

## Romantic Desires Gone Berserk: A Reading of 'A Mother' in *Dubliners*

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### I

Romance lurks in the east in the world of *Dubliners*. It stays in its hideout in so far as it is cherished and aspired to. Once searched or pursued, the ephemeral object for Joyce's hapless Dubliners swiftly fades away into illusion or disillusionment. The Irish novelist's first work of fiction compiles fifteen sketches of thwarted desires and prematurely terminated dreams of his fellow citizens under circumscribed, morally paralyzed conditions of being. The characters chase what seems to them a gateway to freedom or a path to independence and abruptly find themselves stranded in a spiritual moorland with or without a bitter epiphany as their only reward. The boy in 'Araby', for instance, braves a nocturnal trip on a deserted train across the city and heads for an 'Oriental' bazaar in his attempt to find something worthwhile for Mangan's sister. His solitary adventure, activated by his vaulting puppy love, brings him face to face with his own folly and vanity. The home-bound Eveline's assignation with her seafaring lover in her eponymous story takes her 'eastward' to the port of Dublin but fizzles out even before her westward voyage of love commences. Day in and day out, Mr. Duffy in 'A Painful Case' assiduously traverses the city he vehemently loathes from west to 'east' to make his living. A rendezvous with Mrs. Sinico extends his journey further 'eastward' to her abode until her inadvertent gesture of passion sends his soul instantly and instinctively back to its indigenous, barren sobriety. In 'A Mother', Mrs. Kearney as a young girl used to satisfy her frustrated desires for romance by eating the 'Eastern' sweets of Turkish Delight in secret. Her social downfall, accompanied by her daughter's, is sealed when her intention to revive her long-suppressed desires, this time not in the east but in her own native soil, turns out disastrous. She happens to deal with people from the *Eire Abu* Society and a cultural activity on behalf of the Irish Revival, two of the most fanatic embodiments of Irishness.

Merely a select handful of the citizens, like Frank in 'Eveline', Ignatius Gallagher in 'A Little Cloud' and Gabriel Conroy in 'The Dead', are privileged to relish the fruit of their fortitude and determination which took them out of the stifling, repressive milieu of the city of Dublin. In particular, Gabriel is called a 'West Briton' (*Dubliners*, p. 214: subsequent references to the collection are cited parenthetically), since he looks to the 'east' for intellectual stimulation and

exposes himself to the cultural influences of Britain and the Continent. On the other hand, most Dubliners, like those mentioned above, have no other options than to halt their pursuit of dreams, trudge back to their old places and resign themselves to the drab lives from which they desperately wished to flee. In the case of Mrs. Kearney, her retrogression is more tragic, more poignant, in the sense that she is compelled to retreat far beyond where she was by losing almost all she had – reputation, a daughter's future and communal friends – at the end of the vignette that features her person, desires and endeavours. She is a nominal nationalist and specious supporter of the Irish Revival, but she firmly establishes her status as a genuine denizen of *Dubliners* when her temper and tongue glide into a lapse and temporarily go out of control. On the spur of the moment, she resorts to a certain mode of conduct and speech which are deemed inappropriate for ladies and impermissible in Ireland or, for that matter, in any country or society. Her romantic aspirations, which have long since her marriage been lying low inside her, are stymied in the conceivably ugliest and most corrosive way.

This modest research intends to take up 'A Mother' for further analysis and investigation. The subject is the thirteenth story in *Dubliners* and the second in the category of Public Life, which is installed by the author after the three preceding sections of Childhood, Adolescence and Maturity. It was produced in September 1905, the tenth of the fifteen stories in order of composition, according to Don Gifford (p. 96). Earl G. Ingersoll, in his very brief but convenient overview of the critical reception of 'A Mother', states that the principal character suffers from 'almost universally negative responses from Joyce critics' (p. 136). Spearheading this critical trend, David Hayman terms Mrs. Kearney a dominant female who turns 'a superficial culture into a whip with which to flog the males who cross her path or into a means of cozening them' (p. 124). Ingersoll maintains critical impartiality by directing attention to the presence of such revisionist readings as by Jane E. Miller and Sherrill E. Grace: well informed of contemporary literary theories, these female commentators question whether the protagonist is a monster of a woman or simply refuses to play 'the role of silence and passivity' (Ingersoll, p. 137) to which the other female characters like Eveline and Maria succumb without resistance. What primarily concerns the present paper is not really whether Mrs. Kearney is such an abominable personage or an early practitioner of feminism but what she as a matter of fact does prior to and during the three concerts and how the artistic designs of the story can be grasped and verbally reconstructed.

