

## An Encounter with the Void: Epiphanic Closure in James Joyce's Dubliners

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# An Encounter with the Void: Epiphanic Closure in James Joyce's *Dubliners*

Hitoshi MAFUNE

## Introduction

By an epiphany he [Stephen Dedalus] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. (*Stephen Hero* 211)

In the early draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, titled *Stephen Hero*, James Joyce uses the concept of “epiphany” in a secular sense to signify the revelation of a sudden radiance that occurs among commonplace objects.<sup>1</sup> Although this term is primarily used by Christian churches to commemorate the manifestation of Christ’s divinity (6 January, Feast of the Epiphany), the characters in Joyce’s collection of short stories, *Dubliners*, have individual epiphanies.<sup>2</sup> How is a moment of epiphany revealed in closure in the first three childhood stories and the final story of maturity in *Dubliners*: “The Sisters,” “An Encounter,” “Araby,” and “The Dead”? In *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge states, “In modern fiction an epiphany often has the function performed by a decisive action in traditional narrative, providing a climax or resolution to a story or episode” (147). He concludes that, in *Dubliners*, Joyce uses an anti-climax with a defeat, trivial accident, or frustration rather than conventional narrative closure and that Joyce’s language may transform the anti-climax into a moment of manifestation: that is, an

epiphanic moment for the protagonist.

The best-known scene of epiphany in Joyce is found in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like featherings of soft white down. Her slate-blue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some dark-plumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (144)

This is a climactic moment of the first half of the novel, where the hero has decided to live as an artist rather than commit to a religious vocation. Watching the girl wading the sea, it must have felt like an epiphany to him. With this outburst of profane joy, the hero greets the advent of life, the epiphany that has come to him. Although the *Portrait* is a novel, this moment may be considered an anti-climax given the protagonist's frustration or that it is a trivial incident or even defeat, rather than the conventional climax. Stephen could have decided to discard the ceremonies of his soul the moment he witnessed the godsend of the young woman gracefully wading in the sea. As Walton A. Litz states, "The epiphanies are like an artist's *trouvailles* [French: good luck or a godsend]: their significance lies in the writer's recognition of their potentialities, his faith that a revealing context will eventually be found" (159). Stephen eventually discovers his faith of seeking life and freedom. In the *Portrait*, epiphany can be recognised fundamentally by its connection with spiritual but vulgar manifestations, something like a godsend conveyed by the desire to live in the joyful freedom of sexuality, discarding the knowledge of repressive religion. In *Dubliners*, the epiphanic moment is recognised by its being formed by a conflict between the desire to live and the knowledge of the certainty of death.

*Dubliners* shows how epiphanic moments eventually appear in each of the three

childhood stories (“The Sisters,” “An Encounter” and “Araby”) as anti-climaxes and ultimately in an accumulation of anti-climaxes in the final story, “The Dead.” A conflict, as mentioned above, may be produced by an encounter between the desire for life and inevitability of death. In the first three stories, an epiphanic event is described, such as a negative incident, as a fundamentally extensive or almost incomprehensible void. However, readers of “An Encounter” may find the use of the term “penitent” in the story rather explicable. The word is used by the boy narrator to describe an emotional response to his friend Mahony’s actions after his encounter with the strange old man. This encounter occurs among the living, but in “The Sisters” and “Araby,” one boy narrator has an encounter with the dying priest, and the other with his nearly despairing self. Each encounter with the dying, the odd, and the lonely self in the stories of childhood occurs in an atmosphere of something deathly. In this essay, the three boys’ stories are discussed alongside “The Dead” because the latter has something deathly in common with them and because the protagonist, Gabriel, shares an element of the boys’ character. In the latter story, not only is a positive and epiphanic love experienced by Gabriel, for his wife, Gretta, but this moment also encompasses all the living and the dead, who are mutually dependent. Joyce achieves a conventional climax, a positive moment of epiphanic love in “The Dead,” after the accumulation of such negative moments derived from anti-climaxes involving cases of epiphanic voids.

