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## The Desire to Escape and the Inability to Follow Through in James Joyce's Dubliners

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The Desire to Escape and the Inability to Follow Through in James Joyce's Dubliners

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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in  
English

by

Alyssa Moreau Wheatley

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## **Abstract**

In my research, I will examine James Joyce's *Dubliners* as a collection of stories that is unified by an ongoing theme; escape or the desire to escape. In the collection, the want or need to escape serves a major purpose throughout the characters and their lives. This thesis explores five stories that share this theme in particular: "The Sisters," "Eveline," "Araby," "An Encounter," and "The Dead." Each story will be discussed in the context of how each story progresses from a want to an actual escape. In addition, the thesis also considers how these stories exhibit a progression towards isolation and paralysis in the living until the final story, "The Dead." "The Dead" can be interpreted as a positive, hopeful ending to the bleak collection, but I will argue its ending is anything but optimistic along with its crucial role as a conclusion to *Dubliners*.

Keywords: Paralysis; James Joyce; Dubliners; Escape; Desire

## Introduction

In a letter to Grant Richards, Joyce declares his intentions in conceiving the stories of *Dubliners*:

My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis... I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard. I cannot do any more than this (Corrington vii).

James Joyce's *Dubliners* sparked my interest from the very moment I read the first story. "The Sisters" caught my attention with its dark setting and underlying sinister elements that contribute to the overall theme of the collection. I quickly found out that these short stories were more than what they first appear to be: a collection depicting the normalcy of life. The characters all have something in common when it comes to the way they think about their own lives, their diminishing naivety and the monsters they are trying to escape from. The desire to escape Dublin and their lives contributes to Joyce's primary theme. Each character suffers from a paralysis within the mundane life they live which only escalates as each story continues on: "In each case, disillusionment and failure to escape have resulted in emotional injury and Joyce's descriptions presage a greater degree of constriction for the characters" (Walzl 224).

Najar Daronkolae writes about Joyce's use of diction in *Dubliners* where readers see a reoccurring theme of *gnomon*, a literary technique where things are made implicit rather than explicit. In this, events can be inferred from the shadow they cast (173). In this thesis, I will examine several of Joyce's short stories in this collection and examine Joyce's characters and the misery of their daily lives and how comfort undermines happiness through the vehicle of

*Dubliners*, specifically: the characters in *Dubliners* place the blame on Dublin being that this all they know, by doing this, Joyce creates characters that ultimately fall to human nature. Joyce is showing this oppression through these characters and their inability to escape themselves and their situations. Through this thesis, I will argue that Joyce shows Ireland as an oppressive place by using *Dubliners* as a social commentary, but more importantly, he's making the argument that anywhere we normalize becomes an oppressive force.

## Background

In Joyce's piece, *A Portrait of the Artist as James Joyce*, readers are presented with a possible pre-discovered concept of Dublin actually serving as a symbol for paralysis. Joyce believed that the city was inhibited by two major factors: The Roman Catholic Church and the independence that Ireland so yearned for that was denied by England. "Irish Catholicism taught through the use of fear, negation, and self-denial, and Joyce was inclined toward free expression, affirmations of life, and frank sexuality" (Prescott 21).

The characters throughout *Dubliners* are all victims of circumstance, whether it is a life choice they made or a situation they were born into. The common thread among the characters in these short stories all long to escape, although not all have the same motives or positions. Some dream of escaping a situation, a place, even a relationship, but following through is the difficult part. For example, our narrator in "The Sisters" has a hard time escaping his strange relationship with a local priest along with his own crushing psyche, "An Encounter" shows a young boy attempting to escape but the realities of life come crashing down on him, "Araby", much like our protagonist in "An Encounter" is crushed by the harsh truths of life and our first and only female protagonist in "Eveline" is unable to escape her family and the haunting promise she made to her mother, and lastly, "The Dead" shows a man unable to escape from his own ego. The desire for freedom and the limitations that prevent that freedom suggest a deeper, more psychological and sinister case than it seems to be. It is not that these characters simply do not have the means to leave Dublin, but they are prisoners of their own choices and lifestyles. Some characters experience a temporary escape through dreams and fantasies, but this seems to make their current conditions seem even worse. The only escape we truly see in *Dubliners* is death, and this is not a journey that the majority of these characters go on.

In their own day, these stories were applauded for their exactness and precision or “style of scrupulous meanness,” as Joyce called it, and for their thematic seriousness in presenting a direct and piercing view of the city of Dublin in the modernity of the early twentieth century. It is said that Joyce announced that there was significance in the order in which he presented and arranged his stories. The significance in which each story is presented is how each character’s innocence and inability to escape is heightened and becomes more prominent as the stories progress.

Joyce's Dublin was a city in conflict with its past and yearning for a future. As Joyce depicts it, though, many of the ways its people tried to escape their current conditions led to even worse extremes of paralysis, whether from their religious beliefs, moral traditions, or even just their station in life. Through my reading of several stories in *Dubliners*, I find that Joyce continuously explores the ideas of escaping and a sense of paralysis that the characters get from living and being stuck in their everyday lives. This could be a result of the poverty that Dublin was experiencing at the time Joyce wrote *Dubliners*, which would be an obvious contributing factor to the dissatisfaction of life and the want to escape.

Joyce’s stories in *Dubliners* are driven almost completely by internal monologue, which makes them exceptionally intricate. In most, the internal thoughts and feelings of the main characters are the real setting of the story. This is where all the changes take place, and almost all of the action. If the city of Dublin affects the minds and hearts of its citizens, there's almost no difference between the city and the minds of the people who live in it. Both can be hard to escape, and often full of disappointment. All of these short stories are connected by potentially life changing decisions these characters are faced with.

## “The Sisters”

In “The Sisters,” Joyce explores themes of escape and paralysis that permeate his writings. “The Sisters” gives readers a glimpse into a young boy’s life whose conflicted feelings about a local priest set the tone for the rest of the story. The unnamed narrator’s feelings about his mentor, the priest, evoke a world of perplexity and the paralysis that comes along with these muddled emotions. Presented with this notion early on in story, readers are forced to come to terms with the fact that this perplexity of emotions will require them to consistently draw inferences to fully understand the delicate balance of these characters, and that this practice will be necessary through the entirety of this piece. We are given an inside look into the narrator’s thoughts and feelings, and although it may be difficult to decipher exactly what these jumbled emotions mean, this point of view helps us appreciate the narrator’s innocence and candor. Joyce opens “The Sisters” with, “[T]here was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke,” which sets the tone for an ominous beginning to his collection of stories (3). In the story, we see a young unnamed boy and a priest who, both, are seemingly trapped within the boundaries of their lives and the expectations that follow. The narrator may be too young to realize that he is trapped, but the emotions he experiences are an outward display of paralysis to the readers: “I crammed my mouth with stirabout for fear I might give utterance to my anger” (5). His feelings about the priest and how to act in front of his family and neighbors show that he has already begun to conform to what this society expects of young boys: be respectful, be quiet and don’t make any waves.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce reveals his contempt for the Roman Catholic Church due to the pressure and boundaries put on him while growing up to stray away from his individuality. The Catholic Church, during this time, demands absolute submission of

