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# Life and Death in Joyce's Dubliners

Matthew Gallman

Clemson University, [gallman@clemson.edu](mailto:gallman@clemson.edu)

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LIFE AND DEATH IN JOYCE'S DUBLINERS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts  
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by  
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Wayne Chapman, Committee Chair  
Catherine Paul  
Arthur Young

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of James Joyce's *Dubliners* as a collection of stories that is unified by an ongoing intersection between life and death. In the collection, the dead often serve to expose a deficiency in the living. The thesis explores four stories that share this theme in particular: "The Sisters," "A Painful Case," "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," and "The Dead." Each story is also presented in the context of how each relates to the progression from youth to public life within *Dubliners*. As such, the thesis also considers how *Dubliners* exhibits a progression towards isolation and paralysis in the living until the final story, "The Dead," which marks a reversal of this trend. Thus, "The Dead" is interpreted as a positive, hopeful ending to the bleak collection, and such an interpretation resolves the ambiguity of the story and reinterprets its role as a conclusion to *Dubliners*. Furthermore, other themes and motifs that have been observed by critics are also examined in this thesis, including silences, communions, drinking, and the Oriental trend to the collection.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Taken at a surface level, Joyce's *Dubliners* is essentially a collection of short stories with no linear continuity. However, to consider the work this way is to largely ignore the fact that *Dubliners* is structured around themes and motifs and, as such, the collection should be considered more than a series of vignettes of Dublin life. Instead, the collection is unified, and many of the stories lose their richness when read out of context. As Ghiselin notes, "the idea is not altogether new that the structure of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, long believed to be loose and episodic, is really unitary" (35). Ghiselin continues by noting that "Richard Levin and Charles Shattuck made it clear that the book 'is something more than a collection of discrete sketches'" (35). Wright, too, notices that "the individual stories in *Dubliners* do furnish context for each other" (256). Viewed in this light, *Dubliners* becomes an infinitely complex work whose "integrity" is "enhance[d]" (Ghiselin 36). Ghiselin cites Levin's observation that "the episodes are arranged in careful progression from childhood to maturity, broadening from private to public scope"; however, in 1969, Ghiselin declared that such a "narrow understanding of *Dubliners* is no longer acceptable" (36). Instead, Ghiselin points to the various symbols in the novel and ultimately argues that the "unity of *Dubliners* is realized, finally, in terms of religious images and ideas, most of them distinctly Christian" (39).

The approaches by both Ghiselin and Wright allow for a myriad of avenues in which to explore *Dubliners*. Indeed, even the most obscure of motifs, including "odor," the "looking glass," "ashpits," "old weeds," and "offal," have been said to "contribute to

the aesthetic pleasure and unity of *Dubliners* as a whole” (Jones 112). It is within this context that I offer another unifying theme in the work: the intersection of life and death that occurs throughout the collection. As Ruoff notes, “Padraic Colum once observed that the most memorable stories in *Dubliners* are those which have to do with people touched by death” (108). More specifically, it would seem that Joyce intends to show that the living are not “touched” as much as they are haunted by the dead (Ruoff 108). In my thesis, I explore this relationship between life and death in *Dubliners* and, particularly, show that Joyce often exalts the latter to show the former’s failures. In fact, the dead often serve to propel a narrative or to provide some sort of realization for the living. Indeed, Joyce often does not treat death as an end; instead, the dead tend to linger in the minds of the living and constantly interrupt life while exposing and instilling a paralysis in the living.

In his praise of Irish poet James Clarence Mangan, James Joyce exalted the poet’s “intense broodings upon Ireland’s woe”; furthermore, Joyce also argued that these broodings were, “however, too unrelieved by the perception of the ‘holy spirit of joy’” (Ellman 95). Thus, Joyce argued that “literature to come must be a fusing of Mangan’s intense romantic imagination with a classical strength and serenity” (Ellmann 95). Joyce further proposed that “the time is come wherein a man of timid courage seizes the keys of hell and of death, and flings them far out into the abyss, proclaiming the praise of life, which the abiding splendour of truth may sanctify, and of *death, the most beautiful form of life*” (Joyce, “James Clarence Mangan” 60, emphasis mine). This last, italicized

portion of Joyce's quote is a theme that Joyce would revisit in his literary career, particularly in his short story collection, *Dubliners*.

In my thesis, I propose to explore the intersection of life and death in *Dubliners*, and particularly show that Joyce often exalts the latter to show the former's failures. In fact, the dead often serve to propel a narrative or provide some sort of realization for the living. Indeed, Joyce often does not treat death as an end; instead, the dead tend to linger, constantly interrupting life while exposing and instilling a paralysis in the living.

I intend to examine four stories from *Dubliners* in this context: "The Sisters," "A Painful Case," "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," and "The Dead," with each story encompassing a chapter in the thesis. Also, I will examine how each story represents a very specific intersection of life and death and discuss this theme within the overall narrative progression from youth towards old age within *Dubliners*. Much has been written about this narrative progression, and I do not think it is a coincidence that Joyce explores the effects of death during each stage of life.

A quick overview of each story reveals the theme of life and death intersecting within this narrative progression. The collection opens with "The Sisters," where Joyce treats readers with the ultimate contrast of youthful, innocent life experiencing the paralyzing quality of death for the first time. "A Painful Case" explores the intersection of passionate love and death in adult life, as James Duffy must reckon with a life rendered meaningless due to his reluctance to return a lover's passion. Joyce later examines the effect of death in the sphere of public life in "Ivy Day of the Committee Room," where Charles Parnell looms posthumously and contrasts with the political

paralysis of Ireland. With “The Dead,” the final, valedictory story of *Dubliners*, the character of Michael Furey embodies each of these intersections of love, passion, and death. Protagonist Gabriel Conroy is then left to examine the emptiness of his own life and those around him, as he recognizes a pervasive, death-like paralysis. “The Dead,” then, achieves a crescendo effect regarding death’s presence in *Dubliners*. Thus, *Dubliners*, while a seemingly random collection of vignettes depicting life in Dublin, finds a unity in death.

For my first chapter, I focus on “The Sisters,” as it provides the first intersection between life and death in the collection. Particularly important, however, is the unnamed child narrator of the story, as the reader encounters death through his eyes. Thus, the story presents a contrast between youth and death that immediately establishes death’s presence within the collection. The story also introduces the theme of paralysis that recurs throughout *Dubliners*; although the narrator of the story is referring to the priest’s paralysis here, Joyce reveals the living characters (the narrator and the eponymous sisters) to actually be paralyzed in the presence of the dead Father Flynn.

The theme of paralysis is one that Joyce himself espouses when he describes Dublin as “the scene because that city seemed to [him] the centre of the paralysis” (qtd. in Werner 33). As such, “nearly all critics have recognized [paralysis] as Joyce’s central theme” in the collection (33). In the novel, Joyce presents a literal paralysis in the aforementioned Father Flynn; however, he also presents a figurative paralysis that exists within the characters. Specifically, a figurative paralysis refers to the characters’ inability to literally move from a stifling Irish environment. However, one also sees another

paralysis emerge in the lack of meaningful personal interactions and relationships in Dublin life. Throughout the collection, readers find characters that are emotionally stifled by their environment, and, as a result, life in Dublin is a sterile, unfulfilling existence. In the four stories explicitly explored in this thesis, it is the dead that illuminate this sterility in the living, as the former often appears more vivacious to the latter. This precedent is set forth in “The Sisters,” as the dead, paralyzed priest is literally paralyzed in his final days; however, his death seems like an escape. Furthermore, his presence still hangs over the scene to show that the living are emotionally paralyzed in his presence, as they prattle on in a seemingly meaningless existence. Indeed, Father Flynn’s death is even referred to as “beautiful,” which echoes Joyce’s aforementioned sentiment on death (Joyce, *Dubliners* 15). Thus, readers find a dichotomy of beautiful death and tortured, paralyzed life in “The Sisters,” and this is true of the entire collection.

A close reading of the opening paragraph in “The Sisters” is a key to me in examining not only “The Sisters” itself, but the entire collection of *Dubliners*. As Staley notes, the “acknowledge[ment] of the opening paragraph [of “The Sisters”] as an overture for the themes, conflicts, and tensions that were to be evoked and stated again and again...throughout all of *Dubliners* has been critical commonplace” (Staley 20). Staley refers particularly to the “first sentence’s tone of finality and certainty [which] begins the circle of death for *Dubliners*, a circle clear enough from the last lines of the final story, “The Dead”” (Staley 22). However, one can also argue that this paragraph establishes a specific link between death and paralysis that will also recur throughout the entire collection.

Moving on, I show that “A Painful Case” examines how death interrupts adult life. Contrary to the death of Flynn in “The Sisters,” the death of Mrs. Sinico suddenly occurs within the story, leaving readers to witness the way her death interrupts and destroys the life of the methodical protagonist, James Duffy. Within the story, Duffy is revealed to lead a passionless, non-descript life, which enables the character to represent the archetypal Dubliner. The main conflict of the story arises when Duffy inexplicably rejects a passionate overture by his lover, Mrs. Sinico. Duffy cannot comprehend or reckon with this moment of passion interrupting his life, and rejects Mrs. Sinico to “return to his even way of life” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 112). Mrs. Sinico, on the other hand, is not able to return to her mundane life and apparently commits suicide by throwing herself in front of a moving train, an image invoking the doomed romance of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. Duffy later learns of her death through a newspaper clip and is immediately haunted by this revelation. Furthermore, he begins to realize how passionless his life actually is; thus, death leads to a realization or consciousness on the part of the living. At any rate, the story again presents a dynamic that seems to exalt death over life, as Mrs. Sinico’s suicide is a passionate escape from a mundane world. Meanwhile, Duffy resigns himself to a passionless, emotionally-paralyzed existence.

“A Painful Case” also exhibits many of the smaller themes or motifs from “The Sisters” as it pertains to death. For example, one finds a sense of communion and conflation between the living and dead in both stories which serves to further intertwine the two. Just as the narrator of “The Sisters” drinks his sherry in silence, Duffy begins to drink after Mrs. Sinico’s death, an activity which mirrors Mrs. Sinico’s own habits before

her death. Also, the end of “A Painful Case” is marked by a haunting, oppressive silence that tortures Duffy. As Rabate notes, the silence here mirrors the silence found in “The Sisters,” and readers see the relative silences operating similarly (39). Throughout my thesis, I will examine how Joyce weaves these smaller motifs and themes throughout all four stories to further unify *Dubliners*.

The next story I examine, “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” explores death in the public sphere. Although the previous stories examine an individual’s encounters with death, this story reveals the paralyzing effect of Ireland in general through its politics. Furthermore, unlike the previous stories, the dead figure is never physically present at all; instead, the story evokes the memory of the great Irish politician Charles Parnell. For the first time in *Dubliners*, the dead figure is meant to evoke some sense of faded glory and possibly inspire a sense of dynamism in the living. However, these politicians and activists ironically do very little during the course of the story, apart from slandering each other and debating the role Ireland should play in welcoming the king of England.

This story continues to build upon the role of the living *Dubliners*, particularly in their own awareness or consciousness of the dead. Whereas the first two stories feature characters who are forced to confront the dead, the characters in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” are ignorant of Parnell. This is best seen in the fact that none of the men seem to be truly moved by Hynes’s speech; instead, they seem to be only concerned with the shallow aesthetics of the piece. Furthermore, Joyce again employs silence to reveal the politicians’ ignorance. Instead of leaving readers with a profound silence, the story ends with the politicians’ inane patter, which indicates that these characters are too

far gone to be redeemed. Indeed, one can argue that Duffy at least serves a penance by realizing his passionless life; however, the same cannot be said for the characters in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” Ultimately, the dead figure there again serves to highlight the paralyzed nature of the living.

Finally, I examine the last story in the collection, “The Dead,” and this chapter is slightly longer than the preceding ones. If the opening paragraph to “The Sisters” is the overture of *Dubliners*, then “The Dead” is certainly the crescendo, as it intertwines the themes from all the previous stories to once again seemingly establish an indomitable paralysis found in the living (here represented by protagonist Gabriel Conroy and the other party-goers). Throughout the story, however, the eponymous dead remain in the background while symbols and images of death are interspersed throughout. However, the eventual emergence of Michael Furey at the close of the story represents the ultimate “triumph” of the dead in *Dubliners* (Hart 153). In Michael Furey, readers see both the intersection of death with both youth and love, which is evocative of “The Sisters” and “A Painful Case,” respectively. More importantly, however, Michael Furey is directly responsible for Gabriel’s realization. While this seems simply to repeat the themes of “A Painful Case,” that is not the case.

Instead, the ending of “The Dead” is much more optimistic. One can argue that “The Dead” seems to imply a sort of rebirth, as Gabriel pledges to revisit the land of his ancestors: Western Ireland. This vow is significant because Gabriel’s denial of his ancestry is a major theme of “The Dead.” This denial ties into Gabriel’s superiority complex towards those whom he encounters throughout the story, especially Lily, his

aunts, and, most importantly, Gretta. That Gabriel pledges to submit to a westward journey at least indicates some sort of action or attempt at self-improvement, a notion that is sorely missing from the previous stories. Also, while the final image does seem to firmly unite the living and the dead in the falling snow, one can argue that the snow represents a sort of grace for the living, as the snow will eventually melt. If this is the case, it seems that Joyce may be echoing Shelley's final line in "Ode to the West Wind": "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" While Joyce to this point has exalted death over life, it seems as if he is fulfilling his own desire for the artist to "praise...life," as he shows that life can be as vivacious as death (Ellmann 95).

On this subject of grace, I also explore another phenomenon found in "The Dead": the role of the Epiphany holiday. As Harty argues, one can very easily assume that the story takes place on the holiday. However, whereas Harty refers to this fact as a "small joke," I believe this to be a more profound statement by Joyce (23). If the party in "The Dead" is indeed an Epiphany party, then the absence of Christ himself is somewhat alarming. In many ways, Christ serves the same role as Parnell in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," as he is largely ignored despite the holiday being dedicated to his honor. It would seem that Joyce is again criticizing the ignorance of the living characters in the story; however, again, "The Dead" again provides a sliver of redemption for these characters, as there are arguably two Christ-like figures in the story: Michael Furey and Gabriel Conroy. The former's similarity to Christ is rather obvious: he dies so that Gabriel can realize that his life is passionless and so that he might be reborn. However, Gabriel himself also seems to take on a Christ-like role for the rest of the characters in

*Dubliners*, as his character offers the possibility of hope or redemption. By analyzing these two characters in this way, I believe it becomes all the more clear that “The Dead” represents a more optimistic ending to *Dubliners*, as Joyce, above all, is praising life and its possibilities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SISTERS

To begin seeing *Dubliners* as a work unified by death, one must start with the beginning. The opening story, “The Sisters,” is firmly concerned with death, particularly its intrusion on the lives left in its wake. By considering its place as essentially an opening chapter, one will eventually find a sense of unity throughout *Dubliners*, as this story establishes the overarching theme of death and its associated motifs: silences, communions, and epiphanies. While the later motif is found throughout the novel, the stories I will examine particularly contain epiphanies (or a lack thereof) in the presence of death. Furthermore, “The Sisters” is a story concerned with youth, which represents the beginning of the “progression from childhood to maturity” which eventually broadens “from private to public” (Ghiselin 36). In this respect, the story’s form parallels the narrative for the reader, as the story at its core is concerned with the young narrator’s developing awareness; at the same time, however, the reader also begins to simultaneously become aware of the aforementioned themes and motifs. As we shall see, “The Sisters” itself functions as a gnomon for the entire collection, as the narrator is the first of several who are frustrated or stifled by their environment.

