

Joyce In and Out of Character:
The Syntheses, Oppositions, and Archetypes of "A Painful Case"

By

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I. Exploring sympathy and identification with the character of Mr. Duffy in “A Painful Case”

Once, as we were discussing the subject of suffering, [Joseph Campbell] mentioned in tandem Joyce and Igjugarjuk. “Who is Igjugarjuk?” I said, barely able to imitate the pronunciation. “Oh, replied Campbell, “he was the shaman of a Caribou Eskimo tribe in northern Canada, the one who told European visitors that *the only true wisdom lives far from mankind, out in the great loneliness, and can be reached only through suffering. Privation and suffering alone open the mind to all that is hidden to others...* [Campbell’s] eyes were alight as he said, “Can you imagine a long evening around the fire with Joyce and Igjugarik? Boy, I’d like to sit in on *that*.”

Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*

Readers of “A Painful Case” in James Joyce’s *Dubliners* will find themselves situated in the throes of an endearing romance between a man and a woman, a match made in heaven, of soul-mates having found one another, inside “a story of passionate natures” as Joyce’s brother, Stanislaus, described it (*Letters II* 115). That the woman is already married to another man in Catholic turn-of-the-century Ireland curiously seems to present only a minor obstacle, perhaps even a welcome one, as only flight from the homeland, unavoidable if the lovers wish to live together, will free them from the paralysis which permeates human existence there at all levels, from soul to society, in Joyce’s view.

Mr. James Duffy, the male protagonist, is introduced at the beginning of the story as a solitary figure working in a Dublin bank, living on the outskirts of the city, and leading an austere, indeed ascetic, life of unwavering routine. Readers are told of some curious traits: he orders his personal library – including works of William Wordsworth, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Gerhart Hauptmann, and also the Maynooth Catechism, which punctuate points in the narrative progression in the story – according to volume size and he lives “at a little distance from his

body” from which vantage point he composes “in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense” (*D* 90), recalling to the minds of Joyce readers the street conversations of Stephen and Maurice Daedalus in *Stephen Hero*, as the former speaks to the latter in a “sidewise fashion” (*SH* 58). Mr. Duffy “abhorred anything which betokened physical or mental disorder,” yet *forgets* an apple in his desk, left to become “overripe,” and he furnishes his room in black and white, except for one splash of red in a rug (*D* 89), a color is that is, as Kathleen Ferris points out, associated with whores (132). Still, his rigid profile is softened by the narratorial notation that “there was no harshness in the eyes which, looking at the world from under their tawny eyebrows, gave the impression of a man ever alert to greet a redeeming instinct in others” (*D* 90), putting one in mind of the revered Cynic, Diogenes. Joyce goes to some length to impress Mr. Duffy’s face upon readers much as he did in his review of Mihaly Munkacsy’s painting of Christ, *Ecce Homo*: “the whole face is an ascetic, inspired, wholesouled, wonderfully passionate man” with his “mouth...concealed by a brown mustache” (*CW* 37); Mr. Duffy’s “tawny mustache did not quite cover an unamiable mouth” (*D* 90). Mr. Duffy’s “only dissipations” are his preference for the works of Mozart which he practices, borrowing his landlady’s piano, as does Stephen Daedalus his landlord’s instrument, and his occasional attendance at operas and concerts. He eschews society but remains connected to humanity through literature and music, and perhaps most importantly, through autobiographical tendencies, in which he fulfills the existential roles of both self and other, seemingly simultaneously, much in the way that for Joyce, as Hugh Kenner suggests, Dublin, itself, was “his other self” and that *Dubliners*, as a whole, “abounds in disguised images of the author” (98).

Mr. Duffy meets Mrs. Emily Sinico, a married woman and mother of a grown daughter, at a concert and responds immediately to her initiatory conversational gesture, an act that may seem to be out of character for him. They meet twice more, serendipitously, and then begin a relationship of platonic intimacy, casually carried out, often in Mrs. Sinico's home, with her husband present. Mr. Duffy "shared his intellectual life with her" and their "union...emotionalized his mental life" (*D* 92, 93). When, during one of their visits together, Mrs. Sinico "caught up his hand passionately and pressed it to her cheek," Mr. Duffy was "very much surprised" and "disillusioned" (*D* 93) by the unanticipated touch. After one last scheduled meeting with her, he breaks off the relationship completely and "returned to his even way of life" (*D* 94). Four years after their final conversation, Mrs. Sinico, ostensibly intoxicated at the time, dies suddenly after being hit by a train. David Wright notes that "[d]eath by train became a recognized nineteenth-century punishment for adulteresses, most famously, Anna Karenina" and Mrs. Sinico's "mere thought of an adulterous tie with Duffy seemingly seals her fate" (111). Suicide, as a corresponding subtextual notion, considered by many readers to have been Mrs. Sinico's conscious intention, whether she was intoxicated or not, is scrupulously downplayed by her husband and daughter to avoid any religious taint brought upon their family by Catholic beliefs. Regardless of the true facts of Mrs. Sinico's death, there is forewarning of the potential for such a narrative progression, however, by the invoking of the tragic Tristan and Isolde legend: "Mr. James Duffy lived in Chapelizod...[Isolde's chapel]" (*D* 89) within the first half-dozen words of the story, i.e., a love story without a happy ending is about to ensue.

What reason does Mr. Duffy give Mrs. Sinico (and readers, who are also very much surprised) for his rejection of her touch? "[E]very bond, he said, is a bond to sorrow" (*D* 93). What does this mean and what life experiences could have shaped this sentiment? The famous

ambiguity of the entire narrative text of the story makes it impossible for readers to know for sure and Mr. Duffy neither explains his reasoning nor shares any of his autobiographical sentences. Tanja Vesala-Varttala opines that “not many (if any) readers are, in fact, moved to sympathy towards Duffy, after reading ‘A Painful Case’ ” (80), as they tend to focus upon his rejection of Mrs. Sinico, and attempt to make sense of it. “What is character but the determination of incident?” asks Henry James in *The Art of Fiction*; “what is incident but the illustration of character?” (13). Blakey Vermeule, in *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*, asserts that “[r]eaders typically adapt their point of view to one or another of a story’s characters, usually the protagonist, and make their way through the narrative by tracking the character’s actions” (41). Vesala-Varttala counters with the suggestion that the narrative of “A Painful Case” *does* make a powerful attempt to explain and to justify Duffy’s actions and inclinations (80), but are typical readers able to circumvent the pathos of the story, the seemingly *avoidable* heartbreak caused by Mr. Duffy’s actions, and understand *how* the explaining and justifying are accomplished? The story structure, which falls into three parts in a typical circular Joycean pattern – Mr. Duffy alone before Mrs. Sinico, Mr. Duffy with Mrs. Sinico, and Mr. Duffy alone but transformed, after Mrs. Sinico – must be considered in its *entirety* for readers to receive its full hermeneutic impact. If the middle part captures the whole of readers’ attention, obviating effort toward a more comprehensive understanding of the character of Mr. Duffy in light of the circularity, the greater archetypal and aesthetic meanings of the synthetic construction of the character and the narrative progression of the story will remain elusive.

That *I* have sympathy for, indeed identification with, Mr. Duffy, has led me to seek as complete an understanding of Joyce’s genetic literary intention in developing this character and

narrative as possible, even if I were to be the only reader, in the sense of Vesala-Verttala's "if any," to do so.

What causes this kind of sympathy and identification of readers with characters, such as I have with Mr. Duffy, to occur? Characters, after all, as the narratologist Mieke Bal states, "the people with whom literature is concerned, are not real people;" however, it is the "character-effects" which emerge when "the resemblance between human beings and fabricated figures is so great that we forget the fundamental difference" (113); hence, identification is possible, when the reader is the human being in question. Though critics such as Theodor Adorno argue against the *value* of reader-character identification: "Philistines are those whose relation is ruled by whether and to what degree they can, for example, put themselves in the place of the actors as they come forth" (346), Hans Robert Jauss, the aesthetic reception theorist, believes, conversely, that "[i]t is precisely in such identifications, and not in detached aesthetic reflectiveness, that the transformation of aesthetic experience into symbolic or communicative action is accomplished" (285).

Though the emphasis of postmodernism on linguistic and semiotic determinants of literary text has discouraged reader-character identification in the way that Adorno does, Jauss argues that the historic tendency of readers, or spectators, as he calls them, to identify with characters remains in practice but has shifted modally from *presentational* aesthetics, i.e., in which, often, characters descend from divine states to take on human problems (e.g., as expounded by George Hegel in *Aesthetics* and Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism*) to *receptional* aesthetics, "an understanding of character which sees human individuality in the relativity of social roles" (284).

Jauss articulates five levels, or patterns of identification, with concomitant receptive dispositions that may occur between readers and characters: *associative identification* in which spectators (readers) enter the imaginary world of the text and position themselves as “players,” entering into the fictive world and identifying with all the characters, individually as well as in a collective sense, *admiring identification* in which spectators discover characters who are models of perfection that they can emulate, *sympathetic identification* in which the distance between spectators and characters is less than in admiring identification and there are feelings of similarity, sentimentality, and solidarity with characters “leading,” as Jauss puts it, “to action and emulation” (307), and *cathartic identification*, a concept that originates with Aristotle, embodying much of the same qualities as sympathetic identification, but leading, rather than to action (e.g., changes in perspective) and emulation, to critical reflection; quoting Friedrich von Blankenburg, Jauss clarifies that the “thinking reader” experiences catharsis because he “learns from the novel hero to ‘value correctly’ his own feelings” (312). The final pattern is *ironic identification* where the hero (or antihero) provides spectators with unanticipated reactions or when the narrative structure forces spectators to “become” the main characters themselves after the heroes “disappear.” In my own readerly case, the identification with Mr. Duffy begins with sympathy and deepens to catharsis and of particular interest to the present analysis, is Jauss’ contention that

[t]he disposition of cathartic identification brings into consciousness that hiatus between aesthetic disposition and moral action which at the stage of admiring identification is hidden by the vividness of the perfect model and which at the stage of sympathetic identification is supposed to be transcended by a pitying but potentially active solidarity. But this hiatus by no means excludes a movement

from the aesthetic to the moral; in fact, the inner freedom arrived at by catharsis is a precondition for the spectator's becoming able to follow his new insight, not in response to didactic pressure but out of free reflection...in the process of emancipation of aesthetic experience, cathartic identification represents the threshold of autonomy: the spectator is permitted to partake of tragic emotional upheaval or sympathetic laughter only to the extent that he is able to lift himself out of the immediacy of identification onto a level of critical reflection concerning what is presented. (311)

The liberation of which Jauss writes is described by Aristotle, in *Poetics*, and refers to the emotional situating of the spectator with the hero, who is suffering undeservedly, and whose experience arouses pity and fear in the spectator, "for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves" (43). Notwithstanding, Jauss avers that "the spectator who thus places himself in the position of the hero, must also be 'purged' [Joyce links the concepts of catharsis and purgation in "The Holy Office" (*CW* 149)] of those purer affections which are aroused by the tragedy and brought to a state of 'desirable composure'" (288), which according to the literary historian, Max Kommerell, "is the condition of all higher intellectual business" (qtd by Jauss 311).

Uffe Seilman and Steen Larsen describe the "personal resonance" which some readers may experience when text brings meaningfulness and relevance to their reading. They postulate that the resonance has to do with "reminders," i.e., of personal experiences, those that readers bring to text which relate to perceived "verisimilitude," or the "semblance of real life," rather than the story's veridicality (166). Seilman and Larsen conclude, after an analysis of empirical data, that "[p]ersonal involvement consists very concretely of relating the text to experiences in

which the reader had an active role and therefore must be personally responsible for” (175).