### **A Puzzle in “The Sisters”**

At the end of “The Sisters,” the first story, something manifests itself to the boy narrator, who is frustrated and puzzled as he listens to one of his mentor’s (the dead Father Flynn) sisters, Eliza: “—Wide-awake and laughing-like to himself.... So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him...” (10). This “something” does not mean enlightenment in the context of the protagonist’s entire life; it is, rather, a bitter moment of confusion for him, which may be labelled epiphanic. Kevin J.H. Dettmar argues, “If we are honest, however, for many of us the story ends not in epiphany but in utter muddle” (178), which is Dettmar’s counter-argument to critics who have applied to the end of “The Sisters” such expressions as withholding something mysterious or flash of insight regarding the realisation of Father Flynn’s simoniac guilt.<sup>3</sup> Colin MacCabe

comments that the “movement of the text is not that of making clear a reference already defined and understood; of fixing the sense on an expression. Instead, the text dissolves the simple sense of Dublin as a city, as a context within which people live their lives, and replaces it with the very text of paralysis” (29). Emphasising that “[a]t the close of ‘The Sisters’ the narrator appears to us frozen — puzzled and paralysed — and we cannot help but ape his response” (177), Dettmar asserts that “The Sisters” has no epiphany but only a moment in which readers find a muddled utterance.

It must be emphasised that Joyce’s creation of an unsettling sense of inconclusiveness by means of such language as “utter muddle” or “frozen,” “puzzled” and “paralysed” elicits an effect of a moment of manifestation: that is, of epiphany. Dettmar concludes that because the chalice that Father Flynn’s boy assistant broke contained nothing, it becomes, therefore, filled with the needs and desires of the characters, citing Homer Brown’s remark that “in a sense, the symbolism of these stories [*Dubliners*] consists in the failure of the symbolic, the emptiness of the symbol” (179). However, symbols of emptiness or fullness can be interpreted solely as epiphanies. The first line of “The Sisters” — “There was no hope for him [Father James Flynn] this time: it was the third stroke” (4) — describes the priest’s hopelessness, his nearness to death; the story begins with a death, which, thematically, usually comes at the end of a story. Every night, the boy narrator gazes up at the window of the priest’s house and softly says to himself “paralysis,” which had typically sounded strange to him, but “now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work” (4). He is now fascinated by the mysteriously maleficent, sinful, fearful, and deadly paralysis: that is, he wants to see the nature of the world, which can manifest epiphanically. Declan Kiberd remarks, “Joyce’s notion of ‘epiphany,’ although it has ancient links with the Christian feast of the manifestation of Jesus to the wise kings of the East, is also a fairly obvious version of the medical ‘symptom’” (222). This suggests that epiphany is connected to the medical symptom of paralysis in the story.

Laying in his bed late at night, the boy tries to identify what sort of medical condition could lead to the symptom of paralysis that was indicated in the dream: “In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the

paralytic.... 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" (4). He wants to listen to his mentor's confession — an epiphany — from his mentor's perspective, as he feels he is on a journey of some kind. Cruelly, he not only feels curious about the paralytic with the heavy grey face, but he also has pleasant and vicious feelings towards it. Then, "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<sup>3</sup> of his sin" (4). Though the boy knows neither the confession nor the reason for the heavy grey face's smile, he smiles, feeling that he has absolved him of his religious sin. The boy seems rather satisfied with his gaining freedom through his mentor's death; it is ambiguous whether he is conscious or unconscious because it is quite late when he falls asleep.

The chalice that the priest (actually, it was the altar boy) broke contains nothing, and the old priest is lying still in the coffin — "solemn and truculent in death, an idle chalice on his breast" (10) — as he was when the boy, his aunt, and the priest's two sisters saw him. There is nothing but the coffin in the silent room, and even the coffin contains only matter. There is no life within, it is empty. There are a few impressive ellipses in the last passage; Eliza remembers her brother the priest was sitting alone in the dark in the confessional where he was discovered after having disappeared one night: "Eliza resumed:—Wide-awake and laughing-like to himself.... So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him..." (10). Even these ellipses do not seem to conceal anything. In the silence of the room the boy is afraid of something epiphanic, but the epiphanic moment seems negative because it is a void, but the voidness can afford a variety of full meanings through transformation from being merely a void to becoming a conceptualization of the void, which opens the possibility of interpretation. "The Sisters," the first story in the collection, was considerably revised just before the writing of "The Dead," the last in the collection, which suggests that the anti-climactic form of "The Sisters" is the story most effected by and connected with the last story's climactic form. The boy's moment of frustration transforms into an understanding of the relationship between his friend and the trivial incident in "An Encounter," which is analysed next.

