

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Suzette L. McGrory for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on June 12, 1998. Title:  
'That life of commonplace sacrifices': Representations of Womanhood in Irish Catholic Culture  
in James Joyce's *Dubliners*.

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Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

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Traditional interpretations of James Joyce's *Dubliners* have often focused on the pervasive "paralysis" of the city, covered in the stories' range of "childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life." However, these approaches have limited their focus on the women in the stories, often spotlighting the male characters--and the author--through a Freudian lens; consequently, the interpretations have overlooked important considerations in light of developing feminist criticism. Through a selection of the stories, this thesis attempts to show how the text of *Dubliners* offers a cultural critique of the ways in which women were oppressed and constrained by the Irish Catholic ideology which established their roles within society. By the close of the collection, however, Joyce's creation of an inchoate image of the multi-dimensional, sexualized women of his mature works, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, is embodied in the character of Gretta Conroy in "The Dead." Using Judith Butler's theory of performative acts of gender construction and Julia Kristeva's cultural dynamic of "the maternal" in the *Stabat Mater*, this criticism of the text lifts the female characters from the backgrounds of *Dubliners* and reveals the dis-eased culture of Dublin from another perspective. The female characters in the text act out expected cultural roles, often modeled after the Irish Catholic ideal of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Through the speech, silence, and physical acts of the female characters in *Dubliners*, "the female" in Irish-Catholic-Victorian culture is constructed--and reinforced--for Joyce's audience. This reading then furthers our understanding of the institutions, values, and practices which defined "womanhood" in nineteenth-century Dublin.

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'That life of commonplace sacrifices': Representations of Womanhood  
in Irish Catholic Culture in James Joyce's *Dubliners*

by

Suzette L. McGrory

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Suzette L. McGrory, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The present study began over four years ago, as I sat in Professor Bill Potts' Joyce class at Oregon State University and became fascinated with all of the stories within *Dubliners*. While deciding on a topic for a Masters thesis, I eagerly discussed the possibilities of a study combining feminist and religious perspectives (not necessarily mutually exclusive) at length with the man who would become my major professor and thesis advisor, sometimes to his chagrin. I owe a large debt of gratitude to Dr. Neil Davison, whose careful reading and precise criticisms helped me achieve this goal. Thank you for your help *and* your patience!

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## NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

Occasionally, when reference is made to a specific diary or collection of letters, abbreviations have been used to avoid confusion:

- CDD* Joyce, Stanislaus. *The Dublin Diary of Stanislaus Joyce*. Ed. George H. Healey. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1963.
- LI or LII* Joyce, James. *Letters*. Eds. Stuart Gilbert (Vol. I) and Richard Ellman (Vol. II and III). New York: Viking, 1957, 1966.
- MBK* Joyce, Stanislaus. *My Brother's Keeper: James Joyce's Early Years*. New York: Viking, 1958.

For Martha Alice Orin Cottew,  
my grandmother



“That life of commonplace sacrifices”:  
Representations of Womanhood in Irish Catholic Culture in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*

1. Introduction

My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity--home, the recognized virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines. How could I like the idea of home? My home was simply a middle-class affair ruined by spendthrift habits which I have inherited. My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father’s ill-treatment, by years of trouble, and by my cynical frankness of conduct. When I looked on her face as she lay in her coffin--a face grey and wasted with cancer--I understood that I was looking on the face of a victim and I cursed the system which had made her a victim.

(LII, 48; Aug. 29, 1904)

In this excerpt from a letter to Nora Barnacle, his future wife, James Joyce criticized the role he believed cultural influences played in his mother’s tragic life. Later, in his 1914 collection of short stories, *Dubliners*, Joyce positioned a female character’s existence as a life “of common place sacrifices closing in final craziness” (40)--extending the physical illness which claimed his mother to a disease of the culture that bred him. Throughout the collection, Joyce combined Naturalistic detail with a Modernist critique of Catholic and bourgeois social convention to portray the lives of women in turn-of-the-century Irish society.<sup>1</sup> While Victorian British and middle class cultural assumptions stymied the progress of Dublin’s women, the Catholic church dictated the specific roles women could assume, creating and controlling their lives, making them perform roles as de-sexualized and subservient handmaidens to male power and male desire. Thus, the text of *Dubliners* offers a specific criticism of the ways women were oppressed and consumed by the Catholic superstructure which established their roles within the society. Although the traditional

criticism of the collection has often focused on a Freudian analysis of the male protagonists or of the author himself, scrutinizing the female characters who are usually seen only as background for the “main” action and intent of the stories leads us to see the “diseased” culture of Dublin from another perspective.

In the world of *Dubliners*, the patriarchal society of both imperial British and middle-class Dublin established the norms of femininity and feminine-gendered behavior; when women didn't meet these norms, they often became unworthy and, thus, expendable. Within the Catholic middle class, women could typically expect to lead lives of childbearing, household chores, and religious duties, in service to their husbands and God. If they were not married, their lives were often spent in service to God--as nuns--or in service to their families or employers, fulfilling another kind of social duty as “slaveys.” Even though female-run small shops--ranging from clothing to draperies--flourished in the city, women operated these shops only if they were working in a family-owned business or if they had been widowed or willed the proprietorship (Walzl, “*Dubliners*” 196). However, the depressed economic conditions and limited employment opportunities of Dublin just as often led single women into lives of prostitution. In *Dubliners*, then, the female characters described by Joyce perform tasks within culturally assigned, constructed gender roles--creating a background in the stories, supporting the male--and central--characters, and thus marking the text as a site of fruitful examination of cultural dynamics.

In considering how “feminine” gender is expressed in *Dubliners*, the idea of “body rhetoric” becomes essential. The performative acts--what the characters' bodies *do* in the context of a story (and the mind of the audience)--can be culturally symbolic within a social

economy that is relatively stable; these actions can create the potential to disrupt or can also be “real-life” acts, reinforcing cultural markers of behavior. The physical appearance and behavior of the characters create a culturally gendered identity, as well as a cultural symbol or representation of Irish nationalist consciousness expressed through the feminine role. But how are these multiple levels of meaning accomplished within what appear to be stereotypical images of women? One way of answering this question involves identifying how the actions of the female characters in *Dubliners* correspond to Judith Butler’s idea that “the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body is a historical situation, as de Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation” (521). Thus, the body becomes a text, inscribed with the social expectations of a culture, molded by the institutions of the society around it.

In mirroring the effect of cultural norms on the women of Dublin, Joyce’s stories run from representations of young Irish girls to elderly Dublin matrons. The younger female characters in Joyce’s world still have dreams and hopes of marriage, the epitome of women’s achievement according to the institutions which surround them. Like the women in historical Dublin society, they have been programmed from an early age with Irish Catholic and British bourgeois expectations, and failure to meet these expectations leads women--as they age--to focus on action rather than introspection. However, the younger women’s introspection is circumscribed by what the culture dictates they can think about. The cultural norms have shaped their psyches to suggest that their ultimate self-definition is that of a self-sacrificing, *married* woman and mother. But Joyce seems to afford younger

women more introspection in the text because they're still hopeful about their "possibilities," even though they demonstrate limited motivation to move beyond the boundaries dictated by society. This insensibility also reflects public attitudes toward the women. For example, in "A Mother," the narrator explains that when, as a girl, Mrs. Kearney

came to the age of marriage she was sent out to many houses where her playing and ivory manners were much admired. She sat amid the chilly circle of her accomplishments, waiting for some suitor to brave it and offer her a brilliant life. . . . However, when she drew near the limit and her friends began to loosen their tongues about her she silenced them by marrying Mr [sic] Kearney, who was a bootmaker in Ormond Quay. (136-7)\*

To achieve success within the cultural constraints of Irish Catholic Dublin and avoid the ridicule of impending spinsterhood, Mrs. Kearney had to sublimate her talents and her own romantic desires, settling on a tepid marriage and limited future--a "future" totally ensconced within the ideological parameters created for her by the culture.

The stories of *Dubliners* incorporate and blur distinctions between the overt Naturalist scenarios and covert patriarchal ideologies performed by and on the characters. Thus, the collection also offers a subtext of cultural practices related to the constraining roles of women in a patriarchal society: female characters as maidens, spinsters, wives, and mothers.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, reading the specific gendered performances of the female characters reveals the overt (and covert) structures of power relationships between men and women in the patriarchal Irish culture. By considering the stories which feature female characters, we

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\*All quotations from *Dubliners* are taken from James Joyce, *Dubliners*, eds. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (1916. New York: Penguin, 1970).

can see how the text itself reveals the potential--if not actual--progression of the female characters within pre-established cultural assumptions: Joyce reconfigures the images of the female from the de-sexualized stereotypes of "The Sisters" to a strong--and sexualized--woman, Gretta, in "The Dead." However, since no female character in the stories of *Dubliners* achieves social liberation or even a complete grasp of her own cultural conditioning, Joyce may *appear to* reveal himself less as a subversive than a product of his time. As H. Aram Veerer notes regarding the dangers in containment of subversive materials, "Every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes" (xi). Consequently, the text of *Dubliners* can be re-read in ways that illustrate through "the analysis of tiny particulars, the behavioral codes, logics, and motive forces controlling a whole society" by foregrounding cultural constructs and considerations (Veerer xi). By considering the performative acts of the female characters, as well as their dialogue and dynamic within each narrative, the exchanges between the native Irish Catholic middle-class culture and the colonizing British culture can open up central tensions in the text surrounding the construction of "the female" in turn-of-the century Dublin.

But limiting the stories to a Naturalistic representation of women's roles in Irish culture may overlook the progress in female characterization the stories themselves represent. The author ends the collection with "The Dead," which offers a female character who exhibits an emotional depth and a sexualized humanity unparalleled in the female or male characters of the preceding stories. Here, Joyce "hints that, beneath their circumscribed roles, women possess untapped potential" (Werner 95). Even though Gretta Conroy is

culturally scripted in her role as wife and mother, her performance in the story reveals less an uncritical ideological representation than “a symbol of the emotional, intuitive life of a woman, perpetually mysterious and enigmatic” (Henke and Unkeless xiii). Through the not quite fully actualized presence of Gretta, Joyce represents an inchoate image of the fully sexualized women who appear in his later works, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Through these texts, he expresses a strong recognition of the empowered female perspective and sexual potency beyond the constraints of the masculine cultural stereotypes. That Joyce does not achieve a fully formed depiction of this type of female character in *Dubliners* speaks not so much of late Victorian misogyny as his development as an artist and his ability to illustrate the rigid boundaries of life in Dublin.

Moreover, the other female constructs that appear throughout *Dubliners* are not simply stereotypical characterizations: they represent a response to specific cultural markers of late nineteenth-century Irish society, such as the Blessed Virgin Mary and the symbol of Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan. These two icons, especially, represent the twin poles of female “role models,” from the spiritual and de-sexualized ideal of womanhood (Mary) to the nationalist and carnal mythic figure (Cathleen). Joyce’s Dublin is paralyzed both by the British government and by the various institutions of (Anglo-)Irish culture, and the subversive text of *Dubliners* illustrates another level of the dis-ease of the silent victim--a dynamic embodied in Joyce’s description of his mother’s face on her deathbed in this study’s opening epigraph.

Drawing on his own religious upbringing as well as on his relationships with women, Joyce depicts female characters in *Dubliners* who can be differentiated by their social

functions or status as they relate to other characters in the stories: multi-textured images of “the woman” as nurturer, procreator, peacemaker, temptress, and asexual “virgin.” Through their physical appearance, psychological behaviors, and performed actions, these “women” display a continuum of female images from virgin martyr to whore, “whose fate is staged, rather than articulated, by the stor[ies]” --yet never liberating themselves from the constraints of this culture (Norris, “Dead” 193).

In considering how these notions of gender were constructed, several levels of patriarchy which dominated Irish society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries need to be identified: the male-dominated British colonial system, the Catholic church, the nuclear family model, and the nationalist movement. Such institutions determined normative behaviors for the men and, especially, the women of Dublin.<sup>3</sup> The patriarchal structure of Irish society expressed “an ideology that developed partly in response to social and economic conditions resulting from British colonization and nineteenth-century famine” (Mullin 43). Dublin itself was a key location of such a nexus of discourse.

Historically known as the “Second City of the Empire,” Dublin perhaps represented what was worst in British colonialism. As Joseph O’Brien explains,

In an age when towns and cities underwent rapid transformation under the urbanizing pressures of industrialism, the Irish capital was a city pretty much in decline. . . . There, retarded material progress, lack of population expansion, widespread and continuing unemployment, pockets of direst poverty, and some of the most daunting vital statistics to beset any metropolis set it apart from its sister cities of the United Kingdom. (xii)

These conditions were especially true in the Catholic parts of the city; even though a small percentage of Irish Catholics had made the transition to a “middle class” composed primarily of merchants, civil functionaries, and liberal professionals at the time of *Dubliners*, the socio-economic effects of hundreds of years of British colonialism could be seen throughout the city. The combination of British imperialism, Penal Laws, religious and racial discrimination, and centuries of trading restrictions had left the majority of Dublin’s Catholic citizens impoverished and their dwellings in shambles (O’Brien 9). The wealth of the Ascendancy, the Anglo-Irish, created a sharp division between that privileged--and Protestant--class and the “much larger class of wage earners whose mode of dress and manner of speech, occupation, and income condemned them to social inferiority” (O’Brien 161).<sup>4</sup> The various forms of oppression, from Dublin Castle’s “law enforcement” to land seizure by successive Plantation settlements, produced “an accompanying psychology of self-doubt and dependency among the Irish, linked to [British] economic and political power but also the decline of the [Irish] native language and culture” (Kiberd 6). Yet the one constant through years of alien rule and abuse was the people’s allegiance to the Irish Catholic Church.

Over and above the imperial British power structure, the Catholic Church remained the most significant force in the lives of the Irish people. In late nineteenth-century Dublin, over eighty percent of the population was Catholic (O’Brien 282). Just as they could not escape the control and influence of the British government, the people were trapped in “an essentially Catholic and patriarchal Ireland, constructed in part as a form of resistance to British colonialism” (Mullin 46). In fact, the Irish Catholic Church had grown out of a



synthesis of Irish and British traditions--“a hybrid form of religion,” according to Joyce, “produced by the most unenlightened features of Catholicism under the inevitable influence of English Puritanism” (*MBK* 238). Church doctrine pervaded every aspect of Dublin life, beginning in childhood and determining modes of behavior for both men and women. Beyond the education of children, the focus of the priests was saving the souls of the Irish--an institutionalizing mission from God: “Each Christian was expected to be a type of Christ and bear his [sic] cross. Girls were to emulate the Virgin Mary, and families were to model themselves on the Holy Family” (Walzl, “*Dubliners*” 202). Joyce described the “powerless, grey souls” that colored the Dublin landscape, but, as Joseph Florio notes, “instead of portraying them as seekers of emancipation through Christianity, he ironically conveys an image of a country and its citizenry hemmed in by Catholic dogmatism to the point that their fates and lives are paralyzed” (183). In Joyce’s text, representations of Irish life focus on a mediocrity created by this paralysis, which nullifies any hopes or dreams of youth as the people subordinate themselves to religious doctrine. But the doctrine and dictates of the Church were especially rigorous for women, who were expected to model themselves after the Blessed Virgin Mary, the ultimate paragon of a strictly prescribed “femininity.”

In the Dublin of Joyce’s youth, mariology, the growing Catholic reverence for the Virgin Mary, was especially strong.<sup>5</sup> The supposed appearance of Mary at Knock in 1879 only served to strengthen the tradition.<sup>6</sup> The image in the visions “wore the long dress, sash, veil, and crown of the thirteenth-century feudal lady”--an object of courtly love (Warner 115). In the Middle Ages, Mary had been perceived as an approachable intercessor--a divine but human woman--who was a mother to humanity “but loved it like a mistress” (Warner

155).<sup>7</sup> As this object of courtly love, Mary exhibited the attributes of a desirable woman and a holy mother in what Julia Kristeva calls “a totality as accomplished as it was inaccessible. Enough to make any woman suffer, any man dream” (317). However, since that time, some images of the Blessed Virgin had been developed which diminished her likeness to a medieval monarch or to the female condition. Indeed, these images related directly to major dogmas which include “her divine motherhood and her virginity, both declared by councils of the early Church and therefore accepted by most of the reformed Christian groups; [and] the immaculate conception, sparing her all stain of original sin, which was proclaimed in 1854” (Warner xxii). Although Jesus and Mary both traditionally exemplified the virtues of poverty, humility, and obedience as role models for Christians of both sexes, “the characteristics of these virtues--gentleness, docility, forbearance--are immediately classifiable as feminine” (Warner 183). The image of Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, then becomes, for the women of post-famine Ireland--grieving for their husbands and children--a role model (Scott, *Joyce* 15), like a mirror reflecting the people and their core beliefs in the face of monumental struggle.<sup>8</sup>

The femininity of the Blessed Virgin Mary allows her to survive in a patriarchal society. She “represents the quintessence of many qualities that east and west have traditionally regarded as feminine: yieldingness, softness, gentleness, receptiveness, mercifulness, tolerance, withdrawal” (Warner xxiv). These qualities--as well as her freedom from “sex, painful delivery, age, death, and all sin”--show all other women as innately inferior” (Warner 153). Kristeva explains that “a concrete woman, worthy of the ideal embodied by the Virgin as an inaccessible goal, could only be a nun, a martyr, or if she is

married, one who leads a life that would remove her from the ‘earthly’ condition and dedicate her to the highest sublimation alien to her body” (327). And Joyce indeed demonstrates these roles throughout *Dubliners*.