## II

The main character of 'A Mother' is always called 'Mrs. Kearney' except on the single occasion:

'Miss Devlin had become Mrs. Kearney out of spite' (153). The protagonist's transition in her social status is expressed through her shift from one surname to another. Oddly, her first or Christian name is never revealed in the whole course of the plot. Is it irrelevant to ask why her other names are kept in the dark, what meaning lies behind it? Jackson and McGinley provides a useful tip of information to the effect that 'Devlin' means 'unlucky' (p. 134) in the Irish language: by marriage, Miss Devlin cast off her inauspicious name and procured a harmless if not far promising alternative, but Mrs. Kearney wrecks her improved luck in exchange for a condition of being much worse than during her spinsterhood. She enters as wife of Mr. Kearney and presents herself as mother of the older of her two daughters, Kathleen: the younger daughter is referred to only once and in passing and remains nameless and invisible. The title of the narrative unmistakably asserts that Mrs. Kearney is a mother more than a wife and also implies that she is the mother of Kathleen more than anyone else. Obviously, Mrs. Kearney's motherhood overrides her selfhood or individuality, but this does not entirely expound why her first name is withheld or what artistic designs or effects if any are intended in the obfuscation. One possible explication can be the unpretentious view that, given the fact that Mr. O'Madden Burke alone bears a full name, no significance is attached to first names in 'A Mother' or that there simply occurs no necessity of mentioning Mrs. Kearney's first name in terms of characterization or narrative scheme.

Another and more substantial solution to the enigma of first names might be found in the observation that all the first names are deliberately shrouded, in particular from the members of the Kearneys, for no other reason than to highlight 'Kathleen', since the elder daughter's name is a traditional symbol, the best-known personification, of Ireland after the production of W. B. Yeats' celebrated *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* in 1902 (see Culleton, pp. 88-89). The national poet himself was a major figure for the foundation and promotion of the fervent movement of the Irish Revival. By the time Joyce embarked on composing 'A Mother', it was widely acknowledged that any political and cultural event related with the Irish Revival could and should be adorned and inspired by this specific literary figure or a similar incarnation of the spirit of Home Rule and the Gaelic League: therefore, 'When the Irish Revival began to be appreciable, Mrs. Kearney determined to take advantage of her daughter's name' (154). In view of Joyce's self-proclaimed antipathy to and disregard of this fervently patriotic movement, 'A Mother' can be construed as a literary parody which mocks its inveterate bigotry and insularity.

The issue of first names in 'A Mother' could and should also be discussed with greater attention to the protagonist. In other words, the overt emphasis on 'Kathleen' could ensue from the specific role and function Mrs. Kearney assumes, in particular, in her household. There is little doubt that

she is a spiritual leader and matriarch who represents the Kearneys and supervises the domestic affairs of the entire family. She has every reason to be called by her surname in public, and her first name might appear to be an unnecessary distraction which interferes with her role as the absolute representative of the family and undermines her social identity and standing. Then what remains to be elucidated is the literary intent and import of the story that links this role of Mrs. Kearney's with the focus on 'Kathleen'. Looking back on the wretched, woeful history of his country, Joyce opines in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that 'Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow' (470). The striking metaphor might not be Joyce's original but possibly borrowed from Shakespeare (*Macbeth*, 4.1.80-81). The image of a voracious female animal devouring its own offspring is evoked in *Dubliners*, too, and embodied by some female characters. The most notorious is obviously Mrs. Mooney in 'The Boarding House', who exhibits no pity in ousting her husband from her family circle and coolly makes the most of her own daughter Polly for materialistic gains. 'A woman who was quite able to keep things to herself' ('The Boarding House', 66), Mrs. Mooney keeps her first name strictly off limits to the reader. It could be suggested that the proprietress even profanes and trades upon Catholicism conceptually, for Polly is illustrated as 'a little perverse madonna' ('The Boarding House', 67) and aligned with the Saviour's Mother through her premarital pregnancy. The same thing can be said of 'A Mother', in which the protagonist exploits her own daughter whose name she herself knows stands for the passionate thoughts of Ireland. Mrs. Kearney's conduct as a whole is ideologically as treasonous to the land as Mrs. Mooney's is blasphemous to the religion. The two women are well matched in the gravity and magnitude of their sin of *simony* ('The Sisters', 7).

