

Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor... or Spinster:

A Focused Exploration of Perpetual Singleness and Spinsterhood in James Joyce's *Dubliners*

by

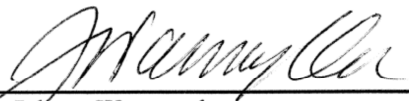
Katherine E. Smith

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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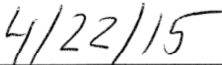
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Jolanta Wawrzycka

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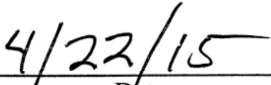
Dr. Jolanta Wawrzycka
Thesis Advisor




Date



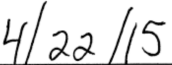
Dr. Tim Poland
Committee Member



Date



Dr. Theresa Burriss
Committee Member



Date

Abstract

One hundred years before Ireland's national conscience awoke to the horrors of the Magdalen Asylums, often euphemistically referred to as the Magdalen Laundries, James Joyce wrote a collection of short stories, which quietly illustrated the stark reality of life in Ireland for both married and unmarried women in the early 20th century. That collection of fictional tales that Joyce penned, though simply titled as *Dubliners*, has become one of the most authoritative pieces on the emotional turmoil and cultural struggles that plagued women in 20th century Ireland. While serving more as a cultural and socioeconomic kaleidoscope of everyday life in Ireland during the 20th century, *Dubliners* explores the societal expectations and restrictions of marriage, spinsterhood, and even the idea of being a single female in a culture that is dominated by men. Throughout this thesis, I will analyze Joyce's "Eveline," "The Dead," and "Clay" as they pertain to the institution of marriage, the isolation of spinsterhood, and the uncertainty of singleness in Ireland.

Relying heavily on cultural illuminations, such as the purpose of the Magdalen Laundries and historical and marital records of Ireland in the 20th century, I will argue that to be a woman in 20th century Ireland was to progress from daughter, to wife, to mother. However, a woman could be labeled as spinster for a variety of reasons, including need for independence, a civic duty to the country during the Great Famine, intellectual disabilities, and most notably, the preventative and punitive use of Magdalen Asylums. Throughout this thesis, I will employ the theory of deconstruction to explore the marital binary between married and unmarried women. It is my hope that this thesis will connect Joyce's stories and the societal construction of marriage to the 20th century causes for spinsterhood in Ireland.

Keywords: James Joyce, Dubliners, spinsterhood

Katherine E. Smith, M.A.
Department of English, 2015
Radford University

Dedication

In Memory of Bain A. Thompson

May 2, 1929-March 17, 2014

My Grandpa, who taught me that “anything worth doing is worth doing right.”

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Introduction: Aspects of Physical and Emotional Spinsterhood in James Joyce's *Dubliners*¹

When James Joyce wrote *Dubliners* in 1914, he certainly could not have imagined that in the next century, there would be books on every subject that remotely pertained to the female characters that he created. From understanding sexuality to grappling with identity, books and essays on such topics are in abundance. Given the cultural developments that have been made in regard to female identity as a part of the Irish consciousness, I think that there is a need to explore how the image of the Irish female has changed—both in the literary context as it applies to Joyce's characters, and in the broader national context of Ireland itself. As the social and cultural boundaries change from decade to decade and century to century, rules that were held in place by the social and moral codes start to bend and break, and, as they do, different information becomes available that helps scholars analyze texts in relation to new historical and cultural information. Marriage and spinsterhood in the 20th century was largely determined by chance, a luck of the draw in terms of time, choice of mate, and social codes of the time. In terms of modes of marriage, the way that we understand Irish culture and its matrimonial laws has changed. In the past few years alone, the world has begun to realize that many of the cultural and social codes that governed a lot of the wives and daughters of Ireland were hidden from view, shamefully tucked away in a corner of national history that no one sought to unveil until recently².

¹ The title of this thesis alludes to a childhood rhyme in which the occupation of a woman's future husband could be determined by the number of buttons on a sweater or the number of petals on a flower—emphasizing the fact that achieving marriage was a luck of the draw situation.

² In Ireland, during the summer of 2014, a mass grave containing the remains of 800 children, likely offspring of Magdalen Laundresses, was found (Roberts, para. 10). This particular mass grave was located, according to a documentary produced by BBC Our World, in a “sewage tank” (Justice for Magdalenes :45). While Sue Roberts' article on the discovery of the crude burial (*continued on next page*)

For the most part, many of the female characters that we see in *Dubliners*, and especially the women that we see in “Eveline,” “The Dead,” and “Clay” are women who are on the fringes of society—they are, or at some point have been, rebuked by the social and moral codes held by society. Both Eveline and Maria are unmarried women and of the lower socioeconomic side of life, but their marital status tells a story that Joyce starts, but never finishes. Gretta, in “The Dead,” is decidedly more refined and accepted as the wife of Gabriel Conroy, but even Gretta’s story has untapped cultural significance in regard to marriage. Spinsterhood, especially in literature, is an interesting concept. In *Dubliners*, the reader is somewhat aware of the various spinsters that crowd Joyce’s literary streets, but in each short story, the respective spinster has a story of her own to tell—one that cannot be generalized by her association with, or comparison to, the other unwed females in the collection of *Dubliners*. Whether spinsterhood arrives at a character’s metaphorical doorstep by chance, by a calculated design to remain single, or by a woman choosing to do something else with her life than marry and raise a family, the women in Joyce’s stories, especially Eveline, Gretta Conroy, the Morkan Sisters, and Maria, have more to say about their lives and marital choices than they are saying. As this project will explore, *what* Joyce leaves unsaid in his stories is much more important to the development of the understanding of the character than what Joyce eventually *does* say. By looking at the cultural history and heritage of Ireland in the 20th century as it pertained to gendering of women and to the morally acceptable codes of sexual behavior, one is able to see that there is a cultural backstory behind each female character that a story alludes to but never explicitly tells. Each

states that these remains date from 1925-1961, the first Irish Magdalen Asylum was opened in 1767—meaning that the cultural cruelty occurring in the Asylums began centuries before this particular grave was erected (Roberts para. 10, Finnegan 8).

woman that Joyce creates is bound to not only her specific story, but to the cultural truths in which these stories are rooted. By writing this thesis, I hope to make a contribution to the field of both literary study and cultural study by trying to link the female characters to a cultural history which Joyce was not at liberty to explicitly spell out and project into the world of 20th century Ireland.

