insoluble dilemma, or is she a silly, fatuous girl, as Kenner thinks? And so forth.) And I think the reason he confuses us is not authorial perversity, to my mind, but to warn readers not to trust stories and narrators and their artful palaver too much. This is pretty much the same lesson we could attribute to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*—only I think Joyce does something much more subversive, and that's to turn the critique not just against junk, but against high art as well, and—most radically—against his own art.

Collaborative
Dubliners



Joyce in Dialogue

Edited by Vicki Mahaffey



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