### The Encounters in “An Encounter”

At the end of “An Encounter,” the second childhood story, the boy narrator’s recognition of manifestation is clearer, it revolves around “penitence.” He wants to escape the fearful encounter with the queer old josser as his friend, Mahony, calls him: “—I say! Look what he’s doing! As I [boy narrator] neither answered nor raised my eyes Mahony, exclaimed again:—I say...He’s a queer josser!” (16). Mahony exclaims thus because he has seen what the man is doing (masturbating) near the field as he walks slowly away from the conversing boys (Thurston 24). Luke Thurston states further that “Mahony does not hesitate to verbalise it, to confront it with his active power to name the world” (24); Mahony is not so innocent as to face vulgar things. The old man asks the two boys about the relationship between boys and girls after proudly telling them about reading great authors: “Then he asked us which of us had the most sweethearts. Mahony mentioned lightly that he had three totties. The man asked me how many had I. I answered that I had none. He did not believe me and said he was sure I must have one. I was silent.... Tell us, said Mahony pertly to the man, how many have you yourself?” (16). Though the man hates Mahony’s brutally boyish attitude toward this theme, “The man smiled as before and said that when he was our age he had lots of sweethearts.—Every boy, he said, has a little sweetheart” (16). This suggests that the man is aware that Mahony is trying to discern his sexual motives. He desires to avert his eyes and pretends not to have noticed what Mahony has discovered: his odd addiction to sexuality.

Despite revealing his liberalism, the old man’s attitude suddenly changes: “He said that if ever he found a boy talking to girls or having a girl for a sweetheart he would whip him and whip him; and that would teach him not to be talking to girls. And if a boy had a girl for a sweetheart and told lies about it then he would give him such a whipping as no boy ever got in this world” (17). This homosexual man with “bottle-green eyes” is “a queer old josser” indeed (16-17), as Mahony rightly exclaims. This encounter frightens the protagonist because it is his first experience of a sexual perversion in his young masculine life. Although the man is a rather typical lonely person in modern society, desiring merely a friend who is intellectual and young, the protagonist has chosen the higher-class Anglo-Irish name “Smith” for himself, giving Mahony a lower-class Irish name, “Murphy,” to selfishly

protect himself alone from the man's threat. He loudly calls across the field,

—Murphy! My voice had an accent of forced bravery in it and I was ashamed of my paltry stratagem. I had to call the name again before Mahony saw me and hallooed in answer. How my heart beat as he came running across the field to me! He ran as if to bring me aid. *I was penitent* for in my heart I had always despised him a little. (18; emphasis added)

The protagonist has a moment to encounter a feeling of his own shame of his paltriness towards his schoolfellow, who had just been his helper; he has always despised him. The title denotes not only the encounter with the odd man but also the boy's recognition of his own penitence. The protagonist suddenly perceives himself as penitent (an epiphany) through his hatred and paltriness.

Dettmar calls Joyce's epiphanies "epiphonies," citing Zack Bowen's assertion that "[e]piphanies may be false, because the meaning of experience, when transformed by either the artists' perception or the perception of less gifted characters may in fact be self-delusion" (qtd. in Dettmar 187). Nevertheless, has not the boy narrator finally perceived something epiphanic? With the statement "I was penitent," readers should interpret the boy's mind for themselves. Does this significantly religious word, "penitent" have something meaningful in this context? David Malcom claims, "the meaning of the presence of such religious lexis is not clear. It is not just that the religious is debased by its context, nor that the religious term establishes some contrast with a debased material world" (216). Though the penitent moment may be interpreted as epiphanic, religiosity does not prevail over the whole story but only on its final part: "And I was penitent; for in my heart I had always despised him a little" (18). The word can be altered into other more common ones such as repentant, sorry, or remorseful; it is not necessary that the ending of the story has a religious connotation. However, Joyce was an apostate Catholic who profaned the priesthood, and so the use of "penitent" has particular associations for the author. This story relates to "The Dead" in the same manner that "The Sisters" does, as the epiphanic moment of penitence manifests in a trivial form, in a trivial incident, as an anti-climax. Though epiphany is a phenomenon of the visible word in "An Encounter," it is invisible in the next story.