the people to God's powers, both secular and divine, which was carried out through religious clergy, and discourages any and all acts of individualism that set anyone apart from the community. According to Ali Gunes writes, Joyce... represents his frustration with the Catholic Church and priesthood and then artistically deconstructs the basis, image and authority of the priesthood through different ways and strategies in the story to escape from the dogmatic nature and restraining climate of the religion" (185). In "The Sisters" we see a man who has taken a vow to be celibate and represent Christ which means being bound to a certain code all while mentoring a young boy. It is hinted that the boy and the priest have had a very strange relationship because of their closeness and the amount of time they spent alone together, and it is not a stretch to say that Father Flynn was confined within the expectations and boundaries that surrounded the Roman Catholic Church; Joyce shows this through the diction used to describe Father Flynn-- as if something is off and his continued description of the priest as a sinner. Several details in the story are linked to the Catholic Church; for instance, our narrator speaks of Father Flynn's face being "heavy and grey" and his teeth "big and discoloured" behind his smile that made our young narrator uncomfortable, which may be symbolic of the Catholic Church and the façade it paraded around in comparison to what was actually going on inside of the Church such as indulgences, sexual abuse, among other things (Joyce 5, 7). In an article that delves into the investigations of both old and new transgressions in the Irish Catholic Church in Dublin, Tom Roberts writes, Clearly there was knowledge of 'old activities,' but no clear understanding that these activities indicated an ongoing serious pattern of grooming which should clearly have raised red flags..." (12) This shows a clear understanding of the corruption and sexual misconduct that took place within the Roman Catholic Church in Dublin. Along with the physical deterioration of Father Flynn, the broken and empty chalice that continues to pop up

through the story may be a representation of Father Flynn's soul as well as the Catholic Church. The idea of Father Flynn being a representation of the Catholic Church and the deterioration of his health and mental state mold to show how Joyce felt about the Catholic Church and its stifling of individualism.

"The Sisters" presents what at first seems to be an innocent relationship between a priest and a boy, but hints at something more disturbing under the surface. The narrator is a young boy, but it's difficult to trust him since he is biased towards Father Flynn because of the bond they had, but much like the boy in "Araby", another story from *Dubliners*, the narrator has no parents or immediate family to turn to other than his aunt and uncle who don't seem to be very present. Our narrator seemed to enjoy the company of Father Flynn and this relationship was a possible escape for him. In "The Sisters," the opening scene presents an unnamed boy walking past a home studying the windows,

[N]ight after night I had passed the house... and studied the lighted square of window: and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead... I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew that two candles must be set at the head of a corpse. (3)

We soon learn that his friend and mentor, a priest, has passed away after his third stroke. Old Cotter, a family friend, tells of the passing of Father Flynn and then immediately begins to give his opinion on the boy and the Priest's relationship: "I wouldn't like children of mine, he said, to have too much to say with a man like that... it's bad for children..." (Joyce 4) This small-town gossip from old Cotter strikes a nerve in our narrator: "I crammed my mouth with strirabout for fear I might give utterance to my anger" (Joyce 5). Already, readers can sense that the young boy's feelings go deeper than just that of a reaction to a silly old fool's gossip; he is

very defensive of Father Flynn and what old Cotter has to say about him. Not only is he angry about old Cotter's gossip and assumptions about his friend, Father Flynn, but also for being referred to as a child. He tells himself not to show any emotion and this stifling of emotion hints that this friendship between the priest and the boy was not as innocent as it should have been. "In "The Sisters," the boy's sexualization of the sacerdotal is part of his informal preparation for a celibate vocation" (Valente 532). It is possible, as Joseph Valente suggests previously, that this relationship began as a course in preparing the young boy for the vocation of priesthood and ended up as a sexual exploitation and grooming, which would give way to the narrator feeling conflicted about Father Flynn and defending him; it's hinted at that the narrator is very confused about how he feels- especially when it comes to Father Flynn.

The death of Father Flynn lingers with the young boy, causing him to slip into a state of paralysis. The narrator is haunted by Father Flynn's "grey face" and dreams of Father Flynn seemingly needing to confess something while moving his lips:

It began to confess to me in a murmuring voice and I wondered why it smiled continually and why the lips were so moist with spittle. But then I remembered that it had died of paralysis and I felt that I too was smiling feebly as if to absolve the simoniac of his sin.  
(Joyce 5)

The diction that Joyce uses to describe the Priest's sins is interesting. The word *simoniac* is defined as a grave offense against the Church which only a bishop or someone of higher power could absolve. What grave transgression did Father Flynn commit? While we never get a direct answer to this question, one can gather that something more than just a spiritual or religious connection between Father Flynn and our narrator occurred divulged from the fact that their time together follows our narrator and Father Flynn even in his dreams. The confessional in the dream

is symbolic and a major reversal in roles since a priest is normally the one listening to confessions not giving them. According to Valente, "...paralysis would represent a properly 'maleficent' being... while in the second it would signal the priest's own "sinful being," implicating him in sexual misconduct" (529). Valente concludes that Joyce's writing indicates that the paralysis stems from something immoral as well as, the Priest's own guilty conscience. Our narrator goes to the Priest's house to confirm his friend's death and once he does, he realizes that he is conflicted and unsure of his feelings: "I found it strange that neither I nor the day seemed in mourning mood and I felt even annoyed at discovering in myself a sensation of freedom as if I had been freed from something by his death" (Joyce 6). His confusion grows when he goes with his aunt to console Father Flynn's sisters and view the body. Our narrator wants to see the body, but at the same time does not; in addition to these feelings, he finds that he is not as sad as he feels he should be about Father Flynn's death and is upset with himself for feeling this way.

Like many of Joyce's stories, this one is rather ambiguous, and Joyce leaves out many details, which results in several specifics left unexplained. When the adults in this story give their accounts of Father Flynn, a different picture is painted by Father Flynn's sister in contrast to what we are presented with when the boy describes him: "[A]h, poor James!... I noticed there was something queer coming over him latterly... I'd find him with his breviary fallen on the floor with his mouth open" (Joyce 10). This could symbolize Father Flynn's relationship with the church in his deteriorating state. We also see that there was a relationship between Father Flynn and the boy that the adults felt was very odd, especially when old Cotter gives his opinion on the friendship between the narrator and Father Flynn. The more the boy thinks about Father Flynn, the more he realizes that indeed there was something peculiar about him. His overthinking

ultimately leads him into not being able to speak when he and his aunt visit the sisters and Father Flynn's body, but we learn exactly what Father Flynn's sisters think of him: "He was too scrupulous... [T]he duties of the priesthood was too much for him. And then his life was, you might say crossed... he was a disappointed man. You could see that" (Joyce 10). The idea that Father Flynn's sister describes him as meticulous and disappointed speaks volumes when it comes to the character of the priest. The fact that his own sister describes him with these words shows that he was not only interpreted this way by the boy but also his close family. Interestingly enough, we never hear Father Flynn speak or even get his thoughts. We do, however, hear the rumors circulating around his death. Father Flynn's sisters say that he had begun to act strangely, and they were under the impression that he was disappointed with life. Father Flynn was once found laughing in the confessional when he was needed, which only leads me to believe that not only was he disappointed in what his chosen life had to offer, but also, he had lost his mind in the process. The idea of Father Flynn being found in the confessional laughing poses an interesting notion that Father Flynn was not taking his priestly duties as seriously as he should or maybe he had just given up the façade completely.

