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BETWEEN SICKNESS AND SIN: THE PATHOLOGIZATION OF ILLICIT LOVE IN JAMES JOYCE'S *DUBLINERS*

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Illicit or non-normative sentimental relationships appear repeatedly in many of the short stories that comprise James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914). This type of emotional link did not have any room in end-of-century Catholic Ireland, and any unorthodox relationship was regarded or punished as sinful and socially unacceptable, following the strict morality of the times. In this article, I intend to analyse some of the most significant stories in *Dubliners*, in order to dissect the ways in which late nineteenth-century Dublin's double standards punished any subject steering away from established social norms concerning marriage and acceptable relationships, either by forcing the reclusion of the subjects to the domestic/private sphere or by imposing a normative marriage on them, or even by pushing them to the brink of madness, alcoholism, or suicide.

KEYWORDS: Joyce, *Dubliners*, romance, women, disease.

Entre la malaltia i el pecat: la patologia de l'amor il·lícit a *Dubliners*, de James Joyce

En molts dels relats que conformen *Dubliners* (1914), de James Joyce, s'hi inclouen diverses relacions il·lícites o no normatives. Aquest tipus de vincle emocional no tenia cabuda a la Irlanda catòlica de finals del segle XIX, i tota relació no ortodoxa es castigava en tant que es considerava pecaminosa i socialment inacceptable, segons l'estricta moralitat de l'època. Aquest article analitza alguns dels relats més significatius de *Dubliners* per disseccionar les maneres en què la doble moral imperant al Dublin finisecular castigava qualsevol subjecte que es desviés de la norma social establerta en relació amb el matrimoni, ja fos mitjançant la seva reclusió en l'espai domèstic/privat, imposant-hi un matrimoni normatiu o, fins i tot, empenyent-lo a la bogeria, l'alcoholisme o el suïcidi.

PARAULES CLAU: Joyce, *Dubliners*, romanç, dones, malaltia.

Entre la enfermedad y el pecado: la patologización del amor ilícito en *Dubliners* de James Joyce

En muchos de los relatos incluidos en *Dubliners* (1914), de James Joyce, se representan diversas relaciones ilícitas o no normativas. Este tipo de vínculo emocional no tenía cabida en la Irlanda católica de finales del siglo diecinueve, y toda relación no ortodoxa se consideraba o se castigaba en cuanto pecaminosa y socialmente inaceptable, según la estricta moralidad de la época. En este artículo me propongo analizar algunos de los relatos más significativos de *Dubliners* para diseccionar los modos en que la doble moral imperante en

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el Dublín finisecular castigaba a cualquier sujeto que se desviase de la norma social establecida en lo tocante al matrimonio, ya fuese mediante la reclusión en el espacio doméstico/privado, la imposición de un matrimonio normativo, o incluso el extremo de la locura, el alcoholismo o el suicidio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Joyce, *Dubliners*, romance, mujeres, enfermedad.

Even though the analysis of James Joyce's *Dubliners* has received a great deal of critical attention over the years (both from the traditional and the feminist research perspectives),[1] the examination of love affairs/relationships in Joyce's short stories from the point of view of the gendered (social) disease has not been thoroughly explored.[2] In most of the stories, there is at least a case of some "illness" associated with heterosexual contact, but as usual in the case of Joyce's works, this approach to disease is far from being used as a mere literary trope (not being exposed in any explicit or overt way), and is indeed problematized by the complex and often challenging stances that some of the female characters exhibit before the authoritative male judgement of late nineteenth-century Irish society.

In this essay I will try to examine some of Joyce's most well-known stories in *Dubliners* under the light of romance/marriage as social entrapment for women (and occasionally for men) in order to expose the ways in which the author creates complex female characters that either succumb to the Irish society's tight morals as regards acceptable relationships, or manage to get the upper hand of those same moral paradigms by fitting in proper female roles, only to subvert them to their own benefit. Reading the stories from a gender perspective, at the same time, will reveal the double standards of a society that regarded illicit relationships (outside of marriage) as a symptom of a disease of the heart, a sickness of the soul, or plain weakness on the part of women who failed to perform the roles expected from them, while at the same time prescribing marriage as the only plausible option for women to lead a "complete", satisfactory life —a sociably acceptable life that frequently

[1] This article was written as part of the results of the I+D+i Research Project "END: Illness in the Age of Extinction. Anglophone Narratives of Personal and Planetary Degradation (PID2019-109565RB-I00)".