For Ireland, the confines of moral and social law created a barrier against the unspeakable—which included premarital sex, sexual abuse, and physical and emotional abuse. It was, then, for the sake of keeping all of the topics and acts taboo that cultural travesties like the Magdalen Laundries³ were created, and functioned as workhouses for women who were, or might become, sexual liabilities. As will be explored later, an unmarried woman could be considered a sexual liability if she were deemed “too pretty” and might be enticed into performing an act of sexual immorality (Smith 136). Furthermore, a woman could be committed to a Magdalen Asylum if she was afflicted with an intellectual disability and may not have had the mental capacity to determine right from wrong (*Sex in a Cold Climate* Part 1, Smith 136). Throughout this thesis, much of the backstory will be explored as it relates to issues that have recently been publicly discovered and acknowledged by a nation—a century later.

For the majority of this thesis, Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive approach will be used to highlight the ranking of particular characters in terms of marriage. Deconstruction proposes that

³ In 2012, according to a special shown on the program RTE One, the international shock produced by the discovery of circumstances surrounding the Magdalen Asylums prompted the United Nations to sanction an investigation into asylums as part of the Committee on Torture, but the report returned that admission into the asylums had been originally recorded as “private and voluntary,” meaning that no action could be taken against the asylums retroactively (Vatileaks :22, 6:55).

all Western thinking is confined by binary oppositions and that in all conceptual pairs, be it black or white, male or female, and in this case, married or unmarried, one group of people is preferred over the other in the eyes of society (Derrida viii). For the purpose of this project, the status of being married is deemed as socially superior to that of being unmarried. While the topic of marital status is vast, and this thesis cannot, realistically, serve as some sort of vast cultural revelation on the private lives of Eveline, the Conroy women, and Maria, it opens a window to a cultural history on the treatment of married and unmarried women in Ireland in the 20th century and lets in some much needed light.

In Joyce's time, women remained unmarried for a variety of reasons. While some women were forced into a life of singleness out of social or sexual shame, some women consciously chose to remain unmarried, never to wed, out of a sense of patriotic or familial duty. The Great Famine that occurred in Ireland during the middle of the 19th century had a widespread effect on marital decisions and population growth, of which the Irish, and Joyce himself, were very aware at the dawn of the 20th century (Lowe-Evans 1-2). Prior to the beginning of the Great Famine, young men and women married at young ages and were encouraged to do so by a number of factors, chief among them being poverty (Kent 526-527). According to J.P. Kent, postponing or abstaining from marriage altogether was a relatively rare occurrence before the years encompassing the Great Famine (527). While the Great Famine, a period of starvation and national instability, lasted six years, from 1845-1851, and was over by the time Joyce published *Dubliners* in 1914, the Irish population was still reeling from the death and despair that had invaded the land (Lowe-Evans 2). Although the Famine left an estimated one million people dead from starvation, its effect on the living and those not yet born was perhaps greater than on those it killed. Census data recorded in J.P. Kent's article notes that in the year 1851, the last year

of the Famine, “11% of Irish adults were never married at 45-54 years of age [and] By 1911, this figure had risen to 27% for men and 24% for women” (526)⁴. Due to the fact that food was scarce during the six year span that Famine swept over Ireland, many men and women avoided marriage in an effort to do their part to control the population (Lowe-Evans 2-3). While spinsterhood and bachelorhood may seem to be a drastic measure for abstinence, the logic was simple—in a predominately Catholic country, where the church was the dominant authority on sexual matters, (and deliberate birth control was considered a sin,) a marriage was bound to eventually produce children (*Sex in a Cold Climate* Part 1, Lowe-Evans 9). Therefore, in order to prevent creating more hungry mouths, young people considered singlehood, and by extension abstinence, a “civic duty” (Lowe-Evans 3, Kent 525). Indeed, as Mary Lowe-Evans states in the Introduction to *Crimes Against Fecundity*, “Marriage patterns and fertility rates altered so drastically in the years following the Famine that thrifty middle-age bachelors and [...] exhausted young mothers, existing side by side, had become stock characters on the Irish scene by the turn of the century” (2). However, while the stereotypical images of the mother and the bachelor that Lowe-Evans presents function as opposites to show both the growth and stunted alteration of the Irish population, the Famine created a cultural mindset of singleness through an appeal to fear of starvation and an anxiety of creating a family one had no means to care for (Lowe-Evans 2-3). As Robert E. Kennedy examines, “Obviously, a great change occurred between 1841 and 1851 in the proportion of Irish persons willing to postpone marriage [or abstain from it forever], a change associated with events surrounding the 1845-58 famine” (qtd

⁴ According to documents cited by Strassmann and Clarke, the idea of forgoing marriage continued well into the 20th and 21st centuries. In 1936, it was recorded that 74% of Irish men and 55% of the country’s women between the ages of 25 and 34 had not married (34). Furthermore, Ireland, even in modern times, maintains one of the highest percentages of unmarried individuals (Strassmann and Clarke 33-34).

in Lowe-Evans 9). Though food was replenished and crops were again planted, the Great Famine forced many into a desolate state, made widows and widowers out of the married and spinsters and bachelors out of the adolescent—a fact not forgotten by Joyce.