Keith Oatley develops a taxonomy mapping emotional reactions of *outer readers*, confronting a text and *inner readers*, entering the world of the text, using the metaphor of Erving Goffman’s “semi-permeable membrane” image which enables readers to have sympathy, emotion memories, and emotions of identification with select features of the text (57). The sympathetic processes of readers, according to Oatley, involve recognition and empathy, as well as responses to “objective correlatives,” a term used by T. S. Eliot in *The Sacred Wood* to describe discrete aspects of textual communication that evoke emotion (100). Emotion memories, the second of the inner reader responses, are awakened during the reading process, and are, according to Oatley, “not just recalled, they are relived,” even to the extent of the “re-experiencing of emotions that had been suppressed or repressed” (63), as in Thomas Scheff’s description of responsive catharsis as “the decrease of tension and the clarification of thought” and the achievement of “double vision; [a reader] being simultaneously and equally a participant and an observer” (250). The third reader response, identification, argues Oatley, can apply to both author and reader whose emotions “are mediated by a psychological process in which the reader (or writer) takes on characteristics of the fictional character,” quoting from *Madame Bovary*, “Your imagination confuses itself with the characters and it seems as if it were your own heart beating inside their clothes” (64). Subsequently, Oatley, joined by Gerald Cupchik and Peter Vorderer, conducts a study which examines emotional responses to stories in *Dubliners*, specifically seeking data on sympathy and identification. The researchers report that the emotionally laden scenes from stories “evoked both fresh emotions and emotional memories and created robust situational models incorporating recognizable person- and setting-oriented details” (Cupchik et al 375). Cupchik, et al, suggest that it may even lie within the purview of a writer to

“orient” readers toward either sympathy or identification, although Seilman and Larsen point out that “different readers – even with similar backgrounds and similar present circumstances – may react very differently to a given work at this level” (167).

Joyce writes in “The Pola Notebook,” as he was developing his theory of aesthetics, that the act of apprehension [of a work of art] involves at least two activities, the activity of cognition or simple perception and the activity of recognition [and that] it may be further said that there is no activity of simple perception to which there does not succeed in whatsoever measure the activity of recognition. For by the activity of recognition is meant an activity of decision; and in accordance with this activity in all conceivable cases a sensible object is said to be satisfying or dissatisfying. But the activity of recognition is, like every other activity, itself pleasant, and therefore every object that has been apprehended is secondly in whatsoever measure beautiful. Consequently even the most hideous object may be said to be beautiful for this reason, as it is *a priori* said to be beautiful in so far as it encounters the activity of simple perception. (CW 147)

For Joyce, images, including characters, must be purposefully positioned between the mind of the creative artist and the perceptive spectator. From there, the images progress through *integritas*, wholeness, *consonantia*, harmony, and finally to *claritas*, radiance, until the receptive heart is enchanted (P 155). In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus redefines Aristotle’s concepts of pity and terror (fear): “Pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human suffering and unites it with the human sufferer. Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence in whatever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause” (148). What Joyce meant

by the secret cause, is explained by Joseph Campbell as mortality. “The terror,” writes Campbell, “is a positive experience of mystical awe before the *mysterium tremendum* of being. The pity is a positive experience of compassion for the human sufferer” (*Mythic Worlds* 28). “Relations,” writes Joyce in *Stephen Hero*, “must subsist between the literary image, the work of art itself, and that energy which had imagined and fashioned it, that centre of conscious, re-acting, particular life, the artist” (77).

Why do most readers not have sympathy for, much less identification with, Mr. Duffy? Vesala-Verttala suggests that Mr. Duffy brings this situation upon himself: “He is repeatedly shown to be disinterested, even to the point of total aversion with regard to sympathy or any other sort of bonding” (86). Whether this distancing of the character involves a conscious or unconscious authorial effect, as suggested by Cupchik, et al, other influences are also seen at work, e.g., the post-Freudian predominance of object-relations psychoanalytic theory which posits “that intimate personal relationships are the chief source of human happiness. Conversely, it is widely assumed that those who do not enjoy the satisfactions provided by such relationships are neurotic, immature, or in some other way abnormal” (Storr 5-6). Failure to understand basic personality types, in Mr. Duffy’s case the “solitary type,” may prevent an empathetic understanding of the character, when viewed in a mimetic aspect. Stanislaus notes in *My Brother’s Keeper* that “the idea that [Joyce] had in mind [generally speaking] was that a man’s character, like his body, develops from an embryo with constant traits” (17). John Oldham and Lois Morris describe “solitary men and women [who] need no one but themselves. They are unmoved by the madding crowd, liberated from the drive to impress and to please. Solitary people are remarkably free of the emotions and involvements that distract so many others. What they may give up in terms of sentiment and intimacy, however, they may gain in clarity of

vision. Left to their own devices, solitary...writers and poets can uncover and record the facts of our existence to which our passions so often blind us" (275). Outside of his employment, Mr. Duffy provides himself with ample time for reflection in his long walks, for engagement in music and literature, and in written expression. "Solitary individuals are self-contained," continue Oldham and Morris, "they are their own truest, most trusted companions, providing the most important resources they need. They require no one else to guide them, to admire them, to provide emotional sustenance, to entertain them, or to share their experiences. Although they may marry or otherwise become involved with others, at heart they remain separate and they find greatest comfort, reassurance, and freedom alone with themselves" (276). Mr. Duffy does not seek out companionship, but also does not reject it when Mrs. Sinico offers it. "Solitary individuals are, in a word, dispassionate. In some ways they are richer for it ... they can stand back and watch the curious things people do. Similarly free of sentimental reverie, they can observe the world around them in strikingly clear focus. Gifted solitary individuals can be highly creative, if reclusive, poets...and intellectuals. They do not speak the language of emotions... (Oldham and Morris 278). Mr. Duffy notes Mrs. Sinico's emotions made physically manifest – excitement, trembling – but remains, himself, composed, at least up until his moment of transformation, or in Joycean terms, epiphany.

Mr. Duffy is not the only exemplar of solitude in the Joycean body of work, or in Joyce's personal life, for that matter. The protagonist of *Stephen Hero* (Stephen Daedalus) says "solemnly" to his brother that "[i]solation is the first principle of artistic economy" (*SH* 33). Similar references march on through this text, "he hardly spoke to his colleagues" (*SH* 29), "he had withdrawn sternly from his little world and surely it was not wonderful that his solitude should propel him to frenetic outbursts of a young man's passion and to outbursts of loneliness?"

(*SH* 37), “[i]t was natural that the youth sought solitude for himself the more his society sought to prevent his purpose” (*SH* 38). When Stephen’s parents limit his contact with, and thus his influence over, his brother, “Stephen himself bore it lightly because he could ease himself greatly in solitude...” (*SH* 49). His evening walks are metaphorically described as “wanderings in the desert” (*SH* 69) - an unmistakable reference to a quintessential habitat of the archetypal hermit – and “[a]ny acquaintances that were encountered during these walks were never allowed to intrude on the young man’s meditations by commonplace conversation” (*SH* 70). “The attitude which was constitutional with him, was a silent self-occupied, contemptuous manner...” (*SH* 146).

While Joyce’s well-known and later well-publicized propensities for drinking and patronizing of brothels have been documented, particularly by his brother, Stanislaus, in the early years of his life, other, perhaps more objective, sources such as Arthur Power, paint quite a different portrait of the artist in maturity. “Indeed, famous man though he was, the life he lived was, socially speaking, hermetically sealed” (48). Power describes Joyce’s works as “ebullience of the high spirits, wit, and violence” (79) and is hard-pressed to connect them with the man who is “remarkably taciturn” (40), “a solitary and lonely figure” (48), and who “[e]verywhere he went...acted in the same detached manner” (49). Stanislaus makes a reference to Joyce’s “abhorrence of the multitude” (*MBK* 147), which Joyce also expresses in “The Day of the Rabblement” (*CW* 69).

Solitude in modernist literature has been represented differently than in preceding periods, especially the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in which the choice of a solitary lifestyle was apt to reflect spirituality or creativity or both. Edward Engelbert notes in *Solitude and its Ambiguities in Modernist Fiction*, “Throughout its history as a concept, solitude has been

presented as an appealing path of escape from the anxieties of the world; at the same time, the caveat that solitude and the isolation that defines it can also be hazardous has been equally recognized” (8). The tendency of modernist writers, though they can hardly be accused of any kind of solidarity, has been to shift from the celebratory aspects of solitude when crafting their characters, toward darker and isolationist figures, unlike the earlier Romantic certainty of the spiritual value of solitude (e.g., Wordsworth); the latter gave way to “mixing the joy of inner communion with the potential for dark, destructive discoveries” (Massie v). Engelbert points out Joyce’s high regard for Defoe’s character, Robinson Crusoe, exemplified in Joyce’s Trieste lectures of 1912, all the ambiguities of the solitary protagonist notwithstanding, which “yields insights not merely into Joyce’s affinities but into the nature of solitude’s complexities” (60).

II. Critical review of selected commentary on “A Painful Case”

That “A Painful Case” has challenged the capacity, as well as the efficacy, of critical interpretation is an understatement. My foremost explanation for this situation is that the critical focus has been largely misplaced. Critics have been far more interested in the behavior of the story’s protagonist, Mr. Duffy, than in his thematic role, specifically his rejection of Mrs. Sinico’s suggestive touch, widely interpreted as a proffer of sexual intimacy. This kind of narrow critical focus runs the risk of committing a “fundamental attribution error” or “the attributing of the cause of the behavior to the individual [character] even when there is good reason to suspect situational causes” (Bartolucci 143). After the period of growing closeness - the middle part of the story - comprised by enjoyment, entanglement, and exaltation on his part, in which physical love *seems* the natural progression, and which frames a prospect that generally enjoys readerly approbation, Mr. Duffy recoils from Mrs. Sinico’s physical contact, becomes immediately disillusioned with his “soul’s companion,” and decides to abruptly end the relationship. For readers charmed by the ingenuousness of Mrs. Sinico in extending comprehensive love to such a seemingly dispassionate, detached, and disdainful human being as Mr. Duffy and sensing a sort of salvation for them both in consummation, sympathy is widely engendered for *her* in the wake of his rejection and an explanation for his resisting behavior is sought, as it defies commonly held beliefs about male sexuality and quite spoils the romance with a jarring cessation of vicarious sentimentality.

There is no shortage of clinical explanations, if a critic wants to go there, in the post-Freudian world that can rationalize Mr. Duffy’s behavior: *obsessive-compulsive personality disorder*, a pattern of preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and control (Dsm-5 645); *erotophobia*, or sexual aversion disorder, a morbid aversion to the thought of sexual love and to

its physical expression (Fisher, et al 123); *asexuality or hypoactive sexual desire disorder*, a lack of sexual attraction that does not preclude emotional or other kinds of attraction (Dsm-5 440); and *haphophobia*, a morbid dislike or fear of being touched (Doctor 501). But Mr. Duffy does not appear in the story to seek a diagnosis and a cure; he is there to advance the narrative purposes of the author. However, it is the “character-effects,” mentioned above, that so intrigue literary critics and prompt them to attempt to formulate psychological analyses of those characters. For critics working with “A Painful Case,” this process has proven to be difficult, possibly because the story, as Martina Plock asserts, “...resists a clear-cut application of diagnostic labels. There is hardly enough evidence to establish nosological [i.e., referring to disease] parameters for Mr. Duffy’s case. Even the most scrupulous reader cannot achieve such a prognostic feat” (258-259). Plock further contends that part of the difficulty of analyzing “A Painful Case” is due to shifts in narrative style ranging from objective and reserved to melodramatic (259). While such shifts in the story can be demarcated and identified, experienced readers of Joyce have become inured to them and do not allow such shifts to affect their analyses unnecessarily. And in this vein, Barbara Sloan has to wonder: whose epiphany, at the conclusion of the story, is it, the character’s or the reader’s? (26). Readers may answer, “both,” but even so, have difficulty teasing apart what they think they may have discovered about Mr. Duffy and what Mr. Duffy may have discovered about himself.