“The Sisters” introduces readers to the world of *Dubliners* through the eyes of an unnamed child narrator. From the opening paragraph, readers must confront images of death along with the narrator, who bluntly states that “there was no hope for him this time,” referring to Father Flynn, the dead priest in the story (Joyce, *Dubliners* 9). Also, the narrator introduces the word “*paralysis*,” a theme which reoccurs with death

throughout the whole of *Dubliners*. The “acknowledge[ment] of the opening paragraph [of “The Sisters”] as an overture for the themes, conflicts, and tensions that were to be evoked and stated again and again...throughout all of *Dubliners* has been critical commonplace,” Staley notes (20). On the subject of death, Staley continues this notion of overture, as he notes that the first sentence’s tone of “finality and certainty...begins the circle of death for *Dubliners*, a circle clear enough from the last lines of the final story, ‘The Dead’” (22).

Adopting Staley’s idea that the opening paragraph acts as an overture, one can argue that death and paralysis are not to be seen as separate entities here, but, rather, their intersection in the opening paragraph suggests the relationship between the two in *Dubliners*. Beyond the narrator’s word-association in the first paragraph, one finds paralysis and death intertwining throughout “The Sisters.” Through physical paralysis, the priest here becomes the embodiment of most of the characters in the collection, who are paralyzed in some way, be it emotionally, artistically, or politically. Later, readers begin to see how death begins to interrupt or arrest the living, as the narrator “imagine[s] that [he] [sees] again the heavy grey face of the paralytic,” which hauntingly “follow[s]” the narrator (Joyce, *Dubliners* 11). Already, readers see that the dead play a haunting role in *Dubliners*, hovering over the living. However, this haunting does not content the dead, as they begin to instill a paralysis in those they haunt. Such is the case here, as the narrator notes that he finds himself “smiling feebly” like the corpse of the paralytic Father Flynn (11). Here, the living and dead first begin to merge as an image, with the narrator mirroring the state of the immobile priest. On the other hand, Father Flynn’s

presence is felt even in death. Corrington notes that “the boy and the old man fuse briefly” through this smile, and readers are left with this ultimate contrast of death and youth (24). The innocence of youth is tainted early in *Dubliners*, as death and Father Flynn permeate the entirety of “The Sisters,” looming over both narrator and reader in a sinister way. Rabate notes that the “child may supply the reader with a figure mirroring his own interpretative process” (36), as both narrator and reader simultaneously realize the paralyzing and intrusive nature of death in the world of *Dubliners*.

Continuing this thread, the reader watches the boy unwittingly realize this paralyzing quality of death. Ironically, the narrator calls attention to “a sensation of freedom as if [he] had been freed from something by his death” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 13). However, his actions in the story suggest otherwise, as readers begin to see Father Flynn’s presence manifest itself in the silence he leaves behind, which acts as an interrupting force. Indeed, the narrator introduces paralysis itself as a “maleficent and sinful being” that “fill[s] [him] with fear” even though he “long[s] to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 9). The young boy is clearly repelled yet transfixed by the paralysis he experiences here, which anticipates his inability to be truly free from Flynn’s death. As we shall see, it would seem that paralysis can also be considered the work of death, as both the boy and the sisters find themselves utterly arrested in the wake of Father Flynn’s demise.

The protagonist’s inability to find any sort of release from Flynn’s death is apparent when he finds himself mentally haunted by the dead priest. Here, the child finds himself “imagin[ing]...the heavy grey face of the paralytic”; furthermore, he feels that

the face “follow[s] [him]” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 11). Interestingly, the narrator refers to Flynn synecdochically here, as the priest becomes defined by a heavy pallor that suggests death incarnate, which again intertwines death and paralysis. Even more importantly, the boy here has rendered Flynn incomplete, a true “gnomon” in every sense of the word. Joyce takes the Euclidian definition of gnomon: “a remainder after something else has been removed” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 9; Connolly 86). Joyce Such a description of Flynn becomes more important later in the story when one considers who is actually left complete and incomplete by the story’s end. At any rate, this episode clearly illustrates the boy’s unwillingness to be freed by Flynn’s death. Indeed, it seems significant that he “imagine[s]” Flynn’s face instead of dreaming about it, as this would indicate a sort of conscious refusal to let the dead be truly dead. Werner notes that when “contemplating the word *paralysis*, the boy attributes to it an active presence that he wishes to observe rather than evade,” and the same can be said about death in general for the narrator, as both are intertwined throughout the story (45).

To continue this theme of haunting, the boy later realizes that “a silence [takes] possession of the [dead] room” and recalls the image of “the old priest...lying still in his coffin,” establishing the connection between silence and the stasis of death (17, 18). Here, the silence associated with Flynn is also aggressive, perhaps antagonistic, as it seeks to possess the realm of the living. The narrator refuses to “take some cream crackers” because he “[thinks] [he] would make too much noise eating them” (15). If Father Flynn’s presence is marked by silence, then one can take the narrator’s comments as evidence that he does not want to offend the priest himself. The mundane nature of

simply eating crackers and the narrator's inability to do so represents the profound effect of the priest's death on the boy. He does, however, "under the cover of [silence] taste [the] sherry," which Rabate acknowledges as the narrator's "indulg[ance] in [a] silent communion" (17; Rabate 42).

With this notion of communion, readers see the narrator again becoming merged with the world of the dead, as he partakes in the silence in an attempt to commune with the dead. This not only anticipates Joyce's employment of communion imagery throughout *Dubliners*, but also the narrator's description of Eliza "communing with the past" later in "The Sisters" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 17). Readers will often find the protagonists in *Dubliners* contemplating their past when faced with an absence or death of some sort, a development which culminates in the image of Michael Furey in "The Dead." Within the context of "The Sisters," such a communion marks the young narrator's entrance into a world where "the external environment crushes the individual sensibility" (Werner 41).

Here, we must return to the significance of the narrator's youth in the story. As Werner also notes, "the stories of childhood" in *Dubliners* "picture early confrontations of young boys with their corrupt environment (41). In the case of "The Sisters," such an environment is marked by an inevitable intersection of the living and the dead and wherein the latter haunts the former. As we have seen, the young individual here is indeed paralyzed by the external circumstances of his life as Werner would argue. Interestingly, Werner goes on to argue that such a suffocating experience "encourage[s] even the more sensitive...children to accept and internalize paralysis," which leads to

adult counterparts who “have surrendered utterly to paralysis” (41, 42). As readers shall see, James Duffy, the protagonist in “A Painful Case,” is clearly an example of an adult Dubliner who has repressed his emotional paralysis his entire life.

Returning to this idea of internalizing, it would seem that “The Sisters” represents the development of a consciousness of death and its paralyzing quality. Again, this development points to the story’s role as a beginning, as the development (or lack thereof) of the various narrators’ consciousness and awareness becomes a major issue throughout the work. Of course, epiphanies are abundant in the world of *Dubliners*; however, as Werner notes, Joyce only “gradually focuses his attention on the experience of revelation” (47). Furthermore, “the increasing complexity of his epiphanies is basic to the mature voice capable of articulating the contingent experience of truth as an ongoing process for character, author/narrator, and reader” (55). Readers particularly see such a development in the various protagonists’ encounters with death in the collection. Again, “The Sisters” represents a beginning for both narrator and reader. Just as the boy is experiencing a first encounter with death, readers are also having a first encounter with a world in *Dubliners*. As a result, both are simultaneously introduced to an intertwining of life and death.

Indeed, the moment of realization in the penultimate paragraph displays the narrator’s awareness of an overbearing death, as he simply states that he “knew that the old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him, solemn and truculent in death” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 18). Here, the narrator still attributes a sense of hostility to Flynn here as if to further show the haunting qualities of death. The detached style in which Joyce

reveals this realization is also important, as it indicates that the narrator himself is aware of anything beyond Flynn's corpse. This revelation "communicates no incredibly precocious philosophical breakthrough, but the verisimilitude of a dawning awareness, a gradual, hushed, yet decisive epiphany" (Beck 43). Most importantly, he does not seem conscious of his own paralysis as later narrators, such as Duffy and Gabriel Conroy, are.

Considering the opening story as essentially a framing device, one would assume that Joyce's boy narrator in "The Sisters" exhibits the beginning of a vicious cycle of internalizing paralysis. While Werner argues that the narrator of "Araby" represents "the first stage in the development of a destructive solipsism" exhibited by adult characters like Duffy, one can argue that this stage actually begins with the narrator of "The Sisters" (54). As Beck notes, the narrator of "The Sisters" eventually "realizes his identity just that much more, and with it his secret isolation" (43). At the heart of the story, then, "is the boy's beginning to see into himself as to the life around him," specifically death's intrusion upon that life. Interestingly, the epiphanies in both "The Sisters" and "A Painful Case" are both triggered by death. In the case of the former, death triggers an emotional paralysis in the living; however, in the latter story, death leads to an awareness of Duffy's pre-existing emotional paralysis, and this development will be analyzed in detail in the second chapter.

Another motif associated with death is also introduced in the opening story: silence. As we have already seen, the narrator of "The Sisters" characterizes the presence of Flynn's corpse with an antagonistic silence. However, readers should also note the relationship between Flynn's silence and the sisters referenced in the title, as the two

entities seem to be almost at odds with each other. Throughout the story, the sisters attempt to break this pervasive silence with their patter; however, the conversation is only ever about Flynn himself. Therefore, the dead continues to haunt even the speech of the living. Corrington remarks that “the old man has had a certain degree of ascendance over [the sisters]...and, even in death, he is their primary concern” (22). Though Corrington is mostly concerned with the sisters as a symbol of faithful service to the Catholic Church (represented here by the dead Flynn), the idea of Flynn’s ascendance and lingering presence speaks to the haunting nature of the dead. Flynn is never more than a corpse in “The Sisters,” yet the character’s presence is undeniable. He looms silently, to the point where his silence is almost a malevolent force. Rabate speaks on the nature of silence in the text of *Dubliners*, and postulates that “silence can finally appear as the end, the limit, the death of speech, its paralysis” (33). Working within this idea of silence as the antagonistic inversion of speech, one sees the final moments of “The Sisters” as the ultimate paralysis instilled by the dead Flynn. Joyce ends with Eliza’s speech, interrupted by ellipses before her voice finally trails off, leaving readers with a paralyzing silence. Just as the boy is unable to eat, the sisters’ speech is eventually interrupted by silence; though the boy claims to feel some sort of freedom, neither he nor the sisters can escape Flynn’s presence, as his silence not only haunts, but intends to paralyze them all.

If Joyce juxtaposes life with death as a means of illuminating the deficiencies of the former, we must now turn our attention to what specifically is left in the wake of Flynn’s death. It would seem that the title, “The Sisters,” points readers in the right direction, as Joyce here presents the title characters’ rather dull, “impoverished,” and

“semi-paralyzed” existence (Beck 75). As we have already seen, both sisters are completely arrested by the death of their brother, even on the level of their speech. A closer analysis of their patter reveals a dialogue full of “devotional clichés and platitudes”: “he’s gone to a better world,” “ah, poor James,” “it’s when it’s all over that you’ll miss him,” and so on (Doherty 34; Joyce, *Dubliners* 17). Thus, the sisters’ “complacent ignorance which uncritically lives and endures by half-answers they illustrate a classic form of paraplegia Joyce diagnosed in *Dubliners* and sought to hold a mirror to” (Beck 60). Eliza also recounts Father Flynn’s wish to “go out for a drive one fine day just to see the old house again,” which shows a refusal on his part to relinquish the past (Joyce, *Dubliners* 17). Of course, the irony here is that Eliza is unwittingly doing the same thing by allowing herself to be haunted by her dead brother, all the while paying homage to him with a “circling, considerably understated, and actually impercipient discussion of [his] troubled life” (Beck 60). Ultimately, of course, even this conversation is overtaken by silence as Eliza’s final sentence trails off, which fully illuminates the living’s inability to even communicate.

If a reader juxtaposes the narrator’s dawning awareness of “himself as to the life around him” with the sisters’ ignorant, complacent existence, one finds the polar opposites of possibilities in *Dubliners* (Beck 45). However, as we have already seen, Flynn’s death marks the beginning of the boy’s turn towards internalizing his own paralysis; thus, it is possible to speculate, as Werner does, that “by the time he matures, the boy will be reduced to the more profound silence of the adult characters” (45). Indeed, as Goldberg notes, by the end of the story the young boy “sits among hapless

women, all immobile and disconsolate, in the dead priest's own room, in the very house where the priest has died, near the center...of paralysis" (Ghiselin 38). Furthermore, by the end of the story, "the narrator appears to us froze—puzzled and paralyzed," and "we cannot even decide who, if anyone, in the story has seen the light" (Dettmar 179). Thus, the story presents both the development of paralysis (in the young narrator) and its end result (in the sisters). By presenting such a range, Joyce is again anticipating the exploration of paralysis and death.

In the case of "The Sisters," it is important to return to the notion of the communion between the living and the dead to fully see the role reversal for each. As Ghiselin notes, "when the priest is dead, his sisters Nannie and Eliza assume his place," which further links the living with the dead (Ghiselin 47). Interestingly, Eliza is even "ursurping the position of the dead priest" as she is sitting in his armchair (48). Furthermore, Nannie specifically "performs the hospitable actions paralleling imperfectly the ceremony of the Eucharist," (48). Here, it would seem that the living are specifically communing with the dead, and such an assumption is reinforced by Joyce's claim that Eliza acts as if "she were communing with the past" when talking about her dead brother (Joyce, *Dubliners* 27). Here, the sisters' paralysis is most evident, as they are essentially becoming their dead brother by assuming his role. Again, Joyce intertwines the living and the dead to show that the former is actually just as paralyzed as the latter. As far as the narrator is concerned, even though he "refuses the ministration of the women" by "reject[ing] the crackers [and] the bread," he does "take up the wine from the table himself, the element reserved for the priest" (48). Thus, the boy's actions here are no

different than the sisters' in that he is almost physically assuming the role of the priest. Because of this, it can be argued that such a communion marks the boy's symbolic entrance into the paralyzed world of *Dubliners*. Beck notes that if there is any communion to be found among this episode, the boy's communion is only "with himself," which indicates a turn inwards and towards the possible internalization of paralysis put forth by Werner (63). Ultimately, this symbolic communion unites the dead priest, the young narrator, and the sisters in a ritual designed to unite the living with the dead.

It would seem, then, that Joyce extols no sense of hope in the world of *Dubliners*, as the living display an emotionally paralyzed life equal to that of the dead. However, upon further inspection, one can argue that Joyce actually glorifies death in some ways and indicates it as a more favorable condition. Though the sisters' dialogue in the story is ridden with clichés, one particular turn of phrase is striking. Eliza claims that Flynn "had a beautiful death," which is reminiscent of Joyce's claim that death is the "most beautiful form of life" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 15; Joyce, "James Clarence Mangan" 60). She also later claims that Flynn "make[s] a beautiful corpse," which is a striking contrast compared to the paralyzed description we receive of Flynn's life. In fact, Flynn is marked by incompleteness from the opening paragraph when the boy associates his paralysis with the word "gnomon" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 9). Also, as we have already seen, the boy simply represents symbolically the priest by his face only, which also suggests incompleteness. Finally, the broken chalice that represents the "beginning" of Flynn's descent into madness symbolically represents his brokenness. In death, however, it would seem that

Father Flynn has obtained peace and freedom from his paralysis, and this is best represented by the “idle chalice on his breast” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 18). Such an image reverses the trend of incompleteness and brokenness and symbolically intimates a sort of forgiveness if we consider the chalice to represent Flynn himself. Eliza’s final image of Flynn “wide-awake and laughing-like to himself” contrasts with the image of the priest at peace in his coffin, which indicates a sense of escape from a paralyzed life (Joyce, *Dubliners* 18). Throughout *Dubliners*, Joyce reveals characters who are unable to escape their “encompassing paralysis”; however, in Flynn, we see that death is a means of escape (Werner 37). While this is a particularly bleak outcome, it seems almost preferable to what Flynn leaves behind: a physically and emotionally paralyzed society which he “dominates” even in death (86).