The fact that the Famine created early spinsters out of the young is critical to understanding the women that Joyce chooses to create his characters as matrimonially ambiguous. Joyce never directly states why female characters like Eveline, Greta, and Maria do or do not marry, but the dwindling of population and the surge of emigration to America in the six years of the Great Famine creates a logical reason for women in *Dubliners* to have avoided marriage.⁵ The characters that Joyce brings to life in his short stories are very close to reality; many of the characters and events are based on everyday people and issues that Joyce saw and experienced in Ireland. Indeed, as Florence Walzl notes in her article, “*Dubliners*: Women in Irish Society,” “*Dubliners* mirrors Irish social conditions with accuracy and realism” so much so that Joyce described *Dubliners* as “a ‘looking glass’ in which the Irish people could see themselves and their paralysis” (31-32). Even from the early days of his literary career, Joyce was aware of the toll that the Great Famine had taken on the people of Ireland in a political, economic, and personal way and reflects that understanding in his own writing (Lowe-Evans 7-8). *Dubliners*, in its stories, reflects the reality of the time period, even though that truth is wrapped in fiction (Walzl “Women in Irish Society” 32). In *Dubliners*, much like in 20th century Irish society, “Children are stunted in their development, youths are frustrated socially and

⁵ A Washington Post article, published in December of 2014, noted that an estimated two million people, double the number of people who died during the Famine, emigrated out of Ireland during those years (Moyer para 2). Furthermore, of the 2 million people who left Ireland, many were children who may not have survived the anticipated journey to America aboard what were known as “Coffin Ships”—cramped vessels known for spreadable disease and disaster (Moyer para 7-9).

economically, and adults are trapped in sterile and unproductive lives” (Walzl “Women in Irish Society” 32). One characteristic, from young adulthood to old age, however, is instrumental in the tribulations of the folk of Dublin—marriage.

The attention to the personal lives of the characters in *Dubliners* offers an interesting angle when viewed in terms of marriage within Irish society in the 20th century. At first glance, the stories may seem to have very little connection, aside from the fact that they all take place in the same city. If examined further, however, the “Two demographic characteristics that recur in Joyce’s works are considered typical of Ireland-- postponed marriages and permanent celibacy—first became evident after the Great Famine” (Lowe-Evans 8). While many scholars have noted the perpetual singleness of many of the male characters in *Dubliners*, like the character of Bob Doran in “The Boarding House,” the female characters are subjected to a perhaps more isolating experience by giving up their chance at matrimony and a family.⁶

Though many Irish men and women did put aside marriage in order to better their odds of surviving the national crisis that was the Great Famine, other Irish citizens decided to forgo marriage, and therefore childbirth, out of a sense of obligation to both land and family. Rates of delayed marriage or permanent celibacy for both sexes were higher after the Famine and these practices were common to both wealthy and more rural areas of Ireland (Kent 529). The farming communities, according to Kent, adopted higher rates of celibacy, as their land holdings and economic success increased (532). While it remains unclear whether the correlation of land girth and agricultural success led to a *causation* of male celibacy, the marital patterns within the rural

⁶ In “The Boarding House”, the male character of Bob Doran is celebrated for his bachelorhood and economic and social freedom from a wife while women, like middle aged, unmarried, Mary Jane Morkan in “The Dead” is supported economically, begrudgingly, by her male cousin, Gabriel.

areas of Ireland cannot be ignored, as many characters in Joyce's *Dubliners* seem to migrate from rural areas in Ireland to the cosmopolitan capital, Dublin (Kent 530-532).⁷ Even though male celibacy was common after the years of the Great Famine, marital patterns among those who did have children in the rural community led to a larger discussion of chosen and forced female spinsterhood.

Being a woman in Ireland at the turn of the century was difficult; being the daughter of an Irish farmer at the same time may have been even harder. According to information in Strassmann and Clarke's article, "Ecological Constraints on Marriage in Rural Ireland," during the 20th century it was a common practice for a father to leave all of his land to one child, regardless of the number of children he had, and often regardless of the inheriting child's gender. The leaving of one's property to a sole heir is known as creating a "stem-family" and, in this option of the division of assets, the inheriting offspring is the only one who earns the right not only to the land, but also to marry. The non-inheriting children of the farmer, in the stem family method at least, had two options: either to leave the family home and have the possibility of engaging in matrimony, or continue to live and work on the family farm while remaining single and celibate. One of the more common options for adult children, especially females, was to stay on the family property, help with the raising of other siblings, and nieces and nephews, and then marry if a dowry could be provided and a suitor found. More commonly, though, the female sibling continued to live with the male sibling and his family, or was, at the very least, the male sibling's economic responsibility. Finally, in more affluent families, an inheritor would be linked

⁷ While the stories themselves take place in Dublin, characters, like the Morkan Sisters in "The Dead" are originally from Stoney Batter and are considered to be country girls. However, characters like the female put forth in "Two Gallants," is much more of a country girl in terms of social behavior and economic status than either of the Morkan sisters would have been.

with a spouse through the considerations of economic compatibility, not necessarily romantic attraction, with the match usually being the product of two wealthy fathers tying their children together with the bond of matrimony. If no suitable match could be made for either the prosperous male or female heir, it was considered better for that person to remain single than to marry beneath the station and create tension within the family (Strassmann and Clarke 38-41).⁸

In the previous paragraphs, spinsterhood is discussed as a product of both the economic and agricultural environments of Ireland within the 20th century. However, a darker, more sinister reason for the vast quantities of unmarried women was created by the Catholic Church and a socially strict society. The remnants of the Victorian era dictated cultural mores where the expression of sexuality, especially by a female, was forbidden and was reserved only for those women who had successfully permeated the upper side of the marital binary and could add a “Mrs.” to their names. Instead of embracing sexuality in a nonchalant and public way, as had been the norm in prior centuries, “Silence became the rule [regarding anything of a sexual nature]. The legitimate and procreative couple, laid down the law” (Foucault 3). Foucault’s reference to the “legitimate couple” as the only rightful signifier of any intimate behavior plays into the idea adopted very quickly by the Irish society during, and even prior to, the 20th century—that of reforming those who had embraced sexuality illegitimately. Even though societal containment of sexuality created a divide between those who adhere to the moral expectations of the community and those who do not, the accepted role for a woman was defined