### III

Miss Devlin married Mr. Kearney for practical ends as well as 'out of spite' (153). The nuptial knot was tied with little personal interest or respect on her part: her man was a typical old bore who was 'sober, thrifty and pious' (154) but financially reliable and morally responsible. His 'brown beard' (153) is a hallmark for being a genuine Dubliner in the Joycean layout of colours. The 'spite' Miss Devlin entertained toward the end of her unmarried years emanated from her innate spirit of defiance which finds expression in the aggressive action of 'silencing': '... when she drew near the limit and her friends began to loosen their tongues about her, she silenced them by marrying Mr. Kearney, ...' (153: emphasis added). This unruly, vainglorious aspect of her personality is instrumental to the mode of judgement she makes at the critical turns of her life. If marriage is considered one of those turns for most people, a brief chronicle of Miss Devlin's marriage and

transition into Mrs. Kearney sheds light on what will come up and how she will cope with it. The opening section of 'A Mother', thus, betrays her selfhood denuded to an ultimate phase of its humanity in preparation for the later developments.

Well worthy of mention here is Jane E. Miller's interpretation concerning the protagonist's character: she contends that the 'spite' out of which Mrs. Kearney married is 'not any inherent maliciousness of character, but rather a response to a stifling and disappointing world' (413). If a specific type of response is spotted more than once in one's life or, in this case, in a short fiction, it might not be taken as accidental but could be tracked to the essential part of one's personality. As for Mrs. Kearney's personality, it is so obstinate and incorrigible as to be immune and unyielding to such potent circumstantial forces as marriage and childbirth. Mrs. Kearney remains in spirit and temperament what Miss Devlin was, with her old spite ever smoldering and her girlish sentimental aspirations never at rest, as is proved by '... she never put her own romantic ideas away' (154). Her craving for romance, under the weight of the decorum and probity of the married status she strongly coveted before, only withdraws into the obscure corners of her mind and tenaciously awaits a suitable occasion to strike again. 'A Mother' can be recapitulated as a narrative account of that occasion where the key concepts of 'spite' and 'silence' evolve into something worse respectively and entangle each other in the subversion of another key-term, the protagonist's romantic fantasy. There lives inside her something childish and churlish that resists growth, spurns experience, and defies people and society.

In the meantime, a glimpse into the early family life of Mr. and Mrs. Kearney affords a vantage point from which to examine how the seeds of future woes were strewn. Mrs. Kearney's devotion to raising her daughters imposed on Kathleen exactly the same sort of education as she had received, namely music and French and nothing else. While the mother as a young woman was admired for 'her playing and ivory manners' (153), the daughter is reputed to be 'very clever at music, and a very nice girl and, moreover, ... a believer in the language movement' (155). The mother has somehow brought up her daughter into a copycat of her own. In fact, reiteration persists from generation to generation as a principle of Dubliners' lifestyle and prevents a new vista, a new horizon, from emerging in their outlook of the future. Kathleen was destined early in her life to follow in her mother's footsteps, destitute of the latter's spite and determination. But things are going on without a hitch when the story opens, until Mrs. Kearney sniffs out the scent of romance. Around the time the mother grows worrisome about her daughter's lack of suitors as she once did about her own, a rare opportunity lands at her doorstep in the wobbling shape of Hoppy Holohan. The visitor is nicknamed 'Hoppy' for his 'game leg' (153), which actually means a

lame leg, and he is the 'perambulator' of the story in spite of his handicap and non-principal role. In most of the tales in *Dubliners*, the heroes and heroines walk untiringly along dimly-lit alleys and dirty backstreets of the city, for instance the boys in the first three stories, Corley and Lenehan in 'Two Gallants', Little Chandler in 'A Little Cloud', Mr. Farrington in 'Counterparts', Maria in 'Clay', and so on. 'A Mother' reverses the role between the protagonist and the antagonist. While the energetic protagonist shouts 'Get a cab' (168) to her obedient but inefficient husband and the disabled antagonist painstakingly performs his itinerant duty, 'A Mother' has little hope of carrying itself too far. Intriguingly, Warren Beck declares that there is 'less at stake' here (p. 259) than in the other stories.