### **A Void in the World in “Araby”**

In the final paragraph of “Araby,” the third childhood story, the disillusionment of the protagonist’s romantic dream reveals a void in the world: “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger” (24). His romantic dream was that he would buy gifts at a bazaar, the Araby, for his first love, his friend’s sister. She cannot go to the bazaar because there is to be a retreat at her convent. “—It’s well for you, she said.—If I go, I said, I will bring you something. What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening” (21). The boy’s trip to the bazaar is akin to a knight’s quest to find the Holy Grail for his lady. That romantic dream to purchase a gift for her is prevented by two secular phenomena: one is that the bazaar is nearly over when the boy arrives because his uncle, who has promised to give him money for the bazaar, returns home late and drunk, saying sarcastically, “—The people are in bed and after their first sleep now” (22), though he does finally give him the money. The other is that the boy feels his motivation sullied by a vicious quality to the conversation with two young English men and a woman in the poorly lit corner of the shop: “—O, I never said such a thing!—O, but you did!—O, but I didn’t!—Didn’t she say that?—Yes, I heard her.—O, there’s a ... fib!” (23). The boy is frustrated by the nerve of the males (his uncle and the two young men), but he is consoled by the tender voices of the two females, one of whom is his aunt: “My aunt said to him [his uncle] energetically.—Can’t you give him [the boy] the money and let him go? You’ve kept him late enough as it is” (22). The other is the young lady in the conversation at the shop, though she is business-like: “Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seems to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty” (23). Ultimately, he is unable to purchase a gift for his first love because of the males’ arrogance and vulgarity.

By the end, the protagonist must reach a new level of awareness regarding the harshness of life. This awareness is what Dettmar asserts as the void (190), which he becomes aware of by recognising his own vanity or, what Dominic Head claims, an intense boyhood experience of humiliation (51). Though they read the boy’s awareness as empty or imaginary or as a desirable illusion or falsification, it can be called an epiphany nonetheless. Lodge asserts that the “term [epiphany] is now

loosely applied to any descriptive passage in which external reality is charged with a kind of transcendental significance for the perceiver" (146-47). The boy transcendently and significantly perceives himself "as a creature driven and derided by vanity" (24) in his dark external reality. This anti-climax is made into a moment of a truth for the protagonist by the language of epiphany. Even Dettmar's epiphony can be one of many epiphanies. Though the epiphanic moments in the stories mentioned above could be called voids, they seem to be produced by the negative moments of the epiphanies, which appear decidedly at the anti-climax: that is, as "some defeat or frustration or trivial incident" (Lodge 147); these end up being moments of truth for the protagonist and the reader. The intensification of this epiphanic void through the accumulation of negative moments of anti-climaxes creates a positive effect in the resolution of the final story: "The Dead," the epilogue of *Dubliners*, becomes the climactic epiphany of the anti-climax of all the other stories.

### **An Interpretation in "The Dead"**

The three stories analysed in this paper are in the first of the four chronological divisions of *Dubliners*, childhood. The following divisions are adolescence (four stories), maturity (four stories), and public life (four stories). The final story, "The Dead," can be read differently as the story that unifies the others in the world of Dublin rather than as one more aspect of public life. In "The Backgrounds of 'The Dead,'" Richard Ellmann states, "'The Dead' begins with the party and ends with a corpse, so entwining 'funferal' and 'funeral' as in the wake of Finnegans. That he began with the party was due, at least in part, to Joyce's feeling that the rest of the stories in *Dubliners* had not completed his picture of the city" (245). Therefore, "The Dead," which closes *Dubliners*, implies something epiphanic.