Attempts to sew Mr. Duffy up in neat deterministic or diagnostic pockets have been made by a number of critics. Coilin Owens surmises that even though Mr. Duffy “had neither...church nor creed,” at least at the time of the story, the presence of the *Maynooth Catechism* on the character’s well-ordered bookshelf reveals a religious past (Owens, *Painful Case* 115) which cannot be entirely banished by secular employment, political involvement, intellectual literary

pursuits, or classical music. Addressing the central question of Mr. Duffy's refusal of Mrs. Sinico's intimate gesture, Owens contends that although religious vocation may be surrendered, its vows can be so binding as to persist even through loss of faith and for this reason Mr. Duffy continues to perpetuate his chaste state. Mr. Duffy clearly displays no fidelity to the two remaining vows in the priestly triumvirate – poverty and obedience – why, then, would he remain loyal to the one, chastity, that has traditionally provided the most compelling reason for men abandoning the priesthood in the first place? The diffident, but persistent, presence of the apple in the desk seems to suggest, in fact, prior and/or illicit sexual experiences, as Joyce would later express it in *Finnegans Wake*: “with *apple* harlottes” (113, emphasis mine).

The rise of gender criticism has provided a venue for critics such as Roberta Jackson and Margot Norris to suggest that Mr. Duffy cannot satisfy Mrs. Sinico's sexual desire because he is homosexual, albeit a strictly closeted one. The most convincing evidence for this argument is Mr. Duffy's, i.e. Stanislaus Joyce's, journal aphorism: “Love between man and man is impossible because there must not be sexual intercourse and friendship between man and woman is impossible because there must be sexual intercourse” (*D* 94). Because of the strictly enforced illegality and criminalization of homosexuality and its potential and severe penalties in the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, Mr. Duffy may have resigned himself to a life of celibacy, gender critics argue, purposefully keeping himself ensconced in the suburbs, far away from the “gilded youth” (Jackson 337; *D* 91) in Dublin, in whose association he might run afoul of the law and suffer dire consequences. Following this argument, Mr. Duffy, burdened with this exigency to keep his orientation secret, would find himself unable even to ameliorate Mrs. Sinico's wounded feelings with an honest explanation when he ends the relationship, thus leading him to affirm the impossibility for him to have a friendship with a woman. As the

aphorism was lifted directly from Stanislaus' *Dublin Diary*, and since Stanislaus, the person, contributed personal attributes to Mr. Duffy, the character, it may be useful to consider two other related entries in Stanislaus' diary, "Friendship with men repels me" (35) and "If they [American women] think that friendship and intimacy is possible without desire, they deceive themselves" (132). Though these sentiments do not appear in "A Painful Case," they may help shed some light on the elusive meaning of the aphorism as originally expressed. Norris does concede a "simpler possibility that Duffy, while heterosexual and attracted by the woman's [i.e., Mrs. Sinico's] personality, was simply not attracted to Mrs. Sinico sexually" (167).

Other criticism of "A Painful Case" has applied Freudian and Lacanian analysis to both Mr. Duffy and his actions by suggesting an extreme narcissism in need of, not a lover, but a mother-figure to hold up the mirror of spiritual ascendancy. If Mrs. Sinico was seen by Mr. Duffy as maternal, he would have refrained from "physical intimacy with the untouchable body of the mother" as Suzetter Henke (36) suggests and Darcy O'Brien clarifies: "The mother is forbidden as an object of sexual desire but to her the child directs his emotional impulses and from her receives his emotional comfort" (18). Arnold Modell, in *The Private Self*, views the muse [a role played by Mrs. Sinico] also as a mother-figure who "exemplifies the artist's continued connection to the mother despite apparent solitude" (Knafo 57). Mr. Duffy "thought that in her eyes he would ascend to an angelical stature" (*D* 93); in response to this, Benjamin Boysen asserts that "[h]owever, Mrs. Sinico is not the real object of Mr. Duffy's budding devotion; she is merely the mirror through which his narcissistic inclination can be better satisfied" (397).

And yet, none of these attempts seems to present a complete and satisfying solution to the enigma of Mr. Duffy, the character, or as to the meaning of the story. As Richard Brown in

James Joyce and Sexuality states, “for all the attention to the perverse in Joyce, there is no single character [in *Dubliners*], except perhaps the man in “An Encounter,” who might be called sexually deviant” (83). Mr. Duffy’s initial appraisal of Mrs. Sinico at the concert follows predictable heterosexual male patterns of assessing the female physique: the face, which in Mrs. Sinico’s case “must have been handsome,” the eyes, “revealing for an instant a temperament of great sensibility,” and the bosom, “of a certain fulness” (D 91-92) with obvious approbation. The kindling of an attraction of some kind, particularly after the added fuel of the subsequent chance meetings, is not in doubt. The presence of a catechism on a bookshelf does not warrant an assumption that Mr. Duffy had somehow failed at priesthood, but is more likely indicative of a lingering symbolic tie to his Catholic past (Ferris 12), as the decomposing apple is almost certainly emblematic of at least a vestige of sexuality, past, present, or as it was “overripe,” future. The idea that Mrs. Sinico may have functioned as a symbolic mother to Mr. Duffy formed upon the reference to her “maternal solicitude” (D 92) seems insufficient to support a stand-alone Freudian manifestation of this nature; modern readers tend to reject the universality of Oedipal dysfunctions in characters unless there is convincing textual evidence and character action is limned in that direction. Readers cannot miss that it was Mrs. Sinico’s *daughter*, and not she who, after all, received the name “Mary” which, especially in a culturally Catholic setting as *Dubliners* is, would connote a maternal or madonna-reference at work in the text. It is well-known that Joyce selected character names with the utmost perspicacity.

The aforementioned critical perspectives view the action of the character, Mr. Duffy, as indicative of clinical deviance, at least according to the Krafft-Ebing taxonomy of Joyce’s time, as well as more modern descriptors. Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, in *Psychonarratology*, cite a study by E. Jones and K. Davis on *correspondent inference* “that occurs when observers

take a behavior at face value and assume the individual has a corresponding trait” (143).

Consequently, critics run the risk of missing the narrative point when they focus upon attempts to explain Mr. Duffy’s, or any other character’s, behavior viewed in isolation and stop short of deducing the author’s purposes for the character behaving the way he/she does. From the perspective of the author of any given work, all character behavior is normal for the all of the characters, considered within the contextual frame of the story.

III. Determining the genesis of the character of Mr. Duffy

On November 12, 1912, the Triestine newspaper, *Il Piccolo della Sera*, had this to report about a lecture on *Hamlet* by James Joyce, delivered the previous evening at the prestigious Societa di Minerva: “In his lecture Professor Joyce began with a concise exposition of the origins of the drama, passed on to a colourful presentation of the writers in the age of Elizabeth, and finally outlined the character and life of Shakespeare with particular attention to the *psychological moment* when he wrote *Hamlet*. Warm and prolonged applause greeted the speaker at the end of his learned and graceful talk” (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 776, emphasis mine).

The value that Joyce placed upon connections between artists and their personal lives is elaborated upon by Richard Ellmann in *The Consciousness of Joyce*: in the aforementioned series of lectures, “he developed this theory of the relation of the play to Shakespeare’s life” and “celebrated not the ‘lofty impersonal power’ of the artist, but the intimate tie between work and life,” promulgating “the theory that great literature was *necessarily autobiographical*” (48, italics mine). Though Joyce’s *Hamlet* lectures have ostensibly been lost and cannot provide a concrete guide, it is my intention here to apply a similitude of what I perceive to have been Joyce’s method to the *Dubliners* story, “A Painful Case.”

Following Joyce’s autobiographically-based model for analysis for a study of “A Painful Case,” it can be speculated that the concurrent events in Joyce’s life during the period – actually not a very lengthy time - in which “A Painful Case” was written may provide clue as to the meaning of the story.

In October 1904, Joyce eloped with Nora Barnacle to Zurich, flouting the convention of marriage, amid expressed criticism of his actions from various family members and friends. “He did not want to marry,” writes Stanislaus, “because of his anti-matrimonial principles, and since

he was unable to live with her openly in Dublin (he did not want clandestine relations), he left Dublin almost on the spur of the moment..." (Joyce, S., *Recollections* 23). Joyce remained in constant contact with Stanislaus through letters and telegrams, continuing a longstanding habit of depending upon him for advice, for criticism of his work and that of other writers, as well as for monetary support. As early as February 1905, Joyce began his attempt to convince Stanislaus to join him in Trieste. By June, Joyce was forming theatrical career aspirations, in preparation studying with a voice teacher named Sinico, and at the same time asking Stanislaus in a letter if he knew that "Ibsen's married life had ended by his leaving his wife" (*Letters II* 91), a first sign that the bloom may have been fading off the rose of Joyce's romance. On July 12, in a very lengthy letter, a sheet of which is missing, he describes his elopement with Nora to Stanislaus as an "experiment" (*Letters II* 93). Joyce used the word "melancholy" (a term associated with Mr. Duffy) twice in reference to Nora and to their time together and stated that "in my present uncertain position I would not like to encumber her with a family" (*Letters II* 95). His "exile," he wrote, "is degrading (both Stephen and Mr. Duffy also use this word in reference to Emma Clery and Mrs. Sinico, respectively) and unsatisfactory" (*Letters II* 96) and he explored the notion with Stanislaus of returning to Ireland and the two brothers, along with Nora and the coming baby, renting a house for a year's trial period. Of Nora, he wrote, "Sometimes she is very happy and cheerful" but concluded that "I, who grow less and less romantic, do not desire any such ending for our love-affair as a douche in the Serpentine," a reference, as Richard Ellmann points out, to the suicide of the wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley (*Letters II* 96); presumably Joyce was referring to Nora in that passage. Joyce's experiment had left him "distracted" and "unable to see things with my former precision" (*Letters II* 98). The letter to his brother was a "confession" (98).

These events and sentiments form the backdrop against which “A Painful Case” was composed. Under the lens of autobiography, given that Joyce’s current “psychological moment” was laid out so clearly in his July 12th letter to Stanislaus, it is conceivable that in “A Painful Case,” Joyce was portraying, through a series of disguising oppositions in character and plotline, his own present personal situation. In the end, however, the story failed to satisfy him; in a letter to Stanislaus in November 1906, Joyce names “A Painful Case” one of “the two worst stories” in *Dubliners*. Why this was so remains unknown.

The factual basis for the argument that “A Painful Case” is both biographical and autobiographical is as follows: Joyce and Stanislaus both had chance meetings with women in Dublin when they were young men. Stanislaus records:

About this time (1901) I went alone to a concert in the Rotunda...The concert hall was crowded and among the audience I was one of the most enthusiastic.

After a while I became aware that a lady who was sitting beside me looked at me several times. She was a handsome, dark-haired woman, between thirty and forty years old. I noticed her fair skin and the large pupils and the very pure whites of her brown eyes. In one of the pauses she spoke to me, and we continued to chat in the brief pauses and the interval about the concert and about music, in which she seemed to be competent. At the end she shook hands with me, smiling placidly.

Afterwards I met her by chance at least once that I remember. She stopped me in the street; I was not yet eighteen and should not have had the audacity to accost her. She asked me some conventional questions about my studies, and her manner was pleasant and friendly, but I never met her again.” (*MBK* 159)

Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico, both middle-aged, meet under almost the same circumstances as Stanislaus' meeting with the older woman (her marital status was unknown). Joyce's meeting was with the young, single Nora Barnacle (Maddox 36). After the second meeting, Stanislaus never saw the older woman again, while Joyce and Nora plunged immediately into a relationship and soon left Ireland together. Stanislaus remained in Ireland romantically uninvolved. In the story, Mr. Duffy considers an elopement with Mrs. Sinico and decides against it. When the constraints of economic realities which interfered with Joyce's writing began to cool the ardor of his adventure, Joyce keenly felt the absence of his original "other half;" his near-desperation conveys itself vividly in his plea to Stanislaus in July 1905: "Dear Stannie Could you possibly come here for a few days – by hook or crook? I want to speak to you on a very serious matter and it is so unsatisfactory writing" (*Letters II*, 92). Exactly during this time, Joyce was creating a protagonist who seems to be a composite of his brother and himself and who breaks off a relationship with a woman before they become intimate, in fact, rejecting the advance made by the woman. In his "real life," Joyce was agonizing over his unhappy situation with a pregnant partner, obviously, judging from the content of the letters to Stanislaus and contemplating leaving her, which given the circumstances, especially the moral climate of the day, would have been an extreme step. Abandoning Nora at that stage would have condemned her to the most miserable of lives. "Unmarried mothers," observes Stanislaus, "had better be dead than alive" (*MBK* 158). The composite character, Mr. Duffy, in regard to his developing relationship, counsels himself: "We cannot give ourselves...we are our own" and tells Mrs. Sinico in their final meeting, "Every bond...is a bond to sorrow" (*D* 93). Later Joyce will write, "The pleasures of love last but a fleeting but the pledges of life outlasts a lifetime" (*FW* 444). And in an early draft of "A Painful Case" readers find Mr. Duffy rather vehemently declaring, "I, he said, will

receive with disdain every advance on the part of this civilization which is untrustworthy of me but which seeks to entrap me” (Qtd by Magalaner 47).