The sudden visit by Hoppy Holohan, assistant secretary of the *Eire Abu* Society, is aimed at inquiring Mrs. Kearney of the availability of her daughter for the concerts sponsored by his organization. Their acquaintanceship is kicked off felicitously. He questions and she replies; he explains and she listens; he entreats and she complies, at least at her home: it might be a different story out in public places. By the time he leaves, 'a contract was drawn up for her [Kathleen's] services as accompanist at the four grand concerts' (155). The formulation of the legal document does not mark the end of Mr. Holohan's visit but the beginning of his frequent return to Mrs. Kearney's house in quest of more of her advice and suggestions. Hinted beyond the business talks is his faint expectation of a decanter of wine served by his new friend:

'Now, help yourself, Mr. Holohan!'

And while he was helping himself she said:

'Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid of it!' (155)

It could be the hostess, not the guest, who is afraid and timorous: the scene entails an enumeration of expenses she incurs in addition to wine and biscuits – lovely blush-pink charmeuse and a dozen of two-shilling tickets to be sent to some of her friends who will not come at their own cost. In due course, thanks to Mrs. Kearney's ardent cooperation and competent consultation, 'everything that was to be done was done' (156), perhaps except for the confirmation of Kathleen's will. The docile girl is never asked to attend the session or express herself. She is 'silenced' by her mother before the concerts.

#### IV

The series of concerts are planned to start on Wednesday and continue on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. On the first evening, a slight crack already emerges in the newly-minted partnership between Mrs. Kearney and the Society, not necessarily Mr. Holohan. With her old sense and

sensibility gradually aroused back into operation, Mrs. Kearney notices a slackened and sloppy air pervading the whole concert hall. This unfavorable initial impression grows more sour upon her encounter with Mr. Fitzpatrick, secretary of the *Eire Abu* Society. This little man with a white, vacant face, disappoints her in both appearance and speech. He carelessly has his 'brown' hat on sideways and speaks with a flat accent. Here is another allusion to the colour evocative of an authentic prototype of Dubliners. The other thing that rattles the protagonist's unbending 'ivory manners' is Mr. Fitzpatrick's nonchalant act of chewing a corner of the program into a moist pulp while talking with her. Mrs. Kearney makes conscious efforts to keep herself calm and conceal her irritation. The narrative records her exertion for reticence twice in the same paragraph: 'Mrs. Kearney said nothing' and 'she said nothing' (157). The protagonist strives to observe the rule of silence in a stoic manner akin to that of the monks of the monastery at Mount Melleray ('The Dead', 229). The first concert closes on a pathetic note but without any palpable setback.

The second night discernibly aggravates Mrs. Kearney's dissatisfaction and misgivings about the planning of the whole project. The audience is ill-mannered and hardly capable of appreciating what is offered. Mr. Fitzpatrick's conduct continues to grate on her nerves. Yet Mrs. Kearney still works hard to keep herself under control and retain her muteness until the news that the Friday concert has been cancelled reaches her. She is immediately alarmed, and indeed panicked, not artistically by the management of the subsequent concerts but pragmatically by the full execution of 'the contract':

'But, of course, that doesn't alter the contract,' she said. 'The contract was for four concerts.' (158)

Mrs. Kearney loses no time seeking to talk personally to Mr. Fitzpatrick and employs the plain expression of 'the sum originally stipulated for' (158) along with the familiar one of 'the contract'. The true source of her alarm is unveiled at the moment of crisis, 'crisis' only to her and no one else. Mr. Fitzpatrick is even unable to comprehend her assertion and, wishing to dodge the growing intensity of her verbal attack, takes shelter under his magic formula of 'the committee'. The word 'committee' further fuels her anger and drives her to the verge of uttering 'And who is the *Cometty*, pray?' (158). But, at the last moment and by all means, she checks her swelling temper and keeps her composure because she is aware that it will not be ladylike to utter as much: once again, 'she was silent' (158). The rest of the story witnesses the process of her departure from being 'silent' and 'ladylike' toward articulation and a new social identity. What is at issue is what to be ladylike is like and whose judgement defines that 'ladylikeness'.

The concert on Friday is abandoned in order to 'secure a bumper house on Saturday night' (158).