The virtues considered feminine, Marina Warner notes, “degenerate easily: obedience becomes docility; gentleness, irresolution; humility, cringing; forbearance, long-suffering” (190). By constructing the parameters of the feminine as “shrinking, retiring acquiescence, and by reinforcing that behaviour in the sex with praise, the myth of female inferiority and dependence could be and was perpetuated” (Warner 191). In this context, Irish women often *performed* the acts which identified their “feminine” gendered, Mary-modeled roles within the Catholic framework of society: praying and appealing to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin herself, singing hymns, lighting candles before statues of the Virgin or other saints, and working as members of Catholic charities. Through the performance of all these duties, men and women came to an “understanding” about religion: women carried the burden of maintaining the spiritual consciousness within the family, becoming the moral conscience of the home and the culture.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, British social influences were as inimical to women as were the oppressive conditions of Catholicism (Scott, *Joyce* 140). The treatment of women in society at large combined aspects of both cultures, colonizer and colonized. Thus, Dublin society represented a distinctive admixture of Irish Catholic dogma and British Victorian culture.<sup>10</sup> Mary Poovey has described late-nineteenth century British society as “a system of difference based on the ‘natural’ divisions of sex and articulated as a series of polar oppositions that imply and order one another and that centrally inform Victorian middle-class ideology and

institutions” (Newton 162). To understand how this hierarchy affected the daily lives of the female citizens in Britain *and* Ireland, consider the four categories which excluded persons from many civil and political rights in nineteenth-century Britain: “criminals, idiots, *women*, and minors” (Cobbe 110). In fact,

[b]y the common law of England a woman has not legal existence, so far as property is concerned, independently of her husband. The husband and wife are assumed to be one person, and that person is the husband. The wife can make no contract, neither sue or be sued. Whatever she possess of personal property at the time of her marriage, or whatever she may afterwards earn or inherit, belongs to her husband, without control on her part. . . . From none of her property is he bound to reserve anything for her maintenance or that of her children. (Cobbe 111)

In addition to adhering to the British legal system, the rapidly increasing Irish middle class emulated Victorian models of femininity (Scott, *Joyce* 14). The most common and essential assumptions in this context were that young women should remain ignorant of their own sexuality--psychologically and physically virgins--until they were married. Above all, marriage remained their long-term goal. Until that event, young women could perform “menial, charitable, or clerical work, always grooming themselves to be marketable brides. Once married, they should submit to their husbands, procreate, and serve as pale, self-sacrificing ‘angels in the house’” (Scott, *Joyce* 14). The combination of the de-sexualized ideals of British Victorian prudery and Irish Catholic doctrines created a cultural entrapment for women within the patriarchal structure of Dublin. If a woman was to “succeed” according to cultural standards, she must contract a “proper” marriage and an onerous life

of service to husband and children, but if she failed to do this, her life was even more difficult.

Indeed, women's roles in Irish society in the late nineteenth century were affected by still more sociopolitical forces. Florence Walzl explains that "for over a century following 1841, Ireland had . . . the highest rate of unmarried men and women in the world" ("*Dubliners*" 33).<sup>11</sup> After the Famine, young people faced almost impossible odds to establish households without their parents' financial support. Because a typical Irish Catholic daughter only had the small dowry she might receive from her father, her prospects for marriage depended on him and her compliance with his choices for marriage partners (Lee 38). Furthermore, since parents lived longer, sons had to wait to marry until after they inherited their land--if they married at all. Given this social reality, the stories in *Dubliners* are filled with bachelors and spinsters. For example, the abundance of unmarried male characters featured in "After the Race," "Two Gallants," "The Boarding House," and "A Painful Case" correlates to the number of unmarried female characters in "The Sisters," "Eveline," "Clay," and "The Dead."

Just as opportunities for marriage were scarce for women, opportunities for employment were also limited (Walzl, "*Dubliners: Women*" 33). Lack of economic security was far "more serious for women because women's choices were so much more limited than men's" (Walzl, "*Dubliners: Women*" 37). *Open Doors for Irishwomen: A Guide to the Professions Open to Educated Women in Ireland*, published in 1904, lists approximately twenty-five potential occupations for women, especially in the fields of nursing and teaching. However, many of these jobs paid much less than a living wage, and though there

were several openings in clerical or other civil service positions, hundreds of women would apply for a single vacant position (Walzl, “*Dubliners: Women*” 40). Without an “acceptable” job or a husband or family, women often faced extreme choices: the convent or the street. In the last half of the nineteenth century, thousands of Irish women entered convents, and by 1900, there were thirty-five female religious orders, over eight thousand nuns, and 368 convents (MacCurtain, “*Godly*” 245). While convents continued to be established in dioceses throughout Ireland, offering education to girls and young women, the streets of Dublin were considered “wicked places filled with wicked and ‘lost’ women”--the Dublin by Lamplight metaphor of “Clay.” To fight this “social evil,” the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had been enacted to eliminate brothels through imprisonment and fines of the brothel keepers and prostitutes.<sup>12</sup> Even so, according to census records, Dublin’s population in 1901 was 84,497, including wards and suburban areas, and contained “the largest number of streetwalkers in the country”--estimated at two to four percent of the adult female population (O’Brien 284, 192-3). In contrast to the socially acceptable role of the submissive, de-sexualized woman (wife/mother), the prostitution trade allowed women to *perform* the role of sexual complement to a man--in a fee-for-service sexuality, not in a liberating act of empowerment.

In light of the strict moral codes that allowed most females to be “generally reared with a ladylike abhorrence of sex and . . . ill prepared for the realities of marriage” (Walzl, “*Dubliners: Women*” 46), an ironic hardship for women could be attributed to their high fecundity after marriage. Indeed, families with more than four children were common throughout Ireland (Walzl, “*Dubliners: Women*” 37). However, the aim of all proper young

women was not only to remain pure (celibate), but also to achieve a marriage that maintained the social and economic status of the participants (French 268). Within this cultural context, sexuality was connected to economy. Thus, sex--and marriage--became a commodity which related to the long-term belief that ignored a feminine sexuality which might be connected to their physical body or desires (the masculine stereotype) and which reinforced the socioeconomic dependency of women in the marriage relationship (French 270). Most men took an openly mercenary view of this process. In considering the socioeconomic impact on male-female relationships, Veerer explains that “[s]ymbolic capital accrues in the ruses used to enhance one’s social standing in the marriage mart. . . . All such practices have cash equivalents and aim, even if unconsciously, at material advantages” (xiv). In late nineteenth-century Dublin, marriage became a deliberate and unromantic business arrangement, involving capital and property for the groom and security for the bride (Walzl, “*Dubliners: Women*” 35).

This idealized split of feminized virtue and masculine vice was not only damaging to women, but also, ultimately, damaging to the men, who faced the demands of an externalized, patriarchal power quashed by the combined institutional forces of the Irish Catholic Church and the British State. These tensions created the high percentage of alcoholism (as a coping mechanism) in the society--coupled with a prolonged adolescence for the male members of that society: “a masculine world . . . clearly not centered in the family” (Walzl, “*Dubliners: Women*” 45), and thus free of responsibility. As a modern Dublin psychiatrist explained in a recent *Journal of the Irish Medical Association*,

If there is a picture characteristic of Irish culture, this is probably it. The male, doted on by his mother, reared in a monosexual atmosphere in school, who has never learned to form a friendship with the opposite sex of his own age--then marries and takes a 'housekeeper' into his home--while he continues his friendship with his male friends--'the lads.' She goes on to become the mother of his children, invests her life in these and so carries on the pattern to the next generation. (qtd. in Lyons 93)

This pattern results from the tradition of "single-sex education, and the separation of young boys from maternal nurturance [which] promotes misogyny, narcissism, and a residual terror of the female" (Slater 416). In response to these childhood traumas, men suffer from "an unconscious fear of being feminine, which leads to 'protest masculinity,' exaggeration of the difference between men and women" (Slater 416). However, these masculine excesses were not accepted without question; by the end of the nineteenth century, women were beginning to demand more just treatment.

The controversies which arose in Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century over the use of chloroform in childbirth, divorce and property laws, and employment of women in the ever-expanding marketplace were also reflected in the Anglicized Dublin society (Newton 158). Historian Rosemary Owen explains that the first attempts to organize women in demanding equal rights occurred in Ireland in the 1870s (Mullin 42). Later, this "small but influential" Irish movement would use Irish Renaissance connections<sup>13</sup> to forward the cause: the *Shan Van Vocht* journal and the nationalist organization founded by Maud Gonne, *Inghinidhe na hEireann* (Foster 449). Young Catholic as well as Protestant women also entered the nationalist movement through these women's organizations like *Inghinide na hEireann* and the slightly later *Cumann na mBan* (Scott, Joyce 24). The



feminist/nationalist movements also correlated to the era's fledgling Irish Literary Revival, another cultural force acting on Dublin during this period.

Even though Joyce resisted the Irish Renaissance movement on many levels, Bonnie Kime Scott suggests that he “did not reject strong women” as potential role models. Scott argues against Hugh Kenner's assertions that Joyce created “types”: “His depiction of nationalist women was more varied . . . as was his overall treatment of Maud Gonne” (22). In contrast to the Anglo-Irish leaders of the Revival, Joyce found the Gaelic League full of those he condemned as “respectable, suburban, and bourgeois” (Foster 448-49). As Richard Ellman explains, “The whole literary movement seemed to him as much a fraud as the Irish virtues, among which cruelty masqueraded as high-minded moralism, and timid onanism masqueraded as purity” (166). Women in Irish society, in Joyce's perception, were not going to achieve any kind of liberty from their cultural bonds through the *faux* morality of the Irish Revival: this particular “event” was yet another set of standards with which women must comply to be considered socially acceptable.

Given this history of female oppression, many feminist critics see Joyce as, at worst, a spiteful misogynist and, at best, a “typical” product of a patriarchal society. Margot Norris asserts that, in *Dubliners*, Joyce fails to effectively portray “a community of women whose relationships are politically heterogeneous--mutually supportive, oppressive, liberative without consistency--and the stories thus seem committed to offering a liberal, pluralistic representation of Irish women” (203). I will argue here, however, how the text *represents* the variety of roles women played in Dublin society, as well as their frustrations and circumstances. The female characters create a background for the main events of the stories,

much as they created a background for the lives of others in real society. More importantly, even though the male-dominated society of Dublin was paralyzed and spiritually barren, the women represent a life-force, an untapped emotional and physical potential beyond Irish Catholic cultural assumptions, even while they keep the disparate pieces of the Irish culture from breaking apart. On occasion, the female characters themselves in Joyce's stories also share an understanding of their ironic participation in this unhealthy situation: Edward Duffy, for example, notes that the stories "dramatiz[e] the Irish dialectic between virtuosity with words and a communally enforced code of silence" (421). Why should the women of these stories state the obvious? For in their society, women's roles as caretakers extended "beyond the daily fulfillment of the necessary. . . . They also help[ed] to maintain the moral and cultural life of Dublin, partly by their devotion to the Church" (French 268). They are a conscience or internal commentary for their families. In Dublin, "women frame men's lives, as if they existed before men and shall exist after them, like some eternal silent presence" (French 267). Women become the memory for the society, trapped in the role. For example, in "The Dead," Joyce features several female characters who provide bits and pieces of family history to their guests. However, Joyce alludes to no positive future for many of the female characters in his collection of stories, from the self-defeated "Eveline" to the "Sisters" who only talk about past events with no mention of tomorrow.

While some critics question the author's accuracy in depicting "the social milieu of his women characters and of the realism of his portraits of women as social entities" (Walzl, "*Dubliners: Women*" 33), Joyce demonstrates his understanding of the Catholic culture by frequently foregrounding the figure of the self-sacrificing Mother in his writing. In fact, the

author experienced first-hand many gender-related problems within his family of origin. While John Joyce remains a negative influence in Joycean biography, Joyce's relationship with his mother had a different tenor. According to Stanislaus Joyce, Mary Jane (May) Joyce performed her role as mother with an

ever-watchful anxiety for her children, a readiness to sacrifice herself to them utterly, and a tenacious energy to endure for their sakes [that] replaced love in a family not given to shows of affection. She was very gentle with her children though [sic] she understood them each. It is understanding and not love that makes confidence between Mother and children so natural though unacknowledged, so unreserved though nothing is confessed (there is no need for words or looks between them, the confidence that surrounds them like the atmosphere). Rather it is this understanding that makes love so enduring. (*CDD* 8-10)

Thus, she represents the "idealized" maternal figure, created by society and Church, who sacrifices all for her family. Joyce would later describe his mother as "the Irishwoman, the accomplice of the Irish Catholic Church, which he called the scullery-maid of Christendom" (Scott, *Joyce* 63). However, at her death, he sees her not as an accomplice of the institutions of Dublin, but as the victim of the culture which consumed her.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, in considering the role of women and the function of Irish female/maternal icons within Dublin society, it is also important to consider the cultural dynamic Kristeva has described in terms of "the maternal": culture does not have a problem with all women; it has a problem with mothers. Kristeva describes the body of the mother as a continuum from dangerous--threatening boundaries, borders, and identities--to an abstracted, desexualized ideal. The dangerous, physical body will not respond to social (patriarchal) control; in contrast, the idealized "woman" is a creation like the Blessed Virgin Mary to the

Irish. Kristeva sees this construction of the Catholic church as “the gathering of the three feminine functions (daughter-wife-mother) within a totality where they vanish as specific corporealities while maintaining their psychological functions” (316). Creating a fantasy icon disempowers the “dangerous” woman, and creating or demanding compliance with that glorified ideal subdues the women of the society.<sup>15</sup>

Within the discourse of “the maternal,” Joyce depicts his culture’s commitment and adherence to the schizoid myths of “the purity of Irish womanhood and that of general Irish saintliness” (Strand 13). His Naturalist interpretations of life in the early *Dubliners* would develop and deepen, of course, in the later fiction, allowing the often explored Freudian resonances of *Ulysses* and Jungian archetypes of *Finnegans Wake*. Critiques of *Dubliners* based in Freudian explication often note images of displaced abjection, which are

projected by the child of psychoanalytic theory onto the preoedipal mother. Joyce’s [woman] corresponds to the psychological concept that the child knows the mother as all-powerful in the preoedipal stage, before becoming aware that the mother belongs to the more powerful father and lacks, anatomically and symbolically, the phallus. This figure is transformed in the hag, of course, into a degraded image, and in a sense . . . represents the child’s ability to dominate or castrate [the power of] the mother. (Moloney 105)

Or, as in the Irish Catholic version, the female figure is transformed into the untouchable, pure, and non-carnal Blessed Virgin. Either way, the mother/woman loses power and control. Playing on the dualistic, idealized images of Old Mother Ireland<sup>16</sup> and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the potentially consuming fluid state which induces fear and the need for abjection in the first place remains a force in Irish society, as the victims themselves

continue to be the conscience and catechism of the culture--yet always relegated to a disempowered background.

Even though the position of women within such a patriarchal society remains “background,” Marilyn Frye explains that “women’s existence is both absolutely necessary to and irresolvably problematic for the dominant reality and those committed to it . . . [their] existence is a background against which the phallogocentric reality is a foreground” (qtd. in Cornell 167).<sup>17</sup> Thus, a feminist revisionary history identifies the constructs of sexuality and reproduction as sites of power and conflict, which contribute to the subjective perceptions of both women and men (Newton 154). The maintenance of the gender hierarchy then requires that the “attention of women be focused on men and men’s projects . . . [and] not focused on women” (Frye 172). This dynamic is illustrated within the context of Irish culture when

popular images of the Irish past--found on greeting cards, school textbooks, multimedia tourist attractions, in the discourse of everyday life--typically construct a version of Irish history in which women are absent, insignificant, or domestic and dainty creatures who lean on the arms of powerful men. These images help to legitimate and naturalize the present social order. (Mullin 40)

This history is re-enacted and re-constructed daily in turn-of-the-century Dublin through Joyce’s representation of “the female” or womanhood in *Dubliners*.