The three elemental aspects of “A Painful Case” align with Joyce’s life events and concomitant state of mind during the timeframe in which the story was composed: (1) the detailed portraiture of the protagonist, Mr. Duffy, as a composite of himself and his brother whom he was calling to his side; (2) the star-crossed “adventure” with Mrs. Sinico, interpreted here as the rejection of physical and emotional relationship for the isolation of the overman-artist; and (3) the realization or epiphany that making a choice between art, representative of the self, and commitment to another human being is a painful one, with uncontrollable repercussions and profound personal effects. With respect to Joyce’s theory on Hamlet which comes to maturity in the “Scylla and Charybis” episode of *Ulysses*, “the historical and geographical setting is a cover for a timeless spaceless event taking place in Shakespeare’s brain (Ellmann, *Consciousness* 53). In “A Painful Case,” oppositions in personality and situation can be likewise construed as providing cover for such an autobiographical event and its creative transformation to story.

By employing the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* in a literary endeavor, Joyce vivifies Giordano Bruno (under whose spell Joyce was) who posited in *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds, Fifth Dialogue*:

You see...that our philosophy is by no means opposed to reason. It reduceth everything to a single origin and relateth everything to a single end, and maketh contraries to coincide, so that there is one primal foundation both of origin and of end. From this coincidence of contraries, we deduce that ultimately it is divinely right to say and to hold that contraries are within contraries, wherefore it is not

difficult to compass the knowledge that each thing is within every other. (Singer 369)

While Joyce's real life events were set forth in plain terms to family and friends – he shared Nora's first correspondences in Dublin with his friends, much to her consternation and detailed the psychological moment of his disappointing elopement to Stanislaus, as well as to his Aunt Josephine Murray through letters - he took a different tack in his fiction so that the task of figuring out similitudes and oppositions is left to readers and "A Painful Case" was not the first experimentation with plot and character opposition. Joyce published his poem, "My Love is in a Light Attire," at the same time he was trying to convince Nora not to wear her coat all the time: "Did you ever see the men that go round with Guinness's cars, dressed in enormous frieze overcoats? Are you trying to make yourself like one of them?" (Qtd by Maddox 45).

The relationship of James and Stanislaus Joyce is described by Jean Kimball as "an odd, almost unconscious reciprocity" (Kimball, *Blood Brothers* 105) and she compares it to "brothers in many primitive tribes" who develop such co-dependent existences that eventually they seem to become "one individual" (76). The vast extant historical record offers ample documentation for examination of the Joyce family dynamics by way of personal correspondence (letters numbering in the thousands), two published journals written by Stanislaus, and perhaps of the most interest to literary critics, the mimesis of the characters who populate Joyce's works of fiction. The "fundamental opposition," as Kimball terms it, in nearly all aspects of the two eldest Joyce brothers' lives, is familiar to scholars and readers: physically, Joyce was blond, tall, and thin and Stanislaus, dark, short, and stocky; personally, Joyce was egotistical and confident, and Stanislaus emotionally transient and self-doubting. Joyce was known for his charm and conversational wit; Stanislaus for shifting moods and bluntness. And yet, each served

complementary purposes from which they mutually benefitted. From Stanislaus, Joyce had financial assistance for himself and his growing family, valuable and trusted criticism for his work, and logistical management for his business affairs. Stanislaus enjoyed (and despaired of, by turns) proximity to, although minimally recognized at the time, one of the greatest literary minds of modern time whose products afforded opportunities for the publication of Stanislaus' own writings, as well as camaraderie in social circles to which he would otherwise have had no access. In a later study of the Joyce brothers, "Lui, C'est Moi (1988)" Kimball "would suggest further that the remarkable balance of naturalism and symbolism in Joyce's fiction during the time that he shared his life with his brother owes much to the consolidation of the two opposing ways of being in the world represented by these two brothers" (233).

Scholarly discourse on the presence of Stanislaus in Joyce's fiction is extensive and primarily focuses on the character of Maurice in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, though the progression from the former to the latter displays a reductive treatment, and on the character Shaun in *Finnegans Wake* ("enchanted, dear sweet Stainusless") (237) portrayed as Joyce's (Shem's) twin. Though Stanislaus has no discrete character mimesis in *Ulysses*, James Cahalan argues in *Double Vision* that "Stanislaus may be a shadow figure who is actually almost everywhere" (94) in that work. "An Encounter," in *Dubliners*, recounts an experience shared by the Joyce brothers as boys, although they appear in the story as schoolmates, rather than siblings.

However, the Joycean critical corpus seems to have overlooked what is perhaps the most interesting and complex literary inclusion of Stanislaus into Joyce's fiction, and is, I believe, actually a conjoining of the two brothers into a single character in Mr. James Duffy of "A Painful Case."

Stanislaus Joyce writes in *My Brother's Keeper* that his brother "used many characteristics of mine in composing Mr. Duffy," and that he (Mr. Duffy) "is also intended to be a portrait of what my brother imagined I should become in middle age" (*MBK* 160). Stanislaus provides some specific descriptors common to himself and Mr. Duffy: intolerance of drunkenness, hostility to socialism (Mr. Duffy's eventual feeling), and "the habit of writing short sentences on a sheaf of loose pages pinned together" (*MBK* 160). The structural premise of the story allegedly was Stanislaus' meeting of the ostensibly married lady at the musical performance in Dublin, his conversation with her there, and a brief subsequent encountering of her on a public street. Other identifiable details of "A Painful Case" were taken from Stanislaus' life as Joyce's younger brother: the calling of Stanislaus' diary "Bile Beans" by Joyce, also the name of Mr. Duffy's journal, and the now-famous (or infamous) "love and friendship" aphorism from that same diary which so interests Joycean gender theorists. Helene Cixous posits that Stanislaus, by virtue of having a father who was well-known, as well as having a brother who set a high standard of achievement, always regarded himself through the eyes of others (123). But Stanislaus, with a formidable intellect of his own, whom Cixous says fascinated his brother, often voluntarily or involuntarily provided Joyce with material, and was, at times, the "initiator, rather than the imitator" (123). However, upon close analysis, Joyce figures as much in Mr. Duffy's character construction as does Stanislaus, if not more, beginning with the given name of James, (again, the point of Joycean character-naming cannot be overemphasized), the use of a walking stick, and his short-lived membership in the Irish socialist movement. In *James Joyce Remembered*, C.P. Curran, a former schoolmate of Joyce, notes the similarity between Mr. Duffy's listening to the strange and impersonal sound of his own voice and how he (Curran) was reminded "strongly of Joyce's manner" (13). And as Marvin Magalaner reflects, Joyce's

“intense analysis of the intellectual and emotional life of this protagonist suggests that Joyce himself is Mr. Duffy” (35).

The original version of “A Painful Case” includes this narratorial observation about Mr. Duffy: “Every two or three days he added a short sentence to an *unwritten story* containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense” (Joyce, *Dubliners: Drafts and Manuscripts* 99; emphasis mine); as has been noted, this was revised to having Mr. Duffy composing sentences more randomly. The original work implies cohesive composition taking place, even if the thoughts are not actually transcribed. Magalaner notes that “Joyce deleted all mention of Duffy as a writer of short stories from the final draft” (89) but it is obvious from the first draft that Mr. Duffy was at least an *aspiring* writer of fiction, providing another autobiographical link with Joyce. In the published version, readers only see Mr. Duffy as an occasional writer of random thoughts in a journal designated, “Bile Beans,” as Stanislaus did, a title which can be viewed as an exemplar of self-irony (Hyman 113). Frances Wilson notes that “people turn to their journals when there is nowhere else to turn, when they need to divide themselves *into two* in order to talk” (4, emphasis mine) and clearly, Mr. Duffy structures his world through language (Hyman 112), receptively through reading, expressively through writing, and in his conversations with himself. The writing that Mrs. Sinico encourages Mr. Duffy to pursue seems to be of a political nature rather than of literature; again here Joyce seems to be deliberately downplaying the artistry of Mr. Duffy to hide his own personal details. As Mr. Duffy “distances himself from experience” (Hyman 112), his writing becomes difficult to bring to any kind of fruition, resulting in an “atmosphere of isolation and barrenness,” an “indifferent artist” (Sloan 26). First and foremost, Mr. Duffy “demands absolute freedom to do as he pleases. He wants the freedom to do wrong [e.g., his bank-robbing fantasy] whether he uses it or not, and

for fear he should be deceiving himself by any back thought he is vindicating his right to ruin himself” (Magalaner 159) and, I might add, to allow his literary talent to lie fallow, indicting the infertile artistic soil of Dublin.

“A Painful Case” was written during a time of separation from Stanislaus, who had been Joyce’s lifelong companion. The brothers’ voluminous correspondence clearly shows Joyce’s insatiable need for his brother at that juncture, an overdependence on Stanislaus (Cahalan 90). At the same time that Joyce was constructing the character of Mr. Duffy, he was formulating a plan to physically draw, even coerce, Stanislaus to him. In this he succeeded, although the original brotherly conjoining had been surgically, as it were, separated, by Joyce’s leaving Ireland; henceforth, in the brothers’ ensuing relationship Nora was naturally in the middle. Relations between the brothers were never to be what they once were and they progressively disintegrated throughout their adult lives.

Joyce, himself, is now substantively camouflaged in “A Painful Case” by the composite character he has created in Mr. Duffy. Mr. Duffy has only himself for which to care and support, but he works diligently and steadily at a full-time, but mentally unstimulating job - indulging his passions for music and literature in his free time - and has kept his position for many years, a lifestyle that Stanislaus, unlike his brother, would also be able to maintain. Joyce’s foremost occupation was his writing and his pecuniary pursuits were half-hearted, even as he tried to support his family on an unstable income derived from part-time teaching. Joyce *could* be social and spontaneous, and Stanislaus, after acceding to Joyce’s wishes to join him in Trieste and becoming his “brother’s keeper” (Stanislaus used the biblical analogy of Cain and Abel, with himself in the former position) time and again dragged him home from bars inebriated, while extracting promises that Joyce would abandon his alcoholic consumption and focus upon his

writing. Redolent of Mr. Duffy's affinity for literature, Stanislaus respected and was willing to help support Joyce's artistry, and like Mr. Duffy could not tolerate personal disorder. Almost two years after the writing of the first draft of "A Painful Case" and considering revisions to it, meanwhile breaking away from Stanislaus' supervision, Joyce found himself experiencing the life of a bank clerk, working nine-hour days, not unlike that of Mr. Duffy and he wrote to Stanislaus, back in Trieste:

I have come to the conclusion that it is about time I made up my mind whether I am to become a writer or a patient Cousins [an Irish writer and theosophist, referenced in *Letters I*, 91]. I foresee that I shall have to do other work as well but to continue as I am at present would certainly mean my mental extinction. It is months since I have written a line and even reading tires me. The interest I took in socialism and the rest has left me (*Letters II*, 217).

Did Joyce gain an appreciation for his character's painful existence, after the fact?