Valente proposes the idea that Father Flynn's strokes might point to the tertiary, or second to last, stage of syphilis. One may question how a priest would contract syphilis, but Valente observes Joyce using clues and diction to suggest that the boy and Father Flynn had a sexual relationship and his strokes being the last stage of syphilis: "Accordingly, the kind of initiation that Flynn has given his young mentee remains properly enigmatic, soliciting without enforcing a libidinal diagnosis- both from the reader... and from the boy himself, who suffers the priest's demise in ambiguously sexual terms throughout the story" (Valente 529). This alludes to the italicized words throughout the story, but especially at the start. In the very first few

paragraphs, Joyce italicizes the words paralysis and simony. The footnotes indicate that paralysis is defined as: "...may be caused by an apoplectic seizure or other medical condition such as syphilis", and simony is defined as: "...the sin of buying or selling church offices or spiritual pardons" (Joyce 3). The fact that both of these italicized words are unholy concepts such as syphilis or selling pardons would lead readers to infer that Father Flynn is corrupt. In addition to this, Father Flynn's sister tells the narrator and his aunt that before his passing, Father O'Rourke anointed him which according to *Dubliners* footnotes is defined as a Roman Catholic sacrament that the dying are allowed to receive where a priest anoints them with oil and forgives all sins so that they may die in a state of grace and enter heaven. This is not an uncommon practice within the Catholic religion, but along with the boy's haunting dreams about Father Flynn's looming face and the reversed roles in the confessional suggest that Father Flynn needed to confess and be forgiven before he died. Another noteworthy aspect of "The Sisters" is the fact that Father Flynn's sister said when she believes his mental deterioration began: "It was the chalice he broke. .... That was the beginning of it... it contained nothing... But still" (Joyce 11). A chalice is a ceremonial cup that holds the wine which is transformed into the blood of Christ during the Mass, and even though this chalice contained nothing, this broken and empty chalice is a metaphor for the person who broke it: Father Flynn. He is broken and purposeless towards the end of his life and the fact that he was buried with the exact object that is linked to his mental deterioration is humiliating for him even after death: his transgressions are linked to him still, even now. Not only does the chalice represent the Catholic Religion, but it also represents the brokenness of a man who has lived his life behind a mask.

We may never directly catch the nature of the boy and Father's relationship, but the boy's behavior, strange dreams and obsession with Father Flynn and Old Cotter's connotations about

the priest lead me to believe that the relationship was inappropriate which may be what tipped Father Flynn to madness. Father Flynn's sisters describe his last moments as laughing crazily behind the confessional window and dropping his chalice. Being a priest, Father Flynn is not allowed to marry, and it is certainly unacceptable for him to have a romantic or sexual relationship, especially with a young boy. It's possible that he realized that the life he chose was not the life he wanted and there was no escaping it because of the public's high regard and opinion of him. Being so unhappy with life, Father Flynn's death was a great escape for him. He was able to escape whereas our narrator must continue on and live with whatever decisions that were made along with Father Flynn's death. Our narrator does not get this great escape from his lonesome life and he has lost his only friend and confidante.

## **“An Encounter”**

In “An Encounter,” the reoccurring themes of escape, failure, paralysis and disappointment can be found. Many of the characters in the stories often lose sight of their true selves or remain in isolation for the rest of their lives because they never change their routine. They often miss out on new opportunities, love or fulfilling their dreams because they are paralyzed by the overthinking they do. Such is the case for the boys in “An Encounter,” and our narrator who seems to be harmed by his own unfulfilled expectations. An unnamed boy who is looking back on something that happened in his childhood narrates a specific encounter that was a significant moment in his life. In one’s own mind, the notions of escape and failure tend to stick out in one’s mind; in “An Encounter, Joyce states, “The mimic warfare of the evening became at last as wearisome to me as the routine of school in the morning because I wanted real adventures to happen to myself. But real adventures... do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad” (12). In this story, the narrator actually attempts to break free from the unexciting routine of his everyday life with an experience that he thought would change everything. He fantasizes about this adventure and is let down by not only himself, but also what the world had to offer. In short, it seems as though our narrator is doomed to a life of unhappiness brought on by his own choices and the city of Dublin itself.

As in “The Sisters,” as well as the other stories examined here, Joyce allows his readers to get close to the narrators and their emotional numbness. Our narrator longs to escape and finds this through novels that his friend, Joe Dillon, introduced to him along with pretend games of adventure. Much like the narrator in “The Sisters,” he is beginning to understand that he is unhappy with the state of his life and the monotony of it.

As in “The Sisters,” Joyce critiques the Catholic religion and the corruption within the church that Ireland, more specifically, Dublin, deals with. There are indications that point to tensions between Catholicism and other religions in “An Encounter” when Father Butler scolds the young boys for reading the “Wild West” stories: “‘What is this rubbish? He said. ‘The Apache Chief! Is this what you read instead of studying your Roman History? Let me not find any more of this wretched stuff in this college’” (Joyce 12). Father Butler says that Catholic boys do not read stories like that, only Protestants. Here, Joyce shows how Catholic religion places itself as the more superior and there is a certain way one should live their life in order to be faithful to their religion. Here, we also see the theme of paralysis and the desire to escape within the characters. The young boys, particularly the narrator, yearn for a way to get out of their boring routine ridden lives. They are completely unfulfilled and disappointed with their school and society, dominated by pastoral figures and religion, consequently they seek an escape through an adventure, hoping to find meaningful experiences and create something more than what they experience in their everyday lives. Our narrator searches for an escape through adventurous tales of the West and detective novels that are banned at his school because they show an alternative to the constricted society that they reside within. Reading gives our narrator a brief escape from his current situation and allows him to live and see life through someone else’s perspective: “the adventures related in the literature of the wild west were remote from my nature, but at least, they opened the doors of escape” (12). The “doors of escape” implies that his school does more than enforce the children’s discipline; it is a prison for the students.

In addition to reading his forbidden adventure and detective books, the narrator along with several boys from his school who also seek adventure and escape by playing “Indians” and having battles after school: “[E]very evening after school we met in his back garden and

arranged Indian battles... we fought a pitched battle on the grass. But, however well we fought, we never won siege or battle and all our bouts ended with Joe Dillon's war dance of victory" (Joyce 12). Joyce also gives readers an indication that the boys were often left alone to their games because his friend's parents were otherwise obligated: "[H]is parents went to eight-o'clock mass every morning..." (12) The boys were free to play without fear of being caught because the adults had a routine to stick to and appearances to maintain. The Indian roleplay proves to be significant because this is the only time throughout "An Encounter" besides our narrator and Mahony's adventure where the boys are allowed to play and actually be kids unrestricted by rules and obligations. However, our narrator does not really look forward to playing these games because Joe Dillon "played too fiercely..." while he was much "younger and more timid," and would rather read books, but continues to play for reasons that are not made clear. It is conceivable that our narrator continued on in these games because of his craving for acceptance by his peers and the risk of disappointing them or maybe because there simply weren't many other options. The idea of a game simply titled as "Indians" served as an outlet for the boys to act like savages and play roughly without consequence; more importantly, this game is a complete contrast of what actual life was for them with their studies, rules and Priest-driven school. This might sound like normal childhood behavior and life, playing roughly without a negative outcome, but the children in Joyce's story are expected to follow by all the rules without acting out: "...when the restraining influence of the school was at a distance, I began to hunger again for wild sensations... The mimic warfare of the evening became at last as wearisome to me as the routine of school in the morning because I wanted real adventures to happen to myself" (13). This is where readers get a clear indication that he yearned for more than just a game; he wanted a real-life escape from what his life offered.