Since “a seemingly fixed social given like masculinity reemerges as a tenuous value that its possessors must unendingly strive to keep in place[, t]his enduring condition of gender becomes the volatile act of gendering” (Veesser xv). The way the male then shapes

the idea of “the female” comes not just from the dangerous aspects (Freudian entropy, losing self in that fluid state without boundaries), but also from this fantasy of the wonderful, luscious, emotional Irish woman that seemingly conflicts with the pure, cold virgin “constructed” by the Church: “The Catholic Virgin becomes a figure of courtly devotion, whose holiness radiates a hypnotic, translucent glow. . . . an icon that seems an object of both veneration and desire. A sanctuary of heavenly peace after the fervor of sexual frenzy, the Virgin becomes a postcoital Madonna offering refuge from the turmoil of hormonal agitation” (Henke, “*Stephen*” 316). However, the function of the Virgin in her role as an earthly yet divine power became “checked when the Church became wary of it” (Kristeva 316).<sup>18</sup> Yet this popular representation persisted, and somewhere between the institutions of church and society, the culture created a charming icon: “a figure of the female body as a desirable and coyly inaccessible market commodity” (Henke, “*Stephen*” 312), which desexualized and thus made non-threatening the image of woman, who became, “after centuries of English plantations and the disaster of the famine in the mid-nineteenth century, the ideal of . . . the Irish colleen, a young beauty with submissive, downcast eyes, a humble shawl, a pale, starved cheek” (Scott, *Joyce* 14). In *Dubliners*, Joyce presents a collection of the roles constructed for and by women as part of an infrastructure, maintaining the *status quo* of the late Victorian, Irish culture of the city. In order to maintain the gendered hierarchy, the roles of these women must be most often constructed as maternal, weak, submissive, and de-sexualized.<sup>19</sup>

In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” Butler explains that “the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts”

(521). Having been inculcated with the cultural roles these acts represent, the audience participates in “shared, collective experiences” as they interpret the text (Butler, “Performative” 525). In contrast to a unified experience, Butler also recognizes the possibility of performative acts which attempt to challenge or analyze the cultural conventions that separate the imaginary image from the reality (“Performative” 527). For her, an act itself is not a contrast to the real or reality, but it “*constitutes* a reality that is in some sense new, [creating] a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality” (Butler, “Performative” 527). In order to perform the feminine-gendered role constructed by society, the actions of the body must conform to a social and historical idea of “woman”; thus, the body becomes a cultural sign, created within the context of socially constructed limits to “feminine” behavior (“Performative” 522). This personification of the woman creates its gendered self through “*a stylized repetition of acts*: bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds [which] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler, “Performative” 519). These acts are then “renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (Butler, “Performative” 523). Thus, the gendered role becomes constructed through physical acts which create a whole, and “*the appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity” (Butler, “Performative” 520). Within the background of nearly every story of *Dubliners*, that is, the environment or “scenery” of the “drama” presented, the female characters perform activities specifically designed and restricted by their Irish Catholic culture. And each character provides a slightly different aspect of the lives of women in nineteenth century Dublin.

Just as a kaleidoscope, when tilted slightly, changes the bits of an image, each story in *Dubliners* slightly shifts the roles and appearances of the female characters, with each providing another piece to the whole puzzle of women's lives. Indeed, in each section of the chronologically structured *Dubliners*, Joyce includes a story permeated with the impact of the rigorous Catholic doctrine on the lives of the women of Dublin. The texts of "The Sisters," "Eveline," "Clay," and "Grace" limn out the dysfunctional effects of Catholic faith as it works itself out in the lives of the female characters he has created. "Eveline" demonstrates a young woman's life governed by her response to the devotional tradition of the Sacred Heart and service to family. In "Clay," Joyce reveals the outcome of a life lived by the "rules," yet not "succeeding" in marriage. The main character of "Clay" also symbolizes a dysfunctional Mary, wandering the streets of--according to Joyce--the spiritually "dead" Dublin. The first story of the collection, "The Sisters," again represents the life of spinsters, serving as docile servants yet illustrating the corroded potential force of the feminine in Irish culture. In "Grace," Joyce uncovers the hypocrisy within a religion which has severely restricted and negated the feminine. In this particular story, Joyce describes males' tremendously self-defeating behaviors--recklessness, hypocrisy, and materialism (simony), but he also introduces a female character who represents the Irish woman who has stoically come to terms with the constraints of her life--a secularized Mater.

While many of these characterizations parallel the role model of the chaste (desexualized), subservient Virgin Mary, the role of the nurturing maternal figure, the Madonna, is another theme of the stories in each section. This image of motherhood takes on more secular, socially constructed forms in "The Boarding House" and "A Mother."



Having endured the cost of the expectations placed on them by church and society, the female characters in these stories challenge the *status quo*, one successfully in terms of personal power but not in terms of radical potential, the other in abject failure. Finally, at the end of the collection, Joyce takes a new turn in his criticism by offering an example of a female character in “The Dead” who has the potential for psychological liberation from the constraints of the Irish-Catholic-Victorian culture of Dublin.

## 2. Maidenhood: "Eveline"

While the promises of the Sacred Heart create the sad context of "Eveline," the story begins with a focus on a young woman's dreams for the future, but goes on to describe the borders of her "prison." The central character, Eveline Hill, wants to escape from her past and move on to a new life, with a husband, in "Buenos Ayres" (38). The "good air" of that faraway home contrasts sharply with her suffocating existence in the "black pool" of Dublin. Until the afternoon described in the essay, Eveline has fulfilled her role as caretaker of her family. She serves them through her actions at home and through her employment. As the only daughter, she has worked hard to "keep the family together" and fulfill the deathbed promise she made to her mother—a duty she has followed to her own detriment (40).<sup>20</sup> Then she meets Frank and finds a chance for a brighter future. She thinks that "Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love too" (40). Nevertheless, the future frightens her, and Joyce carefully unfolds the details of her concerns about this unknown, describing her actions and thoughts as she sits, frozen, in her room. Eveline is immobile, and the narrative is evoked through her thoughts, not her actions: "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" (36). Here again is a reference to the potential "good air" of Buenos Aires, in contrast to the dusty environment which surrounds her, but Eveline resists the change. The "familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years" bring her a strange sense of comfort "from which she never dreamed of being divided" (37). The text reveals these internal versus external descriptions through most of

this story. Eveline's internal emotions and thoughts are the focus. We see inside the mind of a young Irish woman, consumed with hope and fear, finally overcome by guilt. It is that guilt that keeps her gripping the rail on the dock, unable to move forward.

Eveline is able to recognize the brutal reality of her mother's life and death as "she mused the pitiful vision of her mother's life . . . [and] trembled as she heard again her mother's voice saying constantly with foolish insistence--'Deveraun Seraun! Deveraun Seraun!'" (40) This phrase has been interpreted as corrupted Gaelic for "the end of pleasure is pain" by Patrick Henchy of the National Library in Dublin (Tindall 22). Other possible interpretations, suggested by Professor Roland Smith of the University of Illinois, include variations (corruptions) of the Gaelic *Direadh Amrain Siabran, -ain*, "The end of the song is raving madness," or *Deireadh Fuinn S, mearaide*, "The end of a song" or "the end of inordinate desire" is "the first cloud of insanity" (Brandabur 62). If these interpretations are accurate, Joyce's use of language implies that Mrs. Hill's life of service and sacrifice, constructed and constrained by religious doctrine and social expectations, led to "raving madness" as the promises of youth--"song" and "desire"--gave way to the duty and demands of adult life. Joyce seems to imply that if Eveline cannot override her own years of social and religious indoctrination to break free to a life with Frank, her own life--though not one of "insanity" yet--could become just that.

When Eveline prays on the dock for God to show her duty, she is falling back on centuries of belief and practice. Her "fervently praying" stance resonates with the image of her mother's voice "saying constantly," and both images correspond with the image of women with bowed heads repeating "Hail Mary, full of grace . . ." while reciting the prayers

of the Rosary. Such Catholic dogma pervades Eveline's life and controls her actions. Consequently, the text reveals how "the consentaneous succession of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, Mrs. Hill, and her daughter (the Eve-line behind Eveline) indicates that female authority is exercised and reproduced in private, domestic space through the direct transmission of affective obligation and personal propriety" (Valente 431). The picture of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque in Eveline's home symbolizes more than religious devotion.<sup>21</sup> Alacoque was the epitome of submission and servitude for women. From the time she was twenty, in the seventeenth century, she is said to have experienced visions of Christ, including a series of revelations that were to continue over the next year and a half. In them, she was informed her that she was a chosen instrument to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart and then instructed in a devotion that was to become known as the Nine Fridays and the Holy Hour.<sup>22</sup> Her example presented a role model for young Irish Catholic women: their duty to God demanded service to others. Through compliance with the veneration of the Sacred Heart, believers were promised a better life here on earth and after death: "a common emblem in Catholic households, the print promises domestic peace to the faithful, a particularly ironic promise in light of the brutality of Eveline's father" (Werner 37).<sup>23</sup> And Eveline has performed her duty to her family, knowingly complying with the Irish Catholic culture's expectations.

However, Joyce describes the various ways life in Eveline's home is *not* peaceful or blessed. In this, he reveals his "contempt for the vulgarization and superstition of the Sacred Heart . . . but he knew also the good things that Irish Catholics, like his mother, thought they

saw in the devotion” (Boyle 88). The devotion was supposed to bring peace of mind, but Eveline’s life is filled with turmoil. She faces her father’s brutality and selfishness alone.<sup>24</sup>

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. And now she had nobody to protect her. (38)

Her father also abuses her financially. Money is scarce--even her own earnings are withheld from her use:

She always gave her entire wages--seven shillings . . . but the trouble was to get any money from her father. He said she used to squander the money, that she had no head, that he wasn’t going to give her his hard-earned money to throw about the streets, and much more, for he was usually fairly bad on Saturday night. (38)

She is either working at the Stores, another place she experiences emotional abuse-or at home. Eveline also works to care for the “two young children left to her charge” (38). The patriarchal and the economic proscribe her every move.

Further, the “bell” that clangs upon Eveline’s heart (in the conclusion of the story) signifies the unrelenting presence of Catholic doctrine in her life: “It does not induce joy and exultation but, on the contrary, dolor and burden, a reminder of the duties that Eveline subconsciously feels are hers” (Florio 184). The “music” that she hears from the bell contrasts sharply with the music Frank has brought into her life: Michael William Balfe’s popular *The Bohemian Girl*, a romantic operetta, a love story which “serves as an

appropriate form for Eveline's unsophisticated fantasies about life away from Dublin's secure if pedestrian pieties" (Brandabur 62). This musical and its songs will recur throughout the stories of *Dubliners*, implicitly contrasting the fantasy with the reality (and loss) of the women's lives.

As her crisis of opportunity plays itself out, Eveline's inner strength fades away until she is finally left alone on the dock "like a helpless animal." Silenced by her fear, she cannot even extend a word of "love or farewell or recognition" to Frank as he goes to the ship (41).<sup>25</sup> With her capitulation to the rigors of her culture, she loses her love and her inner will: "she cannot conceive of a real alternative to her present circumstance; the resulting failure of courage reinforces her paralysis" (Werner 36). Joyce describes her actions with shocking clarity, but a question nags the reader: does Eveline actually leave her room, or is the scene played out in her mind? Her internalized performance would reveal the devastating extent of Irish Catholic culture's control over her life. Earl G. Ingersoll notes,

More graphically than any of the *Dubliners* to follow, Eveline is the ultimate 'feminized' subject . . . Eveline comes to embody the essence of the 'feminine' in patriarchy. She has seen the possibility of 'travel,' but she evades the opportunity to 'travel' because she can associate it with only the very vulnerability and loss to which, in the end, she ironically commits herself. Even if she never leaves her room at the end of the story--indeed especially if she does not--she has passed a life sentence on herself as a 'housekeeper,' a servant of details. (506)

The consequences of her decision leave little hope of a future except as a maiden aunt in her family, caring for relatives. It is this sad denouement into a life of loneliness, servitude, and a deprived existence which reveals the connections between this story of feminine

adolescence and the stories of feminine age, “Clay” and “The Sisters.” By bringing these stories together here, one sees Joyce creating, within the text, the trajectory of a life harshly repressed by prescribed feminine roles in Dublin.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. Spinsters: “Clay” and “The Sisters”

While “Eveline” represents the victimization of a young woman through her culture’s expectations and her religious training and faith, the story “Clay” reveals several levels of meaning in the text’s illumination of Catholicism in Dublin’s culture: first, Joyce presents varied images of a stereotypical spinster character, the end-product of a life spent following the coercive codes of conduct instilled by catechism and community; and second, the images of the text present metaphors for the dysfunctional state of religion in the city itself.

The main character of “Clay” represents that woman whose internal life force has withered away. Maria, an aging woman, has come to a shame-filled point in her life, without husband or hope. Her days are acted out in external increments. Little description is given of her internal processes, yet the narrative is “mediated through Maria’s consciousness” (Werner 44). And while little physical description is given to Eveline, in “Clay,” Joyce focuses heavily on Maria’s external appearance: “Maria was a very, very small person indeed” (99). He describes her face, “a very long nose and a very long chin” (99); her “gray-green eyes [which] sparkled with disappointed shyness”; her clothes; and despite her years, “the diminutive body which she had so often adorned. . . . a nice tidy little body” (101). Maria’s worth depends not on her physical appearance but on her actions: fulfilling her role at work and in her family as the maiden aunt. The story revolves around her visit to her family on All Hallows Eve, but Joyce first describes Maria’s work environment

Situating the story on All Hallows Eve allows Joyce to create a physical image of Maria as a witch--on the night when witches roam.<sup>27</sup> Her physical gestures, movements, and



enactments create the illusion, the symbolic figure, including grotesque facial expressions: “the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin” (101), a description repeated for emphasis. The narrative opens with Maria in the kitchen of the laundry, surrounded by “big copper boilers,” like cauldrons, and participating in the making of barmbracks, a traditional food (and part of a divination game), which “seemed uncut,” but almost magically, “they had been cut into long thick even slices . . . Maria had cut them herself” (99). In this symbolic description, Joyce combines the “evil” and dangerous image of a witch with the character’s Marian resonances. While she is not obviously the “evil,” depraved being of a witch, Maria is also not guiltless in her own contribution to the enabling of the oppressive Irish Catholic patriarchal structure. Joyce does not blame her outright for the conditions of women’s lives in Dublin, yet one might question whether he thinks the fault lies as much with those like her who follow blindly church doctrines. Through her almost mindless, compulsive adherence to the dogma of the Catholic church, she perpetuates its role and control of the people, especially the women, of Dublin.

More importantly, through the third person narrator, whose shy tone mimics the character, Joyce presents a “compassionate study of the minimal term on which little, old Maria manages to sustain herself psychologically” (Beck 201). In turn-of-the-century Dublin, for an ever-increasing number of spinsters, employment was a priority if they were to survive in the city. However, “they had several obstacles to overcome, among which were the pronouncements of the Roman Catholic Church and the way in which mortals modified papal advice to suit their own prejudices. . . . There was no escaping their subservient place in the scheme of things” (Sawyer 40-41). Maria works in the *Dublin by Lamplight* project,

a place, according to Joyce, “run by a society of Protestant spinsters, widows, and childless women” (Scholes 483). These types of charities or working laundries were organized under the Protestant Church of Ireland to support homeless women, “who, otherwise, the name suggests, might be plying their trade beneath the street lamps of Dublin” (Bidwell 115). Maria is surrounded by outcasts of society--mostly prostitutes and petty criminals, doing the dirty laundry of Dublin.