[2] There is, however, a large number of scientific studies that deal with different aspects of disease (and different diseases) in Joyce's life and works, although in most cases they are focused on the analysis of physical or psychological disease from a medical perspective. See, for example: Robert M. Kaplan (2008), "Doctors, Disease and James Joyce", *Australian Family Physician*, 37 (8): 668-9; L. Ventura (2008), "Rittrato dell'artista malato. Patografia reumatologica di James Joyce (1882-1941)", *Reumatismo*, 60 (2): 150-8; or Paul J. Wheelan (2009), "James Joyce and the Asperger Syndrome", *The British Journal of Psychiatry: The Journal of Mental Science*, 195 (6): 555-6.

led wives to suffer their husbands' violence, fall into madness, and reach an untimely death (in no small measure because of venereal diseases transmitted by their male companions).

It is precisely one of the most well-known sexual infections in the 19th century (syphilis) that lurks behind the never-stated condition that assails the protagonist of the first story in the collection, "The Sisters". Not only is Father Flynn suspected to have been suffering from such ailment —as has often been suggested (see Waisbren and Walzl, 1974: 758-62, and also Margot Norris in her introduction to the 2006 Norton edition of the collection)— but more interestingly the priest's two sisters (Nannie and Eliza Flynn) also seem to show signs of physical/mental decay that might be associated with the disease (Timins, 2012: 449). We know from Joyce's correspondence that he was especially interested in the "general paralysis of the insane" and its effects on the Irish society of the times: "My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. [...] I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" (Ellmann, 1975: 83 and 22; italics in the original). Joyce's brother, Stanislaus, also remarked on the author's interest in syphilis at the time. Stanislaus wrote, in an entry corresponding to 13 August 1904: "[Joyce] talks much of the syphilitic contagion in Europe, [and] is at present writing a series of studies in it in Dublin, tracing practically everything to it. The drift of his talk seems to be that the contagion is congenital and incurable and responsible for all manias, and being so, that it is useless to try to avoid it" (Healy, 1971: 51). Joyce himself had enrolled in medicine courses when he went to Paris in 1902 (although he soon dropped those studies to focus on writing), which also reveals a personal interest in the topic, possibly derived as well from the example of his father, John Joyce, who had been a medicine student at the University of Cork (see Timins, 2012: 442).

As Michael Timins accurately explains, the bacteria that causes syphilis can be transmitted by direct sexual contact ("acquired syphilis") but also from the mother to the foetus ("congenital syphilis") (2012: 443-4). By their own doctrine Catholic priests were supposed to be confined to strict celibacy, although it is easy to assume that many of them had frequent sexual contact, either with men and/or with women, and even abused young children, a practice that unfortunately has continued until the present time. In this regard, despite all the hints in the text, Irish physician and medical historian J. B. Lyons attested repeatedly that Father Flynn could not have suffered from syphilis (on the sole basis that Flynn was an Irish priest), insisting on unspecified mental disorders instead, either resulting from dementia or old age (see

***Lectora*, 30** (2024): 161-175. ISSN: 2013-9470 D.O.I.: 10.1344/Lectora2024.30.9

Lyons, 1973: 85).[3] Nevertheless, Father Flynn's own sisters do display symptoms that might be identified with the "general paralysis of the insane", such as deafness (most noticeably in Nannie, but also in Eliza's malapropisms,[4] since hearing problems may lead to wrong usage of words), skeletal problems (the way Nannie's body is crooked and her head is bowed "scarcely above the level of the banister-rail" (Joyce, 1991: 12)), or other physical problems, like abnormalities in the hands and feet (Nannie, again) or hypersensitivity to sound (in the case of Eliza, when she states her preference for carriages that do not make a lot of noise) (Timins, 2012: 446-7). It is certainly remarkable the extent to which Joyce described the details of the sisters' physical peculiarities in his definitive reworking of the story (as compared to the simpler and less detailed *Homestead* first version), and this may be linked indeed to a deliberate use of the knowledge the author himself had acquired on medicine in the abovementioned brief stay in the medicine school in Paris, a couple of years before writing the story (442).

We may speculate on the origin of Father Flynn's and his sisters' illness(es) but, given Joyce's interest in paralysis at this moment in his career, it seems plausible to suggest that congenital syphilis may be an explanation for the symptoms they experience. In the *Irish Homestead* version, Eliza states: "Not that he was anyway mad, as you know yourself, *but he was always a little queer*. Even *when we were growing up together* he was queer" (Joyce, 1991: 270; my emphasis). Eliza's insistence on the "queer" word might hint at some peculiarity of behaviour that was present in Father Flynn even when he was a child; adding the fact that she explicitly remarks that they all grew up "together" may also hint at the direction of sharing some sort of physical/mental condition or disorder (Timins, 2012: 449).