The story is set at the annual Christmas dinner dance given by Misses Julia and Kate Morkan, sometime between Christmas and Twelfth Night, the Feast of Epiphany; it is perhaps the night of the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January. The narrative structure can be divided into two parts: the former describes typical events, such as merry dancing, a marvellous dinner, humorous conversation, and Gabriel's witticism about applause concerning the three hostesses—"the Three Graces of the Dublin musical world" (161)—the Misses Morkan and their niece,

Miss Mary Jane. Gretta, Gabriel's wife, has a sort of epiphany while listening to Mr D'Arcy sing the sorrowful love ballad, "The Lass of Aughrim," during which she is reminded of the deceased young Michael Furey (167). In this moment near the end of the first part, the tone of the narrative structure begins to change: the assurance of the close relationship between the husband and the wife becomes doubtful. Though Gabriel's sexual desire for the beautiful Gretta has increased after the party and he plans to spend the night with her without their children at the luxurious hotel, Gretta's mind remains preoccupied by her deceased lover, Michael Furey, and so, she is unaware of her husband's feelings. Galway's Michael, not Dublin's Gabriel, is on her mind; the past, not the present, occupies her. When he discovers her feelings, he jealously tries to deride Michael. Gretta's answers to his questions surprise him. For example, when he ironically asks, "—What was he?" she immediately answers, "—He was in the gasworks" (173), as if this profession were as good as any other, countering Gabriel's pride in his own higher-ranking profession, teaching language at the university. In response to his cold question, to which he already knows the answer, "—And what did he die of so young, Gretta? Consumption, was it?" her answer is "—I think he died for me" (174). This shocks him as he had expected an answer like "Yes, it was, Poor Michael." With her answer, Gabriel is seized by a vague terror that makes him feel as though "some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world" (174). Despite his hope to triumph and be his wife's whole world, he now feels that the ghost of Michael, Gretta's past lover, for whom she may still have feelings, is overwhelming him.

Gabriel is affected by three women: Lily (the servant girl), Miss Molly Ivors (a Gaelic Leaguer), and Gretta (from Galway). First, Gabriel is attacked by Lily. Ellmann points out that "From the beginning he [Gabriel] is vulnerable; his well-meant and even generous overtures are regularly checked. The servant girl punctures his blithe assumption that everyone is happily in love and on the way to the altar" (247-48). This is from the scene of Lily's bitter response "—The men that is now is only palaver and what they can get out of you" to Gabriel's thoughtless question "—O, then, said Gabriel gaily, I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?" (140). Lily, whose name is the same as the flower that symbolises death, should be considered in light of the story's theme, death.

Second, Miss Ivors, an enthusiast of the Gaelic movement, directly criticises Gabriel and calls him “—West Briton!” as he insists that “Irish is not my language. ...—O, to tell you the truth, retorted Gabriel suddenly, I’m sick of my own country, sick of it!” (149). Gabriel is upset not only by Miss Ivors’ insistence that he should spend his holiday in the Irish-speaking Aran Islands in the west but also by the fact that his wife is from Galway, which is also in the west, and her past, which he wishes to forget. Throughout the story, the west of Ireland is connected with a dark and painful primitivism in Gabriel’s mind, which is steadily occupied instead by the continent. The west is savagery for him, he who merely watches his wife listening to the old Irish song “The Lass of Aughrim” rather than attending to the expression of grief in the lyrics.<sup>4</sup>

Third, through the distance between Gabriel’s desire for his living wife and Gretta’s mind, constrained by the memory of her deceased lover, he learns about the secret of his wife and Michael in Galway. Though, perhaps, “she [Gretta] had not told him [Gabriel] all the story” (175), as generous tears fill his eyes, he feels a feeling of love that he has never felt towards any woman before, and he concludes that the “time had come for him to set out on his journey westward” (176), where the past and the dead lie, both Michael and others; Aunt Julia would quite soon be a shade as well. This journey westward suggests that he consciously or unconsciously accepts what he had felt contemptuous of and that, by conceding or relinquishing something superior, he is now ready for a real journey to Galway. Gabriel does not insist on his own perspective—his pride in having been civilized by continental thought—any longer; he abandons himself to a different way of life, to Michael’s way of life. He has, in a way, lost possession of himself, but this does not result in a mere void but in a conceptual void, which implies a sense of death. Gabriel is now joining the dead in his mind: he now no longer feels jealous or furious at his wife’s deceased lover, only pity, conscious of a unity between the living and the dead.