The narrator does not get the satisfaction he craves from these games and he daringly decides to “mich,” or skip, school, which leads one to believe that the boy was utterly bored and drained from the uniformity and boredom of school. “...I made up my mind to break out of the weariness of school-life for one day at least... I planned a day’s miching” (13). Readers are not given much about his teachers or even what events were taking place at school which leads one to believe that school was just another part of his life that he had to take part in. In addition to this, we are not given any indication that our narrator’s parents are seriously involved in his life or even around, which resembles the preceding story, “The Sisters” and the following story, “Araby,” where the narrators do not have very strong parental or guardian influence in their lives. We also get the impression that he is disappointed in his friends when only one of them shows up for this plotted adventure: “We waited on for a quarter of an hour more but still there was no sign of Leo Dillon” (Joyce 14). Regardless of this disappointment, our narrator and his friend, Mahony, begin their adventure which is mostly uneventful in terms of action. The two boys buy their lunch and decide to eat sitting by the river and talk about their plans to run away. They watch the sailors and imagine the kind of adventure a life on the sea would provide.

Mahony said it would be right skit to run away to sea on one of those big ships and even I, looking at the high masts, saw, or imagined, the geography which had been scantily dosed to me at school gradually taking substance under my eyes. School and home seemed to recede from us and their influences upon us seemed to recede (14).

Watching the sailors symbolizes a life the narrator wants but cannot obtain. Dublin cannot give him the kind of life he wants and because he cannot escape this city, it holds him prisoner. As previously expressed, Joyce felt that in order to truly have an adventure, one must go abroad. The boys, especially our narrator, become disappointed when they realize that the great Dublin

that they set out to explore, is merely just a city where life continues on just as it had in their own lives- nothing special or out of the ordinary going on. The boys are slammed with the reality of life and exposed to the mediocrity that everyday life brings.

Towards the end of the story, readers get the sense that the narrator is also disappointed in his adventure because it did not fulfill the expectations that he thought it would. He never completes his task of going to the Pigeon House and in this, he is disappointed in himself. Instead of having this great escape he intended, he had a negative experience: an encounter with an older man whose first question to the boys is if they have sweethearts. The narrator is left alone with the old man after Mahony runs off to chase a cat. The old man tells the narrator that Mahony is a wicked little boy and asks if he gets whipped. He continues on for a while talking about how boys should get whipped for speaking to girls and how he would like to be the one doing the whipping. Florence Walzl concludes:

The boys meet the reality, not of their aspirations, but of a corrupt society embodied in a father-figure or a shattering experience as a result of attempts at escape. The end of their quest confronts them with corruption, materialism, and loss of values, represented by images of darkness, decay, blindness, and sterility. The total experience of disillusionment is associated in each case of the paralysis image (223).

The narrator slips into a state of paralysis as a result of the unexpected and bizarre conversation he's had with this man. He cannot speak, and he does not know what to think of the conversation or even what to say. This shows that adventuring out into Dublin and meeting this strange man negatively affected his routine and ultimately interfered with it, causing him to yearn for his old and wearisome routine. J.P. Degnan reiterates this point in commenting:

...the narrator, the "reluctant Indian" cannot instinctively and naturally enjoy the hooky-

playing adventure: he is too intelligent and too imaginative. Notice how often he “reflects”, “imagines”, “pretends”; notice also that he regards the hooky session as a “plot” as something usually associated with the imaginary world of literature. The narrator cannot think or behave like Mahony because the narrator is too sensitive to other people’s rights and feelings; he is too conscientious, too civilized... (90)

This narrator seeks new adventures and when he tries to leave his routines behind, he ends up being disappointed in the break from the norm. We see an uncomfortable interaction that leaves our narrator unsure about his craving for adventure and change which causes him to rethink his romanticized ideas of adventure and escape; the reality of life hits him. Joyce gives readers a peep into our narrator’s innermost thoughts: “[H]ow my heart beat as he came running across the field to me!... And I was penitent; for in my heart I had always despised him a little” (19). Our narrator is jealous of Mahony because of his ability to run on instinct, whereas the narrator succumbs to his conscience. Mahony has no problem running away from the stranger while our narrator feels the need to be polite and force conversation with him. The narrator has always despised Mahony because he is not confined by society’s rules like the narrator is. Mahony has no conscience or moral compass about what he does, and the narrator feels the need to follow to the rules and expectations of society like he did when he hid his books that were not approved before school or when he was upset and embarrassed when they were caught by Father Butler. Conforming to society and its expectations is something that many of the characters in *Dubliners* face; they all have desires, but they do not pursue their aspirations and desires – even later in life- because of the expectations society has placed on them and a fear of what a disruption in routine brings- just as the rest of the people in Dublin. The narrator and Mahony are eventually

able to escape from the bizarre old man but not from the dreariness and rules of school and the boredom of the games the boys play after school.

## “Araby”

“Araby” introduces a strong self-hatred from the narrator which gives readers the impression that the maturity of this narrator is more developed than that of the previous two. Because “Araby” gives major insight into the mind of the narrator, a stronger empathy towards him and his situation is developed. Joyce gives us yet another unnamed narrator who lives with his aunt and uncle in a house where strangely enough, a priest has died, and in this story, a boy passes by a home on his street that is eerily similar to the priest’s home in “The Sisters”. However, “Araby” does not focus so much on the entrapments of Catholicism in Dublin but rather the hold Dublin has over its people and their choices. “Araby” is the third story in this descending pattern of life, entrapment and paralysis; it can be seen through the settings, the main character, his sad attempt to use romance as an escape, and ultimately his disillusionment with everything, including himself, at the bazaar. The speaker is a young boy whose life is propelled forward by a longstanding crush on his friend’s sister. We find him spending much of his time staring longingly through a window at Mangan’s sister. His life, even at this young age, is monotonous and lackluster. “Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen” (Joyce 21). His main source of escape is his obsession with watching of his friend, Mangan’s, sister, and even then, he could not fully escape by confessing his true feelings to her-- she had no idea he was watching her. Just as the rest of the narrators and their stories that precede “Araby,” he is truly alone.

Joyce uses the setting to make us sympathetic and understanding toward the characters and their situations. The narrator describes his neighborhood and houses of his neighbors as: “conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces”

(Joyce 20). With his use of the word imperturbable, Joyce personifies the houses and gives the impression that the neighbors are simply just there. Imperturbable, or composed, gives the illusion that they wear masks that hide their true emotions. Along with this description of the people that live in Dublin, we are introduced to his neighborhood, “North Richmond Street being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers’ School set the boys free” (20); These are the first images given, and it sets the tone for the whole story. The neighborhood seems anything but warm and friendly; the neighborhood is worn down, and the image of the boys being set free allows us to see the neighborhood as a place where the boys are released from school almost like they were in a prison, but this dark and dead-end neighborhood they are released into is not much better. The narrator gives readers an image of the home he lives in with his aunt and uncle: “...a priest [,] had died in the back drawingroom. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers” (Joyce 20). The stale air within the home is from being trapped in the same place for a long period of time, much like its inhabitants who have been trapped in Dublin. This story mostly takes place in the dark. The various descriptions of darkness and shadows throughout winter and nighttime symbolize the unhappy life that the people of Dublin are living.