More importantly, however, the two sisters have remained single until old age (and we may presume they might have had little or no sexual contact throughout their lives, especially since they have cared for their brother for

[3] Lyons's study, despite being well researched and documented, displays some shortcomings deriving from the time it was published, in particular a certain naivety as regards the behaviour and practices of Catholic priests in Ireland. Over the past few years several essays and monographs have been published on the topic of Joyce and medicine, very often stressing the link between Joyce's own eye problems and his suffering from syphilis. See, for example: Kathleen Ferris (1995), *James Joyce and the Burden of Disease*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky; Kevin Birmingham (2014), *The Most Dangerous Book: The Battle for James Joyce's* Ulysses, London, Head of Zeus; or Deborah Hayden (2003), *Pox: Genius, Madness, and the Mysteries of Syphilis*, New York, Basic Books.

[4] In the *Irish Homestead* version of the story, however, it is Nannie who is said to suffer from all these disorders: deafness, malapropisms and torpor (Joyce, 1991: 267-8), a fact that Timins has already observed in his analysis of the story (2012: 454, n. 39).

Lectora, **30** (2024): 161-175. ISSN: 2013-9470 D.O.I.: 10.1344/Lectora2024.30.9

many years). Since both sisters are spinsters (using the term habitually employed to refer to single women at the time), social morality prescribes that they need the presence of a male father figure (their brother, or, after his death, another priest, Father O'Rourke) that may take "charge of all the papers" (Joyce, 1991: 15) and the serious aspects of life, in the absence of a husband. As we will see immediately, several of the female characters in *Dubliners* contest this vision of the vulnerable woman (either married or unmarried) and attempt to become strong women who make their own decisions. Also, there is an evolution in this regard, in the course of the collection, towards progressive autonomy and strength (even if it occasionally ends up in failure, as in the case of Mrs Kearney in "A Mother") —a process that reaches its peak in "The Dead" with the characters of Molly Ivors and Gretta Conroy (unmarried and married women, respectively, and yet both complex and strong female characters that challenge male authority).

Romantic love, a frequently used term in gender theory, may be at the root of the kind of imbalanced relationships wherein women are those that lack power and assertion, and men are those who possess authority and agency (to control women and/or other men). This might be the reading of the term in admittedly radical feminist accounts like Shulamit Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*. Firestone speaks specifically of romantic love as a "diseased form of love" (1972: 139) that is used as a tool to reaffirm men's power and women's subordination, although she also leaves room for a kind of "pure", natural, or uncorrupted love feeling. A more precise definition of romantic love might include *passion* as an essential component (though not necessarily sexual passion) with a tight link to monogamy in the case of women (not so in the case of men) (Jackson, 2013: 41). Nevertheless, Irish society in Joyce's youth (the last years of the nineteenth century) sported a notion of romance and romantic love that was based on the idealisation of feelings following well-settled stereotypes of social behaviour, expectations and roles to be played both by men and women, rather than on blatant sexual exploitation, although power relationships played a major role in the management of emotions. This concept of romance had, therefore, little to do with its evolution in the twentieth century (where romantic love did indeed develop an increasingly close association with sexuality). Still, in *Dubliners* we also do find situations where women are exploited sexually (as well as abused or mistreated) by men ("Two Gallants" is possibly the clearest example, even though the exact moral position of the maid Corley exploits remains unclear at the end of the story).

In "Araby", the third and last of the "childhood" stories, we already get a depiction of idealised love in youth: the male character that narrates the tale of his youthful infatuation with an unnamed girl (a neighbour only known as

***Lectora*, 30** (2024): 161-175. ISSN: 2013-9470 D.O.I.: 10.1344/Lectora2024.30.9

"Mangan's sister") already anticipates a trope of idealized love that will persist over many stories in the book, progressively losing meaning as the harsh reality (marriage) imposes its rules on women who want to partake in the masquerade of adult/public life. The boy in "Araby" sees himself as a hero or knight bearing a "chalice safely among a throng of foes" (Joyce, 1991: 31). The boy's language, mirroring that of medieval chivalry, contrasts vividly with the subtle physical yearning that perspires under his depictions of his loved one: "her figure [was] defined by the light from the half-opened door. [...] Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side" (Joyce, 1991: 30). Not only do these descriptions betray a reduction of the girl to an object for the male gaze, but they also reveal a budding sexual interest. The boy's idealized vision of a mystical world of romance, heroes and maids, crumbles down at the end of the story when he reaches his epiphany: the realization —and acceptance— of reality as a prosaic world devoid of romance and pure feelings. Thus Joyce underscores society's corrupted moral values (performed/interested societal relationships and the reduction of feelings to a mere commercial transaction) as opposed to the child's naïve and "pure" idea of romance.