It is also interesting to note that another definition of the word *gnomon* is applicable to Flynn in the story: “a shadow cast as on a sundial” (66). Flynn’s presence as a deathly shade in the story is unquestionable, as he lingers throughout the story. However, at the same time, his presence also illuminates the “partial, reduced lives of Joyce’s *Dubliners*,” which seems to be Joyce’s ultimate goal here (66). This opening story’s explicit concern with this dynamic of life and death is no accident, as “Joyce carefully arranged the order of stories in *Dubliners*” (Beck 42). Indeed, Joyce’s exploration of life and death will become one of the major threads by which *Dubliners* becomes unified. Thus, both Beck’s and Connolly’s concerns with the “meaning” and “interpretations” of the story are secondary to discovering how the story actually functions as a beginning to the novel (42; Connolly 79). Ultimately, “The Sisters”

establishes a pattern of the dead altering life to the point of emotional or physical paralysis that is not significantly altered until the final story, “The Dead.” As a result of “The Sisters,” it becomes possible to explore later stories within the context of the themes and motifs set forth by the opening one. Werner’s statement that “the remainder of *Dubliners* fulfills [the young narrator’s] longing to be nearer to paralysis and its deadly work” is accurate, as Joyce will recontextualize and develop the relationship of each throughout the work” (35).

While the focus throughout the rest of this thesis will center especially upon the remaining three stories concerned with death and the dead, this is not to say that Joyce does not develop the theme of paralysis in other stories; in fact, if any theme unifies *Dubliners*, it is this inescapable paralysis experienced by the characters in the collection. “The Sisters” especially establishes the theme of “belatedness that pervades” the early stories that feature young child narrators who long to escape yet cannot (Kaye 88). This begins with the narrator in the first story who is bound to Father Flynn and his “decrepit sisters” and the “dying past they represent” (Kaye 88). The boys in “An Encounter” experience a similar fate, as the “pathetic futility of the boys’ attempt to escape lies in the fact that they try a path that had been closed before they were born” (Kaye 89). Indeed, it would seem that “The Sisters” establishes such a fate (and variations thereof) by instantly conflating youth, death, and paralysis. The boys in “The Encounter” long for adventure, a fact that is immediately apparent with the narrator’s reference to the “Wild West” and the adventure novels early in the story (Joyce, *Dubliners* 19). The boys then decide to embark on a journey to “break out of the weariness of school-life for one day at least”;

however, they are “unable to escape” when they encounter an old pervert “who represents Ireland itself” (21; Kaye 89).

Like the narrator in “The Sisters,” the boys here are confronted with a decrepit adult figure who reminds readers of the youths’ ultimate fate in a sterile Ireland. Furthermore, Kaye compares the pervert to a “priest instructing a catechumen,” which of course is reminiscent of Father Flynn in “The Sisters” “instructing the same boy narrator” (92). In this respect, the pervert represents the “epitome of all he detests,” as Joe Dillon’s “vocation for the priesthood” is met with derision from the narrator early in the story; furthermore, the boys all fear an encounter with “Father Butler or someone out of the college” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 21). Thus, one can read the boy’s longing for adventure as a longing to escape a latent hostility towards the priesthood. This, of course, connects “The Encounter” with “The Sisters,” and Kaye also notices that the “pervert is dressed in greenish-black” as is “another symbol of unsuccessful paternity, Father Flynn” (91). That the boys end up encountering that which they desire to leave behind only points to the paralysis that already pervades their young lives. Even worse, this encounter even renders an immediate effect on the young narrator, who reveals that he has “always despised” his friend Mahoney, from whom he is “obliged to ask for help” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 28; Kaye 92). Gone is the youthful naivety that pervades most of the story, and only resentment remains for the narrator, who has found his desires frustrated by the encounter with the old man.

Likewise, the young narrator in “Araby” experiences frustration, as, at its core, it “is a story of a boy’s disappointment” (Brooks and Warren 93). As is the case with “The

Encounter,” this story also continues the motif of the priesthood. In fact, the narrator reveals that the “former tenant of [his] house, a priest, had died in the back drawing room,” and that “he had left...the furniture of his house to his sister,” an image that immediately recalls the opening story (Joyce, *Dubliners* 29). The story, which centers around the narrator’s infatuation with a colleague’s sister, reveals a growing isolation in the characters of *Dubliners*, exhibiting a “lack of sympathy between [the narrator] and his friends, teacher, and family” (Brooks and Warren 93). Indeed, it is not inconceivable to see that this character is an older version of the protagonist in “The Sisters,” as he exhibits the internalization that develops at the end of that story. Even more interestingly, the boy compares carrying his unspoken love to that of bearing a “chalice safely through a throng of foes,” another image that links “Araby” to “The Sisters” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 31). Of course, that story serves to foreshadow the narrator’s disappointment here because, just as Father Flynn’s chalice is broken, so to will be the narrator’s dream in “Araby.” Similarly, it is also important that the narrator’s emotional climax (the utterance of “O love! O love!”) occurs in the “back drawing-room in which the priest had died” (31). Again, Joyce conflates death and youthful exuberance; it is also not a coincidence that the object of the boy’s affection finally speaks with him after this episode and introduces him to the “splendid bazaar” named Araby (31). The Eastern association here is another trend towards escape that pervades the narrative.

As readers will find in the fourth chapter of this thesis, a number of characters long to escape eastward but only manage to find frustration. This is especially the case in “Eveline,” as the title character similarly longs to escape to the east. However, like other

characters, she, too, is haunted by the dead, as the “memory of her dead mother” ultimately hinders the young girl from leaving (Tindall 108). In the story, readers see Eveline particularly recalling the promise she makes to her dying mother to “keep the home together,” and it is this promise, especially, that keeps her from making the escape she desires (Joyce, *Dubliners* 40). Like other protagonists in *Dubliners*, we find Eveline here to be paralyzed by the memory of the dead, and her eastern momentum ceases. “The Dead” features many reversals, and among them is a reversal this eastern movement. Indeed, in “The Dead,” it is the memory of Michael Furey that urges Gabriel Conroy to set out on a westward journey of the mind.

The remainder of “Araby” is concerned with the bazaar’s “Eastern enchantment,” which is “cast over” the narrator, who intends to purchase the girl a gift (33). Brooks and Warren read the story as a struggle between the boy and the outside world, which seems “ignorant of, and even hostile to, the experience of his love” (95). Also, the narrator “accepts his isolation and is even proud of it” because “the world not only does not understand his secret but would cheapen and contaminate it” (95). In this sense, the boy exhibits the isolation and hostility towards his environment that is found in the two previous stories; however, he is also connected a later character: James Duffy in “A Painful Case.” While the narrator of “Araby” is not quite the antithesis of Duffy, it is interesting that he exhibits a form of solipsism like Duffy. However, unlike Duffy, the boy embraces love here and seems to embrace it as a source of hope in a world that misunderstands him. Of course, the boy only meets with disappointment at the end of the story and comes to view himself “as a creature driven and derided by vanity” as his “eyes

burn with anguish and anger” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 36). While the ending here leaves little resolved, one can read this realization as a cementing of the paralysis that has appeared in the stories of youth thus far in *Dubliners*. Just as we can read the protagonist in “Araby” to be an older version of the narrator in “The Sisters,” one can also see him as a precursor to James Duffy, as it does not seem unlikely that the boy’s disappointing experience would lead him to spurn love later in life as Duffy does.

In terms of themes and motifs, it would seem that as a story “The Sisters” has more in common with “Araby” than “An Encounter.” However, each story represents an aspect of the paralysis first established in the opening story. While the paralysis there stems from the priest’s stroke, the later two stories reveal paralysis as a general Dublin condition, as the young characters in each story meet with frustration when they attempt to escape both physically and mentally. Thus, “The Sisters” functions as an opener not only to the theme of death in *Dubliners*, but also, as a general opener, it establishes the inescapable sterility of Irish life, as there is no hope to be found anywhere: in religion, in love, or even in the east. As we shall see, all three prove to be an insufficient source of spiritual and physical nourishment throughout *Dubliners*. As the book progresses into adult life, readers find a continuing paralysis that finds its origins in the opening story. It is fitting, too, that the movement towards adult life finds its culmination in “A Painful Case,” as death there serves to cement paralysis, just as it establishes it in “The Sisters.”

## CHAPTER THREE

### A PAINFUL CASE

If “The Sisters” marks the development of a paralyzed life, then “A Painful Case” is a study of its maturity, as life and death once again intertwine to reveal a paralyzed existence. As a result, the story allows Joyce to explore further the themes of isolation and ignorance found in the title characters of the first story, while he also continues to develop the motifs of communion and silence that are associated with death. Furthermore, Joyce introduces the role of love in the interplay of life and death. In the story, it would seem that true, passionate love represents an escape that James Duffy spurns, and he finds himself unwittingly confined within himself as a result. At its core, the story is about Duffy’s inability to reckon with his empty, solipsistic life upon learning of his former lover’s death; thus, the title is almost ironic, as the painful case is Duffy’s, though the headline within the story is meant for Mrs. Sinico. Thus, the dead, here represented by Mrs. Sinico, once again illuminates the faults of the living. Furthermore, by the end of the story, it is clear that there is no hope for Duffy, who will continue to live alone in an emotionally paralyzed wasteland. Thus, once again, it is paralysis that is the work of death rather than vice versa.

The structure of “A Painful Case” truly allows a reader to witness the haunting effects that death has upon the living. Unlike the death of Father Flynn, the death of Mrs. Sinico suddenly occurs within the story, leaving readers to witness the way her death interrupts and destroys the life of the methodical protagonist, James Duffy. While “The Sisters” presents the developing psyche of its narrator, Joyce very clearly introduces

Duffy as a man leading a life of order and routine. Readers find “the lofty walls of his uncarpeted room [to be] free from pictures,” before Joyce catalogs the rest of Duffy’s abode (Joyce, *Dubliners* 117). The cataloging nature of Joyce’s description allows readers to glimpse into the orderly, tidy mindset of Duffy. Connolly considers the room to be “described as though it were a monk’s cell,” with the room being “disrupted by one slash of color—the scarlet in the extra blanket at the foot of the bed,” which “sets the stage symbolically for the ultimate attraction towards Mrs. Sinico” (108). Though Connolly refers to this scarlet as the “color of passion,” it also can represent blood, and therefore foretells Mrs. Sinico’s ultimate fate (108). Surrounding this one instance of color is an otherwise “liturgical black and white” that represents the arresting quality of Duffy’s monk-like existence (108). Thus, just as the opening paragraph of “The Sisters” establishes a link between death and paralysis, so too is the case here.

Duffy, then, becomes Joyce’s ultimate embodiment of a typical Dubliner: his “life roll[s] about evenly—an adventureless tale” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 109). Therefore, Duffy is also the best character in which to examine the intrusion of death upon life; however, one must first examine the first intrusion in James Duffy’s life: passionate love, as represented by Mrs. Sinico. Like Mr. Duffy, readers learn that “she had [not] had any such adventure before,” and through his friendship with Mrs. Sinico, readers begin to see the emergence of what Connolly refers to as a “bifurcated personality” in Duffy (110; Connolly 108). The narrator of the story notes that Duffy owns a copy of “a complete Wordsworth,” a reference to the Romantic poet whose notions of spontaneity and passion are completely absent in Duffy’s life (107). However, Duffy’s possession of

Wordsworth is important, as it perhaps indicates a desire for such passion or spontaneity which has been suppressed by the rigors of life. As Connolly notes, Duffy is “a divided character...who contains within himself the protagonist and the antagonist of the story” (110).

Readers see the conflict between these two aspects of Duffy’s personality climax with his rejection of Mrs. Sinico. The narrator comments on Duffy “listening to the sound of his own voice,” which soon becomes a “strange impersonal voice...insisting on the soul’s incurable loneliness” (111). This voice insists that “we cannot give ourselves,” as “we are our own” (111). This occurs just before “Mrs. Sinico “[catches] his hand passionately and pressed it to her cheek,” a gesture that “very much surprise[s] Duffy” and “disillusion[s] him” (111). Here, readers see the monk-life, orderly aspect of Duffy triumphing over the repressed, romantic aspect. Duffy cannot comprehend or reckon with this moment of passion interrupting his life, and rejects Mrs. Sinico to “return to his even way of life” (112). Mrs. Sinico, on the other hand, is not able to return to her mundane life, and apparently commits suicide by throwing herself in front of a moving train, an image invoking the doomed romance of Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. Thus, Mrs. Sinico’s death is intertwined with her spurned love, as she is not content to return to a passionless life. Death, then, is an escape for Mrs. Sinico, while Duffy lives on without passion. Duffy now becomes the symbol of a living dead in his own right, even before the moment of revelation at the story’s close.

A closer inspection of Duffy’s reaction to Mrs. Sinico’s death reveals the level of his own paralysis and ultimately reveals the primary deficiency that her death illuminates.

Throughout the story, Duffy's selfish, solipsistic life is made clear, and this is perhaps best revealed in the revelation that Mrs. Sinico's death "revolt[s] him"; furthermore, "the details of a commonplace vulgar death attack[s] his stomach," as Duffy feels Mrs. Sinico not only "degrade[s] herself" but himself as well (115). As Corrington notes, this reaction reveals "the depth of Duffy's spiritual corruption," as his "total failure to grasp Mrs. Sinico's death" represents a complete failure to comprehend anything beyond his own existence (135). Instead of considering Mrs. Sinico's "loneliness," "desperation," or her "long fall into self-destruction," he considers only the "shame" she has reflected upon him (135). Such an incomprehensibly selfish reaction allows the readers a bit of an realization here, as Joyce's style here does not contain the "obvious pity for the frustrated lives" presented in earlier stories (Goldberg 32). In "The Sisters," the young narrator's descent into paralysis feels foreboding and inevitable; Duffy's fully-realized paralysis, on the other hand, does not because it is an existence he unwittingly chooses for himself by leading an inordinately isolated life. Like the sisters in the first story, Duffy's crime is his ignorant refusal to truly recognize the lives of others.

However, Duffy's eventual acknowledgment of Mrs. Sinico is essential in once again realizing the haunting nature of death in *Dubliners*. After reading the story, Duffy "responds in an uncharacteristic way" when he "call[s] for another punch" to "settle his nerves" (Connolly 113; Joyce, *Dubliners* 116). Duffy is now partaking in the very activity Mrs. Sinico takes up after his rejection of her, as her daughter claims her mother has "been in the habit of going out to buy spirits" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 115). Again, readers see a sense of the living communing with and mirroring the dead, just as the narrator of

“The Sisters” does by drinking his sherry and sharing the dead priest’s smile. Here, Joyce’s communion imagery is also bitingly ironic because Duffy’s effort to commune here seems more concerted than any attempt he made to communicate with Mrs. Sinico during their affair. When the narrator of “The Sisters” participates in a faux communion, he is entering a world dominated by death and paralysis. In “A Painful Case,” Duffy’s communion represents a full a resignation to such a world once he realizes he cannot simply reject or ignore her death as he did her passionate affections, leaving him permanently paralyzed emotionally.