Cixous, in *The Exile of James Joyce*, contends that Nora was the model for all Joyce's literary women (120); in "A Painful Case," she serves as the counter-model in the character of Mrs. Sinico. Mrs. Sinico is refined, skilled at musicianship, intellectually-inclined, middle-aged, married, denied sex by her husband, all in opposition to Nora, who had minimal education, "an untrained mind" by Joyce's description (*Letters II* 81), was young, and enjoyed an energetic sex life with Joyce. The touch Mrs. Sinico offers is a lifting of Mr. Duffy's hand to her face after their relationship had been in place for some time, contrasted with Nora's purported bold sexual gesture on the first date with him, as reported by Brenda Maddox

When Nora joined him at the corner of Merrion Square for their first meeting, Joyce did not take her to any of the theatres or cafes in the centre of Dublin but

rather to the east, past the docks and toward the harbour, to the area, deserted at night, known as Ringsend. The attraction between them was immediate and Nora, who had to be back at Finn's [the hotel where she was employed] by half-past eleven, wasted no time. To Joyce's grateful astonishment, she unbuttoned his trousers, slipped in her hand, pushed his shirt aside and, acting with some skill (according to his later account), made him a man.

Another man might have congratulated himself on his luck and pressed for a quick seduction. Instead it was Joyce who was seduced. Nothing in his experience, from his pious mother to the Jesuits, had prepared him for the frankness and directness of Nora's sexual approach. Instead of losing respect for her, he fell in love for life. (42)

Joyce claimed to have been made a man of with Nora's touch (Maddox 42), but Mr. Duffy is very much surprised by Mrs. Sinico's seemingly simple touch even as another Joycean autobiographical character, Stephen Hero, is by Emma Clery, whose bold gesture was to merely stand close to him in the dark night:

At every step that they took Stephen's resolution to leave her and see no more of her became more deeply rooted. Even as a diversion *her company was slightly degrading to his sense of dignity*. As they passed under the tall trees of the Mall she slackened her pace and, when safe from the lights of the bridge, halted deliberately. Stephen was *very much surprised* as the hour, and the place made their position equivocal and, though she had chosen the broad shadow of the trees to halt in, she had committed this audacity in sight of her own house (SH 188, emphasis mine).

There is an obvious parallel in the similar reactions of the two characters, Stephen and Mr. Duffy, and their surprise and punitive reactions toward what is actually mild behavior on the part of Emma and Mrs. Sinico and connects the two male protagonists to the extent that readers may consider them younger and older versions of the same character; in fact, Joyce's later statement through the mouthpiece of Leopold Bloom ruminating on Stephen in the "Eumaeus" episode of *Ulysses*, "...however, he brought to mind instances of cultured fellows that promised so brilliantly nipped in the bud of premature decay and nobody to blame but themselves" (*U* 330) seems to apply to Mr. Duffy, as well as Stephen. If Mr. Duffy can be regarded as an aged Stephen, Bloom's prognostication coming to fruition, in the timeless and spaceless world of Joyce's writing mind, then Stephen's/Duffy's/Joyce's attitudes toward women may unlock some mysteries and enable the intended character-plot progression in "A Painful Case." Readers will find in the 1992 "Introduction" to Rudyard Kipling's *That Light That Failed*, a book that Joyce was reading during the timeframe in which he was composing *Dubliners*, this observation: "Women, and marriage, are thus a threat to the true male artist because of the confinement, which he is then required to share; he is cut off from the rich diversity of experience which is the inspiration for his work" (xix). Stanislaus writes, "my brother, I am afraid, never quite rid himself of that Iago complex towards women, *radix malorum*, which he imbibed in youth" (*MBK* 254) and Magalaner believes that "Duffy's attitude towards women is that same as that of Stephen Dedalus, and hence is Joyce's own" (158). For Stephen and Mr. Duffy, a single act severs relationship. Other Joycean male protagonists, e.g., Leopold Bloom and Richard Rowan, manifest more tolerance towards perceived female transgressions.

It is clear from the original draft of "A Painful Case," that Mr. Duffy considers the possibility of elopement with Mrs. Sinico as he is justifying his dismissal of her, which would

have entailed the necessity of leaving Ireland, bringing along other issues, such as unemployment, as Joyce well knew from his own experience. A passage from the first draft of the story merits consideration:

He asked himself what else he could have done – carried on a ~~comedy of~~ furtive comedy which must have ended in mutual disgust or gone away with her out of Ireland. Either course would have been ridiculous. ~~He thought of the pain~~ impossible the one an undignified intrigue the other a ridiculous elopement.

(Joyce, *Dubliners: Drafts and Manuscripts* 129)

The original lines were written shortly before Joyce wrote to his aunt in Dublin: “...when I think of the free and happy life which I have (or had) every talent to live I am in a fit of despair” (*Letters II* 129) referencing the deteriorating situation following his own elopement with Nora Barnacle. The character, Mr. Duffy, thinks through, unlike Joyce had done, future implications of an elopement and decides against it, the opposite of his creator’s actions.

Richard Brown believes that “Joyce is most keen to present his central characters with a variety of shades of sexual taste as if to suggest that such varieties are intrinsic to human psychology” (83) and also to imbue his female characters “with strong sexual desires” (115). Stanislaus writes, in *My Brother’s Keeper*, that “Mr. Duffy is the type of male celibate, as Maria in “Clay” is of the female celibate” (159). But, what exactly is a “male celibate?” Most of the celibates encountered in literature sacrifice their sexuality to religion, for example, the character John Norton in George Moore’s *Celibates*, a work that Joyce admired so much as to begin translating it into Italian only a few months after completing the first draft of “A Painful Case.” Norton embarks on a vocation for the priesthood, takes a hiatus, and develops a strong platonic friendship with a young unmarried neighbor woman. Engulfed in a burst of amorous feeling

during a meeting with the woman which was spontaneous but short-lived, Norton proposes to her and is accepted, only to resolve to himself to withdraw his offer the following day, his thoughts running thus:

He was as unfitted for marriage as he was for the priesthood. He had deceived himself about the priesthood, as he was now deceiving himself about marriage. No, not deceiving himself, for at the bottom of his heart he could hear the truth. Then, why did he continue this,--it was no better than a comedy [as Mr. Duffy also expresses it], an unworthy comedy, from which he did not seem to be able to disentangle himself; he could not say why (329).

Norton's fiancée meets a tragic and fatal end before he can cancel his "contract" with her. Like Mr. Duffy, he has a "walking epiphany" in the English village of Brighton in sunny daylight, as contrasted with the Phoenix Park at night in "A Painful Case;" as he processes the whirlwind gain and loss of his potential marital partner, "He feared that he had adventured perilously near to a life of which he could nowise sustain or fulfil, to a life for which he knew he was nowise suited, and which might have lost him his soul" (366) and in a retroversion, "in the divine consolation of religion John Norton hoped to find escape from the ignominy of life" (368).

Though the intertextuality is apparent, John Norton's story is not Mr. Duffy's. It is made clear early on that Mr. Duffy has "neither church nor creed" (*D* 91) and therefore no religious reason to steer clear of romantic entanglements. If he is a middle-aged Stephen, he has long let go of his youthful antithetical juggling of faith and illicit sexuality, represented by the lonely catechism on the shelf and the moldering apple in the desk, which is possibly a "painapple" (*FW* 167), and beyond eking out his meager economic survival, holds on to the mainstays of his life:

music (Joyce refers in *Letters 1* to “the seductions of music” (37)) and literature. The music represents temporary release and respite from ritual and control; it is “nonverbal and therefore beyond Duffy’s means of linguistic manipulation” (Hyman 113). Stanislaus notes that his “brother used the phrase, ‘the asexual intellect of the Irish.’ He did not mean that Irishmen are less virile than others (families are rather larger in Ireland than elsewhere), but that sexual motives have little influence on their lives. Sexuality is in their lives a thing apart which rarely ‘gets entangled with reality’” (*MBK* 158). Stanislaus, himself, had an early commitment to “continence” which he reports lasted until he was twenty-four or twenty-five years of age (*MBK* 42) – he was around nineteen years old at the writing of “A Painful Case” – and “Joyce tantalized his celibate brother [in his letters to Stanislaus in Dublin] with scenes from married life” (Maddox 75). Though Stanislaus avers that Joyce “considered sexual contact a necessary physical fulfillment” (*MBK* 153), “[b]oth Richard Ellmann [Joyce’s most well-known biographer] and Brenda Maddox [who authored a biography of Nora Barnacle] suggest that Joyce lost sexual interest in women while he was still a rather young man” (Ferris 64). Stanislaus makes it clear that sex and romantic love were not on equal footing with Joyce; indeed, Joyce maintained “contempt for sentimentality,” because “he who has loved God in youth can never love anything that is less than divine” (*MBK* 153). Stanislaus never suffered under a similar burden, even though he was known to practice celibacy during his younger years; he does not clarify his purpose in this stance other than to denigrate the “besotted satisfaction increased by certain social qualms regarding the white slave traffic” and later, writing from a retrospective view as a married man in *My Brother’s Keeper*, considers celibacy as “the straight path to abnormality” (156). Joyce, writes Stanislaus, “longed to copulate with a soul” (*MBK* 153),

which is an apt, and possible prescient, description of the intense, but short-lived, platonic intimacy of Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico.

Ivan Turgenev's story, "Clara Militch" (particularly its protagonist) may have also contributed to "A Painful Case," as Coilin Owens points out that Joyce was reading Turgenev and Maupassant, as well as Moore, during the writing of *Dubliners* (Owens, "High" 115). The protagonist, black-haired, piano-playing Yakov (the Russian form of James, as noted by the translator within the text) Aratov, possessing a melancholy temperament, making friends "with scarcely anyone...especially held aloof from women," and "living in great solitude, buried in books" (5). Aratov attends a concert one afternoon, attracts the attention of a singer, Clara Militch, and meets her one time, briefly and publicly, upon her invitation. He "resolved to keep a firm hand over himself, as it is called, and to obliterate the whole incident...more than a week passed before he got back into his old accustomed groove" (39). After three months, when he "was the old Aratov again," he reads in the *Moscow Gazette* that Clara has committed suicide by poison. He examines his reaction: "Pity? Remorse? Or was it simply his nerves could not stand the sudden shock?" (41), as with Mr. Duffy, reading in the newspaper about Mrs. Sinico's death, "[t]he shock which had first attacked his stomach was now attacking his nerves" (*D* 97). As time goes by, Aratov begins to experience what he believes are ghostly visitations from Clara; as for Mr. Duffy, after learning of Mrs. Sinico's death, she "seemed to be near him in the darkness. At moments, he seemed to hear her voice touch his ear, her hand touch his" (*D* 98). If Joyce was examining the consequences of rejecting a romantic partner, such supernatural occurrences may have argued against that choice, particularly as Turgenev kills off his unhappy solitary, when sheer fright of the dead woman's ghost makes Aratov fall "into a high fever, complicated by failure of the heart" (100). Coilin Owens believes that for Aratov, "it is only in death that he can

be united with his ideal counterpart” (*Painful Case* 173). But in “A Painful Case,” Mr. Duffy’s self-protected heart soldiers on, while it is Mrs. Sinico’s heart that succumbs to her pain.

Joyce was also reading Kipling during this time, as noted above, and may have taken some ideas from *The Light That Failed*, whose male protagonist is rejected by a woman with whom he would like “to sit quietly with...in the dusk” (58) as “[m]any times [Mrs. Sinico] allowed the dark to fall upon them, refraining from lighting the lamp” and in the final scene in Phoenix Park, “[a]s the light failed” is the moment when Mr. Duffy feels Mrs. Sinico’s unseen presence (*D* 93, 96). The character in Kipling’s story resolves, “I’m not going to belong to anyone but myself” (55) as Mr. Duffy’s “strange impersonal [internal] voice” tells him that “we are our own” (*D* 93). Kipling utilizes the phrase, “grim dutch touch,” in *The Light That Failed*, which has been applied to Stanislaus (by Joyce) and to “A Painful Case” (by Stanislaus).