The closure of the story indicates that, despite his hatred for his country, through his experience with his wife, Gabriel begins to admit of a sort of friendship with, acceptance of, and admiration for the Irish. The cold snow falling over every part of Ireland<sup>5</sup> is emphasised from the beginning in contrast to the warm rooms, dances, songs, piano playing, speeches and all the conversations inside the house. This universal snow, connected with mutuality, falls on all the people: Gabriel,

Gretta, Michael Furey, Misses Morkan, and the dead and living singers. This last scene indicates a sense of mutuality, that no one is alone and the people at the party prefer the dead singers to the living ones, and even Gabriel's wife seems to prefer her dead lover to her living husband. Gabriel manages, nevertheless, to feel warm feelings of love towards his wife who prefers her dead lover: "Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be *love*" (176; emphasis added). This love is an epiphany, and this epiphanic love not only connects Gabriel to Gretta, but also covers all the living and the dead who are mutually dependent on one another. Other stories, like "The Sisters," "A Painful Case," and "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," also focus on the living from the perspective of mutuality with the dead (Father James Flynn, Mrs Sinico, and politician Charles Stewart Parnell); yet, "The Dead" is the key description of this acceptance of all things, this acceptance of the interweaving of life and death. For Joyce in *Dubliners*, love is an encounter between the living and the dead that can result in an epiphany.

Though it has been argued that the meaning of Joyce's fiction is uncertain and must finally be interpreted as a void, it is irrelevant to consider these two terms synonymous because the void is an ultimate form of certainty, that is, the certainty of death, which chokes all life. A passage from Samuel Beckett's *Assumption* can help illumine the Joycean concept of the void: "he hungered to be irretrievably engulfed in the light of eternity, one with the birdless cloudless colourless skies, in infinite fulfillment" (7). The "he" in this passage is Father Flynn from "The Sisters" and the old man in "An Encounter." Certainty of the void of real life "can be linked to Joyce's 'epiphanies' of death because death is the only thing we can be sure of," as Sangam MacDuff asserts (69). Death cannot be experienced; it must be only imagined, not understood. Imagination means, essentially, what is phoney; the epiphany of death is, from Joyce's perspective, the same as Dettmar's epiphany. Dettmar and other critics have never called "The Dead" the story of epiphany, because they must recognise the certainty of the epiphanic or epiphonic moments of death. This recalls the passage in "The Dead" (a story about farewell) in which "Good-night" is repeated numerous times as people are departing from the party: "—Well, good-night, Aunt Kate, and thanks for the pleasant evening.—Good-night, Gabriel. Good-night, Gretta!—Good-night, Aunt Kate, and thanks ever so much. Good-night, Aunt Julia.—O, good-night, Gretta, I didn't see you.—Good

night, Mr D'Arcy. Good-night, Miss O'Callaghan.—Good-night, Miss Morkan.—Good-night, again.—Good-night, all. Safe home.—Good-night. Good-night" (167). This seems to be a sort of Joycean phoney exaggeration of parting; the void itself may be an exaggerated, phoney term for death. In "The Dead," Joyce's epiphany implies the mutual love between the living and the dead as a highly scaled climax or resolution accomplished by the aesthetic accumulation of anti-climaxes: this is a highly exciting shift in narrative style rather in comparison with the single anti-climax of other stories in *Dubliners*. Each anti-climax is a step in the progress towards an ultimate resolution; each step is designed for this ultimate purpose.