The decision of cancellation is made solely by the Committee, which has neither asked Mrs. Kearney for any advice nor contacted her in advance about their change of plan. At a public place like the Antient Concert Rooms, she is regarded no more than as Kathleen's mother. Outside her home, her expertise in music and her knowledge of the music world are completely overlooked. Quite unexpectedly, however, Mrs. Kearney cares little about the rearrangement but feels very suspicious about the contract, about whether her daughter is paid as much as guaranteed by her contract. Her 'suspicion' can blatantly be paraphrased into the amount of fees for four days or three days. She confers with her husband, who listens to her attentively and agrees to going with her to the last concert. No matter how limited in talents and abilities, Mr. Kearney has 'abstract value as a male' (159). Mrs. Kearney is aware, though not keenly, that she is again up against what she failed to handle tactfully as a young woman and left suspended in her feminine self-esteem, that is to say, the problem of men's social and political power. But she is unaware that her readiness for the renewed challenge is impaired by her psychological dependence on the 'male value' of her mediocre husband. The battle she is to wage is already half lost.

Before the last of the grand series of concerts opens, the story has laid the foundation for the final phase of the plot. Due to Mrs. Kearney's persistent silence at public places, nothing vital or decisive has so far occurred to her, nor is any manifestation of paralysis shown. The remaining ten pages are loaded with the task of placing 'A Mother' in line with all its counterparts in *Dubliners*. The first thing that is brought out from Mrs. Kearney is her belittling of her own gender. Her search for any of the secretaries of the committee ends up with her chance-encounter with Miss Beirne. This little old woman who appears charmless and useless to Mrs. Kearney kindly offers help for her, but the protagonist flatly turns down her act of goodwill after examining her wrinkled face 'screwed into an expression of trustfulness and enthusiasm' (159). The two women exhibit quite a contrast in their mental fibres in this brief scene: while Mrs. Kearney refuses to talk more in her disrespect, Miss Beirne heaves a small sigh at the sight of the unwelcome rain and murmurs, 'Ah, well! We did our best, the dear knows' (160). As Miss Devlin once 'sat amid the chilly circle of her accomplishments' (153), so Mrs. Kearney's impudent silence, placed unconsciously under the influence of male value and power, isolates her from the psychological network of her own sex. Whether in retaliation for this insult or not, even the seemingly harmless Miss Beirne later bares her teeth at Mrs. Kearney.

It is known that, as a young man, Joyce himself sang in May and August 1904 in a similar concert as depicted in the narrative. His vivid experience is directly reflected in the sketches of the dressing-room. Various types of singers and players, both men and women, arrive one by one and



prepare themselves for their job. A touch of rivalry and envy is perceived in Kathleen's acerbic comment on Madam Glynn, the main singer of the night from London:

'I wonder where did they dig her up,' said Kathleen to Miss Healy. 'I'm sure I never heard of her.' (161)

To these words addressed by one of her best friends, Miss Healy fails to respond on the spot. Prudently, she chooses to smile and be 'silent'. The reason for her taciturnity is clear: her friend's remark on the foreign artist sounds less than appropriate and even a little vulgar. Miss Healy's somewhat awkward response is also the first sign of difference and perhaps discrepancy between the two girls. Miss Healy is to replace Kathleen at the denouement when Mrs. Kearney decides to take her daughter off the stage. The episode of Madam Glynn proves that Kathleen is a self-effacing, reserved young woman only in the presence of her mother. Part of her pretension peels off once her 'governess and superintendent' is out of sight and lays bare an ugly aspect of the Kearneys: like mother, like daughter, indeed.

V

'A Mother' is now geared to a climax with the protagonist steadily sliding down the road to ruin. Waiting in the dressing room, Mrs. Kearney divides her attention and concentration in two opposite directions. She takes the pain of introducing Kathleen to the male artists who are 'well dressed, stout and complacent' (161) with a wish to provide her daughter with opportunities of courtship. At the same time, she continuously follows Mr. Holohan with her eyes to provide herself with an opportunity of personal complacency. Hardly does she catch up with him when she brings out the same old topic of the contract. The under-secretary tries as usual to evade the attack and shift the responsibility over to Mr. Fitzpatrick. The argument boils down to a personal contestation between the two Dubliners, not between the Society and Kathleen. The fierceness and persistence with which Mrs. Kearney argues the issue border on paranoia or pathological obsession:

'I don't know anything about Mr. Fitzpatrick,' repeated Mrs. Kearney.