Her employment sets up the first symbolic construction of “Mary” in Maria’s character: she is the celibate “virgin” surrounded by other “Marys”--the Magdalenes or prostitutes who work beside her. In *Alone of All Her Sex*, Warner notes,

Together, the Virgin and the Magdalene form a diptych of Christian patriarchy’s idea of woman. There is no place in the conceptual architecture of Christian society for a single woman who is neither a virgin nor a whore. . . . The Church venerates two ideals of the feminine--consecrated chastity in the Virgin Mary and regenerate sexuality in the Magdalene. (235)

Mary Magdalene and the Blessed Virgin Mary exemplify the Catholic church’s--and Irish society’s--attitudes toward women. Thus, the culture constructs both figures in sexual terms: Mary as virgin and Mary Magdalene as whore--until her repentance.<sup>28</sup> Maria, then, represents the “pure” female construction while her co-workers represent the sinful, dangerous aspects of the feminine as marked by Church and social stereotypes. Joyce uses this juxtaposition to emphasize Maria’s mariolatry.

The women in the laundry are aware of their own circumstances and of Maria’s. At one point, even the idea of potential marriage for the spinster becomes a joke as Lizzie Fleming tells Maria that “she is sure to get the ring” in the saucer game later that night (101).

Maria exhibits few insights into her own position, laughing away the others' jokes at her expense, exhibiting the church-sanctioned virtue of humility, however contrived. Yet Joyce repeatedly shows the shame of her asexual spinsterhood by making Maria the butt of jokes throughout this story, compounding insult upon insult. Even a store clerk ridicules her status as an old maid: "the stylish young lady behind the counter, who was evidently a little annoyed by her, asked her was it wedding-cake she wanted to buy" (102). Again, Maria blushes and smiles, nervously acknowledging her failure to achieve a marriage. When a drunk, "elderly gentleman" offers her a seat on the tram, Maria deludes herself with the idea of "how easy it is to know a gentleman" which she has never done. Even though she had responded with "demure nods and hems," this particular man made her so "confused" by his quasi-flirtation that she forgot her parcel, which she had just purchased (103). The mere suggestion of intimacy discomfits Maria, who has so long followed the church doctrines of celibacy.

That parcel also correlates with her role in the family. She brings "good things for the little ones" (103). When she fails to fulfill her role, she is "coloured with shame and vexation and disappointment" (103). This moment again represents the unfruitful nature of Maria's life; as a spinster, she can only "look forward to [a] barren li[fe] of isolation, cut off from life's feast of amorous delectation" (Henke, "James" 118). Although barren--indeed asexual--Maria has played the role of "mother" to Joe: "She had nursed him and Alphy too; and Joe used often to say: 'Mamma is mamma, but Maria is my proper mother'" (100). Yet when she has the opportunity to move in with the Donnellys, she chooses to work at the laundry--detaching herself from the family environment. Other women in *Dubliners*, even

more than the men, are also “clearly depicted as societal victims. Female characters are condemned to involuntary celibacy by their own timidity and fear, or to loveless marriages and altruistic motherhood” (Henke, “James” 119). This victimization is reinforced daily by the Irish Catholic Church and the British state.

Nevertheless, her relatives seem genuinely pleased to see her, for Maria thinks that “they were all very good to her,” as if this reception shouldn’t be expected, but it is socially dictated (105). Her presence is actually superfluous to the family gathering; she simply plays the role assigned to her, the old maid of the family. Her vulnerable status allows them to tease and embarrass her. The saucer game turns into a poor joke when blindfolded Maria picks the clay, a symbol of death. Mrs. Donnelly, the mother of the children, acknowledges the awkward incident and tries to “improve” the outcome of the game, but fails again, in that she immediately creates another cruel situation by having the spinster sing a lyrical love ballad. Of course, Maria complies. Obedience is a hallmark of her society’s expectations for women. She follows orders when she has “to get up and stand by the piano” and begins to sing at Mrs. Donnelly’s command: “Now, Maria!” (105). However, the spinster alters the song through an obvious parapraxis; she skips a verse in “The Gipsy Girl’s Dream.” Once again relating to *The Bohemian Girl*, the song refers to the “undying affection held for Arline by Thaddeus” (Brandabur 72), which culminates in the last scene, featured in the omitted verse :

I dream’d that suitors besought my hand,  
 That knights upon bended knee,  
 And with vows no maiden heart could withstand  
 That they pledged their faith to me.

And I dream'd that one of this noble host  
 Came forth my hand to claim;  
 Yet I also dream'd, which charmed me most,  
 That you loved me still the same.

This “dream” represents the polar opposite of Maria’s life: the speaker in the song is surrounded by potential lovers and has a bright, indeed secularized, future. That Maria somehow “forgets” this verse reinforces her denial or blindness to the emptiness of her own life, creating an awkward moment for her family members, who do see the irony of the situation in all its pathos. But Joyce’s most important implication is Maria’s obliviousness.

The awkwardness of her single status also echoes in the continuation of the saucer game. Maria’s second choice is a prayer book, and Mrs. Donnelly reminds her that within a year she will enter a convent, according to the “rules” of the game. Ironically, Maria already lives the life of a celibate sister. Religious practice is so interwoven with her daily life that she methodically resets her alarm to comply with attendance at early mass on All Saints Day: “She went into her little bedroom and, remembering that the next morning was a mass morning, changed the hand of the alarm from seven to six” (101). Maria, a “good” Catholic, also admits to having improved her poor opinion of Protestants since working at the laundry, but she still dislikes the presence of Protestant tracts on the wall there (100). As a “secularized” nun, Maria lacks the credibility of religious vows--and also evokes scorn from those around her. In contrast to the heartfelt faith--and guilt--of the younger Eveline, who also complies with the church’s dictates, Maria’s character reminds the reader of an automaton, performing the rituals with little insight, submitting without question to blindly

conforming her life to the “ideals” of the Irish Catholic Church, which de-sexualize and oppress her.

Joyce describes this character with a sense of Naturalistic detachment. Through his objective detail, her actions, even her thoughts, show “disconnections, gaps in logic and memory, and distortions of reality” (French 271). In denial of her reality, Maria consoles herself with “how much better it was to be independent and to have your own money in your own pocket” (102). However, Joyce seems to have two texts going on within this story: first, the All Hallows Eve events Maria experiences, and second, the symbolic events of this “Mary” wandering the streets of Dublin on the day before All Saints Day, representing the pervasive quality that the Virgin has in the oppressive Irish Catholic heritage of the city. In what Kenner calls the “Uncle Charles Principle,” the author carefully chooses words, idioms, and syntax “as expressions and implicit commentary on the most important character in the textual passage” (Werner 46). Thus, the author combines supernatural and religious images of Maria as Halloween witch and Blessed Virgin as she travels “from the Protestant Dublin by Lamplight laundry to the ‘Holy Land’ of Drumcondra” (Bidwell 115). Joyce also made extensive use of saints’ names on the streets she walks along--and those surrounding the Donnelly home. Maria’s position is physically circumscribed by at least nine streets representing saints: “Columba, Alphonsus, Patrick, Anne, Clement, Ignatius, George, Brendan, and Joseph are all there to welcome her” (Bidwell 118-19). To add to the imagery, Joyce uses the home of his Uncle John Murray as the “source” for Joe’s house, placing it on St. Brigid’s Road Lower, Maria’s final destination (Bidwell 119). In these references to saints, there can be no doubt of the significance of Maria’s name. The pathetic life of Maria

spreads around her as she goes from place to place in Dublin, symbolically “contaminating” the city with the fiction of her life, for this “Mary” represents for Joyce the awful results of the Church’s doctrines.

Joyce begins the collection of stories with what he saw as the primary source of Dublin’s affliction: the Catholic church.<sup>29</sup> “The Sisters” is a story permeated with Catholic references and images—even beyond the more obvious character of the dead priest who displays the “general paralysis of an insane society” (Ellman 163-64). Thus, Joyce introduces the story by situating his text and his readers within the paralyzed, hopeless “hell” of a spiritually dead Dublin. He also creates a foundation within Catholic doctrine for the rest of the narratives, reflecting on his own childhood experiences as well as shared allusions with his audience. After revising the story, moving from the first version’s “direct, naturalistic social plot to . . . indirect, impressionistic narration” (Ehrlich 92), and compiling the others into this collection, Joyce continued to retain this piece as the introduction. In fact, just as he refused to change his choice of the first story to begin the collection, he also refused to change the title of “The Sisters,” which carries a variety of potential meanings.

The word “sisters” could refer to siblings (of the priest), to nuns, to nurses, or to biblical references such as Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.<sup>30</sup> Although the focus of the story and the crux of interpretation remains the relationship between the young narrator and the priest, another perception can be achieved by examining the roles played by the priest’s sisters. The reader is offered only faint physical descriptions here: their actions are more important than their words. Little specific detail is given except through

glimpses in the boy's perception of the old spinsters; his language reveals their "down-trodden" lives of subservience--in Nannie's "bowed head" and her worn-out boots (14). The description of her clothing suggests "the way this old Irish Catholic woman's life has gone" (Beck 59); Joyce's text emphasizes the sisters' hard work, their poverty, and their relationship with their brother.

In the world of Dublin's small businesses, "women were owners or operators of dairies, fruit stores, and bakeries--approximately thirty percent of the shops in these categories. . . . Even in the categories of butcher shops and groceries, some ten percent were listed in women's names" (Walzl "Dubliners" 198). Women held a "virtual monopoly" on businesses which made or sold clothing for women and children (Walzl "Dubliners" 198). In "The Sisters," Eliza and Nannie represent the shopkeeper's economic situation in Ireland; their "unassuming" shop is "registered under the vague name of *Drapery*" (11). These characters not only symbolize the "Ireland that is a nation of shopkeepers, living meagerly off a narrow range of merchandise, but also, pious and hardworking, they exhaust themselves supporting their brother" (Walzl, "Dubliners: Women" 44). Thus, in a symbolic parallel to the people of Ireland working to support the Church, the sisters support their brother, the priest. Since he went to the Irish College in Rome, according to Robert T. Torchiana, the priest and his family might expect his sisters

to earn money and help put him through his training. After serving as housekeepers when he went up the ecclesiastical ladder, his sisters might expect their rewards: a decent chance at good marriages. . . . [H]is scruples, his breakdown, and then his strokes have been the wreck of all his promise and their rewards, since the Flynn sisters had to care for their brother until



his death and are left ignorant, near-destitute, aged spinsters, victims themselves of wrong choice. (22)

Thus, these women exemplify the role of the submissive handmaiden to a greater male, following cultural expectations of the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and that is precisely the role of the sisters to their brother.

Joyce connects the mediocrity of their subservient existence with resonances of the biblical sisters Mary and Martha tending the dead Lazarus. However, in this story, the priest (also the surrogate “Jesus” in Catholic doctrine) does not rise from the dead, just as Dublin lies paralyzed and “dead.” Joyce intends the priest of the story to be a “symbol of Irish life, priest-ridden and semi-paralyzed” (qtd. in Kenner, *Dublin's* 51). Nannie appears to be the worker, like Martha, as she works around the house: she exhibits the corpse, prays with visitors, and serves the refreshments. Eliza, who does all the talking for the two sisters, represents Mary, who sought interpersonal relationships, rather than performing chores. Yet even though she talks and talks, Eliza shows little insight into her world. And her malapropisms like “Freeman General” and “rheumatic tires” show her lack of education. The sisters provide an example of the limited existence of women who, “[b]y being kept in a constant state of poverty and fear by these combined forces . . . were in effect imprisoned, or paralyzed, both in mind and body” (Jackson and McGinley 11). Nannie and Eliza are some of the oldest women depicted in *Dubliners*. At this point in their lives, they perform by rote what they have been trained to do since childhood.

The culturally prescribed actions of these Irish Catholic characters remain more important than who they are or what they look like. In fact, the first female character

mentioned, the boy narrator's aunt, plays such an imperceptible role as "typical" housewife that no physical description is even given to her character: she simply acts out the part of the servant/caretaker of the household and its inhabitants. The narrator recalls that she ladled out "my stirabout" (9). Since society assumes service and entertainment to be the responsibility of the women in a family, the aunt must serve Mr. Cotter his mutton, as *commanded* by her husband: "' . . . Mr Cotter might take a pick of that leg of mutton,' he added to my aunt. . . . My aunt brought the dish from the safe and put it on the table" (11). The aunt is also "responsible" for training the young boy in acts of charity and social support. For example, the boy knows that his aunt "would have given [him] a packet of High Toast for [the priest], and this present would have roused him from his stupefied doze" (12). Later, it is she who visits the sisters' home, another example of social correctness. Notice the absence of her husband; she is accompanied only by her nephew--doing her duty to socialize him into the customs of the culture.

The female characters in this story also reveal the severely restricted, "outsider" status of women in Dublin. As Butler notes, "It is important to remember that subjects are constituted through exclusion, that is through the creation of a domain of deauthorized subjects, presubjects, figures of abjection, and populations erased from view" ("Contingent" 13). Other female characters also emerge in the background for the main events of the story, much as real women created a background for the lives of others in Dublin's society. The "two poor women" who read the death notice at the Drapery shop, standing outside the home, only look at the events from the outside, excluded from an interaction or intimacy. In fact, the only intimacies exchanged between masculine and feminine in the story come

from the woman paid to wash the “beautiful corpse” of the priest; this post mortem care presents an eerie parallel to the paid ministrations of the Magdalenes of “Clay.” In neither case is sexuality and physical intimacy a “normal” behavior. Joyce thus further emphasizes the deadened, unnatural behaviors and attitudes of the Irish, male and female, toward the human body and human sexuality. Here, only “professionals” like nurses, midwives, and prostitutes perform such dis-armed and physically intimate acts as washing or touching bodies.

Playing counter-point to their dead brother, the sisters appear as celibate caretakers, another allusion in the title of the story. The terms “sister” and “nun” have “distinct meaning in canon law but there is a wide practice of employing them interchangeably” (MacCurtain, “Godly” 245). In nineteenth-century Ireland (and for many previous centuries), theologians and priests appealed to women to adopt the virginal (desexualized) life of the convent because then they would relieve themselves of the consequences of the Fall. In contrast to the marriage-as-a-sacrament teachings of the Church, the priests constantly extolled the joys of the single life for a woman, “without a husband to obey or pregnancies or endure” (Warner 73). Yet the Flynn sisters had a brother who was “head of the house”—a role implied by the description of “Eliza seated in his arm-chair in state” (14).

The sisters share another “religious” role: they act as confessors—a conscience and/or an internal commentary for the priest. They acknowledge the priest’s guilt over the broken chalice. In fact, Boyle suggests that “there is an indication that following the madness and death of the priest, the ignorant old ladies, foreshadowing the senile he-ladies Mamalujo of *Finnegans Wake*, take over the management of the Church and sacraments, at least in the

Eucharist” (Boyle 35). Indeed, as the story progresses, the sisters engage in a symbolic version of the Mass.

This re-creation of a male-dominant ritual also allows Joyce to create what Kristeva calls a feminine image of absolute authority, which is “more attractive as it appeared removed from paternal sternness” (317). The boy narrator describes the actions of the participants, reinforcing the symbolism of each detail:

We crossed [*blessed-in another version*] ourselves and came away. In the little room downstairs we found Eliza seated in his arm-chair in state. I groped my way towards my usual chair in the corner while Nannie went to the sideboard and brought out a decanter of sherry and some wine-glasses. She set these on the table and invited us to take a little glass of wine. Then, at her sister’s bidding, she filled out the sherry into the glasses and passed them to us. She pressed me to take some cream crackers also, but I declined because I thought I would make too much noise eating them. She seemed to be somewhat disappointed at my refusal and went over quietly to the sofa, where she sat down behind her sister. (14-5)

In this scene, the “congregation” first blesses itself (the sign of the cross) then moves to the parlor (chapel) with the “priest figure” (Eliza) sitting at the altar, observing the elements of the Mass, as Nannie, the liturgical minister prepares the host (“cream crackers”) and wine. She passes the “bread” and wine to the others, who sit “quietly” meditating as if in a church. The scene mimics Joyce’s comparison of the story as a whole to a “Greek Orthodox Mass in which the celebrant is only occasionally visible” (Erlich 91). The “official” celebrant, the priest, has died, yet the learned-by-rote ritual performance of the believers continues. The women are assuming roles usually restricted to them: “this feminine power must have been experienced as denied power, more pleasant to seize because it was both archaic and

secondary, a kind of substitute for effective power in the family and city but no less authoritarian, the underhand double of explicit phallic power” (Kristeva 317). As Joyce meticulously describes the action of Nannie preparing and serving the *faux* Eucharist of the sherry and cake, the sisters are not actually acting as priests, but as “sacristans, supplying the bread and the wine, a job often performed by nuns or ‘sisters’” (Dilworth 110).