⁸ A prerequisite for matrimony was a clean bill of mental health, and if it was clear that either a potential match suffered from mental illness, or there was an obvious history of it, it was unlikely that the prospective bride or groom would hear wedding bells (Strassmann and Clarke 40). When applied to the stories analyzed in this thesis, the mental soundness of the aloof spinster Maria in the short story “Clary” and the absence of a wedding band on her finger, becomes an interesting correlation.

by her marital status, as “identity for Irish women [was constructed] solely in domestic terms—women were mothers, women were wives” (qtd Smith 3). By constricting sexuality to the home and only acknowledging women who stayed within that realm, the Irish society had created a system by which those who did not conform to those strict standards could be identified and reformed. By the 20th century, Ireland had securely implemented institutions of reform known as Magdalen Asylums, or Magdalen laundries⁹ into the inner workings of Irish society (Finnegan 1-4). The original purpose of Magdalen Asylums was to rehabilitate what Frances Finnegan calls “first fall” prostitutes (8). In later years, the Asylums accepted into the program unwed mothers, women who were mentally ill, and girls who *might* mature into sexually irresponsible women if left unchecked (Finnegan 8).¹⁰ Indeed, throughout the 20th century, Magdalen Asylums became less and less about charity and more about punishment for breaching sexual norms and the desire to hide, punish, and reform those who had deviated from those accepted norms.

In any society, nonconformance to the ideals of the majority has repercussions, but in the case of the unmarried Irish women who bore illegitimate children into a society that wished to deny their very existence, the punishment was severe. Even though Magdalen Asylums started out as a place of reform and refuge for prostitutes, the admission criteria soon included women who had become pregnant due to coercion, incest, rape, and consensual sex (Smith 13-14). Due to the inability to hide the obvious signs of a growing fetus within the womb, women took the

⁹ The Magdalen Laundries finds its namesake in Mary Magdalene, a Biblical-era prostitute who repented of her sexually immoral ways and, after her spiritual transformation, was charged with the task of revealing Jesus’s resurrection to the Apostles, which earned her the title “Apostle to the Apostles” (Schroedel 14-15, Smith 25). In Catholicism, Mary Magdalene achieved sainthood and is the patron saint of beauticians, reformed sinners, and prostitutes (Schroedel 15).

¹⁰ The term “first fall prostitute” refers to the fact that the woman is not a repeat offender in terms of prostitution.

brunt of wayward expression of sexuality outside of marriage (Smith 40-41). Regardless of the fact that the man had an equal part in creating the child for which the mother was shamed, the father suffered no repercussion because nothing, aside from the word of his dalliance partner, could tie him to the child. Therefore, when a woman made an accusation of a sexual nature against a man, the most convenient thing to do, especially if the accused male was a family member,¹¹ was to hide the female in a Magdalen Asylum, while, as James Smith puts it, “the Irish... male [was] not held accountable in the same manner as [a female]... he avoid[ed] institutionalization and live[d] his life unrestrained” (41). Indeed, social shame that came with being a fallen woman spread not to the man that had caused her fall, but rather more to her family, which led to further incarceration of pregnant women by their families.

Being a family of good standing in 20th century Ireland was of great importance, especially to the patriarch of a well-established family. However, “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link” as the saying goes, and a family’s reputation could be ruined by the indiscretion of a single person. As Christina Mulcahey, a former Magdalen, stated in an interview given in the documentary *Sex in a Cold Climate*, after giving birth to her child she returned to her familial home only to be told by her father, “You’re not coming into this house” (Part 1). Having been rejected by their families, many fallen women had no choice but to allow themselves to be institutionalized. Being in a Magdalen Asylum, however, had no timeline for freedom; Mary

¹¹ Because many illegitimate children were conceived from non-consensual liaisons between family members, often a male relative and a younger female cousin or sister, girls who reported the abuse were more likely to end up in an asylum than to receive the help that they rightly deserved (*Sex in a Cold Climate* Part 2). Martha Cooney, a penitent at one of the asylums, reported that after being raped by an older cousin and becoming pregnant, she was sent by her family to a Magdalen Laundry (*Sex in a Cold Climate* Part 2). Mary O’Connor Merritt, on the other hand, noted on BBC *Our World* that, while she was sent to an asylum as a preventative measure, she was raped and impregnated by a priest who claimed that he had “tried to help” her (*Justice for Magdalenes* 10:58).

O'Connor Merritt, who spent fourteen years in an asylum, noted that "she wouldn't have gotten fourteen years for murder," but yet she was forced to serve that time for being considered a sexual risk to society (Vatileaks 13:34). O'Connor's sentiments of unjust imprisonment in the asylums are echoed by women like Mary Norris, another former penitent of the asylums. Norris revealed in an interview with *60 Minutes* that she "would have rather been down to the women's jail" (Symun M. 2:30). "At least," Norris said, "I'd have gotten a sentence and known when I was leaving" (Symun M. 2:30). Apart from women like Merritt and Norris though, there were women, as has been recorded by Frances Finnegan in her book *Do Penance or Perish*, who, having been rejected by their families, saw the asylum as a sort of a refuge and became "dependent" upon the monotonous lifestyle that the Magdalen Asylums offered (4).¹² For those who did manage to leave the asylum, either by escape or by the assistance of a sympathetic relative, the trauma induced by living in a Magdalen Asylum had lifelong effects¹³. While penitents were purposefully limited to singlehood while in the Magdalen Asylums, surviving a Magdalen Asylum did not mean that marriage suddenly became a possibility (*Sex in a Cold Climate*, Part 3). For many, being deprived of individuality, camaraderie, and simple, positive human contact took a heavy toll that later affected their ability to form a sense of self and a sense of family outside of the asylum. "They shaved my head and I had to wear a uniform,"

¹² The daily routine of a Magdalen laundress was steeped in spirituality through the visage of the Madonna, who was described by Magdalen nuns as the "image of spotless innocence," as opposed to the morally stained Magdalen woman (qtd Smith 37). Furthermore, the majority of a Magdalen's time was spent in the laundry where, six days a week for nine hours a day, she would metaphorically atone for her sin of outward sexuality by cleansing the dirty linen of her community (Smith 37-38, *Sex in a Cold Climate*).