In addition, the home he shares with his aunt and uncle is on a dead-end street; the fact that they live on a dead-end street symbolizes that there is little hope for our narrator. Seamus Perry points out that: “This blind street (repeated twice in the same paragraph) could be a symbol of the boy’s character that is literally blind due to his young age and immaturity” (588). The image of the narrator’s home casts a dark shadow on his environment: “The description of the books found in the priests’ room is all symbolic: ‘the curled and damp pages’ along with their ‘yellow leaves’ are symbols of death and decay... they are all yellowing and wasting away. It is

a symbolic foreshadowing of what is going to happen to the boy's romantic image of the world" (Khorsand 94). The books that were left behind by the priest, *The Abbot* by Walter Scott and *The Devout Communicant* and *The memoirs of Vidocq* are non-religious books which hint to readers that the priest was more than just a man of the church. The images presented at the very beginning of the story set the tone and foreshadows the darkness and depression he will surrender to in the end because of his inability to move forward. Joyce further alludes to the character's impending gloominess: "My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future" (22). The narrator, from what we know, has not had a great disappointment in his life yet, and he already has little hope for his future- we don't hear him speak of much to come nor is there any excitement about any events happening. The aunt is his mother figure and unlike most of the other adults in Dublin, she seems to be one of the only people who is sympathetic to him throughout this story. On the night of the bazaar, she tells him that he might have to put off his plans to go to the bazaar, "...for this night of Our Lord", which suggests that she already knows his uncle will disappoint him in being late to letting him leave the house and she offers an alternate reason why he won't be going. She stands up for him and attempts to salvage his night by asking his uncle: "Can't you give him the money and let him go? You've kept him late enough as it is" (24). She seems to understand that he is just a child who has been looking forward to this event only to be put off and failed by the adults in his life. The narrator's uncle is different from his aunt being that he is an authoritative figure who seems to provoke fear within him and his friends: "[I]f my uncle was seen turning the corner we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed"; He ultimately lets the narrator down by returning home extremely late and drunk, in addition to avoiding talking about the bazaar and giving the narrator the money

to go as was promised (20).

From the opening of the story, the narrator attempts to escape from his life through his intense daydreams. He develops a crush on one of his friend's sister and he admires her from afar through his window. Again, the window is used as a symbol of escape-- the narrator is not bold enough to speak to the girl he has developed feelings for just yet, so he gazes at her through his window, wishing and daydreaming that he is with her. She is only referred to as Mangan's sister meaning that she is not as important as the narrator believes; nevertheless, his feelings continue to develop while the girl does not even notice him watching her through his windows and following her to school. Mangan's sister represents something more interesting than his current life. She represents a possible life outside of the one he lives with his aunt and uncle: something fresh and new with open possibilities. The narrator does not fully understand what love is, he is not in love with her, but his infatuation has definitely taken hold of him and his obsession becomes a part of him. He doesn't love her; he loves the idea of her. He is excited by this possibility, and even though he knows deep down that it will never happen, he holds onto it and her and this ends up furthering his disappointment. Readers never even learn either the narrator's or sister's name, and the narrator barely speaks to her which only proves his inexperience and immaturity. "Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance"; when going to the market with his aunt on Saturday evenings, he is accosted by foreign and exciting images of "drunken men and bargaining women" and "the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers," and even through all of the chaos, he manages to fantasize about Mangan's sister and his ultimate journey to her (21). He is completely blind to the realities of everything and everyone but Mangan's sister and what possibilities she represents. Eventually, she speaks to

him only to allude to the bazaar, Araby, saying she cannot go but our narrator should. He jumps at the opportunity to please her and promises to get her a gift from Araby. A bazaar or fair promises excitement and for our narrator this trip invokes a sense of adventure. The waiting for Araby takes a toll on our narrator and it inhibits his ability to concentrate in school and fuels his obsession and daydreams about the girl and what he will get her at Araby: "I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read" (23). He continues to remind his uncle about going to Araby and he is promised that he will be allowed to go. On the day of the bazaar our narrator wakes up with an ominous feeling, and his daily ritual of watching the girl go to school is interrupted by his uncle. Before his day even begins, he knows that it will end badly: "I left the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me" (23). In this, I sense that he is used to life not going his way; he is used to being disappointed. Joyce foreshadows the disillusionment the narrator has yet to experience.

The narrator's frustration grows while he paces around his house waiting hours for his uncle to come home to give him money in order to go to the bazaar. His uncle arrives home late, having completely forgotten that he promised his nephew to be back in enough time. This breaking of a promise proves his feelings of doubt about his day going right. It is already late and after 'an intolerable delay' our narrator begins his journey, passing by the 'ruinous houses' (25). By mentioning that the houses were 'ruinous' may be alluding to a sense of bleakness throughout Dublin. This would suggest a desire for the narrator along with the rest of Dublin to escape from these surroundings. In addition to the bleakness of the environment, Gerhard Friedrich notes: "the double isolation of remaining alone in a bare railway carriage"; the notion that the narrator has to make the journey to Araby alone may be symbolic of his life's journey (423). It is also

noteworthy that the narrator begins his journey to the bazaar during the middle of winter while it is dark. The darkness may act as a foreshadowing for the narrator not finding what he would like to find at the bazaar, leading to yet another setback. The bazaar, or Araby, is significant in the fact that it symbolizes a fantasy and something magnificent which is a stark contrast to his dull and dreary life on North Richmond Street. When the narrator does eventually make it to the bazaar, he discovers that most of the stalls have closed, which only adds to his frustration. This bazaar was drastically different than the image he had fantasized about: “[N]early all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognised a silence like that which pervades a church after a service” (Joyce 24,25). There is a woman working behind a booth at the bazaar and although she asks the narrator if he would like to buy something, she pays him no mind as she talks to two Englishmen and he feels as though she only spoke to him out of duty rather than interest. The boys that the girl at Araby is flirting with are Englishmen which signifies that they are more interesting to her than the narrator who is, like everyone else, Irish. The purpose of the narrator’s desire of going to the bazaar has little to do with his own interest in experiencing it but to buy something for the girl, in order to impress her. The narrator’s actions eventually lead him to these feelings of disappointment. The events that lead to this disappointment are evident in several ways. Firstly, the narrator arrives at the bazaar only to discover that only a few booths are still open and secondly the woman behind the booth ignoring him indicates that the narrator will not be finding the gift he promised to the girl. In addition to this, the prices on the remaining items at the bazaar are above the price range the narrator was expecting; the gift and the events following after are a stark contrast to what he was fantasizing about. Joyce depicts an emotional journey: this journey begins in innocence, runs through

disillusionment, and ends in loss (Bentley 37). His loss of adventure and innocence is apparent after he leaves Araby empty handed and disappointed.

The narrator is not only upset with the adults in and surrounding his life but also the bazaar not living up to his expectations and more importantly, himself. As he leaves the bazaar, he gazes up into the darkness and feels a surge of anger. “Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger” (25). He feels foolish and not only is he disappointed with himself but everyone around him. He failed to do the one thing he promised, which does not give him instant or long-term gratification and satisfaction he was longing for. “... ‘Araby’ ...represents an attempted but frustrated escape in the form of a defeated quest” (Khorsand 93). In the narrator’s mind, these events that ended in his doomed journey signify his impending unhappiness; he now believes that he will never be happy because of the choices he has made. Khorsand points out that our narrator in “Araby” has matured in his mindset and how he sees things: “The story starts with the child-like tone and with the change of his state of mind; the tone also changes, as if he is actually maturing” (95). The narrator’s disappointment and loss of hope has escalated from that of his predecessor in “An Encounter”. Not only has the fair let him down, but his disappointment stems to Mangan’s sister. Most importantly, the narrator realizes he will never be able to escape from himself and the notion that he will have to eventually grow up and face the ugliness and realities of life.