'I have my contract, and I intend to see that it is carried out.' (162)

Inserted in the middle of the heated quarrel is an amorous sketch which serves to soften the strained ambience like comic relief. The two older gentlemen, Mr. O'Madden Burke and Mr. Hendrick, enjoy talking to Miss Healy, whose revealed shoulder and skin colour of pink secretly pleases the latter of the men. In the parlance of *Dubliners*, the young musician and the reporter of the *Freeman's Journal* are seen to be engaged in a psychological game which consists of anticipation of a favorable review in a newspaper article and a silent demand of an erotic entertainment as a

reward: 'He was pleasantly conscious that the bosom which he saw rise and fall slowly beneath him rose and fell at that moment for him, that the laughter and fragrance and willful glances were his tribute' (163). The young woman turns her physical charms to the best possible advantage. The old journalist takes advantage of his profession and status to savour the sensual offering, although he knows that the review in question is not in his charge. What looks like comic relief proves to be a groping needle inserted into another sordid dimension of Dublin life. It is needless to say that social parley or transaction of this kind is utterly foreign to Mrs. Kearney and Kathleen.

Then, the centre stage of the narrative changes hands from Eros to Bacchus. Alcohol is a petty yet expedient piece of setting for *Dubliners*, a usual tool for bringing into focus heavy drinking endemic to the nation. But 'A Mother' utilizes it to portray people at social meetings and gatherings. *Dubliners* as a whole affords a panoramic view of the citizens at each stage of their lives. 'A Mother', in its own right, independently stages a kaleidoscopic gallery of men and women within its limited space of short fiction. Before Mr. Hendrick leaves the Antient Concert Rooms, Mr. Holohan invites him to a few drinks as a token of his gratitude and respect: 'Now, won't you have a little something before you go?' (163). Mr. O'Madden Burke detects the secluded place for drinking 'by instinct' (163). The cast is collected, and alcohol is conducive to loosening people's self-restraint and power of judgement. Back in the dressing room, Mr. Holohan issues a verbal warning to Mrs. Kearney for her conspicuously animated manner of talking - as if to forestall her volubility and keep her in 'silence'. The general atmosphere of the place suddenly grows tense. The opening time of the show arrives, but 'Evidently something was wrong' (164). It soon becomes known that the concert is stalled on account of Mrs. Kearney's ultimate tactic: she holds the whole Saturday evening event as a hostage and demands Kathleen's fees as the ransom:

'She won't go on. She must get her eight guineas.' (164)

At last, the private wrangle infringes the sanctuary of the public performance. The protagonist decisively hurls herself beyond the point of no return. Urged by the clapping and stamping noises from the hall, Mr. Holohan instead appeals to Mr. Kearney and Kathleen, who never lend their ear to him nor let out a single word: '... Mr. Kearney continued to stroke his beard and Kathleen looked down, ...' (164). The husband and daughter are rendered speechless by the mother's garrulousness and belligerence. At that moment, a delicate sign of treason is perceived within the Kearneys' closest circle of friends. Feeling 'the strain of the silence' (165) unbearable, Miss Healy tries to chat with an unnamed baritone, but 'The conversation went no further' (165). Miss Healy's coup collapses in this scene. Yet an inscrutable energy of destruction is still mounting, and a pandemonium of confusion is about to break open. The only possible measure to be taken to

thwart the looming disaster could be fulfillment of Kathleen's contract and payment of her fees. In the very nick of time, Mr. Fitzpatrick storms back into the room with a few banknotes in his hand:

He counted out four into Mrs. Kearney's hand and said she would get the other half at the interval. (165)

Strictly speaking, the secretary of the Society has paid a little less than the half of the sum stated in the contract and encounters a snappy retort from Mrs. Kearney: 'This is four shillings short' (165). She is right, but everybody, including herself, is a little too short of achieving a total and peaceful solution, the result of which is part of the contention still kept alive.