¹³ A woman could be released from a Magdalen Asylum if she was claimed by a male family member—sometimes a compassionate brother or cousin, but in many cases, the patriarchal members of the family were the ones who had placed the female in the institution in the first place (*Sex in a Cold Climate*, Part 3).

remembered Elizabeth Coppin who spoke to *BBC World* (Justice for Magdalens 10:03-10:43). “Straightaway, [in the Magdalen Asylum] your identity is taken because my name’s taken, my hair cut and I’m not wearing my own clothes. I have to answer to the name Enda—which is a man’s name,”¹⁴ Coppin noted (Justice for Magdalens 10:03-10:34). Even if no one knew about their past, many former Magdalen penitents were unable to shake the sense of sin that had been associated with their identity for so long (*Sex in a Cold Climate*, Part 3). Failed marriages and intentionally staying single seems to be common among women who once lived behind Magdalen walls; “You can’t fall into that marriage... it [the damage done by the asylums] haunts ya” noted Magdalen orphan,¹⁵ Brigid Young (*Sex in a Cold Climate*, Part 3). While leaving a Magdalen Asylum seldom meant true “escape,” the women described above had an idea of why they had been incarcerated: they had been sexually promiscuous and usually produced a child. For many of the Magdalen penitents, though, the only crime was not that of sexual immorality or that of shaming her family with an illegitimate son or daughter, but rather, that of being a sexual liability.

The fear of wanton sexuality spawned the need to control the image of the Irish woman, for it was far better that she end up a spinster than a loose woman who brought shame on her family and community. While, according to Strassmann and Clarke, “less than 4% of all Irish

¹⁴It was not uncommon for penitents to have their names changed against their will—especially if there was already another penitent who already went by that name (Rafferty para. 8). However, the most likely logic behind the “common practice of creating a new name for the penitent, especially to that of a more masculine name, was to take away her feminine identity (Rafferty para. 8).

¹⁵ In most Magdalen Asylums, there was an orphanage attached to the laundries where the babies of the laundresses were kept prior to adoption. In several cases, and especially that of Brigid Young, physical and sexual abuse of the orphans by both the clergy and the nuns was not uncommon (*Sex in a Cold Climate*, Part 3).

births occurred outside [of] marriage [for] each decade from 1871-1966,” there was a need to somehow police the women of Ireland to ensure that the sanctity of the family was kept intact, even if that sanctity was paper thin (34). The social anxiety that surrounded females in regard to the expression of sexuality created an overly sensitive public that saw the Magdalen Asylums as a preventative measure instead of the transformative structure that it had originally been meant to be. In order to create a façade of social harmony, girls who were considered to be at risk for the display of inappropriate sexual behavior were sent to the asylums along with the women who had actually conceived a child outside of wedlock. Phyllis Valentine, an Irish woman who spent eight years in a Magdalen asylum in the mid-twentieth century, reported that while Irish girls were “taught to be pretty,” being attractive, especially as a girl blossoming into womanhood, had a great disadvantage (*Sex in a Cold Climate* Part 2). Even though Valentine had not engaged in any unsavory behavior, she was told by a nun that she was “pretty as a picture” and that she had been sent to the institution because her guardians were “afraid [she’d] fall away” (*Sex in a Cold Climate* Part 2). Even though girls like Phyllis Valentine had no reason to be in a Magdalen Asylum, the hyper-sensitive environment that these females lived in was conditioned to see sexuality as a deviant trait that needed to be removed from both the human being and society as a whole. Therefore, as has been noted above, the sequestering of these women to prevent them from sexual expression created something of an unforeseen epidemic in terms of marriage and the production of children. For those women who were eventually liberated from the Magdalen Asylums, sex even inside the bounds of wedlock was a challenge due to the mental and physical abuse that they had endured— which created more spinsters, divorced women, and emotionally stunted women. Martha Cooney, a former Magdalen penitent also interviewed in the documentary *Sex in a Cold Climate*, noted that her experience as a subservient creature in the

asylum impacted her decision not to marry as she, “never wanted anyone to have power over [her]” (Part 3). Mary O’ Connor Merritt, whose daughter was produced from rape while she was in the asylum, was adamant that nothing that happened to her while she was incarcerated, especially the separation from her child, was by her own will. “It wasn’t my fault,” Merritt proclaimed, and while Irish society now understands that the women themselves were not to blame for their incarceration, there is very little that the Irish government can do to seek retribution for these women (Justice for Magdalens 22:15). Indeed, according to the Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland, Joan Burton, who is herself a daughter of a Magdalen penitent, the United Nations investigation into the inner workings of the Magdalen Laundries served more as “recognition for what women had experienced and what women had gone through” than any sort of legal or national action taken on their behalf (Justice for Magdalens 19:47). While the presence of, and ensuing emotional damage created by, the Magdalen Asylums cannot bear the entire brunt for the depictions of spinsterhood in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, the fact remains that from 1904 to 1914, when *Dubliners* was written and published, the Magdalen Asylums were in full operation which, when considered in conjunction with the number of spinsters in the stories, creates a correlation that deserves investigation.