Readers see this when Duffy’s “memory beg[ins] to wander,” and he believes that Mrs. Sinico’s “hand touched his” (116). It is no coincidence that this causes Duffy to “put on his overcoat” and “[go] out” to face the world (116). This is an important movement, as it suggests that Duffy can no longer take comfort himself. Later, he begins to “understand how lonely her life must have been,” and that “his life would be lonely too until he, too, died,” which also reveals how much Mrs. Sinico’s death has shaken Duffy (116). As we have seen, Duffy’s life is extremely isolated, so his recognition of Mrs. Sinico’s pain represents a possible move towards “compassion” for others (Goldberg 32). Throughout the story, Duffy “is locked, irretrievably, in the Hell of his egocentric superiority to life,” and this realization here allows Duffy to move outside of this self-perceived superiority (Goldberg 32). As we shall see, however, Duffy is very much still in Hell by the end of the story; in fact, Mrs. Sinico’s death actually damns Duffy to a permanent hell of self-loathing. Indeed, Duffy will no longer find himself superior to life, as Goldberg claims; instead, it will be this living hell that defeats Duffy.

Later, Mrs. Sinico's haunting of Duffy is audible, as "at moments he seemed to feel her voice touch his ear," which begins a motif of haunting sounds at the conclusion of the story (Joyce, *Dubliners* 117). He visits "Kingsbridge Station," only to find "in his ears the laborious drone of the engine reiterating the syllables of her name" (117). At this moment, the haunting becomes cruel and antagonistic, once again through silence. As Duffy "allow[s] the rhythm to die away, he [can] not feel...her voice touch his ear," and he is left only with "the night" which is "perfectly silent" (117). Ultimately, Duffy realizes that "he [is] alone," with the silence acting as a dull reminder of this fact (117). Therefore, Duffy cannot win in this situation, as the silence is just as much a reminder of Mrs. Sinico as the pounding noise of the train. He cannot ignore Mrs. Sinico in death, as he could when she lived. Whereas he is guided previously by an internal voice of reason, here his thoughts are haunted by sounds associated only with Mrs. Sinico. Thus, noise (or lack thereof) associated with the dead once again haunts the living, just as the silence associated with Flynn haunted and interrupted the characters in "The Sisters."

In fact, Rabate comments that the silence in "The Sisters" is here "taken up by the final silence that surrounds Mr. Duffy," and readers see the relative silences operating similarly (39). Unlike the title characters in "The Sisters," Duffy does not even have a voice to break the silence. This is somewhat ironic, as he is driven by that internal voice of reason throughout the story. In the end, readers do not find this resolute, firm voice; instead, Duffy plagues himself with questions. Returning to the notion of Duffy as a divided individual, it is arguable that his suppressed Romantic personality finally emerges here as he actually acknowledges "one human being had seemed to love him and

he had denied her life and happiness” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 117). He now pities himself when he realizes that “he [is] outcast from life’s feast,” which is a stark contrast from that voice who “insists on the soul’s incurable loneliness” (117, 111). Mr. Duffy realizes all too late that such loneliness is indeed curable, but he spurned that opportunity. Thus, Duffy is left forever broken, without his firm, resolute voice of logic, and is left “waiting for some minutes listening,” and “listen[ing] again” in silence (117). Only now does he actually show any sort of desire for Mrs. Sinico by waiting for her voice, only to confront silence. Again, the silence left in the wake of the dead is overpowering, both haunting and reminding the living of the emptiness of their own lives. Thus, this final episode reads like a twisted case of wish fulfillment for Duffy, as Mrs. Sinico’s death grants him the isolated life he has always desired. As a result, the man who “has chosen isolation [cannot] escape from it” (Beck 235).

Furthermore, the ironic setting of this final episode reveals a profound hopelessness. Ghiselin contends that the scene here occurs in “Phoenix Park,” a name that obviously “suggests a resurrection”; of course, Duffy only realizes that there is no chance for such a feat (Ghiselin 54). Ghiselin also goes on to claim that Duffy realizes that he is also denied “communion,” but this conclusion is debatable, as one can argue that Mrs. Sinico *has* communicated in death by revealing Duffy’s flaws (Ghiselin 54). This episode also represents the only instance of communion in Duffy’s life, as we are told that he “live[s] his...life without communion” earlier in the story (Joyce, *Dubliners* 109). Of course, the communion here comes all too late for Duffy. Furthermore, these religious connotations are also ironic, as Mrs. Sinico offers no absolution or chance for

redemption; instead, Duffy is irrecoverably damned. Continuing with this theme of communion, it would seem that Joyce is also invoking the notion of “communing with the past” that is set forth in “The Sisters” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 17). For Duffy, there is no future without the specter of Mrs. Sinico’s death in it. Indeed, Ghiselin argues that “hereafter in *Dubliners*, the disoriented, unregenerate, unnourished soul...looks...only toward death”; furthermore, “their aspiration toward vital satisfaction beyond the present time and scene is directed to a future that has the aspect of the dead past” (Ghiselin 54). Thus, “A Painful Case” functions as a gnomic representation of the book just like “The Sisters” does, according to Norris (29). By establishing such a seemingly inescapable cycle, Gabriel Conroy’s eventual chance for redemption in “The Dead” becomes all the more significant, as that story possibly reverses the trend set forth by its predecessors.

Some scholars, such as Thomas Jackson Rice, question the sincerity of Duffy’s realization here. In his essay, “Geometry of Meaning,” Rice argues that “Duffy[’s] [failure] to realize that his taking a perverse ‘credit’ for a decline in Mrs. Sinico is, in fact, a sublime form of egotism”; furthermore, Rice also points to the fact that “her decline must date from events quite unconnected with him, occurring at least two years after the end of their brief relationship” (45). While Duffy’s sincerity certainly is debatable here, nonetheless, he does realize his loneliness. Furthermore, by locking himself irrecoverably in this hell of “self pity” that is elucidated by “his recognition of responsibility” in Mrs. Sinico’s death, we see exactly why Duffy has no chance to fully gain redemption: he is still too locked into a solipsistic existence (45). His realization, it would seem, is not quite enough, as Duffy does not experience an outward growth that

represents a release of the individual ego. Even though this final episode takes place in a public area, the visual details contract significantly until we are finally left with the proclamation that Duffy “[feels] that he [is] alone,” a sentence that could be mistaken for one of the sentences Duffy himself would “compose in his mind...about himself” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 117, 108). Thus, what we are left with in “A Painful Case” is a focus on the individual. Readers will see this contrasted greatly in the final passage in “The Dead,” as the imagery spreads from Gabriel’s psyche to Ireland in general before arriving at the all encompassing “living and the dead” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 224).

Thus, while Duffy’s particular case may be hopeless, one can argue that his eventual awareness of his paralysis shows that not everyone is doomed to a life of ignorance like the sisters in the opening story. Of course, readers find Duffy and his passionless life to already be a form of living dead from the onset; however, Duffy’s own awareness of his paralysis represents a significant development in *Dubliners*, as it opens the door for the aforementioned chance of redemption in “The Dead.” After all, one must first be able to diagnose a problem before curing it. In particular, Joyce seems to be specifically offering love and human contact as a possible avenue for escaping the mundane existence of Dublin life. Duffy himself acknowledges this when he realizes that he denied Mrs. Sinico a chance at happiness. Here, it becomes clear that Mrs. Sinico’s happiness would also have resulted in Duffy’s own happiness, as well. Mrs. Sinico, then, represents a passion that is unable to exist in the world of *Dubliners*; instead, she is forced into death, which again seems preferable to Duffy’s forever paralyzed existence.

Indeed, Duffy is only left to reckon with a passion that goes to the grave with Mrs. Sinico, while he lingers in the world of the living and fades into death, slowly; Joyce later revisits this notion of passionate death and empty life in “The Dead.” There, readers will find several counterparts in the two stories, particularly the two protagonists, James Duffy and Gabriel Conroy; ultimately, it would seem that those two stories are companion pieces, as the latter seems to offer absolution to the former when confronted with similar situations. As Corrington notes, this story “nearly equals ‘The Dead’ as a kind of synthesizing and focusing medium which, while adding its own dimension to the collection, at the same time serves to sharpen our apprehension of all that Joyce has been patiently moving towards in *Dubliners*” (131). Indeed, as Corrington argues, to “grasp the full striking irony of the last lines [of ‘A Painful Case’] it is necessary to read forward into ‘The Dead’” (138). Corrington considers “Duffy’s ‘pausing under the tree’” to be a “pathetic and crippled parody” of Michael Furey, who Corrington considers to be “the prime symbol of selflessness and self-sacrificing love (138). In this respect, Corrington also associates Mrs. Sinico with Michael Furey, and this comparison is certainly valid when one observes the parallels (138). Just as Mrs. Sinico’s thwarted love damns Duffy in death, the specter of Michael Furey’s love will provide Gabriel Conroy grace, as his ultimate realization is that such a passionate, selfless love is an avenue for redemption. In “A Painful Case,” Duffy, who shares a number of faults with Gabriel, seems to have the same realization; however, according to Corrington, “unlike Gabriel, Duffy’s realization is of no use to him” (137). The parallels noticed here further point to the unified structure of *Dubliners*, as readers find the earlier story providing a context for the

latter. Most significantly, the final story will serve to reverse the trend of paralysis set forward by “The Sisters” and continued in “A Painful Case.”

In the overall scheme of *Dubliners*, “A Painful Case” serves as the culmination of the stories focusing on adult life. This group of stories is generally concerned with protagonists who exhibit an isolated instance of paralysis similar to that of Duffy. The closest counterpart to the protagonist in “A Painful Case” is Little Chandler in “A Little Cloud,” which is, like other stories in *Dubliners*, according to Ruoff, “also concerned with death, but with the purely metaphorical, living death of creative impotence and frustration” (108). Ruoff continues by noting that this “protracted form of death for Joyce the artist was as terrifying in its finality as any organic dissolution” (108). In this respect, Little Chandler anticipates Gabriel Conroy, as both men arguably represent what “Joyce might have become, had he remained in Ireland” (Beck 358). Furthermore, Little Chandler’s fantasy about reading lines of poetry to his wife is reminiscent of Gabriel’s fantasy about making love to his wife. In the end, both fantasies are frustrated—the former is because of Chandler’s “shyness” and the latter by the intrusion of Michael Furey’s ghost (Joyce, *Dubliners* 71).

Instead, Chandler always opts to “repeat lines to himself and this console[s] him” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 71). In the final analysis, this is the general condition of Chandler, as he is a man whose “self-imposed isolation is absolute,” having “cut himself off from the young and the old, the past and the present, the poor and the rich” (Ruoff 110). Here, Chandler is reminiscent of James Duffy, as each character exhibits a solipsism that has been developing since “The Sisters.” Ruoff also finds another counterpart for Chandler

in the Joyce canon: Stephen Dedalus from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Ruoff specifically points to “Little Chandler’s habit of finding solace in remembered quotations” as a link between the two characters (109). However, as Ruoff notes, there are “some noteworthy differences between Stephen’s studied detachment and Little Chandler’s puerile escapism,” as the former only exhibits a “timid evasion of life” that serves merely as a “disorderly retreat into himself” (110). On the other hand, “Stephen’s detachment is a meaningful ritual in his worship of art,” and his “dissatisfaction with life enables him to come back to it at last on his own terms” (Ruoff 110). Chandler is left only with a “dull resentment against his life” and a desperate fantasy to “escape from his little house” and “live bravely like Gallaher,” his friend who moved to London (Joyce, *Dubliners* 83). Like Duffy, Little Chandler is simply left with a meaningless existence of self-loathing.

It is interesting to note that, like Duffy, Chandler also owns the works of a Romantic poet, as “a volume of Byron’s poems” is described by the narrator (83). There are several ironies at work here. Chief among them is the fact that both Duffy and Chandler lead passionless, repressed lives wholly unlike the Romantic writers of their stories. Also, the choice of Byron here by Joyce reminds us that neither of these men will ever achieve an escape like the exiled Romantic poet. Astute readers of Joyce will also recall that Stephen Dedalus cites Byron as his favorite poet, a fact that further reveals the differences between Joyce’s protagonists here and his semi-autobiographical creation. Furthermore, Chandler attempts to read one poem in particular: “On the Death of a Young Lady,” which returns us to the intertwining of death and youth. The lines cited by

Joyce here are significant, as the word “clay” is repeated twice (Joyce, *Dubliners* 84). This of course anticipates the story “Clay,” a story which features another adult figure haunted by death, as Maria there “is sheltered from an omen that portends her death” (Ruoff 108). Chandler’s attempt to read this poem is interrupted by “the wailing of [his] child,” which causes Chandler to exhibit his frustration when he “realizes he [is] a prisoner for life” and scolds the child (84). Such an outburst reveals that Chandler will “always remain his own inadequate self,” as his “relationship with others becomes only a grotesque duplication of himself” (Ruoff 119). By the end of the story, it is clear that the adult Dubliners have completely internalized the frustration and anguish of their younger counterparts. By the time we reach the end of this sequence in “A Painful Case,” it would seem that the cycle is not likely to be broken.

Ultimately, “A Painful Case” reflects the extremely paralyzed existence that is the result of the initial repression associated with death in “The Sisters.” Here, death continues the inward trend of that repression by driving Duffy further within himself and his own existence. The novel opens with a youth experiencing death, and the sequence dealing with adult life similarly ends with Duffy’s experience with death, a cycle that reminds us of the inescapability of death. However, Duffy is not the only Dubliner confined to such a life, as preceding stories like “A Little Cloud” reveal. Furthermore, the stories of public life (which begin with “Ivy Day in the Committee Room) reveal protagonists that share an isolated and paralyzed existence. “A Painful Case” anticipates this when the narrator reveals Duffy’s association with “an Irish Socialist Party” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 110). Ironically, Duffy considers “himself a unique figure amidst a score of

sober workmen in a garret lit by an inefficient oil-lamp” (110-111). However, as we shall see, Duffy is not a “unique figure” among these men at all, as “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” presents a gathering of characters who are only concerned with their own existence (110). These men (Joe Hynes excluded) seem completely incapable of acknowledging the existence of not only each other, but also the ideals represented by the dead Parnell, despite their superficial reverence for the Irish martyr. Once again, the dead, as represented by the spirit of Parnell, will reveal an utter paralysis in the living.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### IVY DAY IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM

While the previous stories examined in this thesis focus on the establishment and development of paralysis in an individual, “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” shows that such a paralysis is a state typical of Dublin life in general. Once again, Joyce employs the dead to reveal this paralysis in the living by allowing the specter of Charles Parnell to haunt the proceedings of the ineffectual canvassers who are unable to carry on his legacy. Most of these men are ultimately very similar to James Duffy in that they all seem concerned only with themselves, as they are “incompatibly and irreconcilably” at “some distance from each other” (Beck 242). In terms of the recurring motifs of communion and silence associated with the dead, each is present in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” However, Joyce alters their use somewhat. While Father Flynn and Mrs. Sinico haunted in silence, Parnell’s haunting is audible, as the popping of the corks in the story can be read as comments from his spirit; furthermore, his last devoted follower, Joe Hynes, reads a poem in Parnell’s honor, which brings his ghost to center stage. Despite this, the characters only manage to engage in communion with their own ignorance rather than the dead. Ultimately, the end result is the same, as each motif underscores and illuminates the faults in the living.