## “Eveline”

In *Dubliners*, “Eveline” gives readers a more mature character than previously shown trapped in the throes of life. Although she is the first female narrator we get and more mature in physical nature and responsibility, she, like the other characters before her, cannot take control of her life and break out of the cycle she is trapped in. Eveline’s story mostly takes place in her own mind so that readers can see her struggle with the decisions that she has to make, but her situation is inherently worse because she has the opportunity to do something about her situation, yet she does not. Along with the unclaimed opportunities, Eveline continues to allow the past memories of her mother and life keep hold of her. Joyce allows readers to crawl into Eveline’s mind and reminisce with her when he writes: “...they seemed to have been rather happy then... father was not so bad then, and besides her mother was alive. That was a long time ago; she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up; her mother was dead” (27). This memory evokes emotions from a happier time, which is a stark contrast to her current life and feelings. Much of this short story takes readers through Eveline’s struggle to make a decision about her life and future. In Khorsand’s view: “Her mind repeatedly moves back and fro to the memories of her friends, her brothers and her mother and suddenly jumps to the future in which Frank is the only decisive element; Her past so crowded and her future so empty” (100). Joyce provides readers an air of sympathy with Eveline because her inability to make a decision has little to do with her and much to do about leaving her family behind along with the promises she made to her mother who is now deceased. Readers see Eveline yearn for escape, but also see her struggle with the comforts of her current life that ties to the past.

Her lack of confidence in her own future is shown from the very beginning: “She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? ...In her home anyway, she had shelter

and food; she had those whom she had known all her life... What would they say of her in the stores...? ...she was a fool perhaps..." (Joyce 28). Throughout the story, Eveline mostly thinks about her home and her family, but rarely mentions Frank and how she feels about him: the little bit that readers do receive, shows her true feelings about Frank and their relationship: "it had been an excitement for her to have a fellow and then she had begun to like him" (Joyce 30). This is the strongest description of Eveline's feelings for Frank that we are presented with which isn't a typical example of romance. Eveline is faced with the dilemma of either staying home and taking care of her family or leaving in order to marry the man she thinks she loves. She agrees to marry Frank but struggles with her decision even though her life at home is uneventful and miserable: "...tedium, fear, unceasing labor, and constrictions of her life ... to produce a bleak picture" (French 452). Joyce describes Eveline as being "tired," and through her reflections, we find that her father is not only abusive but also useless when it comes to taking care of her family; therefore, she has settled for living a domestic life much like her mother (26). According to Khorsand, Eveline feels conflicted about her current status of complacent daughter or future wife: "[S]he delivers a sad impression of her life with her father, of her attempts in meeting the ends of the family, of her financial distresses and of her heavy responsibilities as a young woman. But she suddenly finishes with a basically different image; that in spite of all the hardships in her life, she still finds it satisfactory or desirable to go on as it is" (100). Being trapped in a domestic state of life leaves Eveline to daydream and wonder about what could be, and the stories she hears from Frank, her lover, only increases her longing for a more exciting life. Eveline uses Frank's tales as an escape to an exciting life, unlike her own: "[H]e had tales of distant countries... [H]e told her the names of the ships he had been on and the names of the different services. He had sailed through the Straights of Magellan and told her stories of the

terrible Patagonians” (29,30). As Khorsand points out that Eveline mainly refers to Frank as “he” which funnels his character down to a simple pronoun, rather than a true love interest; in reality, Frank served as a superficial escape for a fresh start and better life. Although he promises her a life outside of Dublin, he cannot save her from the entrapment she has already been doomed to, which uncannily resembles that of her deceased mother’s.

Joyce’s “Eveline” presents readers with a young woman’s internal struggle that constitutes something more serious than that of the other characters in Joyce’s previous short stories in *Dubliners*. Eveline not only has the desire to flee from this life connected to her in Dublin, but also the *opportunity* to break free of the shackles of this tiresome life. Readers see a major struggle within Eveline’s mind and heart, but: “She insists on using the verb ‘would’ whenever she talks about her future. This could only be a sign of her hesitation. She is suspicious from the very beginning” (Khorsand 100,101). Readers get glimpses into Eveline’s life and the struggles she has to endure because of her father’s lack of responsibility he flees from:

...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... She had to work to keep the house together and to see that the two young children...went to school regularly and got their meals... (29)

Here, readers see Eveline having to grow up quickly after her mother passes, and because she takes on this matriarchal role, she feels obligated to her family to stay. In “Eveline” the window is symbolic of the escape she takes in the form of her daydreams. Trevor Williams notes that: “...dreams of escape, the only form in which a future is available—and even dreams, in *Dubliners*, are rare...” (438) Joyce makes it evident that Eveline cannot decide what the right choice is for her, and her window gazing suggests both longing and fear. Eveline looks around at

her home and realizes that her emotional attachment isn't only to her family, but objects that have filled her everyday life: "[H]ome! She looked around the room reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years... perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided" (Joyce 27). She clings to these ordinary objects along with their memories, which indicates that she cannot let go of her family relationships even though her mother is no longer with them. She obviously feels a pull towards fulfilling the promise she made to her mother to keep the family together, but she battles with the thought of living the same dull and draining life that her mother did.

Eveline is complacent and although she fantasizes about a new life with Frank, she seems to be having a hard time with actually going through with it. The notion of leaving and beginning a new life is exhilarating, but to have to actually leave her family and go through with it offers the reader more insight into Eveline's mindset: although she has been damaged and let down by her father, she cannot bring herself to do the same to him. Although Eveline's father is emotionally abusive and an alcoholic, she clings to the better memories she has of him when her mother was alive: "...they had all gone for a picnic... She remembered her father putting on her mother's bonnet to make the children laugh" (Joyce 30). Her empathy for her father makes it difficult to leave him and her siblings. One might also wonder if she cannot leave her father because of the promise to her mother or if it's because he is the only connection left to the happy memories she once had with her family before her mother's passing. Eveline also lets readers know that although her life of taking care of her father and siblings isn't exactly desirable, she is not completely unhappy: "It was hard work—a hard life—but now that she was about to leave it she did not find it a wholly undesirable life" (Joyce 29). It's possible that by showing readers her inability to decide, Joyce is hinting that she is terrified of what will happen once her daily routine

is interrupted. Readers can sense Eveline's anxiety about the state of her current life through her restlessness: "[H]er time was running out... She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape!" (Joyce 30,31) By leaving to go to the station to meet with Frank, she is taking a step towards her new life, but all of the time it took her to actually leave her house hints at the fact that she has already made up her mind.

Finally, Eveline takes action and leaves her home in hopes of starting a new life: "[U]p to this point, there has been a static and stagnant situation. Prior to this...nothing has happened. The narrator has been sitting next to the window recalling and going through her feeling in an unconscious dialogue" (Khorsand 102). Down at the dock, it still seems as if Eveline is still trying to convince herself that running away with Frank is a good idea. It is uncanny that both of the characters in "Eveline" and "Araby" bring themselves up to this heightened sense of change and happiness only to let them sink down into disappointment after it is done and over. Although Eveline knows that there is a new life and fresh start that will lead to happiness outside of Dublin, she cannot bring herself to leave with Frank. As she stands on the dock, it is as if she is cemented there and cannot move: "She answered nothing...Her distress awoke a nausea in her body and she kept moving her lips in silent fervent prayer. It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish" (Joyce 31). She watches as the boat Frank is on leaves, but she still does not seem fully confident in her decision to stay; Joyce describes Eveline as a: "passive... helpless animal" (32). Joyce furthers the notion of Frank being insignificant in the larger scheme of things when he writes: "[H]er eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (32). It is clear now that this attempt to escape was never about Frank, but about her own situation. In not allowing herself to fully obligate herself to the decision to leave with Frank, she does not completely set herself up for disappointment when she

finds that she is unable to go, but she is aware that by not going she must prepare herself for a lifetime of regret and looking back at her past.