Chapter 1: Till Death Do We Part: Exploring the Obligations, Promises, and Desires of Eveline Hill

Eveline Hill is a woman who yearns for marriage and autonomy, but is tethered to a promise she made to her dying mother years earlier. Bound by a duty to care for those her mother left behind, Eveline spends several years of adulthood caring for her younger siblings and obeying her often violent father instead of carrying a wedding bouquet down an aisle or bearing children of her own. Therefore, even though she is enacting a covenant to her mother, Eveline, with only the title of a daughter, ignores the marital binary by acting as the female head of her father's household, stabilizing the family economically and materially, and positioning herself as more of a maternal figure in her father's house than a daughter. While this thesis is not biographical in nature, it is interesting to note the parallels between Joyce's sister, Poppie, and the fictional character of Eveline. Margaret Joyce, nicknamed Poppie¹⁶ was, like Eveline, trapped between a deathbed promise made to her mother, the children and husband that her mother left behind, and the need to live a life of her own (Ellmann 143, Sutcliffe para.11).¹⁷

Eveline is an interesting character in terms of her own identity and the fact that she is caught in a kind of female purgatory. Eveline, though "over nineteen," has not yet acquired the status of a wife, but she does not act solely as a daughter to her father, either (Joyce 256).

¹⁶ In "Eveline", Frank amorously calls Eveline "Poppens," which could be a nod to the similarities between Eveline Hill and Poppie Joyce (Joyce 257).

¹⁷ According to Joe Sutcliffe's article on the biographical context of Eveline, Poppie Joyce had already committed to becoming a nun prior to her mother's death, which made the promise she made to her mother to keep the family together a choice between familial duty and individual contentment (para. 11). Unlike her fictional counterpart, though, Poppie had already made plans for her future beyond her father's house, whereas Eveline makes her promise to her mother prior to meeting Frank, or even thinking of marriage and a life away from the family her mother has created (Sutcliffe para. 11).

Instead, Eveline inhabits a role that shadows her late mother's standing as the caretaker of the home. The main character has been, because of her mother's death and her fear of disobeying her father, cast as an "involuntary homemaker and surrogate mother" (Norris "The Perils of Eveline" 57). Norris' description of Eveline as "involuntary" replacement for her mother highlights the fact that Eveline is obligated to take on a maternal role without having fulfilled her role as a daughter, and has certainly not had the ability or the opportunity to seek a role as a wife, which leaves Eveline's identity as a daughter, potential wife, and stand-in mother, indeterminate (57-58, Paige 329). Quite simply, Eveline does not know which role she needs to embody, or take steps to achieve, because her identity as a woman is centered on a promise she made to her dying mother to "keep the home together as long as she could" (Joyce 258).

However, in contrast to Eveline's desire to treasure the covenant made to her mother, she is also determined to avoid becoming a replica of her mother, when she recalls the "pitiful vision of her mother's life... that life of commonplace sacrifices" (Joyce 258). Eveline's life, contrasted with the life she *desires*, are both rooted in her mother, as Eveline's mother, as Margot Norris notes in her piece "The Perils of 'Eveline,'" "gives her daughter contradictory and impossible mandates: to hold the home together *and* to save herself [from a dull life]" (58). Eveline suffers from the idea that if she leaves the home, she abandons the family, and if she abandons the family, then she has disregarded her mother, but given the status of the family, with one brother dead, and the other only sporadically in communication, there is the possibility that Eveline has already, though unintentionally, broken her vow to her mother, which would make staying in the familial home pointless, and guarantee that she would become a figure not unlike her mother (O'Gorman 452). While Eveline has the ability to make the choice of serving as a daughter, a wife, or a mother, Eveline's fear is of making the wrong choice—she doesn't want to let down

her mother, but she doesn't want to become her mother, which again leaves her in a quandary. Instead of making a choice and defining her role in the family, Eveline simply misremembers her life as the way she wants it to be, not as it is. Indeed, as Hedwig Schwall suggests in his article entitled "Mind the Gap," Eveline "prefers to dwell in the Imaginary world of her own daydreams where she can play the Noble role" instead of a victimized daughter who questions her place in the family group (353). Therefore, even though Eveline may have once been classified in the female binary as a daughter, she never truly experienced, even in adolescence, an autonomy that allowed her to separate herself from her parents' wishes and demands, which is why she recreates a dreamy version of her childhood and gives a one-sided version of the present.

Beyond the promise that Eveline makes to her mother, the effect that Mrs. Hill, though deceased, has on Eveline is remarkably palpable. While Mrs. Hill may have vacated her role as a wife, a mother, and a caretaker of the home, her ghostly presence pervades the home, influences Eveline's identity, and creates an atmosphere of death as opposed to life, and leaves Eveline, via her deathbed promise, little opportunity to escape.¹⁸ Even though it seems odd that a woman long dead could affect her daughter so, Linda Rohrer Paige notes that "Joyce refuses to confine... negative portraits of 'Mother' to this life: his mothers can reach far beyond the grave," as is illustrated in "Eveline" (329). The home, and its objects, which is now Eveline's domain, is "yellowing, broken, and dusty"—reminiscent not of a place of life, but rather illness and death (Joyce 256-257). Eveline, although she is alive, unlike her mother, is unable to live as freely as other young adults because she is surrounded by the symbols of both death and her mother's last

¹⁸ According to Joe Sutcliffe's article, "Ghosts in Dubliners," Eveline's mother wasn't the only deceased parent haunting her daughter; while mourning her mother, Poppie Joyce attested that she had "seen her mother's ghost," a statement that was not refuted by the town cleric (Poppie and Nora).

words (O’Gorman 452). Even the air that Eveline takes in, which sustains her ability to live, is tainted by death; according to Francis O’Gorman, the “dust’s implication as the substance of the dead—‘ashes to ashes, dust to dust’... is hard to disregard” (452). In her behavior even outside of the house, Eveline does not act as one who is looking to move beyond her identity as a daughter and marry, but acts rather as a woman twice her age—who is settled in her environment and expectation. Though at an age where vitality, vigor, and excitement should abound, Eveline is described as being “tired” and constantly needs to be reminded to “look lively”¹⁹ in public, as if a shroud of death is following her (Joyce 255, 256). In this way, Eveline, with her lack of vivacity, seems to be mimicking, not just an older woman, but her dead mother in particular (Jackson and McGinley 30).