Eveline, the nineteen-years-old protagonist of the same-titled story, is more aware of the traps of the adult world than the boy in "Araby", and yet she too seems to harbour and cling to an idealized vision of love in order to escape the prison of domestic space. Whereas open and public spaces, journeys and quests (both literal and figurative) constitute a fair share of masculinity in the Dublin that Joyce presents us, femininity is more often than not restricted to enclosed, private or domestic spaces—hence Eveline feels entrapped in a life, a job, and a house she cannot escape (Ingersoll, 1993: 503-4). Frank, the young man she intends to elope with, offers her the possibility of escaping domestic life with a promise (false or fake though it may be) of travelling to Buenos Aires. "Home" may be a prison for Eveline, but it is a prison she yields to, at the very end of the story, as she rejects the uncertain and potentially dangerous freedom of a life with Frank. Similarly, Eveline's father presents most of the traits traditionally associated with masculinity: violence, abuse, mistreatment, etc., but in the end Eveline concludes that he is a man she knows well (and one that is growing old, thus less strong than in the past)—and he is also a man she can manage in a better way than she might ever manage Frank (young and still unfamiliar to her)—as the narrative voice remarks with subtle irony: "Her father was becoming old lately, she noticed: he would miss her. Sometimes he could be very nice" (Joyce, 1991: 41). In her obsessive reliance on men (her brother, her father, Frank), Eveline seems to regard herself incomplete as a woman, and to seek "wholeness" either by means of marriage, thus becoming the carer of her husband, or by remaining

Lectora, **30** (2024): 161-175. ISSN: 2013-9470 D.O.I.: 10.1344/Lectora2024.30.9

the carer of the family, even though she is fully aware of the negative impact marriage had caused to her own mother (who went crazy, probably as a result of violence and abuse from her husband, and ended up her days uttering incoherent words).

Just before the conclusion of the story, Joyce parodies some of the clichés of romantic literature by portraying Eveline as if it was an impulse of romantic love that prompted her to go to the North Wall to meet her lover: "She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, *fold her in his arms*. He would save her" (Joyce, 1991: 42; my emphasis). The way her conscience rephrases the image of Frank embracing her with the (more romantic) expression "fold her in his arms" is a clear sign that she needs to resort to the reverie or fantasy of romance in order to reassure herself that Frank's feelings are genuine. The doubt lingers, however, and, in the end, she remains unable to make the final move and put her romantic fantasy to the test. This clash between Eveline's (subjective) romantic ideals about marriage and the (objective) harsh and cruel reality of her parents' marriage —in particular the vivid memory of her mother's image[5] at her deathbed— may be what finally prevents her from fleeing with her lover (O'Brien, 2004: 217).

Contrasting with Eveline, Polly Mooney's character (the "Madam's" young daughter in "The Boarding House") could be seen as narrowing down the concept of romance to marriage even more deliberately, and in this she might be moving closer to the idea of a corrupt "adult" morality understood as a social disease (a disease that, once more, turned the wife/mother into little more than a passive being, subjected to the authority of the father/husband figure). In late nineteenth-century Dublin, marriage was a necessity for women who wanted to escape celibacy in an acceptable manner, but it also imposed strict moral obligations on them. Men had also duties to perform within marriage, but social judgement was far more lenient in their case. Mrs Mooney's boarding house (as so many other boarding houses in Dublin at the turn of the century), as Brown and Castle suggest, was a sort of transitional and liminal space where many single men bode their time until they got married (2012: 148). Before marrying, young men were allowed a life of dissipation (if only with prostitutes or "slaveys", i. e. very poor maids) and a relative freedom of movement, as long as they did not take advantage of virtuous and respectable girls: if they did, "[t]here must be reparation made in such cases" (Joyce, 1991: 70).