Perhaps the most crucial development to the narrative progression in *Dubliners* as a whole is Joyce’s unique irony that allows only the reader to see the characters’ paralysis. While scholars have questioned the sincerity of Duffy’s realization in “A Painful Case,” it is clear that Mrs. Sinico’s death forces Duffy to acknowledge his hollow

existence. The same cannot be said for the characters here, as the major realization here is experienced by the reader. This represents an even further degeneration for the characters within the novel, as they are denied the chance for redemption because all but one of them cannot even acknowledge their faults. While the story may seem hopeless because of this, all is not lost, as Joyce once again provides a hint for redemption in the character of Hynes, as his faith and loyalty to the dead is perhaps the only laudable character trait in the entire story. By serving as the only character who truly respects the dead and heeds his importance, Hynes prefigures Gabriel Conroy's ultimate respect for, and communion with, the dead in the final story.

In terms of the treatment of death, "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" most resembles "The Sisters," as death is present from the outset of the story. The title's reference to Ivy Day immediately invokes the dead figure of Charles Parnell, whose presence is felt throughout the story as a sort of contrast to the arrested canvassers in the story whose "overriding concern" is "payment" (Corrington 15). Later, in a scene that recalls the opening paragraph of "The Sisters," Old Jack "return[s] [to the room] with two candlesticks" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 120). In the opening story, the narrator explains that he knows that "two candles must be set at the head of a corpse" (9). In the case of "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," the corpse is the paralyzed body of post-Parnellian Irish politics. Blotner likens this gesture by Old Jack to the setting of a scene, and if this is true, it establishes a scene dominated by death. It would seem that the roles of the living and the dead have been completely reversed at this point. Whereas the candles in "The Sisters" actually denoted the presence of a dead paralytic, the candles here mark the

arrival of a group of characters who “project from their variance the paralyzing disharmony that further stultifies a disillusioned, semi-paralyzed people” (Beck 245).

This reversal of the living and the dead will be carried forth throughout the story until the readers realize that even in death, Parnell seems more alive than most of the characters.

In the story, the majority of the characters engage in pointless gossip that is reminiscent of the mindless patter found in “The Sisters.” As Hodgart comments, the political “battle is about nothing, and will lead to nothing” (118). Henchy’s remark on the paralyzed state of Dublin, exemplified by the “idle” factories “down by the quays” is almost ironic, as he is relying on King Edward to bring an “influx money into the country” while he and his fellow canvassers idly sit in the committee room (Joyce, *Dubliners* 131). Readers can see that Dublin “is the centre of political paralysis,” with these characters representing a “microcosm of Irish treachery” (Hodgart 121). Joyce establishes these characters as representatives of the inability of Irish politics to move forward in any way, as the canvassers here are reduced, as Hodgart says, to “supporting ‘the lesser of two evils,’” an indication of the characters’ wavering, and all this “will lead to nothing” except the reader’s realization of Ireland’s political paralysis (118). Joyce establishes characters who chiefly value a self-serving notion of politics, which will contrast greatly with the sacrificial image of Parnell later.

The environment of this story is also a key in establishing the paralyzed state of Irish politics. Set in the same committee room where Parnell was betrayed, these characters continue that treachery by not truly honoring Parnell’s memory (at least until the end of the story). Joyce seems to be implying here that Parnell’s betrayal serves as

the root for Irish paralysis. The story's placement in the committee room reveals that Irish politics are locked into a repetitive malaise, as the living characters here continue to betray him in spirit.

Also important is the flame imagery which seems to act as a running commentator that propels Joyce's unique irony throughout the story. As Beck notes, the tendency of scholars to associate this imagery with hell "seems almost a conditioned professional reflex rather than a reading of the story"; instead, the fire "glows as quite other than hellish" (245). Most importantly, this imagery will also be closely associated with Parnell and act as a symbol of his haunting spirit. The first association with fire and Parnell occurs when O'Connor's cigarette "flame [lights] up a leaf of dark glossy ivy in the lapel of this coat" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 119). This association of the Parnell with fire is a key moment in the story, as it establishes a source of hope that will eventually be ignored by most of the characters within the story.

For the remainder of the story, the flame imagery becomes predominantly associated with the fire that lights the committee room. We see another conflation of the fire and Parnell when Old Jack "rake[s] more cinders together" just before Hynes reveals the "ivy leaf in the lapel" (122). At one point, the narrator remarks that this "fire los[es] all its cheerful color" when the "denuded room [comes] into view" (120). Even fire, which is usually associated with passion, is arrested in some way in this environment. If this fire is to be associated with Parnell, then its initial appearance in the story foreshadows the ineffectiveness of Parnell's legacy for the majority of these characters, as it will also symbolically reveal their denuded existence as well. When Henchly makes

his entrance, he “walk[s] over quickly to the fire, rubbing his hands as if he intend[s] to produce a spark,” a veiled reminder of Henschly and the others’ ineffectiveness as canvassers (122). Later, the narrator refers to the fire “utter[ing] a hissing protest” when Mr. Henschly “nearly puts [it] out” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 124). The fire now is somewhat antagonistic, refusing to be put out by these dim characters. By attributing human qualities to the fire here, it is possible that it functions as a symbol of Parnell’s legacy or vitality. This becomes more apparent when Hynes’s poem likens Parnell to “the Phoenix” in that “his spirit may rise...from the flames” (135). However, just as there is no chance of resurrection in “A Painful Case,” Parnell will not return here, in body or spirit. This is also representative of the role of the dead in *Dubliners* as a whole, as the ghost of Parnell seems to be literally illuminating the faults of the living here.

Joyce’s employment of silence in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” represents a slight departure from the previous stories. This is most evident in the lack of portent associated with silence. Whereas the characters in “The Sisters” and “A Painful Case” experience epiphanies in the silence associated with the dead, the same is not true of the characters in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” Instead, Joyce alters his motif of silence to illustrate the ignorance of these men. Whereas the characters in the first story seem interrupted by and afraid of Flynn’s silence, the canvassers here accomplish the opposite by always interrupting the silence. The first instance occurs when Old Jack “fall[s] silent,” only to be interrupted by Hynes’s entrance into the room (120). Later, “the three men f[a]ll silent,” but it is soon interrupted by clichés and platitudes reminiscent of those found in “The Sisters” (122). For example, Old Jack’s call for “God

be with them times” is reminiscent of Eliza’s “God be praised” in the earlier story (122, 15). Soon after this, the room grows “silent again” until Mr. Henchy’s entrance (122). There is also a silence after Hynes recites his poem, but it, too, is interrupted by a “burst of clapping” (135). This last episode seems most significant, as one expects a profound moment to emerge here, but it does not, as, even in the final silence that occurs, “the auditors d[rink] from their bottles” (135).

Instead, this last silence is interrupted by the popping of the final cork which represents the most pivotal moment in the story because we have here an intersection of all the elements at work: the men engaged in a *faux* communion, ignorant of a silence that should inform them, and, most importantly, ignorant of Parnell himself. However, to truly understand the importance of this event, a close investigation of the aforementioned silences also reveals a relationship between silence and the flame. These two elements were associated earlier in the sequence of stories. In “The Sisters,” the narrator notes that “no one spoke”; instead, the characters “all gazed at the empty fireplace” (15). Such an image evokes a sense of hopelessness that is prevalent throughout that story and much of *Dubliners*. However, Joyce reverses the association of silence and fire in this story, as nearly all of the moments of silence are closely associated with the fireplace lighting the committee room. In the first instance, old Jack “gaze[s] into the fire” as the room grows silent, and he later “rake[s] more cinders together” when the “three men f[a]ll silent” (122). Also, when Mr. Henchy enters the silent room, he immediately “walk[s] over quickly to the fire” (122). If silence is previously employed by Joyce to eventually produce moments of realization and the fire is meant to represent

the spirit of Parnell, then the men's refusal to acknowledge the silence afforded to them in the presence of this flame ultimately represents their utter inability to heed Parnell's legacy. Though one might expect a lit fireplace to represent a renewed sense of hope that does not exist in the empty fireplace of "The Sisters," such is not the case. Instead, we see Joyce's subtle irony at work here, as a source of hope does exist, which is certainly not the case in the first story, which appropriately opens with the intonation that "there was no hope" (9). However, the canvassers' ignorance renders the situation utterly hopeless. Furthermore, since the canvassers are meant to represent Irish politics, we see that little hope exists for the country in general, much less its individual citizens. Thus, "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" may be the bleakest story in *Dubliners*, as hope is finally visible, yet ignored.

Also, by associating Parnell with fire throughout the story, Parnell has a warm, calming quality that has strong connotations with the hearth and home. Such fire imagery is seen throughout Irish literature. For example, Yeats's "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" describes a protagonist settling into a house and supping near the "fire of turf in th' ancient tower" (3). Similarly, the constant glowing fire in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* is a source of comfort or hospitality throughout the play. "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" ironically plays upon these motifs, as the characters are more hostile than hospitable around the fire. Parnell should serve as the fire of hope and restoration; however, he is summarily ignored by most of the characters, an act that allows Joyce to show their deep betrayal of not only Parnell, but Ireland itself.

We return now to the final silence of the story, which is interrupted not by the canvassers' chatter, but the "pok!" of the cork in Hynes's bottle (135). Much is made of this popping at the end of Hynes's recitation, and it is no coincidence that this pop is instigated by the flame which has already been associated with Parnell. Thus, Joyce does not have Parnell haunt in silence, unlike Father Flynn or Mrs. Sinico. Instead, the "pok!" is an exclamation point, as the spirit of Parnell indeed seems to be rising from the ashes of the flames to invoke some sense of shame into these men (135). As Garrett notes, this popping of the final cork "is needed to complete the satiric exposure" set forth by the story and completes the epiphanic shift to the reader (14). While much of "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is dominated by the patter of these canvassers, the ghost of Parnell interjects at the moment of realization here and ironically seems to have the most to say by reminding each man of his sacrifice; furthermore, the energy associated with the popping of the cork provides a stark contrast to these paralyzed, lethargic characters.

However, Joyce is not content to leave the story here, as to do so would indicate Parnell's centrality to the story. Instead, we are left with more inane patter from the committee men and the indication that Mr. Crofton considers Hynes's poem to be "a very fine piece of writing," which appears to be a superficial gesture on the part of Mr. Crofton that "evades the substance of the poem" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 135; Beck 249). With the exception of Hynes himself, many of the others appear to be like Crofton here: fixated on the "fine" quality of the writing rather than recognizing their own ineffectiveness (Joyce, *Dubliners* 135). Of the four stories concerning death, "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is curious in that the readers notice the dead overshadowing the

living, but the characters themselves do not. Crofton seems especially unqualified to make such a remark, as he was a conservative until “his former employer withdr[a]w[s] from the contest” (Blotner 143). Unlike the boy narrator in “The Sisters” and James Duffy, who have some sense of realization, the characters here leave readers with a sense of deflation. While there is a moment of silence comparable to that in other stories, the men almost immediately revert to their chatter, with Crofton’s last words in the story being very anti-climatic, yet “loaded with import,” as they reveal the depth of the insincerity found in the committee room (Beck 249). Thus, the ultimate point of “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” is to develop a “contrast between the venality of its petty canvassers and the heroic figure of the dead Parnell” (Garrett 14). Thus, unlike the dead characters in the other stories, Parnell’s ghost does not instill a further paralysis; instead, the characters here already seem too far gone, with readers noting the irony of the contrast to which the characters are oblivious.

Readers also find an alteration in the communion imagery that has been prevalent throughout the other stories focused upon in this thesis. Also, it is worth noting that drinking is generally derided throughout the collection. For example, the alcoholic Farrington in “Counterparts” finds only humiliation and discontent after a day’s worth of drinking (Joyce, *Dubliners* 96). Similarly, Lenehan only finds that “experience ha[s] embittered his heart against the world while sipping his “ginger beer” at the “Refreshment Bar” in “Two Gallants” (58, 57). Furthermore, Jimmy, the protagonist of “After the Race,” drinks “Ireland, England, France, Hungary, [and] the United States of America” before becoming one of “the heaviest losers” in the night’s gambling (47, 48).

One could argue that many of the protagonists in *Dubliners* find a unity in their excessive drinking habits, and it is yet another source of paralysis exposed by Joyce.

Indeed, the practice of drinking also appears frequently throughout “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” beginning with Old Jack’s lamenting of his son’s drinking (119). Drinking then takes on a more prominent role in the story once the boy arrives, “depositing a basket on the floor with a noise of shaken bottles” (128). As the boy leaves, Old Jack offers him a drink, which the boy accepts. This action is met with Old Jack’s lamenting that “that’s the way it begins” (129). While the most of the characters in this story seem largely ignorant, Old Jack’s lament here seems clairvoyant in light of the boy’s communion in “The Sisters,” as that act does mark a beginning or entry into a world dominated by death and paralysis. However, unlike that communion act, the drinking in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” does not seem nearly as sacred. In his essay, Blotner compares the “warm stout” here to the “consecrated sacramental wine” found at the Last Supper, noting that the two are “in obvious contrast” (141). However, one can argue that the stout here obviously contrasts with the more sacred and intimate drinking acts in both “The Sisters” and “A Painful Case.”

This contrast becomes especially clear in light of Henchy’s “little trick” of using the fire to remove the corks from the bottle (Joyce, *Dubliners* 130). Since we have already associated the flame with Parnell, this act can be read as Parnell actually instigating or offering communion. However, unlike the previous stories where the living experience a sort of communion with the dead, the same does not occur here. Instead, the men simply drink and remain ignorant of the spirit of Parnell. Thus, just as the men are

ignorant of the silences afforded them, so too are they ignorant of the more audible gestures instigated by Parnell's spirit here. It would seem that the name of the company the boy represents, "The Black Eagle," symbolically represents the impossibility of communion, as this image directly contrasts with the fiery phoenix with which Parnell is associated (128). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Hynes, the one character who expresses a true appreciation for Parnell and his legacy, does not "seem to hear the invitation" to drink (135). As Beck notes, this is in dramatic contrast with the "earlier instances" in the story where "Lyons ask[s] which bottle on the hob [is] his, the quicker to claim it," while "Crofton 'look[s] fixedly at the other bottle'" (256). Whereas earlier stories employ drinking to designate a communion with the dead, Joyce here employs a lack of drinking to indicate Hynes's sincerity. Thus, just as the motif of silence is reversed, so too is the act of communion, as the majority of the men engage in meaningless drinking that is not nearly as intimate or important as the drinking acts found in "The Sisters" and "A Painful Case."