Mrs. Sinico has a complementary passion for music and literature; their shared affinities bring Mr. Duffy and her together and allow her to supply missing sensibilities in his life: “This union exalted him...emotionalised his mental life” (*D* 93). Her sanguinity balances his melancholia, in the afterglow of their singing or intellectual discussions (Wright 175); he was “exalted.” This is in contrast with Mr. Duffy’s creator, Joyce, who reports that his sexually-compliant partner, Nora, “doesn’t care a rambling damn about art” and bemoaned the fact that he had “no-one to talk to” (*Letters II*, 78). In “A Painful Case,” the one obstacle, seemingly, in the couple’s way is her married state, but Mr. Duffy has already recognized the potentially disastrous effects of an elopement “out of Ireland,” a move about which Joyce, during the writing of the story, less than a year after his own elopement, had plenty of retrospective misgivings. Could Joyce’s “experiment” have been more supportive to him as an artist if Nora had embodied more of Mrs. Sinico’s attributes? Still, readers must acknowledge that despite Mrs. Sinico’s shared

interest in literature, her harmonious vocal compatibility with Mr. Duffy, and her encouragement of his own writing, she emotionalized but not intellectualized him, the latter seeming to have been his life's priority. Joyce has Bloom describe the romance of Parnell and Kitty O'Shea in the "Eumaeus" episode of *Ulysses*: "First it was strictly Platonic [the double entendre of classical intellect and sexual abstinence] and an attachment sprang up between them till *bit by bit* matters came to a climax [figuratively and literally] (*U* 332), almost as *little by little* Mr. Duffy entangles his thoughts with Mrs. Sinico's (92). She was in the habit of "cross[ing] lines" and getting "knocked down" for it (*D* 95 and Lowe-Evans 397); why? "Her husband, had dismissed his wife so sincerely from his gallery of pleasures" (*D* 92) and as seen in the witness testimony of the coroner's inquest following her death, her daughter appears to have moved from a "comradeship" (e.g., attending concerts together) with her mother to a solidarity with her father, and "like her father, disassociates herself from her mother's painful case" (Lowe-Evans 399). Mrs. Sinico is the character in the story who personifies the paralysis of Dublin and like Joyce's mother, "was slowly killed by [her husband's] ill-treatment" and was a victim of the system (Lowe-Evans 400). The cultural conditioning that had taught her that "women do not interest Irishmen except as streetwalkers or housekeepers" (*MBK* 158) caused her to completely misread Mr. Duffy's "moral nature" which had long departed from any type of national or religious convention. Joyce wrote to Stanislaus in 1905: "The struggle against conventions in which I am at present involved was not entered into by me so much as a protest against these conventions as with the intention of living in conformity with *my* moral nature" (Letters II 99-100 emphasis mine).

Mr. Duffy's life, particularly before and after the meeting with Mrs. Sinico, is characterized by order and ritual, and "[h]istorically," as Thomas Moore writes in *Care of the*

Soul, “myth and ritual are in tandem...ritual is an action that speaks to the mind and heart” (224-225). Mr. Duffy’s daily workday circuit is clearly delineated: he rides the tram to work, he has the same lunch in the same pub, he has dinner in restaurants on a certain street, and in the evenings, he practices on his landlady’s piano or walks around “the outskirts of the city” (*D* 90-91). “His life,” writes Joyce, “rolled out *evenly*” (*D* 91) and after Mrs. Sinico, Mr. Duffy resumes “his *even* way of life” (*D* 94 emphasis mine). The word “even” is generally used to connote “balanced” or “moderate,” indeed, “temperate,” which carries the added meaning of restraint from alcohol use, e.g., in the newspaper article about her death, Mrs. Sinico is described as “intemperate” (*D* 96). In using the word “even,” Joyce seems to be toning down indications that Mr. Duffy possesses any neurotic excesses or abnormalities. Temperance, in a Thomistic sense, is explained by Mortimer J. Adler, “as ‘a disposition of the soul, moderating any passions or acts, so as to keep them within bounds’...the man who can curb his desires for the pleasures of touch is more able to check his daring in the face of danger...just as fortitude enters into temperance because it strengthens men against ‘the enticements of pleasure’ as well as against the fear of pain” (840). In *Gorgias*, Socrates enjoins his listeners “to choose that [life] which is orderly and sufficient and has a due provision for daily needs (124); making a man temperate and master of himself and ruler of his own pleasures and passions” (122). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle declares that “temperance is moderation or observance of the mean with regard to pleasures...[t]emperance must be concerned with bodily pleasures (91)...a man is never called profligate for taking an excessive delight in music (92)...the temperate man is called temperate because the absence of these pleasant things or the abstinence from them is not painful to him...appetite involves pain” (95); the temperate man “takes no pleasure in those things that the profligate most delights in (but rather disdains them)...when they are absent he is

not pained, nor does he desire them, or desires them but moderately, not more than he ought, nor at the wrong time, etc. but those things which, being pleasant, at the same time conduce to health and good condition, he will desire moderately and in the right manner” (95-96). Seen in such a classical light, Mr. Duffy, in firm control of himself, arguably emerges as perhaps a more psychologically healthy Dubliner, when compared to other characters in the story collection, who are subsisting in unfulfilling relationships characterized by poverty, violence, disease, jealousy, alcoholism, unrequited desire, and political and personal disillusionment.

Mr. Duffy scrupulously attends to his own physical well-being. He abstains from typical Irish indulgence in *uisce beatha* (Gaelic for “the water of life,” i.e., whiskey) and eats sparingly. His food and drink consumption appear to vary depending upon his levels of stress at any given time: for lunch, during the workday of a job he obviously finds irksome, he eats arrowroot biscuits and drinks lager, both used to ease stomach upsets, but dinner, when he is at leisure, is heartier, if “plain,” e.g., corned beef, which, incidentally, Joyce was craving during the early days in Trieste. Readers only see Mr. Duffy drinking whiskey (in hot punch) *after* he learns of Mrs. Sinico’s death and needs to steady his nerves. Earlier in the story, when he meets Mrs. Sinico at the concert and looks into her eyes, Mr. Duffy notices that “their gaze began with a defiant note but was confused by what seemed a deliberate swoon of the pupil into the iris, revealing for an instant a temperament of great sensibility” (*D* 91); it was actually, as Andre Topia observes, “an involuntary contraction of the pupils” and that “this medically observed fact, which was identified by J. B. Lyons [a 20th century Irish medical historian] as “*hippus*,” was associated at the time with mental trouble and L. W. Fox [a 19th-20th century American ophthalmologist] saw in it ‘a chronic spasm of the iris, as is seen in hysteria, neurasthenia.’ This contraction” continues Topia, “is indeed symptomatic and premonitory of Mrs. Sinico’s later

collapse” (158). In addition to the possibility of mental disease suggested by the pupil-movement, there is a condition, known since 1869 as Argyll-Robertson pupil, informally as “prostitute’s pupil,” a side-effect of syphilis that causes the pupil to contract, as Mrs. Sinico’s did. It is worth readers’ consideration to speculate, as Joyce included the detail about Mrs. Sinico’s eye and as he makes Mr. Duffy notice it, that she had contracted syphilis in the past from her ostensibly unfaithful sea-captain husband and that a recognition of the potential pathologies on the part of Mr. Duffy of either mental illness or venereal disease would provide a practical reason for his unwillingness to consider her as a sexual partner or fellow participant in an elopement. In alignment with the other oppositions in the story, the woman that Stanislaus met in a similar circumstance had unusually large pupils. Advanced syphilis also impairs walking due to progressive spinal cord degeneration and “[c]hronic inflammation and scarring of the aortic valve lead to valve malfunction and heart failure” (Crowley 153). In Mrs. Sinico’s case, “The evidence showed that the deceased lady while attempting to cross the line was knocked down by the engine of the ten o’clock slow train from Kingstown, thereby sustaining injuries of the head and right side which led to her death” although “[t]he injuries were not sufficient to have caused death in a *normal* person. Death in [Mrs. Sinico’s coroner’s] opinion, had been probably due to shock and *sudden failure of the heart’s action*” (*D* 95-96. emphasis mine). Hyman emphasizes Mr. Duffy’s need for self-protection which asserts itself vigorously in response to Mrs. Sinico’s touch (111-113). In the intense talks with Mr. Duffy, Mrs. Sinico at times gives “out some fact of her own life” (*D* 92). She becomes “his confessor” (*D* 92); does he become hers as well? Only a few months before the writing of “A Painful Case,” Joyce had an initial medical consultation with a doctor to address his eye problems, allegedly caused by his own syphilitic infection, the guilt of which according to Ferris, “permeates Joyce’s writing” (7) .

Later in “A Painful Case,” Mr. Duffy’s first thoughts of Mrs. Sinico’s death center around “[t]he squalid *tract* of her vice” (*D* 97, emphasis mine), implying that her issues may have comprised more than just alcoholism. Ironically, if Mrs. Sinico did in fact have syphilis and was manifesting Argyll-Robertson pupil during her time with Mr. Duffy, she would most likely have been at the advanced stage when the disease is no longer sexually communicable.

When Mr. Duffy reacts to Mrs. Sinico’s death, he “follows his melancholy into its depths” (Cousineau 27) and pulls the reader along with him, in a Nietzschean dual role of sufferer and spectator (O’Hara 10), as the illicit liaisons, “venal and furtive loves” he gazes upon outside the wall of the darkened city park seem to affirm his self-reproach over his role, however it may be considered, in her demise (*D* 98). He feels “outcast from life’s feast,” the phrase occurring twice in close proximity, a biblical reference to the expulsion of a guest at a wedding for not wearing an appropriate garment; it is here in his guilty remorse that the *Maynooth Catechism* asserts itself. Clearly, Mr. Duffy retains vestiges of Mrs. Sinico’s emotionalizing, and here emotion trumps rationality, as sensory experiences permeate his figurative armor: “She seemed to be near him in the darkness. At moments he seemed to feel her voice touch his ear, her hand touch his...he saw a goods train...like a worm with a fiery head winding through the darkness obstinately and laboriously. It passed slowly out of sight but still he heard in his ears the laborious drone of the engine reiterating the syllables of her name” (*D* 98). His catharsis is painful, a kind of symbolic death, “he allowed the rhythm to die away” (*D* 99) but the sensory feelings and self-implications do subside and in “the flight of the alone to the alone,” to borrow a phrase from Plotinus (Corrigan 28), even his memories seem to be purged, as the sound of a song ceases to be when it is over and there is “perfect” silence. “He felt that he was alone” (*D* 99), in the way Anna Livia Plurabelle will be “a lone a last” at the “end” of

Finnegans Wake (628). That his epiphany takes place in Phoenix Park is important, as Ferris recognizes the phoenix as “a perfect example of a Joycean symbol, on the mythic level, signifying rebirth and eternal life” (131) if the individual reader (and/or the author) chooses that specific interpretation. Joyce writes of Ibsen’s “all embracing philosophy, a deep sympathy with the cross-purposes and contradictions of life, as they may be reconcilable with a hopeful awakening” (*CW* 66). Where the Freudian sees entrapment, the Jungian sees capacity for change (Brivic 7).

James Phelan’s theory of character

[i]ntroduces a...distinction between the *dimensions* of a character and its *functions*. This distinction, in effect, stipulates that the fundamental unit of character is neither the trait, the idea, nor the predicate but rather what I will call the attribute, something that has mimetic, thematic, and synthetic dimension simultaneously. That is, any sign of a character participates in a mimetic sphere (the attribute can be viewed as a trait), a thematic sphere (the attribute can be viewed as...representative of some idea), and a synthetic sphere (the attribute can be viewed as the material out of which the character is made and it can be seen to have such and such a role in the making of the artificial object that is the narrative). (285)

If the theory that Mr. Duffy is a composite of Joyce and Stanislaus, and that he possesses the traits well-described in the narrative and that he performs the actions depicted therein (mimesis and synthesis), is accepted as a working hypothesis, the present analysis must now move into the thematic sphere and attempt to determine the central idea of the story.