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[5] As in the case of "The Sisters", some suspicion remains as to whether the mother's madness might be a symptom of some other disease, specifically syphilis, though Joyce's text does not provide any conclusive detail on the matter, which leaves any possibility open for consideration.

***Lectora*, 30** (2024): 161-175. ISSN: 2013-9470 D.O.I.: 10.1344/Lectora2024.30.9

Bob Doran, the young boarder who falls for the trap of the Madam's scheming after (presumably) having had some unspecified intimate contact with Polly Mooney, is exposed directly and thoroughly to the dangers of illicit sexual encounters: a forced marriage as "reparation" for the girl's lost honour. Coupled with this punishment is, of course, religious punishment for breaking the moral codes in Catholic Ireland, where sex outside marriage ought to be kept in strict secrecy and never be exposed publicly. Doran's confession to the priest leaves no doubt about the alignment between the Church and Mrs Mooney: "the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair and in the end had so magnified his sin that [Mr Doran] was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation" (Joyce, 2014: 71). In fact, Doran is cleverly presented as embodying a non-normative masculinity, which tells him apart from socially acceptable and expected male attitudes. For one, he is shown to be weak physically and emotionally, even fragile, with almost a feminine vulnerability ("Mr Doran was *very anxious* indeed"; "[h]e felt his heart leap *warmly*"; "he was sitting *helplessly* on the side of the bed"; "[h]e comforted her *feebly*" (Joyce, 1991: 71-2, my emphasis)). He works as a clerk and is very conscious of details —he is well aware of Polly Mooney's vulgarity of speech (and of behaviour), as much as of all her subtle tactics to draw his attention towards her sexuality. Although he is in his thirties, Doran is an immature man who, like Eveline, still holds on to a desperate need for love, even if he is unsure of his own feelings (or Polly's). In his weaknesses and his immaturity, he is the one who suffers the consequence of his illicit love affair with Polly —although she is trapped in a "confessional culture" as much as he may be (Brown and Castle, 2012: 149). In this way, Joyce focuses on him as a victim (a deviant/dysfunctional male filled with feminine traits) while presenting Polly as a vulgar low-middle class girl who surely is smarter than she seems, behind her disguise of "a little perverse madonna" (Joyce, 1991: 67).[6]

As the stories in *Dubliners* enter the world of maturity and public life, the complexities deriving from sentimental relationships between the main characters in the collection also increase. In this respect, the story that probably best embodies (illicit) romantic love as a disease with fatal consequences for women is "A Painful Case". The protagonist of the story, a middle-aged bank cashier named James Duffy, begins a casual relationship with a married woman, Mrs Sinico. This relationship grows progressively closer and more intimate, until a sudden gesture of affection from Mrs Sinico[7] prompts Mr

[6] The contrast with Eveline, who is definitely *not* "posing" as a virgin, could not be sharper. Not coincidentally, both girls are the same age (nineteen years old).

[7] "[O]ne night during which she had shown every sign of unusual excitement, Mrs Sinico caught up [Mr Duffy's] hand passionately and pressed it to her cheek" (Joyce, 1991: 124).

Lectora, **30** (2024): 161-175. ISSN: 2013-9470 D.O.I.: 10.1344/Lectora2024.30.9

Duffy to cut off all bonds with her. After a lapse of four years, Mr Duffy learns about Mrs Sinico's tragic death after being "knocked down by the engine of the ten o'clock slow train from Kingstown" (Joyce, 1991: 126), while reading a newspaper ("a painful case" is the expression the reporter uses to refer to the event). Whether her death was an accident or suicide remains unclear,[8] but the news report states clearly that two years before the event (that is, two years after her abrupt separation from Mr Duffy) she had developed a habit of drinking heavily, which might have been instrumental in her demise. Shocked by the news, Mr Duffy reflects upon his relationship with Mrs Sinico and moves from an acute feeling of disgust at her alcoholism (and at the deterioration of her mental stability) to blaming himself for abandoning her and provoking her death, just before finally acknowledging the loneliness that had marked his life before meeting Mrs Sinico: a loneliness that will be seemingly permanent now that she is gone. The story is told from a male perspective (both the narrator and the protagonist's points of view cast no doubt on this), and whenever the narrator, following Mr Duffy's conscience and ideological paradigm, refers to Mrs Sinico, she is treated as a passive object without a voice of her own. And yet she *does* speak, and her words —as well as her attitude— act as a counterbalance to those of Mr Duffy (rendered indirectly by the narrative voice as though they may be).