As John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley state in their annotated analysis of the short story, Miss Gavan’s constant chastising of Eveline to “look lively” highlights that she is “forced to appear to be alive as opposed to dead” (30). Eveline’s behavior contradicts her biological age and paints her as a much older, much more worn down individual—an individual not unlike her mother. Though she may not realize it, Eveline is imitating her mother’s actions by not only taking her place within the home, but also mimicking her in death by seeming corpse-like. Almost like an umbilical cord, Eveline is connected to her mother, even in death, and as Florence Walzl states in the article “*Dubliners*: Women in Irish Society,” “mothers, [in Joyce’s stories], tend to transform their daughters into replicas of themselves” (49). By requesting Eveline take her place within the family and the home as the head caretaker and, after

¹⁹ The emphasis on the liveliness of Eveline, when contrasted with her mother’s deceased status, becomes of paramount importance when combined with the fact that, according to Jackson and McGinley’s annotations, the line “look lively, Miss Hill” was revised from the original line of “a bit smarter, Miss Hill,” a statement that addressed not Eveline’s overall character and mental state, but simply physical appearance (qtd 30).

death, still affecting Eveline in terms of lethargy and physical appearance, Mrs. Hill, meaning to or not, has limited Eveline's ability to even begin to transcend her role as a substitute matriarch and become a mother in her own right.

As has been noted, the death of Eveline's mother imprisons her in the home, where even though she is comfortable, she is restricted in terms of what she can and cannot do with her days. Eveline continually idolizes the objects of her home, emphasizing her connection to the place not via sentimentality, but through physical labor as "she looked round the room, reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years. Perhaps she would never see again those familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided" (Joyce 255). Eveline does not see, as some young women might, the objects as a bridge to matrimony in terms of a dowry, but views them as her duty. Earl Ingersoll, author of "The Stigma of Femininity" notes that the home, which is cluttered with objects, is only a "museum of memories" that has "feminized" and confused Eveline beyond hope (504). Eveline's particularly feminine, almost possessive, attachment to her home is curious, especially when coupled with the fact that, while many daughters are expected to earn their keep in the family home by performing chores like dusting, Eveline's attachment to the objects that she cleans goes beyond that of a daughterly duty; indeed, Eveline may view these dusty articles as part of her very identity.

The home, for Eveline, is a place of security, and while staying within the home may have disoriented Eveline in terms of her female role in society, she is comfortable within the home because it is familiar and it reminds her that she is fulfilling her promise to her mother. Scholars have hypothesized about what the home might symbolize to Eveline in terms of safety, and there are two theories that are of interest to this project, the first one being the home as a

womb and the second being the home as an institution, more specifically, a Magdalen Asylum. The home, with its connection to her mother, creates, to use a psychoanalytic term, an oceanic feeling of childish contentment within Eveline (Kislak 6596). The home, specifically, and Ireland in general, serves as a womblike environment for Eveline (Kislak 6589, 6596). In the home and in Ireland, Eveline has what she needs to survive; she is cared for, though somewhat dispassionately, and most importantly, Eveline can define the role that she is to play in the binary—she is to be her mother’s placeholder, intimately connected with her mother through the medium of the home and its objects. Hazal Kislack terms Eveline an “Irish fetus” that, given her dependence upon her home as a sort of womb and the presence of her mother as an umbilical cord, is unlikely to seek a place of recognition outside of that home that has served as her second womb (6596). Like the Magdalen women who, after years of servitude, saw the asylums as a place of refuge from a world that they did not know, Eveline’s familial home not only serves as a sort of womb, but also a sort of institution in which there is routine and security. Eveline has very little power within her home, as she is placed between the ghostly echoes of her dead mother’s words and her father’s violence. The house is Eveline’s safe haven, but like the Magdalens who were required to clean garments in order to remove their sexual impurities and atone for what was considered a sin, Eveline, too, cleans the objects of the home meticulously, almost out of a sense of duty to her dead mother and to appease her father’s violence. Indeed, Wanda Balzano highlights the importance of cleaning to Joyce by saying, “Joyce uses images of cleansing to indicate the roles that await and often threaten the silent main character” (81). Eveline, like the constantly-cleaning Magdalens, knows her role within the home and cleans dutifully without verbalizing her thoughts and sees the world from behind the pane of a window

instead of living outside of the bounds of the home (Balzano 88).²⁰ The house, though not its original purpose, has become Eveline's shield. The house has become the medium through which she has come to understand the world, and just like a Magdalen, Eveline is unsure of her ability to function in the world without having the routine and familiarity of her father's home, which can be seen as being akin to a Magdalen Laundry (Balzano 90).

The fact that Eveline's is even considering a personal life outside of her father's home, and has "consented to go away [with Frank]" creates a tension, not only between Eveline and her father, but within Eveline herself (Joyce 256). It is Frank's interest in her and her status not as a daughter or caretaker, but as a candidate for marriage, that forces Eveline to re-evaluate her role in her father's house and tempts Eveline to imagine another life for herself, although she is undecided about whether she will stay or go. Even though Eveline equates Frank with the respect she would gain if she married him, she does not immediately view him as a matrimonial candidate, but rather as a tool to escape her current life, as she only states that during their courtship she had "begun to like him"—a statement that is not overly romantic (Joyce 257). Eveline's viewing of Frank as a way to leave her father, but not be left completely on her own, illustrates her inability to make a decision as an individual, as well as her dependence upon members of the patriarchy (O'Brien 216). Trying to permeate the dividing line of the marital binary and shed her identity as a daughter, Eveline views Frank as her salvation and marriage as her absolution. As is seen in the line, "Frank would save her," Eveline does not view Frank as a romantic partner, but a tool of escape that she can use to her own benefit, only noting that

²⁰ Balzano makes note of the similarities between Eveline, the Magdalens and the image of Mary Alacoque that is part of her home. Connecting Eveline's need to clean everything, Balzano states that Mary Alacoque would only drink water in which soiled laundry had been cleaned, symbolizing her unworthiness as a sinner (88).