It's unclear, however, if Eveline chose to stay with her father or if she was trying to prevent herself from further hurt or distress in her life with Frank. She is perceptibly not content with her life at the moment, but not despondent enough to do anything but dream about it. When Eveline gazes out her window, it suggests that she wants more, but she cannot truly commit to anything besides staying with her father and fulfilling the promise to her mother. In *Missing Pieces in Joyce's Dubliners*, we read: "Eveline wants freedom from oppression, but does not possess enough will or selfhood to conceive of freedom to do anything..." (French 451) What is clear is the fact that Eveline is not living her full life; she is simply reacting to the people and experiences around her. Nothing she does is for herself; she is simply trying to please the people around her. Eveline cannot escape this life that she was born into, but this is not just a question of whether she can or not; it is a question of if she wants to. At the end of "Eveline," we see her stuck in her own emotions and caught between her grieving father and the life she is comfortable with or a life that could provide a new beginning for her: "All what we have is Eveline's imaginations and hesitation" (Khorsand 101). This adventure that Eveline is given the chance to take is just a quick escape from her current situation; she does not ever truly see herself leaving with Frank. David Ben-Mere concludes:

The tragic ending, where she waits "like a helpless animal" at the dock, is classically understood as yet another example of Dublin's paralysis and its citizenry's metaphorical death (D 41). Like so many of her companions in Joyce's short-story collection, Eveline has made the "wrong" choice (455,456).

Eveline, like our narrator in *Araby* is disappointed in herself and her inability to take charge of her own life and make a decision for herself. Khorsand writes: “the point with “Eveline” is that in that story actually nothing happens. The character is inactive. She practically does nothing in the process of the story and her only action is a refusal to take an action: leaving the country” (98). Yet again, we find a lonely alienated character that is trapped by the constraints of life.

Eveline, much like Gabriel and Gretta in “*The Dead*” hold onto the past and the ghosts that come with it and allow them to seep into their current lives.

## “The Dead”

In, “The Dead,” Joyce opens his story with a party that the protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, and his wife, Gretta, are attending. Throughout the story, readers can clearly see that Gabriel is trying escape from the routine of his life, his failing relationship with his wife along with the reality of who he is; eventually, his attempts to rekindle his relationship in hopes of changing his life, fails just as every other character in *Dubliners* fail to escape. The very beginning of the story describes Gabriel’s arrival to the party and how he interacts with the characters at the party along with his inner thoughts and feelings. Gabriel’s sense of superiority can be seen throughout several instances in the beginning, but the most significant being his speech which was meant to thank his aunts and cousins. He dumbs down his speech so that he doesn’t come off as pompous to the other guests and ends up making a fool of himself just as well; “He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers” (Joyce 155). Gabriel deems himself to be smarter than and superior to the other guests of the party and by quoting someone they aren’t familiar with, he believes that he will make a fool of himself which is his biggest fear. It’s evident that Gabriel keeps everyone, including his wife, at arms distance and doesn’t attempt to deepen these relationships until the very end, but even then, his attempt at connecting with his wife is superficial at best. Roland Wagner writes:

Gabriel is revealed to be both secure and insecure, the ‘generous’ and responsible husband...and the somewhat cold, anxious, and sexually uncertain lover. His insecurity is manifest in his self-absorbed, self-justifying and hypocritical feelings of superiority towards the guests... (448)

He lacks an emotional connection with the people and the setting around him, but most importantly, himself. Everyone that he is supposedly close with, tiptoes around him and it’s clear

that there are no true relationships. He criticizes his wife taking “three mortal hours to dress herself,” which could be taken lightly but he is patronizing rather than joking (Joyce 153). His disparaging comments towards his wife do not stop there; he is appalled that Gretta “would walk home in the snow if she were let” (Joyce 180). Gretta’s behavior towards the party guests along with the fact that she is not above walking through the snow are a stark contrast to Gabriel, himself, since he refuses to let his guard down for fear of being judged. Although Gretta comes off as guarded, she is not pompous, nor does she come off as superior. Gabriel feels as if he is above others, yet he obsesses over what everyone else thinks of him. Gabriel is made to look foolish by his friends and family members: “...for Gabriel’s solicitude was a standing joke with them” (Joyce 156). Gabriel’s paralysis stems from his superiority and lack of emotional connection to the people around him, including himself.

Gabriel constantly struggles with his self-identity and allows the comments of others to undermine and diminish the way he feels about himself. We immediately see him as a character who struggles with a clashing set of values: what is expected and what actually is., Benjamin Boysen notes that:

A minor series of events during the evening causes him to swing to and fro between feelings of superiority and inadequacy. His self-confidence is undermined by the comments of the bitter servant, Lily, by the criticism from a teacher colleague, by Molly Ivors, and by the lacking sense of self, which secretly tortures him. His ego is on the other hand greatly flattered and supported by the aunts’ dependency on him, by his primary role when the joint is to be carved, and finally by his compilation of an after-dinner speech (401).

Gabriel is paralyzed by his self-consciousness, as well as social anxiety. He battles with what the

correct thing to say would be, even though it's not exactly what he would like to say. His problem with how people perceive him is at the heart of his problems being that he is constantly self-conscious and self-aware, yet ridiculously pompous. He does not want to make a scene with Miss Ivors at dinner, yet he cannot stop himself from bragging about his job and traveling in order to escape the endless and meaningless conversations. Gabriel is a man torn between his want for people to perceive him a certain way and his internal battle with his wife's aloofness at the party. In Joyce's "The Dead," we see Gabriel continuously try to prove his intelligence and worth to the various people at the party: "Gabriel is caught between an arrogant cultural feeling of superiority and latent feelings of inadequacy, and he projects this inner drama out into the social world, which thus becomes a stage for his continuous strivings for self-affirmation" (Boysen 401). The façade that he presents to society, his wife, and even himself provides a false sense of admiration for him. It seems as though everyone is anticipating his arrival, and when we see him arrive at the party, he is conceitedly expecting everyone's anticipation. This quality we see in him makes him a bit pompous and, although it's admirable that he takes care of Freddy Malins, the drunk, and the others, his true entitled nature is revealed. What I find the most interesting about Gabriel is that he is quick to dismiss any woman that challenges him, like Lilly or Miss Ivors. It's off putting that he tries to shut Lilly up with a handsome tip instead of giving a sincere apology for overstepping a boundary. Through his fretting about the speech and other various aspects throughout the party, one can see that although he is pretentious and exudes confidence, he craves the acceptance from everyone which provides an escape from the reality of his true self. Gabriel is sincerely oblivious to the people and his environment; it's as if he just floats around and is simply there rather than being truly present or registering what is actually going on around him rather than what he wants.

As the party winds down, Gabriel watches his wife standing at the top of the stairs as she listens to someone sing “The Lass of Aughrim” and stares longingly off into the distance. “The Lass of Aughrim” is described in *“The Lass of Aughrim” – Love, Tragedy, and the Power of the Past* as: “...a song depicting a misinterpretation between lovers as leading their tragic separation, serves to reveal the lack of true intimacy and genuine love binding the Conroys, bringing about an emotional distance between them” (Kapus 3). Gabriel notices that this song turns his wife from socialite into recluse as she retreats into herself for the rest of the night until she reveals the story of Michael Furey; “In ‘The Dead,’ ‘The Lass of Aughrim’ serves as an interpretive lens for addressing the weighty subject of a tragic death motivated by love, especially when such love has been hidden within the memory for years... Gabriel observes his wife Gretta, with ‘grace and mystery in her attitude’ listening to ‘The Lass of Aughrim’...” (Kapus 3) He thinks of their life together and the hum of their schedules:

...moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illuminated his memory. He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy... 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 (Joyce 186).