This story has been interpreted variously as regards the responsibility of Mr Duffy in Mrs Sinico's death. However, the most frequent reading has traditionally been that, since Mr Duffy is the one who unilaterally broke the affair with Mrs Sinico, he was also responsible for her death (see Lowe-Evans, 1995: 395-6 for different interpretations in this regard). Following his style of "scrupulous meanness", nonetheless, Joyce carefully chooses the language in the news report to establish a background of male authority that blames Mrs Sinico for her own death and lifts all blame on anybody else. For example, it is stated that she died "while attempting to cross the line" (Joyce, 1991: 126) at the railway station —a "crossing" that may be understood both literally and figuratively, inasmuch as her behaviour (as a potentially adulterous woman) has been socially unacceptable right from the start of the story (Lowe-Evans, 1995: 397). Like Eveline, Mrs Sinico attempts to transgress the boundaries imposed on her and fails in her attempt. Mrs Sinico's transgression, however, being more serious than Eveline's, also brings about a bleaker outcome for her. The train (a phallic figure) may be interpreted as the

[8] Some early reviews of the book already identified Mrs Sinico's death as suicide, as we see in a 1914 review from *The Times Literary Supplement*, where the reviewer states: "[Mr Duffy] has so ordered a blameless life that he drives to drink and suicide the only person in the world with whom he was in sympathy" (Beja, 1973: 60).

***Lectora*, 30** (2024): 161-175. ISSN: 2013-9470 D.O.I.: 10.1344/Lectora2024.30.9

instrument the male authority uses to punish Mrs Sinico for her "sins" (or her disease, if we understand her agency in leading the relationship with Mr Duffy as such), but the witnesses that testify to the circumstances leading to her death (mostly men) are also more worried about determining who is to blame for the death than about trying to explain or understand the woman's personal situation. Predictably, the report's conclusion is: "No blame attached to anyone", while the Deputy Coroner who has led the inquest expresses "great sympathy with Captain Sinico and his daughter" (Joyce, 1991: 128).

It is precisely Mrs Sinico's daughter—the only woman among the witnesses in the "case"— that helps to secure and preserve the *male* moral regulatory system by explicitly exposing her mother as the only one responsible for her alcoholic habits: "Mrs Mary Sinico said that of late her mother had been in the habit of going out at night to buy spirits. She, witness, had often tried to reason with her mother and had induced her to join a league" (Joyce, 1991: 128). By doing what is expected of her, Mary Sinico appears as a sensible "good" woman and daughter, in stark contrast with both Eveline Hill and Polly Mooney (led astray by romantic ideals of escape through marriage). As Lowe-Evans suggests, in the end Mary Sinico's attempts to "reason with her mother" denote a certain "*lack* of real sympathy" (1995: 399, emphasis in the original). Both husband and daughter, in fact, seem to side together in trying to get rid of the burden of a (morally) diseased woman, by staying away from home for as long as possible (in the case of Mr Sinico, a captain of a mercantile boat), and by probably following her father's orders in trying to induce her mother to join a temperance league to control her alcoholism (in the case of Mary Sinico). Mrs Sinico's fall into addiction might in fact have been caused not only by Mr Duffy's rejection but also by her recognition of her own daughter's compliance with a system that prevented women from attaining any agency (Lowe-Evans, 1995: 401).

Interestingly, as stated the language used in the news report (deliberately objective and accurate) denotes the authority of a male voice —an authority based on a "compendium of clichés" (Hyman, 1982: 116)— which betrays lack of first-hand knowledge in the account or sympathy towards the victim. The title of the story is itself a clichéd phrase, one that society uses to soften and disguise what cannot be tolerated or uttered directly. "A painful case"[9] becomes, thus, a synonym for hypocrisy and moral corruption, a way of hiding behind words in order to punish a woman who has strayed from the normative path and the decency to be expected at the time from a married woman. Mr Sinico's wishful thinking that Mr Duffy may want to court his

[9] We must also bear in mind that the title can ironically refer both to Mrs Sinico's (physical) death and to Mr Duffy's "painful" and empty life.

daughter (at the beginning of the affair) also betrays a corrupt moral whereby older men could marry much younger women in a way that was easily tolerated by turn-of-the-century standards (Lowe-Evans, 1995: 400).