IV. Identifying hermeneutic archetypes in “A Painful Case”

Joseph Valente writes, “As a young man [Joyce wrote the first draft of “A Painful Case” as the age of twenty-three], Joyce was given to marshaling archetypes for his experience, lived and envisioned” (87), in fact, he “fill[ed] his work with mythic outcasts” (Ferris 19). The most predominant archetypal motifs in the story are the isolated artist, the tragic romance, the need for spiritual ascendancy, and rebirth after tragedy.

Archetypally, solitude and isolation are associated with creativity and in order “to create solitary characters, a writer – a convincing writer – must have experienced some solitude...himself” (Massie 31). “Joyce,” writes J. J. Curran, a respected, if perhaps not totally unbiased source, “lived a withdrawn life. Reserve, as he said, was always a light penance to Saint Dedalus, though Joyce’s detachment was more reserved. He schooled himself to silence. He assumed a mask...and it was rarely dropped” (28). Solitude can take two forms, enforced and voluntary, and either can manifest defensively with withdrawal and avoidance or generatively, with creativity (Knafo 56). Solitude can also be experienced in the presence of others, in the cityscape, not necessarily in the proverbial “woods” of Thoreau and Emerson, but distance is even so implied, running along a continuum that ends with Flaubert (one of Joyce’s favorite authors): “I have long since come to realize that in order to live in peace one must live alone and seal one’s windows lest the air of the world seep in” (qtd in Foley 65). Self-discovery and self-realization must be self-referenced, according to Storr, and while not discounting the value of positive interpersonal human relationships, most creative people, particularly artists, experience their defining moments in isolation (21). And “[i]t is creative apperception more than anything else, writes D. W. Winnicott, that makes the individual feel that life is worth living” (Qtd in Storr 71).

Maupassant, another favorite of Joyce, argues conversely in his story, "Solitude," that isolation is the natural condition for human beings, whether it is chosen or not, imposed by an impersonal cosmos.

Do you know anything more frightful than this constant contact with beings that we cannot penetrate? We love one another as if we were fettered, very close, with extended arms, without succeeding in reaching one another. A torturing need of union hampers us, but all our efforts remain barren, our abandonment useless, our caresses vain. When we wish to join each other our sudden emotion make us only clash against each other.

I never feel myself more alone than when I open my heart to some friend, because I then better understand the insuperable obstacle.

One hardly recognizes the woman who has been everything to us for a moment of life and whose thoughts, intimate and commonplace, undoubtedly, we have never known.

At the very hour when it would seem in that mysterious accord of beings, in the complete intermingling of ideas and aspirations, that you were sounding the very depth of her soul, one word – one word only, sometimes – will reveal your error, will show you, like a flash of lightning in the night, the black abyss between you." (806-807)

The Tristan and Isolde legend dominates "A Painful Case." Thomas Moore points out that "[a] telling leitmotif in the story of Tristan [the name signifies sadness] is the image of water" (83), which Joyce would later more fully develop in *Finnegans Wake*. The story of Tristan and Isolde, Moore writes, "satisfies our need to be positively in touch with the

unavoidable tendency of the soul to get itself into love trouble...its catharsis is achieved not by moralizing against love's range of emotion, but by giving us strong images of the very sadness that completes love's saturation of the soul" (85). Tristan evokes water imagery as he sails between many points; Mr. Duffy remains on terra firma in his perpetual walking, but he can look out his window at the Liffey River, even though it is at its most shallow from his view. Tristan drinks a love potion; Mr. Duffy indulges in a *restorative* whiskey punch, after he learns of the death of Mrs. Sinico. Isolde heals Tristan's wounds but cannot save her own life and loses herself in him, while upholding the façade of her marriage to another man. In "A Painful Case," the narrator retells the Tristan and Isolde romance so tenderly and beautifully that readers are prepared to overlook arguments against an unlawful union, just as they seem to do in the original legend; moreover, readers are encouraged to conspire with both narrators to pull the two characters of each couple together, without examining possible consequences. In the legend, Isolde is condemned to capital punishment by her royal husband, but escapes, only to die in the end together with Tristan. In "A Painful Case," Mr. Duffy is allowed to live, alone, although many critics like to insist that he is, in fact, dead.

The symbolism of ascending to spiritual heights coupled with angel metaphor runs throughout the Joycean body of work, e.g., Stephen says, "Ibsen has the temper of an archangel" (*SH* 93) and a fellow student, after listening to Stephen read a paper aloud, "felt...during the reading of Mr. Daedelus' essay as though he had been listening to the discourse of angels" (*SH* 101). In the famous scene of the unknown girl wading in the ocean in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce writes "A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory" (*P* 123)). Mr. Duffy aspires to "angelical stature" and

feels that he would ascend thereto in Mrs. Sinico's eyes. (*D* 93). The protagonist in "The Dead," arguably the most well-known of the *Dubliners* stories, is called "Gabriel" and his deceased rival, taken from "real-life," is conveniently named "Michael." Mortimer J. Adler explains the Thomistic conception of the "theory of angels" with which Joyce may have been familiar,

Lacking bodies, the angels are without sense perception and imagination. Not being immersed in time and motion, they do not reason or think discursively as men do by reasoning from premises to conclusion. 'Whereas human intellects ,' according to Aquinas, 'obtain their perfection in the knowledge of truth by a kind of movement and discursive intellectual operation...as they advance from one known thing to another,' the angels 'from the knowledge of a known principle...straightway perceive as known all its consequent conclusions...with no discursive process at all.' Their knowledge is intuitive and immediate, not by means of concepts abstracted from experience or otherwise formed, but through the archetypal ideas infused in them at their creation by God.

It would appear from this that conceptions of the human intellect which minimize its dependence on sense and imagination, and which emphasize the intuitive rather than the discursive character of human thought, attribute angelic power to man.

Lacking bodies, the angels are without bodily emotions, free from the human conflict between reason and passion, and completely directed in their love – or the motion of their will – by what they know. (7)

Aquinas' theory of angel knowledge is suggestive of the Joycean epiphanies as described by John Blades:

Joyce advances the use of epiphanies not only as a fundamentally significant literary technique but also as an important philosophical concept which was to

become the cornerstone of his own mature works – and a cornerstone of Modernism in general.

In Stephen's definition and in Joyce's practice, the term has two meanings: one is that an epiphany reveals the truth, the intrinsic essence of a person or of something which is observed, revealed perhaps through a "vulgarity of speech or of gesture;" and the second meaning is a state of mind, heightened spiritual elation of the observer's mind, what Joyce calls the "memorable phase of the mind itself." The first puts emphasis on the object and the fact that its reality can be revealed by an epiphany, while the second puts emphasis on the observer, for whom an epiphany can be a state of spiritual ecstasy. Consequently, although we would normally think of the acquisition of knowledge in terms of a rational process, both of these meanings involve non-rational states, and insofar as they involve knowledge (either about an object or about oneself), the process implies a subjective source of truth, knowledge as a sort of *intuition*. (50-51 emphasis mine)

Mr. Duffy, in his quest for angelic intellect – and again, through the story drafts, Joyce progressively plays down Mr. Duffy's artistic drive to abet the disguise – leans upon the "friends" that he does have (he had neither companions nor friends) : Wordsworth, Hauptmann, and after his split from Mrs. Sinico, Nietzsche, for intellectual, indeed existential, sustenance; Stanislaus notes in a description of "A Painful Case" that Joyce "*raised*" Mr. Duffy's "intellectual standard" (MBK 160) by his preference for these authors. In a letter to Stanislaus around the time of the writing of "A Painful Case," Joyce declares Wordsworth to be a "genius" and urges his brother to read "The Excursion" (and coincidentally, in the same paragraph, tells

Stanislaus about Sinico, the voice teacher) (*Letters II* 91). “Wordsworth laid down for himself four principles...first, ‘to choose incidents and situations from common life; and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by ‘common men;’ the third proposition was to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way, and lastly ‘to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them truly but not ostentatiously” (Raymer 14-15); in these intentions, Joyce was a kindred spirit. In “The Excursion,” the character of the Solitary “has a brooding Hamlet-like quality, mixing sensibility and misanthropy, solitude and sociability” (Potkay 164), The Solitary, as a younger man, had been “roused by the French revolution,” but left it with “disappointment and disgust” (Wordsworth 614); he had imagined a Saturnian Rule (Wordsworth 622) or renewal of the “golden age.” Mr. Duffy is “saturnine” (*D* 90) - perhaps a Joycean play on words with a dual meaning: possession of the melancholic humor in the medieval sense *and* a longing for utopia - and is interested in “social revolution” but has become disillusioned with local efforts to accomplish it (*D* 93). The Solitary concludes “What from my fellow-beings I require, and either they have not to give, or I lack virtue to receive” (Wordsworth 625); Mr. Duffy rejects his former socialist cohorts because they lacked solidarity, were “timorous,” money-driven, and incapable of precise thinking and he has severed ties with them.

Frances Wilson quotes Thomas deQuincey on Wordsworth: “... we could not conceive of [him] submitting his faculties to the humilities and devotion of courtship” (16) although later he did marry and have children. Wilson notes that “[h]e appeared emotionally cold, ascetic, almost holy in his poetic calling” (16) and that “his poetry is startlingly without sexuality; his

landscapes are peopled by children, old men, women, and idiots; there is not a sexually active creature among them (49).

The protagonist of Gerhart Hauptmann's play *Michael Kramer*, which Mr. Duffy is translating, as Joyce did, is "fight[ing] [his] way through to *something higher*" (431 emphasis mine) as his daughter puts it. The title character, Michael Kramer, tends to receive the same critical disdain and general disapproval as Mr. Duffy, because of his solitary nature, in the midst of his life as a working artist, teacher, and family man. Like Mr. Duffy's room, Kramer's art studio displays "cleanliness and the nicest order" (454). Kramer speaks of "ris[ing] above" one's life and his belief that "the deep and strong in art grows only in a hermitage – is born only in utter solitude. The artist, he says, "is always the true hermit" (465). Kramer is idealized by his daughter and a former student, Lachmann, who seeks him out for advice and moral support during the course of the play. Lachmann has become disillusioned with his own life, as marriage and parenthood have assumed a necessary but unwelcome predominance over his art. Of Kramer as a teacher, Lachmann says, "There wasn't one [of the students] who had a grain of promise, but he [Kramer] ennobled him at one stroke. For he opened the world of heroes to us. That was enough. He deemed us worthy of striving to emulate their work. He made us feel toward the lords of the realm of art, that we and they were of one blood" (502). Lachmann feels that he, himself, has become "suffocated" and has lost his former self, buried in domesticity. As he pours out his heart to Kramer's daughter, she replies, seeming to affirm her own solitary existence, "In that case I seem to be better off in my voluntary loneliness" (503). Yet, criticism of the play has traditionally focused upon the impression that Kramer drives his son to suicide, which actually occurs after the son is scorned by a group of young men, in front of whom the son has brandished, and then been relieved of, a gun. The son does not have positive relationships with

anyone, shows no visible love for his father and little motivation in general, and seems to enjoy frustrating Kramer, principally by refusing to develop his own considerable artistic talent. The son, says Kramer, is “the worm that eats into my life, gnaws at my marrow” (461) and Joyce incorporates both metaphors into the final scene in “A Painful Case” when Mr. Duffy “gnaw[s] the rectitude of his life” and “a goods train...like a worm with a fiery head winding through the darkness” (*D* 98). The drama closes with Michael Kramer’s *cri de coeur* to Lachmann: “Where shall we land? Whither are we driven? Why do we cry our cries of joy into the immense incertitude – we mites abandoned in the infinite? As though we knew whither we are tending! ...There is nothing in it of mortal feasts!” (539). In the throes of remorse, Mr. Duffy also feels “outcast from life’s feast” (*D* 98). However, nothing in Kramer’s heartfelt mourning of his son precludes the expectation that he will return to that which sustains and elevates him, his art.