The sisters’ performance of the Eucharist should not be shocking: Joyce alludes here to a time when nuns had more power and more of a role in the workings of the Church. In fact, in the history of the Church in Europe, “nuns seem to have preceded monks, having appeared in the middle of the third century [and in] Ireland from the outset, they combined authority with humility, and their achievement of a special status was helped in no small way by the aristocratic connections, male and female, of Brigid’s contemporaries” (Sawyer 9). The role of the nuns (what they were allowed to do in ritual and vocation) had changed as the centuries passed, leaving them in subservient roles as “brides of Christ”—and restricted from performing the sacraments of the Mass. Thus, the church and spirituality became a “male-supervised space” (Scott, *James* 60)

The scenes at the sisters’ home also reflect the “social” expectations that the women must act as “hostesses” to visitors in their home. In Nannie’s effort to be of service to the boy, offering him cake, she is “disappointed at his refusal” (15). He does not allow her to fulfill her role. The aunt repeatedly acknowledges the sisters’ care of the priest: “You did all you could do” (15-16). And they reinforce their role by mentioning “all the work [they] did,” yet admitting “he was no great trouble to us” (16). It would be socially incorrect for

them to admit that he was trouble for them; their role is to serve without complaint, in the background, silent.

Traditionally, critics have interpreted the ellipses placed in the conversation among the female characters as part of what the boy narrator could not understand, but they also represent the shared, silenced roles of the women of Dublin. Even though some critics have taken issue with the “banal” clichés the women make to each other as they sit in the parlor, the phrases like “God have mercy on his soul” (10, 12) and “Ah, well, he’s gone to a better world” (15) demonstrate not only a connection to the overwhelming religion of the society but also the characters’ repetition of ritualized discourse--like repeating the responsorial in the liturgy. The characters do not verbalize spontaneous thought or feeling; they repeat half-prayers and quasi-incantations: “They have memorized all the set responses, but have heard none of the real questions, not even concerning their own unfortunate brother” (Beck 60).

Throughout his career, Joyce privileged the use of language; without speech, his characters don’t “live”: consequently, “the absence of a vital language infects the characters’ thought process, rendering them progressively less capable of communicating any important truth” (Werner 42). Silenced by their culture, they can only give pre-conditioned responses. These responses are even timed: the aunt had “waited until Eliza sighed” before commenting (15). Each player has specific actions to fulfill and specific responses to give. In *Dubliners*, “all modes of communication--direct speech, formal discourse, even the early forms of stream of consciousness--are impoverished” (Werner 44). Moreover, these abbreviated

language patterns, “silences,” illustrate the compliant, unthinking, oppressed lives of the “background,” the quiet female characters.

#### 4. Matriarchs: “The Boarding House,” “A Mother,” and “Grace”

Even though he filled the stories of *Dubliners* with “spinsters” and bachelors, Joyce also detailed life for female characters after courtship, marriage, and motherhood. A few months before his mother died, Joyce had expressed a more positive sentiment (to her) about the family, “which was an indirect affirmation of her role and a manifestation of his dedication to the family theme that would culminate in *Finnegans Wake*: ‘no one that has raised up a family has failed utterly in my opinion’” (qtd. in Scott, *James* 64). However, in his early writing, the mother can often be interpreted as a negative stereotype: “the determined, conventional upholder of bourgeois standards and ideas and strong supporter of the establishment, both church and state, when it suited her purposes” (Walzl, “*Dubliners: Women*” 46). By presenting his audience with variations, Joyce reveals the many ways in which those institutions consumed and crippled his own mother’s life--like all the other Irish Catholic women in Dublin.

As we progress through the chronological structure of *Dubliners*, moving from stories of adolescence to stories of adulthood, Joyce’s text again focuses on women--but with a slight shift away from absolute attachment to and compliance with Catholic ritual and practice--expanding beyond the strict model of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The female characters in these “middle” stories illustrate the effect of the social environment on women--and their children. The “practical” attitudes of these Irish matriarchs toward marriage also appear in two stories which foreground the actions of the mothers, “The Boarding House” and “A Mother.” In these stories, Joyce not only examines the role of the



“dominant” mother in Dublin society, but the text also reveals the disparate outcomes of women trying to cope within the boundaries established by their cultures and trying to manipulate the codes of conduct and moral values toward their own empowerment.

In “The Boarding House,” Joyce sets up an onerous triangle which ultimately victimizes the male character, in contrast to the common victimization of the female characters in *Dubliners* and other literature of the late Victorian period. A Freudian interpretation of this story identifies the mother as

the figure of material immanence, bound to mortality through the navelcord of physiological process. And the temptress is portrayed, more often than not, as a ‘potential mother’ in training. Compelled by the life force of the species, she becomes a pawn to the instinctual drives of racial propagation.... [T]he adolescent girl learns narcissistic tricks to tempt the ingenuous suitor. Her body is her sole commodity, the one ‘good’ that she can trade for the infinite security of marriage. (Henke, “James” 118)

Even though most interpretations would identify the negative aspects of Mrs. Mooney’s behavior, I argue that she also exhibits pro-active behaviors as a way of overcoming the parameters established for women in Dublin’s culture. She has tried to find her daughter Polly “honorable” work as a typist, but her estranged husband Mr. Mooney’s harassment of their daughter at her office has required Mrs. Mooney to bring the young woman home to do “housework” at the boarding house--“with the run of the young men” (63). Polly is described as “a slim girl of nineteen; she had light soft hair and a small full mouth. Her eyes, which were grey with a shade of green through them, had a habit of glancing upwards when she spoke with anyone, which made her look like a little perverse madonna” (62)--a symbol of

a “woman as deceptive virginal figure” (Cixous 61). But who is really the deceiver--and the deceived?

Joyce briefly explains Mrs. Mooney’s situation in life in the story’s introductory paragraphs: “she had married her father’s foreman and opened a butcher’s shop” (61). When her husband “drank, plundered the till, [and] ran headlong into debt,” Mrs. Mooney leaves him. Thus, she embodies a “masculine” will in

her determination to survive, to triumph despite the strict impositions of a world ruled by men. Her husband representing the negative masculine principle here, breaks pledges and ruins her business; separation ensues. A surrogate for a male guardian and protector, Mrs. Mooney sets up a boarding house in which she establishes a semblance of matriarchy; she decrees the laws of totem and taboo. (San Juan 103)

And since she is a “good” Catholic, who always attends noon mass at Marlborough Street, she “went to the priest and got a separation from him with care of the children,” the only respectable way to “end” a marriage for an Irish Catholic in Dublin (61). More than the breakdown of the marriage sacrament, economic necessity sets in motion the events of the story that follows.

The only physical description of Mrs. Mooney reveals her to be “a big, imposing woman” (62) with a “great, florid face” (65). Acting as head of her own home, “the boarding house in Hardwicke Street,” she governs “cunningly and firmly, [knowing] when to give credit and when to be stern and when to let things pass” (62). Mrs. Mooney “allows that degree of laxity which will best forward her designs while least endangering the appearance of respectability” (Beck 151). Other characters in the house and the text calling her *The*

*Madam* subtly suggest the sexual improprieties she facilitates between her daughter and young men as well as the materialistic purposes of her manipulations of Bob Doran.

In contrast to the authentic reactions of an “outraged mother” that she will later pretend to be, Mrs. Mooney watches Polly and Doran--purposefully keeping “her own counsel” (63). The narrator “reassures” the reader that “there had been no open complicity between mother and daughter, no open understanding” (63), but she does nothing to interfere with the scandalous seduction. The ever-practical Mrs. Mooney deals with “moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat: and in this case she had made up her mind” (63). She is attempting to manipulate the dynamics of the traditional power relationships between men and women in Irish culture. Mrs. Mooney seems to have no ethical qualms and no illusions left of the nature of these relationships. Indeed, not only is she aware of Doran’s social position and job prospects, she understands the impact negative publicity would have on him. Images of the “game” she is playing with the two pawns, Polly and Doran, are also evoked in the text: “She counted all her cards again” (65). Her winning this game means that she would succeed unlike “some mothers she knew who could not get their daughters off their hands” (65). Mrs. Mooney is conducting a business transaction--she has fulfilled her maternal duties by raising her children--and now works to establish their futures. And she expects Doran to “pay” for services rendered.

Doran thus becomes the willing victim of the combined religious, social, and political forces which had debased the Dublin society Joyce is recalling. Step by step, Polly leads the apparently “unaware” celibate into the trap--through her acts of “thoughtfulness,” her “casual caresses,” and finally, “her crying.” Doran does admit to himself at least once

“a notion that he was being had” (66). In fact, he warns himself, “Once you are married, you are done for” (66). However, circumstances arise that leave him little room to maneuver around the Mooneys.<sup>31</sup> As Doran recalls his and Polly’s first night together, the scene is filled with religious symbolism, like a ritual sacrifice--with candles, incense (perfume), and color imagery (white and red):

Then late one night as he was undressing for bed she had tapped at his door, timidly. She wanted to relight her candle at his, for hers had been blown out by a gust. It was her bath night. She wore a loose open combing-jacket of printed flannel. Her white instep shone in the opening of her furry slippers and the blood glowed warmly behind her perfumed skin. From her hands and wrists too as she lit and steadied her candle a faint perfume arose. (67)

But this sacrifice now demands a “reparation” on the part of Doran. Even though Mrs. Mooney is aware that a man can “go his ways as if nothing has happened, having had his moment of pleasure” (64-65), she knows that the honor and moral value system of the culture support her claim. In fact, “according to conventional morality . . . Polly is a woman and therefore innocent victim” (Cixous 59)--at least by social standards if not ethically.

Although the text gives a description of Doran’s torment at the hands of the priest and through his own conscience, Polly’s expectations and low sense of shame are revealed in the last scene of the story:

Then she dried her eyes and went over to the looking-glass. She dipped the end of the towel in the water-jug and refreshed her eyes with the cool water. She looked at herself in profile and readjusted a hairpin above her ear. Then she went back to the bed again and sat at the foot. She regarded the pillows for a long time, and the sight of them awakened in her mind secret, amiable memories. She rested the nape of her neck against the cool iron bedrail and fell into a reverie. (69)

She has also been a willing victim--and accessory--to her mother's efforts to attain "what she had been waiting for" (69). Although Mrs. Mooney is trying to gain some power or control in a culture that denies her any real autonomy (in the public sphere), the text reveals the cruel irony of her situation. She is cunning and powerful enough to work within the system, but her goal, sadly, is to project her daughter back into the very social structure that constrains them. After years of indoctrination and socialization, she cannot step outside the cultural assumptions that dominate her life. Mrs. Mooney works within these assumptions to achieve her daughter's "security," but she cannot guarantee any brighter future for Polly than she has had.

In "A Mother," Joyce reveals how cultural constraints were enforced to subdue any woman who chose to step outside the established boundaries. Rather than the monstrous, aggressive mother of traditional interpretations, Joyce's description of Mrs. Kearney represents the victim of bourgeois standards of "respectability" and the social institutions governing the lives of the women of Dublin, "closing off her options, circumscribing her life" (Grace 277). Only an examination of the complex cultural context of Mrs. Kearney's social situation, the behavior of the people around her, and their reactions or attitudes toward her can reveal her true character. Jane Miller notes the "astonishing double standard" evidenced in the pejorative descriptions and vehement disapproval of traditional analyses (409), coupled with Freudian allusions to the phallic mother or with the cultural stereotype of bourgeois standards. Indeed, many scholars have criticized this female character who represents the antithesis of May Joyce: Mrs. Kearney is guilty of the cardinal sins of pride,

greed, and avarice. Yet the text reveals two other themes within the narrative, a description of the fine arts scene in late nineteenth-century Dublin and, more importantly, the effects of “Irish provinciality, ignorance, and parsimony on the career of a young would-be artist”-- first, on Mrs. Kearney and then on her daughter (Walzl, “*Dubliners*” 184). Instead of looking at the main--and female--character as a stereotype, the text reveals yet another Dubliner in a public situation.

Like Mrs. Mooney, Mrs. Kearney is a “determined woman.” Her brief life history, again given in the first paragraphs of the story, reveals a life stunted by the “recognized virtues” of the bourgeois Irish Catholic middle class. Once, she had been

educated in a high-class convent, where she had learned French and music. As she was naturally pale and unbending in manner she made few friends at school. When she came to the age of marriage she was sent out to many houses, where her playing and ivory manners were much admired. (136)

However, for all her skills and refinements, she had to settle “out of spite” to be the wife of “a bootmaker from Ormond Quay” (137), silencing the gossips and critics who surrounded her. The discrepancy of her behavior versus expected social codes in front of her peers leads to potential embarrassment, then shame, from a sense of failure or “lack” in the eyes of others (Felski 1). Consequently, she shows her practical side in acknowledging that a man like Mr. Kearney “would wear better than a romantic person” (137). She thus achieves an unusual status in the stories of *Dubliners*. As Miller explains, “In a world filled with alcoholic husbands, downtrodden wives, and abused children, the Kearney’s marriage is an achievement. Mrs Kearney chooses to survive and thrive rather than be stifled by the

absence of romance in Dublin or its wretched economic conditions” (Miller 414). In fact, this situation shares little in common with those characters who follow the Sacred Heart or practice other “requirements” of the Church.

In this narrative, it is Mr. Kearney who attends mass more regularly than his wife: “he went to the altar every first Friday, sometimes with her, oftener by himself” (137). The first Friday observance is part of the devotions to the Sacred Heart: the twelfth promise reads, in part, “. . . that My all-powerful love will grant to all who receive Holy Communion on the First Fridays of nine consecutive months, the Grace of final repentance” (Gifford 50). However, from Mrs. Kearney’s view--told through the narrator--she “never weakened in her religion and was a good wife to him”--implying that her role as wife corresponded to the Catholic church’s expectations (137). She performed her duties as a wife, acting as a caregiver for him: “when his cough troubled him, she put the eiderdown quilt over his feet and made a strong rum punch” (137). Nevertheless, she also acts as the dominant partner; for example, at a party, *she* decides when to leave: “At some party in a strange house when she lifted her eyebrow ever so slightly he stood up to take his leave” (137). In this marriage, the degrees of power within the relationship have shifted, allowing her (the wife) to control some situations or behaviors of the couple.

Since Mr. Kearney has been a good provider financially, their daughters do have dowries “of one hundred pounds each when they come to the age of twenty-four” (137). The oldest daughter Kathleen, in an echo of her mother’s adolescence, goes to a “good” convent school for education in French and music. Then, she furthers her training at “the Academy,” the Royal Academy of Music in Dublin. The continued practice of educating their daughters

in the “fine arts” reveals a (lower) middle class--encapsulated in bourgeois values--anxious to display refinement even though low in income (Felski 1).

From all appearances, the Kearney marriage and family looks like it meets all the parameters established in Dublin’s cultural expectations. However, Mrs. Kearney’s attempts to become a lady have become a trap--“without freedom, autonomy, the chance to realize her dreams or to escape Dublin’s paralysis” (Grace 278). The real tension in Mrs. Kearney’s life comes from her own stifled dreams; Joyce reveals that “she never put her own romantic ideas away” (137). In her youth, she found her way blocked to the expression of her talents. Then, after two decades, biding her time and keeping her dreams and wished in silence, she finds a means of self expression--through her eldest daughter (Benstock, *Narrative* 23).

Mrs. Kearney reveals a pragmatic interest in the Irish Renaissance--and the promotion of her marriageable daughter. Considering employment opportunities and limited marriage possibilities, this is “a practical response to a bleak situation” (Miller 411). In contrast to Mrs. Mooney’s use of her daughter’s physical appearance to achieve security for her daughter, Mrs. Kearney decides to “take advantage of her daughter’s name”--Kathleen--in joining the Irish Revival (137).<sup>32</sup> Joyce here mocks the shallow affectations of the Irish middle class in response to the Revival: Mrs. Kearney hires a private tutor of Gaelic but can only say “good-bye” to her friends in Irish, and Kathleen Kearney and her sister send “Irish picture postcards to their friends and these friends sent back other Irish picture postcards” (137). The narrator further describes another “performance” of the women of the Kearney family, who are trying to comply with yet another cultural “norm”--participation in a musical concert celebrating the “Irishness” of the *artistes*.