Still, we must focus some attention now on the character of Hynes, who emerges as the story's "modest hero" (Beck 240). Beck goes on to note that this is best indicated by the Hynes's "antithesis, the completely opportunistic Henchy," who "concede[s] that [Hynes] is 'one of them...that didn't renege [Parnell]'" (240). Whereas the other characters in the story are only concerned with their own self-serving politics, Hynes is the "epitome of the honorable man mourning the defeat of a cause and a hero he has remained unchangeably devoted to" (Beck 257). Hynes also seems to directly contrast with Crofton, a man who seems to be locked in a solipsistic existence comparable to

James Duffy's, as he sits in silence and "consider[s] his companions beneath him" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 131). Blotner also notes that Hynes is "distinguished by his appearance as well as his steadfastness, whereas all the others are unattractive in some way" (145). For example, Old Jack "is marked by the decrepitude of age," while "O'Connor is 'a grey-haired young man, whose face was disfigured by many blotches and pimples'" (Blotner 145). Furthermore, "Mr. Henchy is 'a bustling little man with a snuffling nose,'" Crofton "is 'a very fat man...[with a sloping nose]," and "Lyons is frail and thin" (Blotner 145). Hynes, on the other hand is "the only character favorably described as a 'tall, slender young man with a light brown mustache'" (Blotner 145). Thus, it is clear that Hynes is meant to contrast with not only the characters in this story, but also with the directionless characters that have preceded him in *Dubliners*, such as James Duffy, Little Chandler, Lenehan, and Corley. Unlike these men, Hynes is dedicated to a selfless cause in his continued support of Charles Parnell.

By providing a contrast, it would seem that Joyce is paving the way for Gabriel Conroy's redemption in "The Dead," as Hynes acts as a sort of messenger who is engaged in a true communion with the dead Parnell. As we shall see in the final story, Conroy's true acknowledgment and acceptance of "The Dead" leads to the ultimate "praise of life" in the novel (Ellmann 95). We begin to see this with the character of Hynes in this story, and Joyce represents this visually with Hynes's "flushed face," which "signal[s] a suffusion of a deeper feeling than has hitherto been show in [the committee room]" (Beck 256). One can also argue that such a flushed appearance indicates a sense of warmth associated with the fire that has already been associated with Parnell;

furthermore, it is interesting to note that O'Connor intones, "fire away, Joe" before Hynes begins his recitation (Joyce, *Dubliners* 133). Thus, the imagery here suggests another merging of the living in the dead, as was the case with the boy sharing the priest's smile and Duffy's taking up Mrs. Sinico's drinking habit. Hynes, then, emerges as the "dominating living character in Joyce's story" and is second only to Parnell in terms of importance (Blotner 145).

In his essay "A Fine Piece of Writing," Michael Brian asserts that the committee room itself represents "hell," but refers to Hynes as an "angel" whose purpose is to "deliver a message" with his poem (219). Brian then goes on to note the etymology of the words associated with Hynes and concludes that he is a "flying, shining deliverer" who is meant to spread the gospel of Parnell (219). In his role as a messenger for the dead, Hynes also anticipates Michael Furey's presence in "The Dead." When searching for other messenger figures throughout *Dubliners*, Brian, too, acknowledges the similarities between the two characters, as he claims that "Michael Furey...presents himself as another candidate for [the] role [of a messenger] and also notes Furey's etymological associations as a Biblical 'redeem[er]'" (219).

This attribution of Biblical roles to secular characters like Furey will become vastly important in "The Dead," but we find its origins here in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," not only in Parnell, who is presented as a "Christ figure," but also in Hynes, who represents the lone devotee to Parnell (Blotner 145). Blotner notes the irony of the situation here as an inverse of the New Testament where "only one of the eleven apostles, Thomas, had separated himself from the rest by his lack of faith and devotion,"

while in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” only “one of the five has retained his faith and loyalty” (146). Since Hynes is so irrevocably tied to the dead Parnell, he, too, is martyred when his message falls on deaf ears. This, of course, means that Parnell, too, is silenced. Thus, Hynes’s poem represents the best merger of the living and the dead, as the hopes of both (here represented by Hynes and Parnell, respectively) are irrecoverably tied together.

Parnell, whose role as the looming dead figure is understated throughout this story, does not truly take center stage until the recitation of this poem, which Hodgart claims that, while Hynes’s poem is “full of absurdities...there shines, obscurely but unwaveringly, an image of the heroic and lonely men who sacrificed themselves for the Irish cause” (121). In the poem, readers again find the living intertwined with the dead, as the “hopes” and “dreams” of Ireland “perish upon her monarch’s pyre” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 134). We here see the fire imagery recur in the poem which represents the “apotheosis of the fire imagery presided over by the feeble fire in the committee room” (Brian 218). Taking Brian’s comment here, Hynes’s poem represents an inflammation of the fire imagery and begins its movement towards the flame’s inevitable climax in the story: the popping of the last cork, which functions as an exclamation point to the poem. That Hynes’s poem associates Parnell with fire is no coincidence, given the pattern set forth by Joyce throughout the story.

Hynes’s poem also allows us to see Joyce’s irony further work itself. The most obvious irony is the fact that Hynes recites “a poem of grief and indignation to an audience that remains completely cold and unmoved” (Cixous 15). The poem itself

ironically confines the legacy of Parnell in the forceful assertion that “[Parnell] is dead” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 134). Furthermore, later lines call for “no sound of strife [to] disturb [Parnell’s] sleep,” as “calmly he rests,” for “no human pain/or high ambition spurs him now/the peaks of glory to attain” (134). Of course, as the events in the story unfold, Parnell seems anything but dead or calmly at rest, as his unseen presence overhangs and shadows the proceedings of the story. Also, it seems that even Hynes himself is not as aware of Parnell’s presence as much as he should be. By consigning the legacy of Parnell to the trite platitudes and clichés of the poem, he seems to unwittingly suppress it as well, as it fails to move the rest of the canvassers in the room.

Interestingly, the poem seems to indirectly address these men in its call for “everlasting shame [to] consume/the memory of those who tried to befoul and smear th’ exalted name” (135). This is one of the “several degrees of irony” that Cixoux claims to find here, as “the poem acquires an aggressive tone, because Parnell died betrayed by people whose description [in the poem] identifies them with the audience” (15). Thus, while the poem here certainly refers to those who actually betrayed Parnell and led to his fall, one can argue that all the men here (excluding Hynes) continue this betrayal by refusing to truly honor Parnell’s legacy. If one considers Hynes to be the lone devotee here in Blotner’s conception of the story as an inverse to the New Testament, then surely the rest of the men must all equate with Judas.

Even worse, Hynes’s poem leads to a “burst of clapping” and “applause [that] continue[s] for a little time,” which reveals the canvassers’ ignorance of this fact, and Crofton’s remark on the writing seals this ignorance (135). Thus, the men “behave as

though they [are] not the people being criticized in the poem,” and they even “applaud their own condemnation” (Cixous 15). Like James Duffy, these canvassers remain locked within their own concerns; however, unlike Duffy, none of these men (excluding Hynes) are cognizant of the dead Parnell and his legacy. Because of this, the petty canvassers in the committee room represent the most paralyzed figures at this point, and even though Hynes does not share their sentiment, he shares their fate. In fact, Hynes is perhaps the epitome of a man whose “individual sensibility” is crushed by his “external environment,” as his fellow canvassers do not heed the message found in his poem (Werner 41). Thus, both the martyr and the messenger are silenced, and all are paralyzed.

This portrayal of Parnell here is consistent with Joyce’s non-fiction writings on the subject. For example, in “The Shade of Parnell,” Joyce claims that the “shade of the ‘uncrowned king’ will weigh upon the hearts of those who remember him” (196). In the story, readers can see this to be true of Hynes, as his mourning is sincere. However, Joyce notes that this shade will not be “vindictive,” and this seems to be evident in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” as the popping of the corks are a satirical gesture at best (196). While Parnell unquestionably hovers over the events in the story, he never seems like a particularly threatening force, as his presence simply illuminates the faults of the canvassers here. Joyce also compares Parnell to the martyred Christ when he refers to “one of his disciples who had dipped his hand into the bowl with him” before betraying him (196). Readers also find echoes of this in Joyce’s article, “Home Rule Comes of Age,” where he accuses the Irish Parliament of selling Parnell to the “pharisaical

conscience of the English non-conformists, without extracting the thirty pieces of silver” (144). Again, the same sentiment exists in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, when Stephen has a fever-induced vision of Parnell’s body being returned to his worshippers. Just as Joyce reveals Ireland to be a spiritual and religious void, so too is it devoid of any secular saviors like Parnell.

The notion that death brings a paralysis to the living is evident in Hynes’s almost prophetic poem because there is indeed very little hope found in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” Instead, readers are left with a grim, pessimist view of materialistic canvassers arrested by their own greed and ignorance. The effect of having Parnell effectively upstage the story here is that readers see that these selfish characters pale in the shadow of Parnell, who becomes a martyr. As Hodgart notes, Parnell is “summoned up...but [has] the effect of reducing the present or living to the condition of twittering, bat-like shades” (119). Therefore, even though Joyce is paving the road towards redemption, we will see that the characters in *Dubliners* still have much to learn in regards to their relationship with the dead, and this is most evident in the failure of Hynes’s poem to invigorate the paralyzed political life exhibited in the committee room.

For the first time in *Dubliners*, the dead figure is meant to evoke some sense of faded glory that will inspire a sense of dynamism in the living (this, of course, also anticipates Michael Furey’s role in “The Dead”). However, the great irony is that these canvassers and activists do very little during the course of the story, outside of slandering each other and debating the role Ireland should play in welcoming the king of England. Furthermore, one can argue that a very distinct reversal in the relationship between the

living and the dead occurs in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” Whereas previous stories had the dead paralyze the living, one can argue that the canvassers’ lethargy and inaction here manage to paralyze Parnell, insofar as rendering his legacy pointless. As Rabate notes, “the name of Parnell has been deprived of all political force and turned into...the myth of the dismembered father devoured and mourned by the parricidal sons” (46). Thus, Parnell’s legacy, particularly his Home Rule movement, is completely arrested by Ireland’s ineffectual political state. Though such a reversal exists here, the effect is the same: the living canvassers are still presented as ineffective and paralyzed, while the dead Parnell, while ignored, is still presented as an ideal by Joyce. While the majority of the men are cold, selfish, and garrulous, Parnell is a fiery Christ figure whose only utterance (the popping of the final cork) is more poignant than anything the canvassers have to say.

The contrast here reiterates the pattern of the dead being more luminescent than the living that is set forth by “The Sisters” and “A Painful Case”; however, within the scheme of *Dubliners*, “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” arguably represents the bleakest point, as the stakes are never higher, as it reveals the “pattern of betrayal that Joyce saw as the defining element of Irish politics” (Werner 38). While the story centers on a few individual Dubliners, Joyce has expanded his scope to reveal the paralysis of Ireland as a country after Parnell’s death. Perhaps the most significant revelation of “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” is the fact that James Duffy’s is not the only painful case, as the men here represent the ignorant and self-interested canvassers that have politically damned Ireland. Thus, this story can be seen as a fulfillment of the cycle set forth by “The

Sisters” and continued by “A Painful Case,” as the process of internalizing death reaches its climax, as it would seem that the country as a whole has internalized Parnell’s death while also ignoring his legacy.

At this point, it would seem that all hope is lost, but the undeniable bleakness of “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” will work in contrast with “The Dead,” the final story in the collection that ultimately reverses the trends set forth by the previous stories. In that story, Joyce establishes several visual and thematic touchstones to connect all four stories. In particular, Joyce will return to the notion of secular Christ figures like that of Parnell, as both Michael Furey and Gabriel Conroy represent characters who bring a sense of grace and absolution to *Dubliners*. Whereas a state of ignorance and paralysis has washed over Ireland by the end of “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” “The Dead” reveals that all is not lost, as Conroy represents a type of Dubliner heretofore unseen in the collection: a man who comes in full communion with the dead and who fully understands the importance of connecting with the ancient heritage that has preceded him.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE DEAD

If “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” completes the cycle of paralysis and death set forth by “The Sisters” and “A Painful Case,” “The Dead” reopens the cycle and provides an escape route through the character of Gabriel Conroy. Whereas the previous stories have presented static characters that appear paralyzed in the presence of death, Conroy will be revealed as a man whose realization represents an inversion of the previous egotistical and internalizing responses to the dead. Gabriel’s profound realization in the presence of Michael Furey’s ghost offers a sense of grace and optimism to the entire collection. As a result, both Conroy and Furey can be examined as potential Christ figures, and the connotations associated with each man’s Biblical counterparts (the archangels Gabriel and Michael) represent an interesting intersection of life and death that point to each character’s larger role within *Dubliners*. Furthermore, Gabriel’s embracing of his Irish heritage, in his turn westward, represents a full acceptance of the dead. Geographically, this turn reverses the eastern trend found in the collection generally (Ghiselin 38). Indeed, the general movement of “The Dead” is one of reversal, as Joyce includes several touchstones and references to earlier stories to establish the characters’ paralyzed lives. In fact, until Gabriel’s realization occurs, “The Dead” seems to act as more of a summary of the themes established by Joyce earlier in the novel, as the majority of the characters emptily interact with each other while also engaging in superficial reveries with the dead. In fact, the annual Morkan gathering with its “pettiness and ugliness” seems as frivolous and empty as the meeting in the committee

room of the earlier story (Ludwig 159). Gabriel's ability to overcome such a paralyzing environment where others before him have failed indicates that the plight of the Dubliners is not without hope, after all.

Just as the beginning of "The Sisters" is the overture of *Dubliners*, "The Dead" is the crescendo of the collection. There, the opening paragraph firmly established the motif of death in "The Sisters", and the same is true of the opening sentence of "The Dead." Benstock remarks that this motif is "solidly established...not only with Joyce's succinct title, but with the various rhetorical devices...in the terse opening sentence: 'Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet'" (153). Benstock goes on to claim that "the connotation of 'caretaker' is mere innuendo" which means to instill "the smell of the graveyard" (153). Indeed, the dead are already hovering over this story, and once again there is some sort of intersection with the living, as the name Lily refers to a flower, but specifically the "funeral flower" (153). Just as "The Sisters" presented readers with conflated images of life and death with the paralyzed Father Flynn, Lily, too, is symbolic of the characters' living-dead state in this story. The image of the lily flower at first seems youthful or vibrant but is shadowed or tainted with death by its funereal association, which is reminiscent of the intersection of youth and death found in "The Sisters." Thus, the specter of death immediately hangs over the vibrancy of life here, and their relationship will be cemented in the final paragraph by the image of the enveloping snow.

In "The Dead," Joyce presents several characters ignorantly paralyzed by routine and passionless lives, which the party comes to epitomize. Conroy lies at the center of

this group of living-dead, a group defined by Benstock as “those who remain alive, but fail to live; the disillusioned, the self-destructive, the blighted and wasted lives” (154). Joyce utilizes the aforementioned sense of routine that drives Conroy’s existence and the subsequent destruction of those expectations as the devices to reveal Conroy’s paralyzed existence. For example, the story’s narrator assures readers that “[the party] had gone off in splendid style as long as anyone could remember” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 175-6), firmly establishing the sense of habit or custom. Joyce gives more attention to the patterned life the characters lead with small details throughout the story. For example readers discover that “Freddy Malins always [comes] in late,” and “screwed,” while the dance itself “never fall[s] flat,” and protagonist Gabriel Conroy gives “a speech,” with each device setting a pattern of expectation (176, 175, 179). Above all, we find Gabriel Conroy to be a man who seems comforted by his expectations. Thus, the end of the story not only represents the destruction of his expectations for an evening with his wife, but the destruction of a life dominated by expectation and routine. Ironically, Gabriel will learn that a willing destruction of the individual is a vital step in truly embracing life, as he must learn to relinquish his ego before escaping a mundane existence. Once again a dead character, here represented by Gretta’s childhood lover, Michael Furey, is the catalyst for this realization.