In a letter dated July 13, 1904, Joyce signs himself, “James Overman” (*Letters II* 56). Stanislaus mentions that “A Painful Case” reflects Joyce’s “interest in Nietzsche” (MBK 160). Curtis Cate notes that “[w]hen Nietzsche had written his apologia [*The Gay Science*] for accepting life and the world... he had stoically assumed that it was his predestined lot to remain a bachelor for the rest of his days. He was far too ‘fragile a thinking animal’ ...to make a happy marriage possible” (328). “Indeed,” Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, “it has often seemed to me as if anyone calling for an intellectual conscience were as lonely in the most densely populated cities as if he were in a desert” (76). In an experience that was the inverse of Mr. Duffy’s, Nietzsche failed to win a romantic commitment from a young woman; he goes on the offensive in a letter to her: “...do be careful! If I now reject you, it is a terrible verdict on your entire being...” (Cate 384) and “I thought an angel had been sent to me when I turned my back to human beings and to life – an angel who would mollify a great deal that had grown too hard in

me through pain and solitude...it was no angel” and curiously in a letter to a friend concerning the failed relationship: “there was nothing in this love that belongs to the erotic” (388). Of his next book, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, he wrote...”it is my best and with it I have rolled a heavy stone from off my soul” (Cate 392). Zarathustra says, “Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth” (13); “Is it not better to fall into the hands of a murderer than into the dreams of a woman in heat?” (54) and “woman is not yet capable of friendship” (57); “I and me are always too deep in conversation (55) and indeed, a lake is within me, solitary and self-sufficient” (84).

While readers may wonder and debate Joyce’s selection of the named literary works on Mr. Duffy’s bookshelf, it is interesting to note that the three featured authors, as did Joyce, all had close emotional ties with one particular brother or sister, who were also writers, and who had to be content with life in the shadow of a more celebrated sibling.

The archetypal concept of rebirth may be linked in Joyce to Giambattista Vico, who took up the ideas of Giordano Bruno and developed a cyclical framework for the philosophical study of history, upon which Joyce patterned *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce was just beginning his study of Vico during the writing of *Dubliners* (Verene 48); circularity is unfused into “A Painful Case,” as noted above. From the material of Mr. Duffy’s unwavering habits, the daily commute, his circumambulations about the perimeter of Dublin, and his return to his even way of life following the split with Mrs. Sinico, Joyce establishes the figurative centrifugal force that holds Mr. Duffy fast on his path, in the absence of external events. But, the text also makes clear that twice Mr. Duffy willingly turns from his circuit for unexpected contingencies, first to enter into relationship with Mrs. Sinico (a direct result of his “dissipations”) and then to deal with the consequences of her death. Mr. Duffy’s adventure – “neither he nor she had had any such

adventure before” (*D* 92) – begins, in much the same way as Joseph Campbell describes the archetypal adventuring hero, with

apparently the merest chance – [which] reveals an unexpected world and [he] is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood...the result of suppressed desires and conflicts...ripples on the surface of life, produced by unsuspected springs. And these may be deep – as deep as the soul itself. But whether great or small, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call [to adventure] rings up the curtain [literally as Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico meet at a concert], always, on a mystery of transfiguration – a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth [or rebirth]. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for a passing of a threshold is at hand.

Thereafter, even though the hero returns for a while to his familiar occupations...signs of increasing force will then become visible...and the summons can no longer be denied. (Campbell *Hero* 51, 56)

Or as John Corrington observes, “the return to ‘normality’ is illusory” because “Mrs. Sinico...has placed a seed in Duffy’s psyche” (187). Mr. Duffy can sever relationship but not the experience of the adventure.

Colin Owens finds a direct link with the cyclical nature of “A Painful Case” and *Chamber Music*, a poetry cycle, which were both written during the same period of Joyce’s life. The original order of the poems describes a solitary musical artist-hero, a call to romantic adventure, and a decline into death and despair. Joyce employs the term “high unconsortable one” in *Chamber Music*, which as Owens suggests “indicate[s] that the hero’s love relationship

is but a temporary interruption of his solitary life” (109). The use of the word “high” also brings to mind elevated angelic remoteness; an existence on some higher plane of awareness and intellect. Owens affirms the idea that Mr. Duffy is “a forty year old Stephen Dedalus” (109). Music runs as a thread in both *Chamber Music* and “A Painful Case,” and the “specific links between [the two texts] are indications...that Joyce was a highly self-aware and, indeed, economic, [recalling the isolation factor here] artist. ‘Like Mozart [whom Mr. Duffy plays preferentially], Joyce knew what he was about from the beginning...his works [as T. S. Eliot remarked], are the same work written again and again with increasing complexity” (Owens, “High”¹¹⁰), a repeating cycle in itself.

Considering the interrelatedness of aspects of the Joycean corpus in this way, Eric Rosenbloom’s comments on *Finnegans Wake* may shed some light on Mr. Duffy’s position at the end of “A Painful Case:” “The book of history assures us that life always rises from the ashes, but we also know that individual loss is unrecoverable. The incomplete sentence at the end of *Finnegans Wake* gives the reader a choice: Leave the book and return to life, or return to the book’s first words” (36) and to an implied endless cycle. “Joyce’s career [one could say “life” as well]” writes Brivic, was “a relentless spiral of transformation,” and in his fiction, readers must contend with the ‘Joyce Paradox:’ “characters *may* change and resolve their problems, or their personalities *may* be fixed so that they can never escape their conflicts and divisions” (3,7 emphasis mine). Brivic and Rosenbloom agree on the idea of reader’s choice in the interpretation of textual meaning, one that Brivic says “depends upon intellectual or literary allegiances” (7) or I would add, upon personal sympathies and identifications, as well.

Cecelia Hunt, in *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing*, postulates that authors may create narrative art to try to make sense of themselves; “one of the

more important functions of personal narratives is that they enable us to make sense of stories which deviate from the norm. In this sense they operate as a means of problem-solving” (100) while acknowledging that “there is bound to be tension between the two goals [of art and self-therapy] and perhaps inevitably one of them will suffer at the expense of the other” (143). Jerome Bruner’s concept of “narrative knowing” implies a communicative phenomenology developed through plot structures derived from lived experiences, and according to Robert Neimeyer, narrative fiction may incorporate “a historical dimension (in the sense of selectively recruiting past events, whether real or imagined) and an anticipatory thrust (in the sense of reaching toward a conclusion or end point) that is posited with more or less clarity and conviction” (Qtd by McLeod 34). Hunt underscores Mikhail Bahktin’s contention that “in order to know ourselves, we have to get outside of ourselves” as Mr. Duffy is shown doing, “and ‘this reflexive outsideness,’ enables an author to speak by means of this story and through this story” (Hunt 93). And “when we write autobiographically, we use language to give shape to knowledge of ourselves that may be felt but is not known until it is enacted symbolically or metaphorically in the text” (Hunt 41).

V. Conclusion

In 1905, Joyce was processing a heavy load of personal experience, past and ongoing. Three years earlier he had left Ireland for Paris, where an authentic artistic awakening was thwarted by the demands of meeting the most basic survival needs. He could not even stay away from his family home for a few weeks before he returned to Ireland. He resumed his residence in Paris but the self-imposed privation continued until his father summoned him home to be near his dying mother in her final days. Her death psychologically fractured the family, already inured to the previous losses of some members, and Joyce was free-floating in Dublin. He met Nora Barnacle who was willing to leave Ireland with him, with no matrimonial constraints. In their exile, he struggled to procure a means of livelihood for himself and his partner and an emerging family, which required a sacrifice of precious reading and writing time. He was twenty-three years old. “His work is one long self-confession” and by achieving a mythic perspective [even vestigially in his early works] on his own suffering, Joyce was able to escape the dangers of being overwhelmed by self-pity, and despair” by “depict[ing] the realities of his own existence, albeit in disguise” (Ferris 65).

“A Painful Case” documents Joyce’s psychological moment in 1905, particularly considered in light of his concurrent projects, *Stephen Hero/A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Chamber Music*. The characters, versions of Joyce himself, are solitaires who inhabit a world where art and romantic relationship are idealized. The solitary Stephen eschews romantic love to pursue his art, the young man in *Chamber Music* cycles through a romantic experience only to return, scathed, to his former solitude, and Mr. Duffy maintains a life of self-sufficiency and intellectual and artistic pursuits, but one that is vulnerable to heterosexual attraction and its potentially painful outcomes. Readers of Joyce recognize this Achilles heel of vulnerability of

attraction to women in the characters of Gabriel Conroy and Leopold Bloom as well, regardless of the ways in which they attempt to insulate themselves within their relationships.

It is my contention that through “A Painful Case,” Joyce is articulating, as well as exploring, a personal dilemma. His desire, on the one hand, for a relationship with a woman – I won’t call this “love” because Joyce didn’t think of it as love – and his desire to create art are experiencing a conflict in this particular psychological moment of his life. He sets up a scenario in literary disguise in which the “experiment” as he calls his relationship with Nora, will end in tragedy, in the way that Shelley’s relationship with his wife did, signaled immediately in the story by locating his alter ego, Mr. Duffy, in Chapelizod. Joyce designs his character as a composite of himself and Stanislaus; he can conceive of life without the romantic partner but not without the whetstone who supports his art in a number of essential ways. Art takes precedence over romantic relationship, if a choice must be made. He recognizes something that he has always known: that the true artist is solitary. How does a man go about severing relationship, after a woman has emotionalized him and has been his confessor? He grants her a few hours of time to plead her case for continuation, knowing he has already made up his mind; he attempts to dismiss her gently, reasonably, and philosophically. He receives back items – books and music symbolizing their union – that he has lent her. He avoids her at all cost, taking no chances at future meetings. He continues to reject the inept organization of social change but fortifies himself with internal nihilism, particularly its misogynous aspects. What becomes of her over the subsequent years? She takes to drink and ostensibly commits suicide, exemplifying the weakness of her gender. How will he process that event? Inevitably, at first, he will experience almost overwhelming remorse and blame himself, abetted by the residual influence of his Catholic past... and then, what? Will there be lifelong loneliness or rebirth to artistic purpose? I believe

that by choosing Phoenix Park as the location at the end of the story, Joyce, as he does at the beginning, signals another intention to readers, one that affirms that Mr. Duffy can again return to his even way of life, with enrichment in the form of residual emotion which may reinvigorate his artistic practice. He may, in fact, be the figure in *Ulysses*, “[t]he man in the brown macintosh [who] loves a lady who is dead” (*U* 206). Although the section of *Ulysses* which contains this reference is considered a parody by many critics, a sympathizer with Mr. Duffy will be inclined to read it with more *gravitas*. “You love a certain person,” writes Joyce unequivocally in the same paragraph (*U* 206). Is Joyce positing that love is inescapable, even for confirmed solitaires...and is love, with all its disillusionments and in whatever form it manifests itself, *salvatory* (Reid 407)?

Biographically, a birth does seem to end Joyce’s indecision of whether or not to leave Nora in 1905 - that of his son and first child, almost exactly at the same time as he is completing the first draft of “A Painful Case.” By the following year, the bloom on the rose of parenthood will have faded a bit, and Joyce’s frustration will reassert itself in another *Dubliners* story, “The Little Cloud,” that will describe how a new father “couldn’t read...couldn’t do anything. The wailing of the child pierced the drum of his ear. It was useless, useless! He was a prisoner for life” (*D* 69).

And, indeed, his relationship with Nora, turned out to be “for life” with one well-documented – again through personal correspondence - separation, a rift which Joyce, himself, however, took great pains to repair.

“A Painful Case” is a difficult case to interpret, every hermeneutic step fraught with uncertainty, and as I hope to have shown by my proffering of what amounts to a defense of Mr. Duffy and his solitude, depends to a great degree upon the level of the willingness of readers to approach his character with some degree of sympathy, even if there is no identification, and

better if there is. And as readers attempt to construct their own images of Mr. Duffy's "face which carried the entire tale of his years," (*D* 90), they can look to Joyce's words "every telling has a taling and that's the he and she of it" (*FW* 213). In this light, "A Painful Case" can be read as a "tell-tale" disclosure of the deep secrets of both self and relationship.

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