When Kathleen is invited to be an accompanist at a series of four concerts, Mrs. Kearney attempts to gain control over the event during her visits with Mr. Holohan, but “her authority and that of her contract for her daughter’s performance are from the first constrained by and within the domestic site” (Valente 432). Mrs. Kearney serves Mr. Holohan refreshments while drawing up a contract for Kathleen to receive payment for her work--“8 guineas.” The sum reveals Mrs. Kearney’s lack of experience in the public sphere. As Don Gifford explains, this payment would be appropriate if Kathleen had been an experienced performer--and if the performance itself was of higher caliber (98). Consequently, it is the mechanizations and the cultural dictates Mrs. Kearney goes through to achieve her daughter’s (and in a way her own) success that create the main plot line. The language of the text emphasizes the character’s attempt to control the situation: “She entered heart and soul into the details of the enterprise, advised and dissuaded,” and “she forgot nothing, and thanks to her, everything that was to be done was done” (138, 139). Later, it is Mrs. Kearney who repeatedly “noticed,” “saw at once,” “learned” and became “alarmed” as her plan for her daughter’s career falls apart--from her own faulty expectations. She is observing the situation as an outsider, yet seems unaware of her position and the restrictions placed on it by those around her; her control and authority disappeared when she left her home.

The mediocre concert then becomes a “scene for the airing of a gender grievance which cannot be ‘phrased’ or sustained” (Valente 430). Mrs. Kearney has again been victimized by the system surrounding her. Denied her payment for services rendered and facing injustice, she earns the sympathy of “a resisting reader” (Valente 431 ). She can only

wonder how events would have transpired differently “if she had been a man” (148). In the nationalist organizations of the Irish Renaissance, women were assigned “traditionally ‘feminine’ tasks; they were involved in cultural events and other fund-raising activities but were expected to stay *in the background* when it came to political issues and policymaking” (emphasis mine, Miller 412). The focus on the men’s actions within this foreground are thus created against a “static background” of women; as Marilyn Frye explains, these figures are “perceptible, have identity, only in virtue of their movement against a background. . . . What would draw the eye to the background would be any sudden or well-defined motion in the background” (167). The text here reveals what happens when a woman forcefully steps out from that background.

Because Mrs. Kearney has assumed the space between domestic and public sphere is permeable, she tries to relate to Mr. Holohan and other men at the concert, including the “committee,” on equal terms. But the story reveals that the patriarchal forces of the city, represented by the coordinators of the concerts, will not be “overridden by the matriarch” (Grace 276). Mrs. Kearney “transgresses the boundaries that separate the worlds of public and private, male and female” (Miller 417). It is at this moment that the text reveals an unspoken reality of Irish culture where

women are the ones who hold things together, who are the practical caretakers of the family, and where the men tend to be the weak ones, the feckless dreamers and drunks. But there is an unspoken agreement that this matriarchal control must always be covert and private. The fiction of the patriarchy in Ireland must be maintained. (Miller 417)

The placement of this story between two narratives almost exclusively about men, “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” and “Grace,” reinforces the text’s illustration of Mrs. Kearney’s position in society, “outnumbered and out of place” in the public sphere (Miller 417).

As her frustration and anger increase, Mrs. Kearney manages to stop herself at one point with the admonishment that “it would not be ladylike” to challenge Mr. Fitzpatrick (141), for as long as Mrs. Kearney behaves as a lady, she is “acceptable,” culturally constructed as “decorous and decorated, passive, silent, long suffering and dependent on male chivalry” (Grace 278). The Irish Catholic middle class of Joyce’s Dublin reacted to women who sought equal treatment with suspicion, often criticizing and even ostracizing feminists and suffragists (Miller 412).

On the first night of the performance, Mrs. Kearney begins “to regret that she had put herself to any expense for such a concert” (140). On one level, she realizes that this will not be the romantic, extravagant fantasy she has dreamed up. She has over-reached and over-acted in anticipation of something to fulfill her own fantasy. On another level, she reacts against the injustice done to her in the flagrant gender discrimination displayed by the men she encounters. Mrs. Kearney saw the contract as a proper business deal, and her frustration mounts as the men change the rules on her. Her frustration, disappointment, and anger originate as much from her youthful “dreams and disillusion . . . as with any violation of a contract” (Miller 414). The second night, Mr. Kearney accompanies her to the concert hall, and she hopes to use “his abstract value as a male” to obtain her fees (141). As “head of the house,” he will “protect” the interests of the “vulnerable” women. Again, she strives “to be polite” (144), but as the evening progresses, she looks “as if she would attack

someone with her hands” (148). In the masculine world where she finds herself, again, with no control and no response to her concerns; the text shows that her language, Joyce’s signature of logical, empowered thought, “degenerates into mere gesticulation” (Miller 420).

“Silenced” again, like so many other female characters in the background of the stories of *Dubliners*, Mrs. Kearney--even when foregrounded--is not heard so much as seen across the room showing her frustration and crisis in the power struggle with Mr. Holohan and the “invisible” committee. Her subsequent “scandalous exhibition” (147) embarrasses those backstage, and, as the narrator explains, “After that Mrs Kearney’s conduct was condemned on all hands: everyone approved of what the committee had done” (148). The other performers go on to say, “Miss Kathleen Kearney’s musical career was ended in Dublin after that” (147). By the end of the story, Joyce describes Mrs. Kearney as “haggard with rage”; the reader only “sees” her arguing with her husband and daughter, a distance created through the description given by the narrator. That distance reflects that, just as her life became foregrounded at the beginning of the story, at this point, she begins to fade back into the background. Once again in her life, Mrs. Kearney suffers from the patriarchal culture that confines her and ignores her abilities. Her daughter’s chances to achieve a career and a better life than she has had are also limited by the same constraints of culture--and the cycle of disappointment continues.

“Grace” is the story which originally finished the collection, and it is within this narrative that Joyce reveals the harsh reality of marital life faced by women in Dublin.<sup>33</sup> Far

from a romantic fantasy, the wife of this story, Mrs. Kernan, has come to terms with the parameters of her life: "After a quarter of a century of married life, she had very few illusions left" (157). Joyce describes Mrs. Kernan as an "active, practical woman of middle age" (155). She suspects, after 25 years of marriage, "that a man of her husband's age would not change greatly before death" (157). Again the text reveals a melancholic, unfulfilled existence." Within three weeks of her wedding, Mrs. Kernan "had found a wife's life irksome and, later on, when she was beginning to find it unbearable, she had become a mother" (156). This latter role, which "presented to her no insuperable difficulties" (156), necessitates her staying in the marriage, but also leads to a continuing cycle of oppression, fostered by the self-defeating behavior pattern of the Marian image followed by Irish women, usually in the roles of wife and mother.

Declan Kiberd notes that many artists of the era wrote about the "over-intense, clutching relationship between mother and son . . . Women sought from their sons an emotional fulfillment denied them by their men . . . but the women could not have achieved such dominance if many men had not abdicated the role of father" (381). The woman--wife and mother--must fill the space vacated by the ineffectual father. And in "Grace," Mrs. Kernan's attention has been drawn to her sons. The narrator's voice becomes that of a proud mother as she describes her children: "Her two eldest sons were launched. One was in a draper's shop in Glasgow and the other was clerk to a tea-merchant in Belfast. They were good sons, wrote regularly and sometimes sent home money. The other children were still at school" (156). The children--raised predominantly by the mother--have achieved success

far above their inept father, echoing Joyce's own family. Mary Frances Keating, an Irish journalist, describes the negative aspects of this "matriarchy":

The Irishwoman has had to become the 'dominant' female, a role which suits her ill and makes her quite frequently dislike herself heartily. It earns for her, too, the dislike of the man. . . . In marriage . . . the woman has to be the driving force. . . . Often denied the protection, affection, and tenderness of marital love, she placates herself with a strangle hold on her children. (qtd. in Walzl, "*Dubliners: Women*" 46).

Not only does Mrs. Kernan--the Irish Catholic housewife and mother--care for their children, she also takes care of the house "shrewdly." Throughout the text, Mrs. Kernan is mentioned performing household chores such as "ironing" (161) and washing--she comes into the room "drying her hands" (170). She also takes care of Mr. Kernan, who seems from the character's description to be what is now termed a "functioning alcoholic": "[s]he accepted his frequent intemperance as part of the climate, healed him dutifully whenever he was sick, and always tried to make him eat breakfast" (156). Later, she even rehabilitates his hat, injured in his latest "episode" (173). Mrs. Kernan also plays hostess to his friends: escorting them into his room, bringing them a tray of drinks, and announcing new arrivals. Her interaction with the men visiting her husband are the rare examples of her speech. Throughout most of her activities, she is silent: she has learned to "hold her tongue" in a "masculine world of witty repartee and cutting responses" (Benstock, *Narrative* 23). Her reactions to the events around her are shared with the audience through her thoughts, which are revealed by the narrator.

Yet even with the dismal servitude of her marriage, a note of romance still exists, for every time she sees a new bride and groom, she recalls “with vivid pleasure how she had passed out of the Star of the Sea Church in Sandymount, leaning on the arm of a jovial well-fed man, who was dressed smartly in a frock-coat and lavender trousers and carried a silk hat gracefully balanced upon his other arm” (156). The name of the church evokes the image of the role model for Catholic women--as Gifford explains, “The Star of the Sea (*Stella Maris*) is an appellation of the Virgin Mary” (102). Subtly, Joyce reminds the audience of the pervasive presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the every-day lives of the women of Dublin.

For Mrs. Kernan, religion has become “a habit” (157). As the narrator explains--through the character’s tone--“her beliefs were not extravagant. She believed steadily in the Sacred Heart as the most generally useful of all Catholic devotions and approved of the sacraments” (158). She is another Irish Catholic woman portrayed by Joyce as caught up in rituals learned by rote, who shows little insight into the application of these “devotions” to her life. Of course, the plot of the story centers on the rehabilitation--and spiritual redemption--of the alcoholic Mr. Kernan. With sardonic wit and a castigating eye for detail, Joyce describes the efforts of his friends to make him “a good holy pious and God-fearing Roman Catholic” (170). Mr. Kernan, who had converted to Catholicism at his marriage, “had not been in the pale of the Church for twenty years” (157). In response to the men’s plans for a “retreat,” Mrs. Kernan thinks to herself that she cannot see the harm in their trying to help her husband.

The most telling--and critical--description of her life comes from Mrs. Kernan's admission that "her faith was bounded by her kitchen" (158). Here Joyce alludes to Knock, the most popular Irish shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose devotions there "focus on the hardships of the Irish mothers in their family kitchens" (Warner 190). In her social role as wife and mother, an Irish matriarch keeps house, reminds her family of social traditions and courtesy, and demonstrates her feelings physically. Her name often implies the close ties she has to motherhood and Ireland: she would be named Mary, for the Blessed Virgin; Kathleen, for the land itself; or Brigid, for one of the patron saints of Ireland--and a composite of Christian and pagan deities reflecting fertility and womanhood as well as spiritual beliefs.

Joyce also connects Mrs. Kernan with the more secular, indeed pagan, Ireland, when he writes, "If she was put to it, she could believe in the banshee and the Holy Ghost" (158). In a rare instance like this, Joyce connects an Irish female characters in *Dubliners* to the myths and traditions usually privileged in the literature of the Irish Renaissance. In *Sisterhood is Global*, Robin Morgan explains, "Few peoples have as rich, preserved, and recorded a tradition of gynocratic myths, legends, and religio- philosophical beliefs as the Irish . . . Irish folklore is a dense tapestry of faerie figures . . . legends and spells which encoded political and religious records of reverence for the female" (346). Yet even in the Irish Renaissance movement, women were not revered or freed from restrictive cultural expectations. As he ends the original "collection" of narratives, Joyce has moved away from the woman as slave to church doctrine and presented a more secular, "practical" female



character, with connections to the similarly more secular characters of Mrs. Mooney and Mrs. Kearney.

## 6. 'A symbol of something': "The Dead"

The final story of the collection, "The Dead," has often been interpreted as "a funeral ceremony with its ritual dancing, ceremonial feast, formal speech, and ritual singing" (Foster 146), a microcosm of the paralyzed, spiritually dead Dublin dissected in the previous stories of the collection. Through a variety of scenes and conversations, Joyce revisits the previous stories of *Dubliners*, "such as the recurring talk about the Church, the same vulgarity, narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, and even drunkenness . . . a showcase of Dublin's social life" (Peterson, *James* 35). Even though the Morkans' party occurs on the Feast of the Epiphany, there is much less overt expression of religiosity in the last story of the collection, yet the pervasiveness of the Irish Catholic Church is present in other images, such as the author's choice of characters' names, and bits of dialogue referencing priests and the Church. The narrator describes this annual event as "always a great affair, the Misses Morkan's annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it. Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style, as long as anyone could remember" (175). This party offers the Misses Morkan "a showcase for their profession of teaching music, work carried on largely at home" (Scott, *James* 61). Moreover, J. W. Foster calls the detailed descriptions of the party and dinner "an exile's salute, through Joyce's remembrance of his great aunt's Christmas parties, to Irish generosity and hospitality, Dublin sociability, and the Irish family connection and its ritual and festive importance" (146). Indeed, Joyce himself had written to his brother Stanislaus that he had "reproduced (in *Dubliners* at least) none of the attraction of the city . . . its ingenuous insularity and hospitality" (*L II*, 164). In his selection

of details and references, the author adds some warmth and color to the collection. Above all, the story serves as a coda that summarizes and extends the major themes of *Dubliners*.

In considering the themes and purpose of the story, Norris asserts that “The Dead” is “not a critique on patriarchy, but a critique of his [Joyce’s] own art as contributing to the oppression and the silencing of women. These critiques are not overt, however, because they are not lodged in the narration, in what is said in the text, but rather in gaps, contradictions, silences, in what is *not* said” (192). However, I will argue that the “graceless, vulgar, blurring voices of the women” she also identified in the text symbolize a beginning, a birth--messy, noisy, full of energy--of a “new” female character, a sexualized woman who reveals an intense, deep emotional core (Norris 194). Gretta Conroy represents, if not a break with the patriarchal traditions of the Irish-Catholic-Victorian culture, at least a transition toward the multi-dimensional female characters of Joyce’s mature works, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Here Joyce

emerges as a revisionist thinker determined to see old institutions in a new light and to question traditional patterns of social organization. He openly challenges an authoritarian power structure and draws acerbic caricatures of masculine bravado. By comically deflating prevalent types of masculine prowess and female passivity, Joyce advocates a more enlightened ideal of androgynous behavior for both sexes. (Henke, “James” 119)

His sympathy for women oppressed by the restrictive cultural conditions in Dublin clearly resonates in the characterizations of “the female” within the text, but he tempers his portrayal with an “ironic dissection of feminine weakness or hypocrisy,” coupled with or biased by the traditional male attitudes of the period (Walzl, “*Dubliners*: Women” 53).

Within the text of “The Dead,” Joyce includes all the female character “types” described in the previous stories of *Dubliners*. They are shown in relation to others as they “perform” their culturally typed roles: playing the piano, dancing, and singing as well as greeting visitors, taking cloaks, and cooking. In considering these characters and describing their performative acts, the text reveals how Joyce juxtaposes Gretta Conroy into the complicated religious, political, and social context of women in Dublin’s society.

Here again are spinster sisters, this time Julia and Kate Morkan, whose professions reflect the musical talents of previous female characters like Mrs. Kearney and her daughter in “A Mother” and Emily Sinico in “A Painful Case”: “Julia . . . was still the leading soprano in Adam and Eve’s, and Kate, being too feeble to go about much, gave music lessons to beginners on the old square piano in the back room” (176). And the spinster Julia’s song “Arrayed for the Bridal Veil” appears as incongruous as Maria’s ballad from *The Bohemian Girl* in “Clay.” Without husbands or children of their own, the sisters build their own “family” with nieces and nephews, “old friends of the family, the members of Julia’s choir, any of Kate’s pupils that were grown up enough, and even some of Mary Jane’s pupils too” (175). Even though their age is repeatedly stressed, they are busy as coordinators and hostesses of their annual party: “toddling round the table, walking on each other’s heels, getting in each other’s way and giving each other unheeded orders” (197). As their guests arrive, the two women are seen “gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come” (175).

Helping the sisters with the party preparations and hostessing activities is Lily, the caretaker's daughter, who performs housemaid's work for them (176), another "slavey" like the young woman in "Two Gallants." Unlike the naive, guilt-ridden "Eveline," Lily's attitudes toward men reveal some experience and some cynicism in this young woman of "marriageable" age; she explains to Gabriel early in the story, "with great bitterness: 'The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you'" (178). There are also other "maidens" at the party, Miss Daly, Miss Power, Miss Furlong, and Miss O'Callaghan, who flirtatiously laugh "in musical echo to his [Mr. Browne's] pleasantry, swaying their bodies to and fro, with nervous jerks of their shoulders" (183). In these stories, women provide "a translucent screen on which men act out melodramatic scripts or engage in bizarre, narcissistic behavior" (Henke, "James" 119). They provide an audience to the bachelors at the party as well as dancing partners and accompanists, repeating the performance of many young ladies in the backgrounds of stories like "Counterparts," "After the Race," and "A Little Cloud."