The dressing room is now turned into an epitome of the Dublin society. It is, like the payment, halved into two camps: the one is constituted by the *Eire Abu* Society and its sympathizers, and the other is comprised of the Kearneys and their friends. Miss Healy is torn apart in herself, staying with Kathleen and wishing to join the other camp. Miss Beirne leads the pack of critics against the scandalous family, though her voice is usurped by someone else:

'I agree with Miss Beirne,' said Mr. O'Madden Burke. 'Pay her nothing.' (166)

Mr. Burke, delineated as 'A suave, elderly man who balanced his imposing body, when at rest, upon a large silk umbrella' (163), displays a shrewd sense of balance and conveys his opinion safely under the cloak of the old lady. The other side of the room sees Mrs. Kearney declare her staunch stance of defiance against the Society, which 'wouldn't have dared to have treated her like this if she had been a man' (166-67). At this advanced stage of her angst, she is quite oblivious to the virtue of silence and has already infuriated both men and women by her unbridled tongue.

The first half of the Saturday concert is over. Yet the remaining half of Kathleen's fees is not paid during the interval. The two men of the Society inform Mrs. Kearney that no payment will be made until after the committee meeting scheduled for the following Tuesday. They do not bother to make clear the reason of postponement. Nor does their notification exactly commit a breach of the contract. But it can be taken as a breach of their former promise quoted earlier. The men equivocate for no known reason, maybe to flaunt their dignity and power; and the woman assumes too inflexible an attitude about money. A series of abusive words and mental attacks are exchanged between Mrs. Kearney and Mr. Holohan, but they come to an end rather abruptly. Perhaps losing herself in extraordinary agitation during the argument, the protagonist apparently wanders out of the range of decency and propriety. She starts to tease the opponent by playfully imitating his pet phrases and habit of speaking:

'You must speak to the secretary. It's not my business. I'm a great fellow fol-the-diddle-I-do.' (168)

On one hand, Mrs. Kearney casts away her self-restriction of the earlier scenes and wins condemnation 'on all hands' (168). Mr. Holohan, on the other, barely keeps his pride and dignity as a man by walking away from her with the powerful line of 'I thought you were a lady' (168). It is not known if he feels convinced that he and Mr. Fitzpatrick have never violated the essential prescription for gentlemen. What the protagonist and the antagonist jointly work out through their unsightly showdown is a feeling of rage, acrimony and bitterness thickly afloat in the dressing room.

'A Mother' closes with a subtle impression of circulation or reversion to the beginning as some of the stories in *Dubliners* do. With an array of grating and screeching sounds, the story skids into the finale, which to some extent harks back to the opening scene as if treading on the Möbius' band. Mrs. Kearney stays on in the hall to see what will be done to the second part of the concert, but she has to step aside to let Miss Healy, quite appropriate to her name, come forward to replace Kathleen as the accompanist and patch up the mess. One of the Kearneys' best 'musical friends or Nationalist friends' (154) chooses their worst moment and most vulnerable situation for her betrayal. When someone is seen to sink, someone else inevitably wishes to go up. The protagonist is compared to 'an angry stone image' (168), which recalls her younger days spent sitting 'amid the chilly circle of her accomplishments' (153). The graphic image of immovable stone, possibly taken from myth or classical literature, betokens Mrs. Kearney's spiritual paralysis as well as her deprivation of the ability to speak. Kathleen, very pertinent to her upbringing, 'followed her mother meekly' (168) and mutely. Mrs. Kearney's departing remark hurled at Mr. Holohan, 'I'm not done with you' (168), evinces two things about her, the amplification of her spite and the further preservation of her romantic longings. Mr. Holohan is also ensconced back in his initial role of a perambulator, with an additional feeling of angst won by his ineptitude and inefficiency: 'Mr. Holohan began to pace up and down the room in order to cool himself, for he felt his face on fire' (168). But, for his suffering, he is credited with the memorable, sarcastic one-liner of 'That's a nice lady! ... O, she's a nice lady!' (168). All in all, the moral verdict on the whole proceeding is delivered by Mr. O'Madden Burke, the perennial bystander and opportunist in 'A Mother'. Having surveyed the lousy scene from a perfectly safe place as before, he claims his presence and influence aboard the band wagon pulled by the disabled man: 'You did the proper thing, Holohan' (168). Mrs. Kearney's romantic desires, once nurtured by the Eastern sweets, are judged negatively by the Irish gentleman with the 'magniloquent western name' (163, emphasis added). Mr. Burke poises himself upon his umbrella again, but his ethical sense of balance and value scarcely appears as secure as his posture or at best remains open to question. Pitiably, a far less secure prospect of

public life falls on the mother and daughter.

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