Mrs Kearney, in "A Mother", is another female character that strays away from societal expectations assigned to women, and is punished accordingly. Like the boy in "Araby" she too used to have an exotic view of romance in her youth —a view that had to be suppressed by marrying Mr Kearney, an older man, the safest, most practical and most sensible option. And still we may infer that she remains a romantic (Miller, 1991: 413) to a certain extent, and that this stubborn reliance on ideals is what instils in her the strength and agency to fight for what she considers her daughter's rights. At the start of the story, Mrs Kearney is trying to promote her daughter's musical career by getting her a contract to play as a piano accompanist in a series of concerts in Dublin arranged by Mr Holohan, the assistant secretary of the *Eire Abu* nationalist society, who has the public support of prominent members of the press like Mr O'Madden Burke. When the concerts prove to be a disaster in organization and performance Mrs Kearney insists that her daughter be paid the amount agreed in advance, a payment the organization is reluctant to give since the box office has yielded much less benefit than expected. Mrs Kearney gets increasingly angry at this attitude and the argument escalates until she leaves the concert room in a fury, followed by her submissive daughter and husband, much to the shock of the men present in the scene.

Very much like marriage in the Sinicos was altered by Mrs Sinico's deviant behaviour, the Kearneys also constitute an unconventional married couple (at least by late nineteenth-century Irish standards) inasmuch as Mr Kearney does not seem to be prone to drinking (a frequent trait in most husbands at the time), does not seem to exert any kind of violence towards his wife (another common feature of marriages at the time), and most of his appearances in the story are marked by a passive silent stance where his wife invariably takes the leading role, all of which apparently points to the fact that in this marriage not only the woman but also the man behaves in a non-normative way. Here we may compare Mrs Kearney with Mrs Mooney (the "Madam" in "The Boarding House"). Mrs Mooney had a bad experience in her marriage, which was brought to an end when Mr Mooney's violence towards her made her go "to the priest and [get] a separation from him with care of the children" (Joyce, 1991: 66). This traumatic experience, together with her innate pragmatism, prevents in Mrs Mooney any possibility of ideal or romantic views on relationships between men and women (O'Brien, 2004: 217), and turns her into a "winner" in her confrontation with Mr Doran about the "reparation" to be made about Polly. In other words, Mrs Mooney uses her daughter (and her loss of honour) to apparently subvert patriarchal paradigms —

the submissive woman/the powerful man— while at the same time reaffirming patriarchal values —marriage as the only socially sanctioned norm for relationships between men and women, and compliance with religious (male) authority (O'Brien, 2004: 218). In this respect she proves to be very intelligent: not only is she fully aware of the different expectations society places on men and women, but she can also exploit and use those expectations to her own advantage.

Mrs Mooney succeeds in what Mrs Kearney does not. From the start, Mrs Kearney is shown as a non-normative kind of woman marked by her romanticism and her pride, an unlikely combination that ultimately prevents her from keeping her words in check before the male discourse and gaze, thus breaking the paradigm where "liberation, movement, and activity are associated with the 'masculine', while oppression, servitude, and passivity (i.e. silence) are associated with the 'feminine'" (Ingersoll, 1995: 36). Both Mrs Mooney and Mrs Kearney are shown to be greedy characters focused on obtaining financial benefits from their respective daughters —here we may recall the sin of simony that was already introduced in "The Sisters" and that reappears in many of the remaining stories. Unlike Mrs Mooney, however, Mrs Kearney does not try to subvert the system by defending its values, but by fighting them, and her fight turns out to be gender-determined. As Jane Miller states, the cause for Mrs Kearney's defeat "is neither her romantic disillusionment nor her economic pragmatism, but rather her gender" (1991: 416). She is trying to act in a way that not only is not expected of her but is actually forbidden to women: as if she were a manager or a "boss", telling other people (men) what they must or must not do, and, most outrageously, displaying her agency in the male public space. This deviant attitude on her part is met with shock in Mr Holohan and Mr O'Madden Burke, and finally with rejection: "That's a nice lady! [Mr Holohan] said. O, she's a nice lady! [...] You did the proper thing, Holohan, said Mr O'Madden Burke, poised upon his umbrella in approval" (Joyce, 1991: 168).

The last story in the collection, "The Dead", poses a slightly different kind of social relationship between men and women. Gabriel Conroy, the male protagonist, is depicted from start to finish under the light of a failed masculinity, "paralyzed in the prison of self and society" (Walzl, 1982: 122). His attempts at showing publicly a standard masculinity are constantly contested and defeated by women who stand autonomous and do not submit to his paternalism —Lily, the young maid at the Misses Morkan's house; Miss Ivors, a cultured and intelligent woman who is not afraid to say what she thinks about him; and her own wife, Gretta Conroy, who confesses to him that she is still in love with a boy she knew in her youth.