The party guests also include matriarchs, either present at the event itself or brought into memory by other characters. Mrs. Malins, a passive mother with an alcoholic son, is described as "a stout, feeble old woman with white hair. Her voice had a catch in it like her son's and she stuttered slightly" (190). She is another Irish Catholic mother who made her son "take the pledge on New Year's Eve," without success (185), relating to the wives of alcoholics in "Grace" and "Counterparts." Gabriel's own mother is present through her portrait and through his recollection of "her sullen opposition to his marriage" (187). At

least Gretta has achieved a marriage; two of the party's guests are passing the age of maidenhood and entering into their roles as spinsters or "career" women.

Mary Jane Morkan is a younger version of her aunts, the next generation of spinster/music teacher, maintaining the traditions of her aunts--and Dublin. In contrast to Maria in "Clay," she is an integrated part of this family; she will also "move on in spinsterhood, more knowing and assertive than Maria . . . but similar in dutiful cheerfulness" (Beck 321). Thirty years earlier, after the death of their brother, the aunts had "taken Mary Jane, their only niece, to live with them. . . . [She] was now the main prop of the household. . . . She had been through the Academy and gave a pupils' concert every year" (176). Mary Jane also helps with serving food during dinner and coordinating the dances.

Another guest at the party represents what appears to be a more dynamic role for unmarried women in Irish culture. Molly Ivors appears as a "frank-mannered, talkative young lady . . . [who] did not wear a low cut bodice, and the large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar bone bore on it an Irish device and motto" (187). Her clothing identifies her as serious and sensible, and her brooch, probably a piece of Celticist jewelry, represents her interest in the Irish Revival and nationalism (Jackson and McGinley 168). She has known Gabriel and his family for many years; according to Gabriel, "their careers had been parallel, first at the University and then as teachers" (188), one of the few professions "appropriate"--and open to--women of the middle class. This female character, who holds her own with a male both intellectually and socially, embodies the possibility of exceptional women capable of asserting themselves with the patriarchal culture. But she will never achieve the career success or financial security of her male counterpart. Even though Ivors

appears to be what Craig Werner calls “feminine energy [which] escapes containment” (100), the text reveals a character who performs the role of an ideologue, imitating yet another patriarchal structure, the Irish Revival, with its own expectations of “the female” based on the icon of Cathleen ni Houlihan.<sup>34</sup> While Molly Ivors ultimately disappoints, Joyce is preparing the reader for Gretta Conroy, a female character with a potentially liberating energy and perspective, even sexuality, beyond the constraints of culture, whether or not intended by the author.

The character of Gabriel Conroy, the story’s protagonist, not only presents an image of the patriarchal Irish culture’s attitude and treatment of women, but he also functions as a conduit through which we “see” Gretta--through the language used by the narrator, who tells the story through Gabriel’s eyes and actions. Conflicts and confrontations with the female characters attending the party, such as the one with Molly Ivors, provide a progression of the plotline involving Gabriel: “by the time the guests are ready to depart, scarcely a woman has encountered Gabriel without being disdained, overruled, or interrupted. . . . Gabriel is the interrupter, the would-be chieftain, the man with the last word. He disregards his wife’s wishes expressed privately, and ignores her publicly” (Bauerle 117). Gabriel is also his aunts’ “favourite nephew, the son of their dead elder sister, Ellen” (179), but the text soon reveals that he thinks of his aunts as “only two ignorant old women” (192) even though he gives a speech in their honor. His character demonstrates the patriarchal culture’s attitude in devaluing “women’s talk in both style (hesitant, qualified, question-posing) and content (concern for everyday, the practical, and the interpersonal)” (Belenky et al. 17). Consequently, Gabriel “rebuffs, belittles, or discounts all female points of view

anyway contrary to his own” (Valente 431). Indeed, his attitude toward the other female characters is no different than toward Gretta, his wife.

The text repeatedly emphasizes Gabriel observing his wife Gretta, as critic and proprietor, yet he hardly seems to focus on what she is doing at any given time. For example, “[h]is curious eyes rested long upon her face and on her hair” (222). Then, he sees her “making her way towards him through the waltzing couples” but then asks her *if* she had been dancing (190). She responds, “Of course I was. Didn’t you see me?” (191) Later, back at their hotel, “Gabriel paused for a few moments, watching her” (215)--and-- “when she had danced with him a few hours before[ , h]e had felt proud and happy then, happy that she was his, proud of her grace and wifely carriage” (215). She is an object to be possessed and exhibited, an ornament to his ego. Later she will become “a presence, an agency” which effects Gabriel’s epiphany (Tindall 43). However, in public, he frequently criticizes and condescends to her. For example, when others notice the couple’s late arrival, he says, “[T]hey forget that my wife here takes three mortal hours to dress herself” (177). Yet he recalls what he considered “some slighting phrases” his mother had used in reference to Gretta and how she had resisted his marriage to the “country cute” from Connacht, and admits that it was the disapproved “Gretta who had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown” (187). Still, when asked by Molly Ivors if Gretta was from the West, Gabriel distances his wife and himself from the “rural” West by saying, “Her people are” (189). He presents himself as an urbane, academic professional who values whatever people do “on the Continent,” even following new fads like the recently popular goloshes (181), yet as the story progresses, he is insecure in his roles as teacher *and* husband.



Again and again, throughout the narrative, Joyce presents the contrasts between Gretta and her husband. While Gabriel posits himself as more of a European or Continental, Gretta remains connected to the rural West of Ireland, scoffing at his pretensions. Of course, she would be interested in an “excursion” to the Aran Isles, saying, “‘I’d love to see Galway again,’” to which he replies, “‘You can go if you like’” (191). Just as he cannot relate to her desire to visit her childhood home, he also does not understand his wife’s sense of humor, saying in response to an earlier remark, “but Gretta thinks it very funny” (181)—even though the humor seems often directed toward him. Their dissimilar attitudes toward Irish culture are also revealed when Gabriel finds Gretta and Mary Jane “trying to persuade Miss Ivors to stay for supper. . . . ‘Beannacht libh,’ cried Miss Ivors, with a laugh, as she ran down the staircase” (196). She had spoken to Gretta in a language she understands, further showing the contrasts between the husband and wife, for Gabriel has said that Irish is “not [his] language” (189).

Gretta’s presence and position in the family are first signified in the text as “Gabriel and his wife” (176). Then she is addressed as Mrs. Conroy or “Gabriel’s wife” (177). The character is first called by her more familiar, first name by Aunt Kate: “Gretta”(180). Although a detailed physical description of Gretta is not given in the story, at the moment she is recognized by her own name, her physical actions become foregrounded—she takes on life. For example, within the next few pages, she “laughed,” “broke out into a peal of laughter and glanced at her husband,” and “clasped her hands excitedly and gave a little jump”(180, 191). Gretta also makes light of some of her husband’s attitudes toward childcare, the domestic sphere:

‘Don’t mind him, Aunt Kate,’ she said. ‘He’s really an awful bother, what with green shades for Tom’s eyes at night and making him do the dumb-bells, and forcing Eva to eat the stirabout. The poor child! And she simply hates the sight of it!’ (180)

In contrast to the previous female characters of *Dubliners*, with the exception of Mrs. Kiernan in “Grace,” Gretta expresses her opinion of her husband’s neurotic need to be all things Continental. Even though she is a target of his condescension and his rebuffs, at times, she also demonstrates a mind of her own--and a knowing tolerance of her husband’s behaviors. Here we begin to see the elements of her personality which make Gretta unique.

Later, her active participation in the dancing at the party suggests another unique characteristic--her sexuality. This performance connects the “long and close association with the erotic display of the female body” with dance in Western culture (Koritz 2). Gabriel’s sexual fantasies about his wife also allude to her potentially “carnal” nature. Yet Gretta, like other Irish Catholic women, is represented as a wife and mother, who was previously schooled in a convent. Thus, Joyce reveals how the character has been indoctrinated--taught to *perform* the female roles of Irish culture. However, even with her “induction” into the culturally prescribed Marian role of virgin-wife-mother, Gretta also remains a willful and sexualized psyche in the presence of these patriarchal constraints, with the potential to move beyond the image of the de-sexualized, subservient Blessed Virgin Mary.

Another image of the Virgin is evoked when Gabriel sees Gretta at the stairs, and Gabriel the character “echoes the angel Gabriel, who hails Mary as full of God’s grace (Luke 1:28, 30)--as he thinks, ““There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something”” (Froula 37). This scene also presents a break with the rest of the stories of

*Dubliners*--and the culturally constructed female characters. Indeed, Harry Levin has described "The Dead" as "the crucial transition to the psychological explorations of *Portrait* and *Ulysses*" (31), and as the moment the text reveals to Gabriel--and the audience--a vision of a female character unequaled in the stories of *Dubliners*:

He was in a dark part of the hall gazing up the staircase. A woman was standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terra-cotta and salmon-pink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness and strained his ear to listen also. . . . There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. 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. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter. (209)

Such is the strangeness of this vision, Gabriel reacts as if he does not recognize her, his wife, the woman he has married, talked to, traveled with, and made love to. But has he ever truly known Gretta? She is not, as many have suggested, "a person whom he loves; she is an object for his self-gratification, this time as he imagines himself an artist arranging a pretty picture" (Bauerle 117). Yet, within the context of their marriage, she also represents the "symbol" of how much Gabriel does not understand about his wife, who he has continually objectified; he privileges a "knowledge [which] . . . implies separation from the object and mastery over it," and he fails to realize that "understanding involves intimacy and equality between self and object" (Belenky et al. 101). And Gabriel still wants to be the "master" in control of their relationship. Note the language of the text: he "longed to be *master* of her

strange mood. . . . to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to *overmaster* her” (emphasis mine, 217), all of which reinforces the idea of his own perception of his dominance in the relationship.

Here he also represents the essence of the patriarchal Irish-Catholic-Victorian culture, unable to envision a woman as other than object or servant, constructed within the ideals of the church and tradition. The female in half-light is a recurring image in *Dubliners*, in “Araby” and “The Boarding House,” for example, yet the text here has re-emphasized the symbol of the woman as Other. Indeed, in the tradition of such feminist critics as Irigaray, Elizabeth L. Berg says, “It would seem that any attempt to define woman as rigorously Other than man--to remove her from all possible complicity with the phallogocentric system--ends by situating woman in the place of truth or origin, and thereby describing her in terms of a metaphysics of presence” (qtd. in Brivic, *Joyce's* 21). Thus, through her physical appearance and her behavior after hearing “The Lass of Aughrim,” the character of Gretta shows the connectedness between herself and her life experience. That “there was colour on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining” reveals the intense connection between her emotional and physical selves (211-12).

Although the final scenes are narrated through Gabriel’s point of view--the Joycean version of “the male gaze”--Gretta’s performance reveals a potentially empowered, sexualized self: through her actions, the text demonstrates her intuitive, intimate inner psyche. As they walk toward the hotel, the necessities of day-to-day life interfere with the fluidity of her movements: “[s]he was walking on before him with Mr Bartell D’Arcy, her shoes in a brown parcel tucked under one arm and her hands holding her skirt up from the

slush. She had no longer any grace of attitude” (213). Yet, her overall appearance is still that of moving “so lightly and so erect . . . so frail that [Gabriel] longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her” (213). The language of the text again reveals his attitude toward their relationship; he considers their shared sexuality as “their secret life,” and he briefly recalls sensual elements of their honeymoon. At some surface level, he seems to comprehend her situation within the culture and their marriage:

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. For the years, he felt, had not quenched his soul or hers. Their children, his writing, her household cares had not quenched all their souls’ tender fire.  
(213-4)

That even he can recognize the constricted role she plays as a “dull existence” reinforces that image--and the quality of life--in Gretta. However, those moments of insight are fleeting, and Gabriel, oblivious to his wife’s emotional state, returns to the sexual fantasies created by “the male gaze” he has been under the influence of since seeing “the stranger” on the stairs. He assumes she is thinking of him, and that once they were alone, “she would turn and look at him” (214), inviting him, responding to his desires.

Gretta, however, is caught up in a reverie of memories and grief. Just as her thoughts are far removed from her present location, her gaze is as well: “[s]he was looking out of the window and seemed tired” (214); and, at the hotel, “[s]he went on to the window and stood there, looking out” (216). Even while Gabriel awaits “the first touch of her body, musical and strange and perfumed” (215), Gretta is still listening to that “distant music”: “other voices and not his; she is still listening in the dark alcove alone, strange and distant as she

was on the stairs in the darkness” (Cixous 614). The emotional weight of her thoughts is also reflected in her actions. Gretta “leaned for a moment on his arm in getting out of the cab” (215); going up the stairs, “her head [is] bowed in the ascent, her frail shoulders curved as with a burden, her skirt girt tightly about her” (215). The moves through which Joyce depicts her disrobing for bed may symbolize a removal of the cultural expectations that dominate and confine her, as she sheds each article of clothing. She first “had taken off her hat and cloak and was standing before a large swinging mirror, unhooking her waist” (215). In distancing herself from the immediate present, Gretta allows herself to experience the memories of her former relationship, when she felt like a fully sexualized being. These memories and Gretta’s physical performance, as well as her refusing Gabriel’s advances, show her privileging this past self, a sexualized “female” self, over her role as an object of Gabriel’s desire.

Gretta’s physical actions, richly described in specific detail, reinforce this sense of self--and this unique character. Most importantly, the language, the choice of words and phrasing, emphasizes the character’s volition. Through the light imagery of the text, Joyce reveals his recognition of the potential inherent in Gretta’s refusal of Gabriel’s desire: “[s]he turned away from the mirror slowly and walked along the shaft of light towards him. Her face looked so serious and weary that the words would not pass Gabriel’s lips” (216). He questions her about her mood and thoughts, but she does not immediately answer this examination. Within her psyche, Gretta achieves a distance--and a small victory--over Gabriel’s needs. When Gabriel changes his tactics and uses his story of Malins to reclaim her attention, Gretta then walks toward him and standing there, looks “at him strangely.

Then, suddenly raising herself on tiptoe and resting her hands lightly on his shoulders, she kissed him. ‘You are a very generous person, Gabriel,’ she said” (217), and, dismissing him even further, moves again to look out the window. When he pulls Gretta to him and again asks her what she is thinking about, “[s]he did not answer *nor yield* wholly to his arm” (emphasis mine), and he asks again. However, he is now an intruder on her thoughts and her memories. By this point, she is unable to contain the emotional turmoil building inside: she does “not answer at once” but bursts into tears as she mentions the song she had heard, “The Lass of Aughrim” (218). Gabriel has no time to respond because, suddenly, Gretta breaks “loose from him and [runs] to the bed and, throwing her arms across the bed-rail, hid[es] her face” (218). As she “performs” her emotions, the text here also reveals that Joyce’s characterization and description express “a strong recognition of the beauty of the womanly world of feeling beyond men” (Brivic, *Joyce’s* 44). In other words, her sexualized memory lifts Gretta above the other female (and male) characters in the text; however, Gabriel cannot recognize this other way of “knowing.”

In the midst of her memories of her former lover, Gretta’s “hand was warm and moist: it did not respond to his [Gabriel’s] touch” (220). The locus of power thus shifts in their relationship when he is faced by “the moral authority of his wife’s intimate, sentimental secret” (Valente 431). The contents of the hotel room itself represent his impotency in the situation: “the chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string dangled to the floor. One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down: the fellow of it lay upon its side” (222). All items are limp, soft, flaccid. Instead of the culmination of his sexual desires, Gabriel is faced with his wife’s intense, intimate--and

private--emotional response to another. He had “never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love” (223). Further, while symbolizing for Gabriel and the audience the possibilities beyond masculine stereotypes of the female, Gretta also has an epiphany: “[s]he realizes that she has rejected genuine love in the [W]est of Ireland to come to Dublin and a ‘successful’ marriage of petty sniping” (Bauerle 118)-- “the currency of the patriarchal state: bourgeois marriage” (Froula 68). However, instead of acting on her new knowledge and progressing away from the harsh restrictions of her marriage, Joyce allows the character neither of these actions--he merely puts her to sleep.