As they make their way back towards the hotel, Gabriel seems to be delighted in the fact that he and his wife are now alone, and he is riding on this high he has brought himself up to of rekindling some kind of fire within his relationship; “She had no longer any grace of attitude, but Gabriel’s eyes were still bright with happiness. The blood went bounding along his veins and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous” (Joyce 185). Gabriel fantasizes about the moments he and his wife will have once they reach their room: “He longed

to be the master of her strange mood... He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her” (Joyce 189). Something is wrong with the way Gabriel fantasizes about his wife and his assertion of power over her. His feelings are not about a mutual love or even a tender desire; instead, he wants to overpower her and is getting turned on by these thoughts of power; his thoughts and desires are purely and sexually selfish.

It’s as if he has a fantasy of controlling his wife and sees an opportunity to fulfill it, but these strange feelings are countered by his wife’s aloofness and his inability to understand why she seems so distant. Once again, we see Gabriel’s need to affirm his power, even over his wife. Boysen states: “Gretta’s story puts a final stop to the idea of the union between Gabriel’s ego and the consciousness with which he is confronted, and which he is unable to comprehend, or master” (411). As he watches his wife, he concocts a plan to shift their relationship back to where he wants it to be. They take a cab home and Gabriel fantasizes about having sex with his wife and dominating her: “[T]o take her as she was would be brutal... He longed to be the master of her strange mood. He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her” (Joyce 169). Gabriel longs to dominate his wife and Joyce’s words leave readers wondering just how far he would take these fantasies. In their hotel, Gabriel attempts to rekindle the flame of his marriage with Gretta and longs to make love to her. Rather than give in to Gabriel, Gretta falls away from her husband and onto the bed sobbing and hiding her face. She tells him that the song “The Lass of Aughrim” reminded her of Michael Furey, a man she thought was the love of her life, because he used to sing it when they were together. Gretta tells Gabriel the story of how she was leaving to come to Dublin and Michael, even though very ill, came to see her in the pouring rain in the middle of the winter. After she had arrived in Dublin, she learned of Michael’s death and believes that his last visit to her was a selfless act of love that

cost him his life. As his wife cries herself to sleep, Gabriel finds himself gravely disappointed; he thinks about how she has kept this sadness and love for Michael Furey in her heart this whole time. Even more so, he is disturbed to realize that he is not the only man his wife has ever loved. Her growing distance and emotional detachment were due to her inability to let go of her former lover Michael Furey and what he did for her. Rather than feeling sorry and sad for his wife, he is upset that he was unable to have sex with her and he becomes exceedingly jealous of Michael Furey. He watches the snow fall down outside of his window and contemplates his very being.

Gabriel's humiliation is deepened because he has been outdone by a dead man: "So she had had that romance in her life: a man had died for her sake. It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life" (Joyce 193). He realizes now that there is much about their relationship he did not fulfill, and no matter how much effort he put into their relationship, he would never out do Michael Furey, who "had braved death" for Gabriel's wife (Joyce 193). Kapus contrasts Gabriel and Michael: "'He was very delicate,' she says (Joyce 204). Gretta reveals to her husband that Michael was very sick and yet snuck out in the rain to see her; she tells Gabriel, 'I think he died for me' (Joyce 205). Gabriel, shocked and pained by the sudden revelation that he is not his wife's first love, withdraws from her" (Kapus 3). Gabriel's supposed realizations may be meant to be surprising or even powerful, but he has not gained anything and is left with exactly what he came with: only himself. When Gabriel experiences his epiphany, he first understands that he is unable to love and finds himself crying. He isn't able to be truly empathetic towards his wife or her feelings and ultimately shows his selfish nature. Wagner shows readers that while "...both Michael and Gabriel are delicate... Michael is openly delicate while Gabriel hides his weakness...and manages to appear competent and successful to the world" (449). He seeks solace and wallows in his own self-pity by

contemplating his own impending death, and what it would mean when he died and had contributed nothing bold or great to this life. As Gabriel watches the snow, he contemplates a journey away from Dublin and his current situation in hopes of finding something other than this mundane and dreary life: “He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward” (Joyce 194). Although Gabriel might dream of leaving Dublin with his wife and rekindling their love and getting away from this situation– he will never fully escape from this reality of his wife’s sadness over her former lover and the fact that he will never measure up to Michael Furey.

As Gabriel looks out at the graveyard and looks upon “all the living and the dead” he realizes, now, that he cannot change nor, will he ever change his true nature (Joyce 194). Joyce writes, “His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world...” (194) Joyce takes Gabriel’s paralysis even further by linking it to the cold and silent snow that is now blanketing Dublin; Gabriel, like the snow is cold and his emotions are blanketed:

It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight...It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead (Joyce 194).

Gabriel realizes that Michael has won because he has escaped, whereas Gabriel is stuck and also struck with the realization that he does not know who he truly is. Walzl concludes that: "...all the forms of psychological paralysis evident in the previous...are skillfully blended. Conroy is shown so timid and emotionally frustrated that he is unable to assert himself either in his public or personal relationships" (228). Gabriel thinks to himself: "Better to pass boldly into that other world, in the full flory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age" (Joyce 194). This only continues to illuminate Gabriel's paralysis. He understands, now, that he has missed out on passionate love and that when his wife lays next to him, she thinks of her dead lover. He contemplates death rather than living a life void of true love and emotion. He is paralyzed within himself; he is dead.

## Order of Presentation

The order in which Joyce presented these stories is significant because the desire to escape and paralysis of the characters escalates as we read on. We know that he wrote *Dubliners* as a reflection of the people of Dublin. As Walzl notes, Joyce wrote his book to show the paralysis of city life under the eye of the church. Walzl concludes that Joyce organized *Dubliners* into evolving sections: childhood, adolescence, maturity and the public life. The narrator in “The Sisters” fits into the childhood section because of his confused emotional state and the fact that he is told what to do and ordered around by adults, our narrators in “An Encounter” and “Araby” fit into the adolescence section because they are innocent but have to deal with some complex and difficult emotions about the world and the realities of it, “Eveline” gives us a look into a more mature character because she has to make a decision that doesn’t only affect her, but her family and lover and lastly, “The Dead” shows us a couple, Gabriel and Gretta whose marriage seems lovely and perfect in public but harbors dark and hurtful secrets behind closed doors. It’s also interesting to note that three of Joyce’s narrators of the stories analyzed in the previous sections have no name. One can conclude that Joyce did not give names to these characters because they are representative of us all, normal people struggling throughout life. They are not significant enough in their own lives to make decisions and escape a life of unhappiness and misery.

There is no escape for these characters or the people that surround them. They are confined within Dublin, within the restrictions of society, their families and their own expectations. Gabriel, in his own self-indulgence, stares out into the snow and thinks about Michael Furey’s grave where he lays. Ultimately, Gabriel has to live with the fact that he will

never be Michael Furey or good enough for his wife, Gretta. He cannot escape the information that he has learned or his own mind as he thinks about his own looming death.

Throughout *Dubliners*, these characters must live with exactly what they want to escape from-- some of them because they have no choice in the matter, and the others because of their own doings. Walzl explains: "The end of their quest confronts them with corruption, materialism, and loss of values represented by images of darkness, decay, blindness, and sterility" (223). We see our narrators and main characters in *Dubliners* make some sort of journey whether it be mental or physical and each and every one of them is left in disappointment. Joyce made it clear that even though some of these characters were given a choice, they were not in control of their own lives.

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