In a similar way to how Mrs Mooney took the lead in plotting out the "reparation" to be made by Mr Doran, Miss Ivors also subverts and deconstructs male expectations of a submissive, passive and silent femininity by publicly displaying her agency and speaking up (in fact, she is the one to start and lead the conversation with Gabriel), and by showcasing "her independent sense of female subjectivity" (O'Brien, 2004: 220). This provokes, as expected, Gabriel Conroy's questioning of her womanhood: "Of course *the girl or woman, or whatever she was*, was an enthusiast but there was a time for all things" (Joyce, 1991: 217; my emphasis). Later on, as he mentally reviews the main points of the speech he is to give in the dinner table, Gabriel thinks despicably not only of Miss Ivors but also of his aunts: "Very well: that one was for Miss Ivors. What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old women?" (Joyce, 1991: 219).

But the focal point in the story, and the one that leads to both Gabriel's and Gretta's epiphanies, is the romantic love between Gretta and a lover she had met in her teenage years: Michael Furey, a boy who "was in the gasworks" (Joyce, 1991: 251) and died of an unspecified pulmonary disease after standing under heavy rain in front of her house, only to say farewell to her before she moved to a convent. This is the moment when we get Gretta's epiphany,[10] as Walzl has stated (1982: 122). Dying for love encapsulates, indeed, the very essence of romantic ideals; but this one time Joyce is not presenting the reader with a fantasy or a reverie or a longing. Here we encounter an actual death, which establishes a tight link with Mrs Sinico, not because hers might be a romantic death but because both she and Michael Furey become more powerful presences in death than they were in life (Hyman, 1982: 118), so much so that they also become the root of their lovers' "disease of the soul". At the end of "A Painful Case" Mr Duffy regains his former status as a living death (only now he is "painfully" aware of it), and at the end of "The Dead" Gretta Conroy confesses her everlasting love for a ghost that may be more alive in her heart than her husband might ever be. Shortly after her confession, Gabriel's final realisation of his failure as a (standard) man and husband leads to his own epiphany, wherein he watches the snow "faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead" (Joyce, 1991: 256). Even though Gretta might have seemed to fit in the pattern of the "perfect wife" at the beginning of the story, she too shows signs of straying away from the socially acceptable paradigm of femininity, until the revelation of her romantic longing for Michael Furey turns her into an autonomous and active being with her own passion and desires, almost an unknown woman under Gabriel's eyes: "He watched her as she slept as though he and she had

[10] "I think he *died for me*" (Joyce, 1991: 252, my emphasis).

never lived together as man and wife" (Joyce, 1991: 254). As Eugene O'Brien concludes, at the end of the story Gretta provokes "the final inversion of the patriarchal paradigm: now it is the woman who has effected a change in male subjectivity" (2004: 222).

As we have seen, Joyce introduces the theme of romantic love very much in connection with his idea of paralysis and the moral corruption of a city that condemned its female citizens to a life of submission through marriage or spinsterhood: any other alternative was proscribed as illicit and led either to social rejection, alcoholism, madness or death. Most of the characters in *Dubliners* try to escape from this moral paralysis, by means of romantic ideals (mostly in the earlier stories), or by recklessly challenging the social status quo as regards the gender norms ascribed to both men and women, and in most cases their attempts end up in failure: Eveline will remain stranded in her home with her abusive father; Polly Mooney will marry Mr Doran and (as we know from *Ulysses*) will take her performance of a "perverse Madonna" even further; Mrs Sinico will become little else than a memory that raises pity, if not plain disgust; Mrs Kearney will be shunned from Dublin's public/cultural life after "crossing the line" of decency; and Gretta Conroy (as well as, probably, Gabriel Conroy) will be plagued by remorse and guilt whenever Michael Furey returns to her/his memories.

Nevertheless, even though most of the women in *Dubliners* can be read as stereotypes (Polly Mooney as a temptress/whore; Mangan's sister as a virgin; Mrs Kearney as a domineering mother and wife, etc.), all of them are presented as round, multifaceted characters with their own "sickness", conflicts and contradictions (Werner, 1988: 94). Still, not all of them are entrapped within or succumb to their own stereotype. Mrs Mooney, for example, triumphs in her search for reparation; Molly Ivors triumphs in showing off her intellectual and moral independence; and even Gretta Conroy triumphs in revealing her emotional independence from her husband.

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