A conflict caused by an encounter may be the necessary element of the occurrence of any epiphany in the aesthetic anti-climax in Joyce's writing. Though the encounter in "An Encounter" may be seen in a clearer form than the two other childhood stories because readers can vividly see the simplicity of the boy narrator and his friend, Mahony, and of the boys and the old man, in "The Sisters" and "Araby," the encounters between the boy and the dying priest, and the boy and himself, are more complex. "The Dead" seems to describe a true encounter between Gabriel, Gretta, the living, and the dead and their reconciliation through love. Gabriel shamefully recognises himself as a deceptive, vulnerable, nervous, well-meaning, and ludicrous person. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Gretta will never love him again; rather, she may have begun to love him more than she had before. Even Miss Ivors and Lily may have never hated him for his fatuous behaviour; he seems still to be a sentimental hero among them as he is with the Misses Morkan. This may evince the existence of a sentimentally epiphanic love powerfully suffusing Joyce's fiction.

## Conclusion

Joyce closes the early stories, "The Sisters," "An Encounter," and "Araby," using the device of the anti-climax, which occurs as a trivial accident, frustration, or defeat, but in "The Dead" he achieves an effective result of a conventional climax, a positive moment of epiphanic love in the light of powerful feelings after the accumulation of negative moments derived from anti-climaxes involving epiphanic voids. In "The Sisters," the frustrating, complicated, and religious moment that the boy experiences as a void when he sees his mentor has died is indeed an epiphanic

manifestation, though a bitter one for the child. By the end of “An Encounter,” the boy clearly achieves an awareness of his own penitence regarding his behaviour towards his friend, whom he has always despised. The protagonist recognises that the schoolfellow helped him escape from the horribly peculiar old man. Though this moment seems to be only an incident, it can be interpreted as an epiphanic manifestation of life and freedom. In “Araby,” however, the boy’s encounter with reality, which causes him to recognise himself as a creature driven and derided by vanity, is much exaggerated at the moment of his defeat; there is a sort of epiphanic manifestation in this true dark moment, a negative moment in which the void is witnessed. Joyce, the Catholic apostate and literary craftsman, provides a sense of the divine in the anti-climax of “The Dead,” in which love appears as a positive moment of epiphany that encompasses all the mutually dependent living and dead; this moment is described in a rather traditional climax in the form of a consolation. As Seamus Deane points out, “Joyce, we learn, is especially fond of such a final coda, suddenly suffusing his fiction with the retrospective power of the very energy which it had until then been denied” (181). This “final coda” is a closure, offering solace derived sentimentally from epiphanic love in the light of retrospective feelings and through the mutuality that binds all together. The epiphanies reveal something to the characters about life’s uncertainty and the unreliability of feelings. The living desire a means to achieving freedom and the highest form of life, and the dead exist in ultimate silence; they are mutually dependent. Joyce uses the anti-climax and climax in order to achieve this radiant epiphany of love and infinite fulfilment from the depths of the unfathomable epiphany of the void.<sup>6</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham quote passages from Joyce’s *Stephen Hero*, “By an epiphany he [Stephen Dedalus] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation,” and “Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object ... seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany” (114).

<sup>2</sup> In *James Joyce A-Z*, A. Nicholas Fagnoli and Michael P. Gillespie explain that “epiphany” can be defined as a moment of individual revelation; therefore, the “epiphanies” in *Dubliners* depend on the perceptions of readers regarding the form and content of the stories (66).

<sup>3</sup> This adjective form of “simony” : “Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word *paralysis*. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word *gnomon* in the Euclid and the word *simony* in the Catechism” (3). A note explains that “‘simony’ is the buying and selling of spiritual things—preferments, pardons, and the like—for money or things of value” (196).

<sup>4</sup> “*O, the rain falls on my heavy locks / And the dew wets my skin, / My babe lies cold*” (166; emphasis in original).

<sup>5</sup> Readers can appraise Joyce’s writing style by noting the marked characteristics of his language of plainness, repetition, loneliness or darkness in his description of the last passage: “[Snow] was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns” (176).

<sup>6</sup> This essay is a study of James Joyce as a short story writer and advances the analysis of Joyce’s craft through a reading of David Lodge’s *Language of Fiction* and Jean-Michel Rabaté’s *Joyce upon the Void: The Genesis of Doubt*.

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