This scene raises a problem that the text--or the author--is not necessarily interested in solving. Because he has already made clear the status of women in Dublin, within the context of the other stories, Joyce makes further progress in “The Dead,” by beginning to create a multi-dimensional, sexualized woman. However, like Gabriel, he *avoids* transcending the cultural norm and “deifying woman by focusing on her desire, which always ultimately appears as a sense of loss” (Brivic, *Veil* 180). In this case, Gretta’s loss is an intense combination of love, intimacy, and grief for past opportunities. She goes on to explain that he died, at 17, “about the beginning of the winter when [she] was going to leave [her] grandmother’s and come up here to the convent” (220), beginning the process which leads to her roles as wife and then mother. As she recollects her relationship with Michael Furey, she pauses “to get her voice under control” and sighs, showing the depth of her feeling, pulling at long-held memories--and emotions. She finally stops her story, and “choking with sobs, and, overcome by emotion, fl[ings] herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt” (221), and Joyce abandons her with a “She was fast asleep” (222).



Having given himself the choice of highlighting her dynamic potential for empowerment or emphasizing her loss and grief, Joyce chose the latter, creating an image of a *Mater Dolorosa* and evoking once again the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Irish society.

In his later works, Joyce's central female characters all exert "strong phallic powers . . . by having (or thinking of) their own men in opposition to their mates. . . . Each shows a will to fix her own identity apart from the role given her by society" (Brivic, *Veil* 29). However, in *Dubliners*, he consistently defended his stories on "essentially realistic grounds, arguing that he could not change his presentation without distorting the reality of which he wrote" (Werner 12). While Joyce acknowledges the social, historical, and cultural constraints imposed on women, who are largely excluded from participation in the power structures of Dublin, in this collection of stories, he ultimately does not construct any female character who can fully transcend the limitations imposed by Irish culture. But by reading *Dubliners* in this way, we can gain further insight into how Joyce exposes key dynamics of these roles and limitations for women in nineteenth-century Dublin.

## 7. Conclusion

*Dubliners* is 'a series of representative pictures--or mirror images, if you will. That is, they catch a permanence in Irish life that has a timeless quality as though each detail in each story had about it a built-in significance.'

--Donald T. Torchiana in *Backgrounds for Joyce's Dubliners*.

In traditional interpretations of *Dubliners*, readers often perceive the female characters as single-dimensional stereotypes. However, reading the narrative through the iconography and ideologically based roles imbedded in Joyce's turn-of-the-century Irish culture reveals a subtext within the narrative. In "History as Usual? Feminism and the 'New Historicism,'" Judith Lowder Newton asks how such readings might be transformed if "the material world of the domestic, women's anxiety-producing power as mothers, household managers, and silent participants in enterprise, were taken into account" (166). Thus, looking into the Irish Catholic background of the *Dubliners* invites us to read the text in another way, perhaps one Joyce did not consciously intend, but which indeed appears through the actions of the female characters. As Norris explains, this reveals "two texts" within *Dubliners*: "a 'loud' or audible male narration challenged and disrupted by a 'silent' or discounted female countertext" (192). While the voice of the text focuses on the male-dominated culture of Dublin, the silent yet consistent performances of the female characters reveal a subtext of a critical perspective of the impact of Dublin's cultural institutions on the lives of Irish Catholic women--and how a society created by these institutions often consumes its female members.

Within the context of the *Dubliners* stories, the narratives are a multi-textured whole with levels of materialistic and symbolic, overt and covert, meaning, which is more often than not saturated with images of the Blessed Virgin Mary. These elements emerge from Joyce's ability to rise above the culture that shaped him. Examining the text for "performative acts" then limns out the problems all these body-based cultural constraints create for the female characters, shifting the focus away from the male protagonists, and enhancing the overall meaning of the stories. Through examining what the female characters wear, how they move, what tasks they perform, and what they say (their dialogues), the reader can glimpse many facets of ideologically based representations of "the female" in Irish Catholic culture. The power of the symbols contained--and performed--within the text of *Dubliners* depends on the response of the reader (audience) to these cultural constructs. As Judith Butler explains, "The act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone" (525). Joyce's Naturalistic text then becomes a cultural artifact which allows us to use *Dubliners* to further our understanding of the patriarchal mind-set and its often subterranean control of cultural definitions of "the female" through the institutions, values, and practices of nineteenth-century Irish Catholic culture.

## NOTES

1. In *The Cambridge Companion to Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), Derek Attridge emphasizes Joyce's use of "the heightened realism of the dominant tradition of late nineteenth-century fiction and the economical exposition of the conventional short story" in *Dubliners* (5).
2. In *Joyce's Waking Women: An Introduction to Finnegans Wake* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1995), Sheldon Brivic explains, "Throughout his career Joyce attacked patriarchy with devastating psychological acuity and insisted on the actual conditions women were subject to." Other stories in *Dubliners* also foreground these conditions: "'Araby' shows how an adolescent boy avoids the reality of a girl he knows in order to project a fantasy about her. 'Counterparts' and 'Two Gallants' show men who abuse children and women respectively to support their masculinity. . . . and 'A Painful Case' shows a woman driven to suicide because she falls in love with a man who is extremely rational" (6).
3. Indeed, as reflected in the 1937 Irish Constitution, "'the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home'" (qtd. in Mullin 42). Molly Mullin goes on to note that "not only does the constitution assume the right to define 'family,' but it also assumes that 'woman' can be used interchangeably with 'mother,' and that both are automatically associated with domesticity" (42). See Molly Mullin's "Representations of Historical Irish Feminism and the Politics of Difference," *Feminist Studies* 17 (1991): 29-50.
4. "Within this culture of the colonized, then, women were "positioned differently inside middle-class ideology than men . . . men positioned differently from other men, and some women positioned differently from other women" (Newton 162).
5. For a detailed discussion of the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, see Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976. New York: Vintage, 1983); and Mary Lowe-Evans, "Joyce and the Myth of the Mediatrix" in Wawrzycka and Corcoran 101-12. Even though the "virgin" in the language of the Bible was not simply a young girl who had never experienced sexual intercourse but rather one who was ripe for the picking, the "finer points" of Mariology include four dogmas which "have been defined and must be believed as articles of faith: her divine motherhood and her virginity, both declared by councils of the early Church and therefore accepted by most of the reformed Christian groups; the immaculate conception, sparing her all stain of original sin, which was proclaimed in 1854; and her assumption, body and soul into heaven, which Pope Pius XII defined in 1950" (Warner xxii).

6. The Virgin, “surrounded by a group of saints, appeared at Knock, a tiny, impoverished village in County Mayo, to approximately 15 ‘visionaries’ during a fierce rainstorm.” The site has become “the most popular Marian pilgrimage in a country devoted to the Virgin” (Warner 309).
7. Three functions of Mary as intercessor or *mediatrix* are as follows. First, her “intercessory function empowers her to secure favors from her a priori superior son/God for the benefit of her impotent children/humanity. Mary’s intercession presupposes her merciful disposition, in turn suggesting her nonjudgmental nature.” Second, her “cooperative function firmly establishes the Marian model for Christian women who are expected unquestioningly to intercede between father and children and facilitate patriarchal business.” Third, her function as an “objective correlative . . . of [God’s] intentions for humanity” (Lowe-Evans 106-07).
8. “Under her aspect of the *Mater Dolorosa*, Mary most resembles the fertility goddesses of antiquity. For she receives the broken body of her son in her arms and gazes upon his features with such avidity not only because she mourns his loss . . . but also because she is propitiated those same forces of sterility and death that the sacrifice of her son is attempting to appease. . . . He is the blood offering, she the principle of abiding earth” (Warner 221).
9. In *‘We Are But Women’: Women in Ireland’s Society* (London: Routledge, 1993), Roger Sawyer asserts that “emboldened by their mythical heritage and Marian emphasis of Roman Catholicism, women enjoy[ed] a special status within the family as a source of wisdom that is not always limited to domestic matters” (21).
10. See Mary Poovey’s *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) for a detailed discussion of Victorian standards.
11. The marriage rate began to decline after the Famine, and by 1926, twenty-five percent of women aged 45 remained unmarried. Fifty percent of emigrants between 1850 and 1950 were women, most of them unmarried seeking a husband and to start a family (Lee 38-9).
12. The Victorian census-takers did acknowledge the “world’s oldest profession” by including that occupation in the censuses of the mid-to-late nineteenth century (O’Brien 190).
13. As Sawyer also explains, “In rediscovering and developing Irish culture, women were at the same time rediscovering and liberating themselves. . . . Written records and oral traditions had reminded them that they had enjoyed privileges under Brehon law which had survived in parts of Ireland until as late as the seventeenth century” (69).

14. See Bonnie Kime Scott's *Joyce and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984). Scott explains that *Dubliners* represents the conditions which Joyce blamed for his mother's death and which would motivate Joyce to leave Ireland in 1904. In these stories, "Joyce infused the all-too-typical problems of urban Irish Catholic households like his own: a long procession of births, a pious and compliant mother, and a garrulous, frequently drunken, free-spending father figure" (58).
15. As Michel Foucault explains in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, eds. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), disciplining bodies--and thus disciplining minds--through a combination of religious constructs as well as cultural constructs de-sexualizes the woman, making her a servant. "The female" in Irish Catholic culture, thus, performs her role within the context and the commandments of the church and culture, which are telling her to role model herself after these ideals.
16. The *Shan Van Vocht*, Ireland portrayed as a Poor Old Woman, is the representation of "the intimacy of Mother Ireland (including the Mother Church and the mother tongue), a mother who is also . . . a sweetheart" who tempts men and leads them into a forgetfulness of materialism and social convention (Foster 128, 315).
17. Lacanian theory differentiates between the penis and the phallus, the latter referring to the "lost" symbiotic connection with the maternal, generative force which elicits desire for power, control, and sexual pleasure. It is thus the phallus, with all its symbolic power, on which the hierarchy of gender is based. Woman, lacking the phallus, both figuratively and symbolically, is seen as the weaker, the castrated or damaged Other. As a result, the "feminine" is devalorized, and the subsequent "assumption of a masculine gender identity thus . . . explains the repudiation of the feminine as the basis of culture" (Cornell 285). For Lacan, gender identity is constructed by and established through cultural norms, not by biology or ontology. Thus, the ideology of male superiority can actually be perceived as a sham, "the fantasy identification that having a penis is having the phallus. This fantasy lies at the very base of patriarchal culture and justifies gender hierarchy" (Cornell 285). See Drucilla L. Cornell's "Gender, Sex, and Equivalent Rights" in Butler and Scott 280-296 for a detailed discussion of the theory.
18. "By 1904 the practice of simultaneously entitling Mary and circumscribing her role had become standard procedure" (Lowe-Evans 102).
19. Simone de Beauvoir asserts in *The Second Sex* that "any gender [is] an historical situation rather than a natural fact" (qtd. in Butler 520). To Merleau-Ponty, the historical idea of the body "gains its meaning through a concrete and historically mediated expression in the world" (Butler 521). Both de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty understand the body to be a complex, dynamic process which personifies the appropriation of cultural and historical constructs (Butler 521). Victor Turner's studies suggest that "social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a

reenactment and a reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established . . . . the performance renders social laws explicit” (Butler 526). Furthermore, Butler’s idea that “sex, gender, and heterosexuality are historical products which have become conjoined and reified as natural over time” ultimately derives from Foucaultian theory (525).

A central basis of Foucaultian thought rests in the notion of the “panopticon”: “In every society the body [is] in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions, or obligations” (180). The social institutions within a specific society (schools, prisons, armies, and hospitals) work to maintain their power through “a policy of coercions that acts upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviors”--disciplinary norms (Foucault 182). These norms create and are generated by the mechanisms of the institution, organized into a system which then produces “docile bodies” who *want* to achieve the prescribed standards. In considering the gender of these bodies, whether male or female, “[p]erforming one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all” (Butler 528). Although Foucault asserts that the hand of power is “invisible,” the maintenance of control requires very visible--and violent--action: verbal abuse (shame) and physical abuse which achieve a uniformity in compliance. Furthermore, the system as Foucault sees it cannot be transformed or resisted: bodies are assimilated into it--male and female. However, being a female in a patriarchal society imposes much more specific--and confining--limits on behavior.

20. Joyce’s sister Margaret was twenty years old at the time of their mother’s death, and she took charge of the house. As Ellman, notes, “Margaret, as the oldest daughter, had already determined to become a nun, but she kept a promise made to her dying mother by remaining until the children were a few years older. Then, in 1909, she became a Sister of Mercy” (144).

21. For a detailed discussion/comparison of the character of Eveline and the saint, see Donald T. Torchiana, “Joyce’s ‘Eveline’ and the Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque” *James Joyce Quarterly* 6 (1968): 22-7.

22. The devotion was officially recognized and approved by Pope Clement XIII in 1765. (from Catholic Online Saints. “St. Margaret Mary Alacoque” On line. Catholic Online. 8 Mar. 98. <<http://www.catholic.org/saints/saints/margaretmaryalacoque.html>>)

23. The Twelve Promises of the Sacred Heart:

1. I will give them all of the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
3. I will bless every house in which a picture of My Heart shall be exposed and honored.
4. I will console them in all of their difficulties.
5. I will be their refuge during life and especially at the hour of death.

6. I will shed abundant blessings upon all of their undertakings.
7. Sinners shall find in my heart a fountain and a boundless ocean of mercy
8. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
9. Fervent souls shall rise speedily to great perfection.
10. I will give to Priests the power of touching the hardest hearts.
11. Those who propagatate this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart never to be blotted out.
12. I promise thee, in the excessive mercy of My Heart, that My all-powerful love will grant to all who receive Holy Communion on the First Fridays of nine consecutive months, the Grace of final repentance; they will not die under My displeasure or without receiving their Sacraments; My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in their last moment. (Gifford 49-50)

24. This physical abuse is usually diagnosed as “aggression-frustration displacement. The alcoholic protagonist of ‘Counterparts’ slinks home to beat his son after being harassed at work for incompetence. The injured victim strikes the weaker until all have been demoralized” (Henke, *Moraculous* 144-5).

25. In a more positive parallel to “Eveline,” Nora Barnacle sailed from the North Wall with James Joyce on Oct. 8, 1904, approximately one month after the publication of this short story.

26. For further discussion of the similarities between Eveline and Maria, see Edward Brandabur’s *A Scrupulous Meanness: A Study of Joyce’s Early Work*. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1971).

27. See Richard Carpenter and Daniel Leary’s “The Witch Maria” *James Joyce Review* 3 (Feb. 59): 3-7.

28. St. Mary Magdalen, the Magdalene, like Eve, was “brought into existence by the powerful undertow of misogyny in Christianity, which associates women with the dangers and degradation of the flesh” (Warner 225).

29. “However various or significant the influences that converge in his work, the earliest, most central, and most pervasive was the Catholicism of his youth” (Sullivan 1).

30. The religious allusions to other pairs of women in the Gospels may also be suggested here. The wake takes place on July 2, the feast of the Visitation, commemorating the Virgin Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth (Dilworth 108).

31. Later, in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom will see Bob Doran “sloping” into the Empire Pub “on his annual bend.”

32. In *John Bull’s Other Island*, George Bernard Shaw refers sarcastically to the Irish Revival’s representations of Ireland by having one of the characters explain, “If you want



to interest him [the Irishman] you've got to call the unfortunate island Kathleen ni Hollihan [sic] and pretend she's a little old woman." References to names like Kathleen and Brigid would infer a more "Irish" identity for the Kearney daughter.

33. "Joyce was at once fascinated and repelled by the Catholic doctrine of conjugal possession. The sacrosanct Irish family, with its assumptions of domestic ownership and female chastity, conspired with the church to stultify individual creativity. Joyce so despised the 'trap' of bourgeois marriage" that he and Nora postponed their wedding ceremony until 1931 (Henke, *Moraculous* 227-8).

34. Cathleen Ni Houlihan, as a nationalist symbol, is capable of being transformed "from the haggardness of enforced servility (or colonial oppression) into the queenly beauty of sovereignty" (Foster 87). The actions of this character, combined with her words, illuminate her symbolic nature. We can also identify how the cultural constructs found within *Dubliners* resonate with the inchoate ideology of the Irish Renaissance. This passage illustrates the creation of a mythical woman to represent Ireland and, in a way, a national consciousness during the Irish Renaissance; however, the "woman" created was a schizophrenic stereotype, at once strong and weak, a product of a society with sharp expectations for those of female gender. These schizophrenic creations embodied not only the limitations placed on women by the culture around them, but also the potential freedom sought by the nationalists. The literature of this period offers an explication of the developing identity of Irish women--and the harsh reality of their time.

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