However, before readers ever encounter Furey, “the dead are very much in evidence,” and “death hovers over the feast at all times” (Benstock 153). Some particular instances of the dead are echoes of the stories discussed previously in this thesis. To begin with, there are “numerous” references to “The Sisters” in this final story (Wright

257). For example, the monks who “sleep in their coffins” in an effort “to remind them of their last end” is another conflation of life and death intermingling as it had for Father Flynn, who only appears as a corpse in a casket in the opening story (Joyce, *Dubliners* 201). The irony inherent in this scene in “The Dead” is of course the fact that these characters are not only oblivious to their impending death, but also are not aware of their own status as the living-dead. The responses here are composed of the typical platitudes and clichés seen elsewhere in *Dubliners*, and their presence “reinforces the institutional paralysis” set forth by the earlier stories (Werner 59). For example, Aunt Kate’s “firm” assertion that such a practice is a “rule of the order” is “plain to her as the superfluosity of apple sauce with goose” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 201; Beck 323). Likewise, “old Mrs. Malins, ever ready with the trite, comes up with the pronouncement that ‘they are very good men, the monks, very pious men’” (Beck 323). The “subject [then] grow[s] lugubrious” and is “buried in silence” before the group moves on to their “raisins and almonds and figs,” a stunning transition which represents this failure to reckon with death (Joyce, *Dubliners* 201). However, the drunken Freddy Malins ironically seems to hint at a bit of truth in his assertion that “the monks were trying to make up for the sins committed by all the sinners in the outside world” (201), as it hints at the possibility of the secular redeemers that will be examined later in this story. Of course, even this statement is brushed off by Mr. Brown, who claims “to like that idea very much,” but wonders if “a comfortable spring bed [could] do them just as well as a coffin” (201).

The next echo occurs with Conroy’s retelling of the story of Patrick Morkan and his horse Johnny who “walk[s] around the statue [of King Billy]” (208). This scene is

reminiscent of the political paralysis found in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” as the horse circles a dead political figure “in mesmerized paralysis” (Benstock 154). The horse is similar to the politicians in the committee room who are also paralyzed, reduced to endless, circular chatter. Instead of King Billy, the politicians are fixated on Parnell, and the superficial reverence (on the part of most of the characters except Hynes) fits Benstock’s term of “mesmerized paralysis” (154). Also, like those politicians, the characters in “The Dead” are oblivious to the tragedy of the political paralysis represented by the horse, as there are only “peals of laughter” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 208). Again, readers are privy to a sense of irony and contrast, while the characters themselves remain unaware. The characters merely carry on their lives in the story and are painfully oblivious to the shadows cast by the dead.

While the dead are content to hover in the background for most of the story, the emergence of Michael Furey represents the “triumph” of the dead (Benstock 153). Like Flynn, Mrs. Sinico, and Parnell, Furey plays the role of the disruptor as he shatters Gabriel Conroy’s expectations and ego. This disruption is visible in the deflation Conroy experiences after he builds to a “fever of...desire” and experiences a “keen pang of lust” for his wife, Gretta (Joyce, *Dubliners* 217, 215). However, this fever subsides into a sense of “annoyance” when he notices Gretta to be “abstracted,” and “he [does] not know how to begin” (217). Throughout the story, Conroy is depicted as a bit of a perfectionist, constantly playing through scenarios in his mind (his speech, for example); however, he is clearly not prepared for this disruption, a disruption which climaxes with Gretta’s recounting of the story of Michael Furey. Gretta’s simple assertion that she “think[s]

[Furey] died for [her]" causes "a vague terror" to "seize Gabriel," which also marks Furey's siege on the story itself (220). Benstock notices that Furey's "specter takes possession of the tale in a way comparable to Parnell's domination of 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room'" (154).

While this intrusion is certainly true in describing Furey's similarities to Parnell as a device that upstages the narrative, Furey's actual haunting is similar to that of Mrs. Sinico. For example, he is defined by his "very good voice" and is associated with the song, "*The Lass of Aughrim*," which reminds readers of Duffy's claim that he can hear Mrs. Sinico's voice (Joyce, *Dubliners* 221, 218). Also, Furey's death is intertwined with his love for Gretta, much as Mrs. Sinico's death is intertwined with her love for Duffy, so, once again, readers find this notion of passionate death being preferable to an empty life. Indeed, Conroy's most important realization that it is "better [to] pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age" (223). This comment here is essentially a summary of the fates of Mrs. Sinico and Duffy, respectively; also, Gabriel's "existence," like Duffy's, is "destroy[ed]," and "the self-assurance of his artificially bolstered world" is "permanently deflat[ed]" (Benstock 155). Conroy's routine and mundane existence is fully exposed to him now, as only now does he realize his "final end" like the aforementioned monks as he realizes "one by one they were all becoming shades" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 201, 223). Like so many other characters in *Dubliners*, Conroy is paralyzed, and Conroy's particular paralysis a result of his passionless life. The dead, who have hovered discreetly throughout the story culminate in the image of Michael Furey, whose story chills Conroy and further paralyzes

him in realization. Eventually, readers are left with the final image intertwining the living and the dead as both are enveloped by a chilling snow, with Gabriel noting that the living are as essentially lifeless as the dead.

Thus, readers are left where they began in “The Sisters,” with a character contemplating death; however, Joyce isn’t content to leave the reader with trailed-off thoughts as is the case in that story. Instead, the ending’s tone is much more resolute than “The Sisters” and lacks the pessimism found in both “A Painful Case” and “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” As Corrington explains, *Dubliners* exhibits a “pattern” in which “the protagonist of a story is placed in a position which reveals the direction he must take if he is to live a full and creative life” (15). However, the characters are always “defeated by the combined forces of [their] environment” (15). This is definitely true of the characters found in “The Sisters,” “A Painful Case,” and “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” Father Flynn’s death puts the young narrator’s on a path towards an internalizing paralysis, Duffy’s indecisive personality spurns the only love ever known to him, and the politicians in the committee room cannot overcome their own incessant and insignificant quarrels even, so to speak, in the face of Parnell. However, Gabriel Conroy does not seem to fit this mold as his realization reveals the direction he must take, and he accepts this direction. On the surface, Gabriel especially resembles Duffy; however, even though “Duffy comes to realize his blindness and his guilt, his realization does not carry him beyond the borders of his own life” (Baker 71). Such is not the case with Gabriel, who “has the intelligence and the imaginative vision to extend the implications of his own realization and so perceive the universal tragedy involving ‘all the living and the

dead” (r 71). Readers see this acceptance in Conroy’s simple resignation that “the time had come for him to set on his journey westward” to western Ireland (Joyce, *Dubliners* 223). Finally, it would seem that someone in *Dubliners* has a meaningful realization, and, more importantly, is actually profoundly moved to take action. As Corrington notes, “if there is room for natural salvation in Joyce’s scheme, Gabriel Conroy is its beneficiary” (139). Furthermore, if such salvation exists, it is firmly rooted in the west of Ireland. Whereas other characters, especially the first-person narrators earlier in the collection, experience epiphanies, none seem to be developed as fully as Gabriel’s here. While the earlier characters’ epiphanies seem hopeless in their finality, Gabriel’s is full of promise in the suggestion that improvement awaits him after the story is over.

This image of rural, western Ireland actually subtly permeates “The Dead” throughout the story and eventually represents a crossroads of the living and the dead. Gabriel Conroy is mostly antagonistic towards his country, particularly the west which comes to represent the heart of the ancient homeland. A reader’s first glimpse into the antagonistic relationship comes when Gabriel refers to “the continent,” a hint that he fancies himself to be above Irish life (Joyce, *Dubliners* 181). This antagonism is more overt in his interaction with the nationalist Molly Ivors, who implores him to “come for an excursion to the Aran Isles,” but Conroy has already planned “a cycling tour” on the continent (188, 189). He later bluntly retorts that he is “sick of [his] own country,” cementing his antagonism (189).

Gretta also plays a prominent role in Gabriel’s prejudice against, and eventual acceptance of the West. There are two instances in which Gretta is referred to as hailing

from the rural west, and Gabriel is reluctant to acknowledge this fact. The first instance comes in the recollection of his mother's comment that Gretta is "country cute," which Gabriel assures himself is "not true at all" (187). Later, Molly Ivors asks Gabriel if Gretta is "from Connacht," and Gabriel "shortly" responds that "her people are" (189). Each of these instances are examples that Gabriel "is a little ashamed of her having come from the west of Ireland" and that he has somehow "rescued [Gretta] from that bog" (Ellmann 248). Ellmann continues to note that "during most of the story, the west of Ireland is connected in Gabriel's mind with a dark and rather painful primitivism" and that "the west is savagery; to the east and south lie people who drink wine and wear galoshes" (248).

Soon, however the west becomes a scene of passion when Gabriel learns that Gretta once experienced the passion of young love while living in western rural Ireland. By the end of "The Dead," the rural west provides a stark contrast to the monotony of city life, while also being "paradoxically linked with the past and the dead" (Ellmann, "Backgrounds" 249). The west invokes a sense of antiquity, ancestry, and is also the land of the dead Michael Furey. However, Gabriel must embrace this land if he is to fill his heretofore empty life in some way. Ellmann contends that Gabriel's resignation to go west "affirms...on the level of feeling, the west, the primitive, untutored, impulsive country from which Gabriel had felt...alienated before" (249). Therefore, the west also becomes a scene of revitalization, with Gabriel's resignation not motivated politically (the mode of discourse which dominates his conversation with Molly Ivors), but spiritually. This idea does not completely diverge from the "cliché...that journeys

westward are towards death,” because Gabriel is indeed going to the land of the dead while seeking life (Ellmann, “Backgrounds” 249). In his analysis of “The Dead,” Anthony Burgess claims that “the west is where passion takes place and boys die for love; the graveyard where Michael Furey lies buried is, in a sense, a place of life” (qtd. in Beck 357).

The west, then, becomes Joyce’s final, symbolic merging of the living and the dead, as it is the ultimate crossroads of each. In the west lay history, ancestry, and antiquity, all of which will presumably invigorate Gabriel with life on his journey. Thus, Michael Furey may ultimately become a benevolent figure who has lighted Gabriel’s path, much as Parnell’s failed attempt in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” to reach the useless politicians. However, Gabriel seems to heed the specter of Michael Furey in his acceptance of the west, which is not the case for James Duffy or the politicians in the committee room.

Such a movement westward represents a reversal of the collection’s “eastern trend” noted by Ghiselin (38), who claims that such a trend operates to show that “the soul’s need for life...cannot be attained in Ireland” for most of *Dubliners*, as “Joyce’s dissatisfied characters...suppose they can change their condition by escaping from Ireland eastward across the sea to another life in a different place” (43). Such a trend is appropriately set forth in the opening story, where “the action takes place...near the center of Dublin” at the dead priest’s home, a move that defines the “sterility of life in Ireland” (48). Readers also see the development of the narrator’s antagonistic relationship with Dublin, as a subtle longing for the orient emerges; however, the “need

for reorientation of the soul is no further defined than in [the narrator's] intimations," as the "symbolic orient does not draw him" completely (49). Thus, just as the story represents the narrator's dawning consciousness of death and its arresting power, it also represents the dawning of this longing towards escaping towards the east, and the two trends are arguably intertwined. If the boy longs to escape, one must assume that he wants to escape the suffocating presence of Father Flynn's death. Already, readers begin to see the east associated with the vibrancy of life, while Dublin represents an inescapable paralysis.

"A Painful Case" continues to develop these associations, according to Ghiselin, as Duffy's relationship "carries him eastward to Dublin concert halls and to the southeastern seaside suburb of Sydney Parade" where Mrs. Sinico resides (54). As we have seen, Duffy's relationship represents a chance for an escape from his paralyzed, hollow existence, and it is no coincidence that the geographic orientation reaffirms the eastern tendency set forth by "The Sisters." Years later, when Duffy learns of Mrs. Sinico's death, he is "drawn eastern again" to "the scene of his last parting with her in Phoenix Park," which is a "movement toward life" and "a yearning for contact" (54). However, as we have already seen, Phoenix Park does not hold the promise indicated by its name, as he only finds a "goods train winding out of Kingsbridge station" whose "laborious drone...reiterate[es] the syllables of [Mrs. Sinico's] name" (Joyce, *Dubliners* 117).

Geographically speaking, this train is moving westward; this movement, in combination with the repetition of Mrs. Sinico's name, establishes an association with the

dead with the west. Ghiselin also points out that “turning homeward, [Duffy] will go in the same direction as the train,” which “is a symbolic movement of the soul towards death” (54). Unlike Gabriel’s spiritual movement westward, readers find Duffy’s to be one of resignation and frustration, and, ultimately “a suitable movement of the action in sin that begins with a proud eastern plunge” (54). Thus, the relationship between the east and west in “A Painful Case” is one of desire and frustration, of life and death, respectively. Of course, Duffy has only himself to blame for his frustration, which further distances him from Gabriel. As we shall see, Gabriel will relinquish his own personal desires and accept the message of the dead. Duffy, on the other hand, will merely be haunted by Mrs. Sinico for the rest of his life. Though his journey is physically westward, his soul is unquestionably locked within his own frustration.

“Ivy Day in the Committee Room” is interesting in that the entirety of the physical action occurs within one building near the “approximate center of Dublin” (54). While such a physical cessation is meant to indicate the paralysis of Dublin life, readers do find an underlying longing for the east in the politicians’ welcoming of King Edward. This reception, of course, completely betrays the purpose of Parnell’s Home Rule movement. In this respect, readers begin to see how “The Dead” retroactively alters previous stories, as that story ultimately posits the acceptance of ancient, western Ireland as a source of hope and renewal for Dubliners. Thus, we find in the politician’s unconscious longing for English rule a sort of latent hostility for their own country, and this anticipates Gabriel’s own feelings toward Ireland in “The Dead.” Unlike Duffy, the

men do not even make an attempt to physically move towards the west; instead, they are completely ignorant of Parnell's message, and, by proxy, their own heritage.

Ghiselin notes that the final story of the collection "shows a new development in *Dubliners*," as Gabriel's "physical movement...from a house in the western part of the city eastward...expresses in spatial terms his commitment to the ways and the doom of his fellow Dubliners" (57). However, "his spiritual movement westward, in imaginative vision, symbolizes his transcendence of that doom"; furthermore, his "recognition of its meaning and acceptance of the truth of his inward nature" represents a true, meaningful realization (57). Previous characters like Duffy only seem to make superficial realizations about their own deficiencies, and these realizations are presented with a sense of finality. Most importantly, it would seem that previous characters in the collection are irrevocably lost with no hope for change. Such is not the case in "The Dead," as Gabriel's realization has a sense of hope or promise that lies in the West. Thus, it would appear that "The Dead" revises the notion set forth by earlier stories that "the soul's need for life...cannot be attained in Ireland" (43). On the contrary, it would seem that life cannot be fulfilled in Dublin in particular; however, as Gabriel's turn westward shows, life is embraced by turning to the oldest part of the country. Although, earlier, he shows distaste for his own country in his conversation with Miss Ivors, Gabriel now is prepared to embrace its heritage.

While the text seems to indicate that Gabriel will literally take a vacation westward (as suggest by Miss Ivors), his spiritual and mental turn at the end is important in revealing a path towards redemption. According to Ghiselin, "escape from Dublin is

not to be conceived of finally as a passage beyond physical enclosure, but as a transcendence of psychic constrictions, an attainment of that full mobility of the soul which is the reverse of its paralysis” (61). In this respect, we see that Gabriel has attained more mobility than his predecessors, as he is not irrecoverably locked within himself the way Duffy is, nor is he confined by ignorance the way the canvassers are in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” Instead, in his embrace of the west, he is able to transcend the “psychic constrictions” that plagued those other characters (61). When Ghiselin speaks about the east, he notes that the characters’ longing for the orient represents the desire for “a new condition of inward life” (43). Their goal is “not a place, but what the place implies” (43). The same is true of Gabriel, as his physical escape westward is not as important as what the west implies: an “acknowledgement inclusive of all that has gone before, and the dead past [that] will rise to instruct him in the way of life” (Beck 332).

Rather than a reversal in geography, Wright notices the circular nature of “The Dead,” particularly when compared to “The Sisters.” He notes that “*Dubliners* begins and ends virtually in the same spot,” as “the priest’s house in Great Britain Street is just around the corner from the Gresham Hotel in Sackville Street” (258). Thus, it is possible to “walk from the main location of ‘The Sisters’ to the final location of ‘The Dead’ in a couple of minutes” (Wright 258). According to Wright, this “shape[s] the whole collection into the circular configuration,” which acts as a “symbol for Dublin paralysis and entrapment”; thus, the last story does not assess “Dublin paralysis from a new angle,” nor “does it achieve a way out” (258). Instead, “it sends us back to the beginning” to show that progress is seemingly impossible for the Dubliners (258).

While Wright's argument is convincing here, he seems to ignore one of his earlier comparisons between the first and last story in the collection. Wright comments that "The Sisters" "begins with a boy standing in the street, looking in through a dimly lighted window and imagining the death of the man inside, while 'The Dead' ends with a man looking out through a window toward the dim light in the street" (258). While this circumstance seems to indicate a sense of circularity, the subtle contrast here is significant, as it represents a reversal of the trend toward internalization found throughout *Dubliners*. As we have already seen, "The Sisters" seems to represent the beginning of this internalization, as the boy is completely locked within himself by the story's end. Such a tendency is hinted at in the boy's looking through the window, as it represents a movement inwards. On the other hand, Gabriel's looking outward symbolically represents his "growth, enlargement of outlook, and access to vision" (Beck 357). It should also be noted that the images of light operate differently here, as the candles in "The Sisters" signify death. On the other hand, the lamplight in "The Dead" illuminates the snow which becomes symbolic of Gabriel's grace. In this light, Gabriel seems to have broken the cycle of internalization, and the fact that *Dubliners* ends where it begins does not at all seem to stress the Dubliners' inability to escape. In fact, Joyce seems to be stressing the opposite: that escape is very possible, even in "the center of paralysis" (Ghiselin 54). As Beck notes, Gabriel's turn westward is not to be interpreted as a man "meekly changing his vacation plans" (357). In fact, such a reading of the story is "absurd," as it implies that "Gabriel is a man totally defeated because of his failure to escape from Ireland" (Beck 357). By story's end, "The Dead" has revealed far too many

reversals for readers to believe that Joyce has simply sent his characters back to the beginning. While Gabriel's embrace of his country seems at odds with the tendency towards escape in Joyce's later work (especially *A Portrait of the Artist*), it is significant to realize that Joyce himself "lived a more insulated life abroad than he had in Dublin" and "retained as a most vital impulse his backward regard for Ireland and the Irish" (Beck 357-8). Thus, while Gabriel's realization lacks the exuberance of Stephen Dedalus's eagerness "to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience" by fleeing Ireland, there does seem to be an embracing of life and its possibilities that is not found elsewhere in *Dubliners*. As Wright comments, movement westward does not suggest "that the *Portrait* merely supplies a positive ending to supplant the negative ending of *Dubliners*; rather, each conclusion qualifies each other" (255). Furthermore, "Stephen's escape to Europe will prove in many respects a failure, as *Ulysses* demonstrates" (255).

Gabriel, like Stephen, is able to flee from the stagnancy of life found throughout the collection. Ironically, the key to such an escape lies in the internal acceptance that one must "find one's life by losing it" and "proving genuine identity by identification with the inclusive reality of the humane" (Beck 360). Indeed, the answer does not lie in escaping to the east, nor does it lie in the *Dubliners*' constant tendency towards internalization. Instead, it lies in the "fading" of one's "identity" that Gabriel experiences here, and, more importantly, a growing awareness of the "grey impalpable world" of the dead (Joyce, *Dubliners* 223). Each of the previous stories presents a struggle between the individual and his environment, and the latter always emerges triumphant. Because of this, the individuals in the story are forced to retreat within themselves. The best

example of this occurs in the final paragraphs in “A Painful Case” where the description of the surrounding environment eventually contracts into Duffy’s simple, solipsistic realization that “he [is] alone” (117).

In the final paragraphs of “The Dead,” readers once again find that Joyce’s description mirrors the revelation. However, readers here find an expansion from the individual into the environment, as Joyce begins with the “generous tears fill[ing] Gabriel’s eyes” before transitioning to the image of Michael Furey and the “other forms” of “the dead” (223). Then, the final paragraph continues this trend, as it begins with the description of “a few light taps upon the pane” in Gabriel’s hotel room (223). Joyce’s description then moves outdoors, as Gabriel notices the “flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight” (223). Gabriel then surmises that “the snow was general all over Ireland,” and the description expands exponentially at this point to include the snow “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” (223). The imagery thereafter shifts to include the land of the dead, as Joyce describes the “lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried” before the last sentence of the collection expands the scope to include the image of “the snow falling faintly through the universe...upon all the living and the dead” (s 223).

While the description of the expanding environment may seem to indicate the insignificance on the individual, it should also be noted that Gabriel does not seem to be particularly stifled here. Instead, he willingly relinquishes himself to the surrounding environment, and this seems to set Gabriel on his way towards grace. Whereas his

previous counterparts find themselves locked in struggles against their environment, Gabriel is able to correctly interpret the signs around him to fully understand his own deficiencies. It must be noted that death overhangs this realization not only in the form of Michael Furey, but also in Gabriel's realization that Aunt Julia "would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan's horse" (222). By realizing the transience of life along with the inevitability of death, Gabriel is able to acknowledge his own vapid existence. The final image of the falling snow represents an "enlargement and liberation" that is "an achievement of true beauty" that is without rival in *Dubliners* (Ghiselin 60). Thus, Gabriel's realization here and the image of the falling snow essentially diffuse the various conflicts set up in *Dubliners*: Dublin versus the east, the individual and his environment, and the living and the dead. Indeed, in each case, "The Dead" has radically altered each struggle, as Gabriel turns westward and relinquishes his own identity that of his environment. Such a turn is not simply a nihilistic "escape into death" as Ludwig claims; instead, Gabriel's acknowledgement of death "provides the image of his life" and provides an opportunity not afforded his predecessors: a chance at improvement, not by physical escape, but through a spiritual one (Ludwig 159; Trilling 156).

The setting of the party in "The Dead" is also important when considering the interplay between the living and the dead. Both Florence Walzl and John Harty point to the party as occurring on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany (Benstock 165; Harty 23). Benstock examines the evidence in the story and concludes that the story cannot take place on "Christmas Eve nor Christmas night" (165). Furthermore, it cannot take place on "Boxing Day," "New Year's Eve," nor "New Year's Day" (165). Benstock claims

that the greatest evidence supporting this lies in the fact that Freddy Malins is drunk even though he pledged to quit drinking on New Year's Eve (165). As Benstock notes, "this could hardly refer to *last* New Year's Eve," as "no one would be shocked that he violated a pledge taken a year ago" (165). Thus, the party occurring on the Feast of the Epiphany marks a "perfect Joycean choice for the final story of a volume in which climatic situations give way...to epiphanies" (165). Benstock's observation here mirrors Harty's assertion that the setting represents "a small joke," as both critics here seem to only make passing, superficial observations of the coincidental setting (23).

Instead, Joyce's decision to set the story on the Day of the Epiphany should be examined for fully, as it represents a culmination of several trends in *Dubliners*. Chief among these trends is Joyce's tendency towards revealing the deficiencies in the living through the absent dead. If *Dubliners* is a collection where absence is emphasized, then "The Dead" represents perhaps the most ironic absence, as Christ himself is nowhere to be found on the Day of the Epiphany (McCarthy 3). However, within the context of the entire collection, "The Dead" merely represents a culmination of this trend, as it, too, has been evident throughout *Dubliners*. In his essay, Ghiselin argues that the entire collection never suggests that "the soul's needs can be supplied by the church in its current condition"; furthermore, Ghiselin argues that "the nature of the soul has not altered and the means of its salvation retain their old aspect" (43). However, though the soul remains unchanged, its needs will be ironically "satisfied in entire dissociation from the Church" (43), which is not a surprising turn given Joyce's personal disapproval of the Catholic Church.

As we have seen, Joyce does offer other avenues to salvation throughout the collection, the most notable of which are the dead. Furthermore, these dead figures are often presented as Christ-like figures. Such is the case of Charles Parnell in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room.” Also, one could argue that even Mrs. Sinico could be a potential Christ figure, as her death could potentially offer redemption to Duffy. In both cases cited here, however, the Christ figure is ignored by those whom they could save. Just as it reverses other trends, so too does “The Dead” reverse this theme. Even though Christ himself is ignored, the story ironically offers Michael Furey as a Christ figure who offers Gabriel redemption; furthermore, if Gabriel’s inclination towards the west is any indication, it would seem that Gabriel will accept the offer that Furey promises. It is already clear that Joyce intends for readers to consider Furey as a Christ figure when Gretta claims to think that he “died for [her]” (Joyce, *Dubliners* 220). While Gretta’s story reveals this claim to be true, one can also argue that Furey died so that Gabriel might escape his own paralysis. In a sense, Furey is also resurrected here in the minds of both Gabriel and Gretta, and he actually seems more alive or potent than either of them. Ironically, Furey is also even more potent than Christ himself on this particular Day of Epiphany.

While Furey assumes a Christ-like role, his given name associates him with the Archangel Michael, and Joyce reinforces this association through imagery. For example, when noting the images associated with Furey and Duffy, Corrington observes that both are described as standing beneath trees (138). However, the former is described as standing beneath a “dripping tree,” while the latter stands beneath a tree that “does not

drip with the symbolic water of life” (Corrington 138). The association of Michael Furey with water is consistent with his biblical namesake, who is traditionally “associated with water and the last judgment” (Werner 68). Furthermore, the archangel Michael is also often referred to as an angel of death, an association that allows readers to see more interplay between life and death in *Dubliners*, as Furey, through his death, also grants the gift of life.

This association is furthered in Gabriel’s association with the biblical Gabriel, the “angel of annunciation” (Werner 68). Benstock claims that Joyce sets up a “conflict [between] Gabriel and Michael, two angels who were never intended to be antagonists but in harmony with each other” (168). This reading of the text, however, seems to ignore the fact that the two ultimately do exist in harmony, as the relationship between the two men serves as a parallel between the relationship of life and death throughout *Dubliners*. Here, we have Michael Furey, the angel of death, announcing his presence to Gabriel Conroy, who must be considered the angel of life, as it is his character that finally affirms life in *Dubliners*. Werner sees the two men as being reconciled in the “merging [of] their elemental associations” (68). While Michael is associated with water and snow, Gabriel is often associated with the “element of fire”; thus, the end of the story (especially Gabriel’s embracing of the snow) represents a “time of conciliation and potential rebirth” (68).

The idea of rebirth presented by Werner allows readers to see Gabriel’s ultimate function in the collection. Like his biblical namesake, Gabriel Conroy delivers an annunciation of birth (or, in this case, rebirth). Specifically, Gabriel is announcing a

sense of hope or salvation to the rest of the Dubliners in the collection. Furthermore, one can also consider Gabriel to be another Christ figure in the collection, as “[he], too is dying ...by giving up what he has most valued in himself” in his ego (Ellmann, “Backgrounds” 25). By relinquishing himself where his predecessors have not, Gabriel makes a sacrifice that shows all is not lost. Such a reading resolves the ambiguity presented at the end of “The Dead” and allows readers to see Gabriel not as a man defeated by his environment, but one who voluntarily relinquishes himself to it.

Thus, while Christ himself is absent in “The Dead,” there is no shortage of characters to assume His role. The secularization of Christ in the story simply reaffirms Joyce’s notion that “the Church...is primarily responsible for...spiritual annihilation” (Benstock 166). Instead, Joyce chooses to reveal other avenues of salvation in Furey, Parnell, and others. Like Christ, all are physically dead. Spiritually, however, each attempts to communicate a message to the living in a way Christ cannot. “The Dead” shows what could happen if the living heed the message. Of course, this takes place (not coincidentally) on the Day of Epiphany, which represents another reconfiguration of Christianity; furthermore, Gabriel Conroy’s secular annunciation occurs here. Thus, in all the conflation lies Joyce’s announcement of a new, secular age of faith in the dead and, ultimately, life. As Benstock’s essay argues, Gabriel’s final realization realizes both his own paralysis and “that of Christianity”; furthermore, “the beginning of his journey westward [marks] a threatening spiritual rebirth” that Benstock compares to the sentiment found in Yeats’s “The Second Coming” (Werner 69). Therefore, while “The Dead” represents an end to the collection, it also represents a new beginning in this respect.

Whereas *Dubliners* opens with the assertion that “there [was] no hope” for Father Flynn (whose death immediately establishes the ineffectiveness of faith in Ireland), the collection closes with the assurance that life and all its possibilities can be embraced.

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Ultimately, readers find that “the dead reconcile the living...to life itself” in the final story of *Dubliners* (Beck 357). By examining “The Dead” within the contexts of the previous stories, it becomes clear that Joyce has been slowly progressing towards this throughout the collection. Whereas the earlier stories seem to establish a nihilistic tendency by revealing an inevitable paralysis associated with death, “The Dead,” ironically embraces life by showing that death can also be illuminating. Generally speaking, it is almost ironic that the characters in “The Dead” refer to death as the “last end” when discussing the monks, as death throughout *Dubliners* is not treated with any such finality (Joyce, *Dubliners* 201). Instead, death and the dead hover over the narratives both to disrupt and contrast the lives led by the living. “The Dead” is the culmination of this theme, as the dead begin to appear as “other forms” to Gabriel Conroy, an image that evokes the sense that the dead are actually present among the living (Joyce, *Dubliners* 221). Such is certainly a case in “The Sisters,” “A Painful Case,” and “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” where the dead are actually characters that disrupt and provoke the living to a realization of their own meaningless lives. In each of these stories, the intersections of death and life seem to build both in profundity and consequence as the overriding theme of “The Sisters” is the establishment that the dead do indeed haunt the living. Moving on to “A Painful Case,” readers find that Mr.

Duffy not only realizes this, but also realizes how futile his life will now be on an individual level. “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” builds upon these themes, but the consequences are more ominous as Joyce exposes the paralysis of the political, public sphere instead of a mere individual. Also important here is the notion that the living do not always heed the dead, as most of the political canvassers, while paying superficial homage to Parnell, do not exhibit his qualities. “The Dead” reveals a paralysis on a public and private level that is initially ignorant of the death surrounding them. However, the story of Michael Furey invokes Gabriel Conroy to a moment of realization not unlike that of James Duffy: that his life is meaningless and passionless. However, Conroy is able to heed this story, and, unlike Duffy, Conroy still has time to set upon a path that can reinvigorate his life. In Conroy, readers are left with a character that not only exhibits the traits of ignorance and paralysis found in the other characters, but also a character who can possibly be freed from this paralysis. The final image of the snow reminds us that, while the living and the dead are joined here, the snow will eventually melt, an image that mirrors Conroy’s own thawing feelings towards the west of Ireland, the crossroads of the living and the dead.

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