“perhaps [he would give her] love, too” (Joyce 258). Love is not the main motivator for Eveline’s actions, nor is it a requisite for her uprooting her life and position in the binary (Joyce 258). Beginning to recognize that her life has been lived in the shadow of her long-dead mother, Eveline seeks to not only legitimize her position in the home through marriage, but most importantly, as Hedwig Schwall points out, to escape “the spell of her mother’s life” (354). Due to the fact that Eveline has lived a life of relative captivity in her father’s house, it is understandable that Eveline would want to transition from that situation to a similar one, though her roles would change from daughter and stand-in mother to wife and possibly biological mother. As Eugene O’Brien notes, “In her marriage, all decisions will be made for her by Frank,” which Eveline, who has lived in a passive role all of her life, seems to unconsciously desire (216). However, as much as Eveline longs to be “married...[and] treat[ed] with respect,” the pull that her father, and the promise that Eveline made to her mother, exerts on Eveline creates indecision within her (Joyce 256).

Eveline’s inability to detach herself from her father completely, as is shown when she spends most of the story contemplating leaving his home, but not actually *doing* it, illustrates that she views herself as indispensable to him, or him to her. Noting Eveline’s dependence upon her father, some scholars hint that she may be suffering from an Electra complex. According to Eugene O’Brien, “the desire for identity is paramount,” and given that Eveline’s identity is intertwined with the presence of her father and the duties that she performs daily in his house, it is not unthinkable that she would, through a desire for power, have an extended Electra complex for her father (213). O’Brien continues by noting that “from infancy we seek to be desired by the ‘other.’ The ‘other’ is defined in terms that are patriarchal almost by default” (213). As Eveline has been sequestered in her father’s home, she may see her father as the “other” instead of men

her own age. Furthermore, Richard Brown, in his book *Joyce and Sexuality*, subtly states that despite the appearance of normalcy in the home, there are hints of “sexual longings” and “sexual secrets” placed throughout the story, and in particular relation to Eveline and Mr. Hill (127). Eveline’s almost neurotic hesitation and anxiety about having to make a choice between the male figures of her past and future shows that something in the maturing process of Eveline has gone askew. Mentally, Eveline still clings to her childish adoration, and physical jealousy of and for her father, as she describes her father “hunt[ing] them [the children] out of the field with his black thorn stick” (Joyce 255). The imagery of the black thorn stick, that both frightens and thrills Eveline, is a tangible representation, at least in a psychoanalytic reading, of Eveline’s envy of her father’s power through the presentation of the phallic black thorn stick. Indeed, possibly playing off her excitement on being with her father, even in a platonic way, the narrator even goes as far as to term this period in her life as “happy” and “not so bad then” (Joyce 255).

If there is an Electra complex in play for Eveline, the fact that the brothers who once tried to defend Eveline from her father and his advances have been scared away shows that there is nothing to keep Eveline from acting on her impulses and that Mr. Hill’s violent actions might turn toward Eveline—which places the presence of the two children in question. Given that Mrs. Hill has been dead for some time, the “two young children that had been left to her charge,” may not be orphans or children of the community, but rather Eveline’s biological children via a relationship with her father (Joyce 257, Balzano 89).²¹ Wanda Balzano also ventures to ponder

²¹ Though Jackson and McGinley’s analysis of the story only describes them as children who have been taken in by the family, they do note that the vagueness surrounding the origins of the children is “one of Joyce’s rare and uncharacteristic loose ends” (30). Due to the fact that Joyce is perhaps purposefully ambiguous about the children and their biology, I argue that Eveline and her father could very well be the parents of the children, but due to Victorian standards, Joyce (*continued on next page*)

the origins of the two charges by noting that if the children were indeed the “fruit of such a forbidden relationship, then she was already like some Magdalene sisters” (89). However, Balzano goes on to state that Eveline’s issues with her father could be only “verbal and psychological,” which would posit the children in the story as ones with anonymous parentage (89). Regardless of whether or not Eveline has borne her father’s children, or even if she has an Electra complex, according to Hedwig Schwall’s analysis, Eveline has blurred the image, not only of what is acceptable behavior between parent and child, but the traditional gender roles of mother versus father (353). Indeed, Schwall points out that “in one of Eveline’s most cherished memories,” that of her father tending to her while she is ill, “the father is acting as the mother” (353 n38). While Eveline may adore her father because she is dependent upon him, she understands if she continues to reside in his home, she will become her mother, which frightens her and makes Frank’s offer to go away with him seem more appealing.

Unlike her father who tied her down to the domestic role, Frank, who “had tales of different countries” and had “fallen on his feet in Buenos Ayres” gives Eveline a taste of the exotic, not only through his reminiscences of life outside the domestic sphere, but also in the way that he treats her (Joyce 257).²² Given that Eveline, as an unmarried daughter, is used to being treated as more of a house servant than a cherished individual, Frank’s attention to her elevates

would have known that such a detail would have been socially unacceptable and therefore leaves the reader to come to her own conclusion.

²² According to Jackson and McGinley’s analysis of the story, and the line “fallen on his feet,” it is quite possible that Frank is being purposefully dishonest about his past, and his reason for being interested in Eveline (31). Frank’s vocabulary, when speaking of his past, seems to be dreamy and impractical, but given Eveline’s obliviousness toward men and romance in general, it is unlikely that she would see any of his tales as suspect (Jackson and McGinley 31). Furthermore, according to Kate Mullin’s commentary on the story, there were no ships going directly from Dublin to Buenos Ayres, which suggests that Frank may be planning to lure Eveline away from familiarity, only to leave her helpless and destitute (56, 63-65).

Eveline in both her own eyes and the eyes of those around her, but the expectation of marriage gives Eveline yet another domestic sphere to work in. With the addition of Frank to her life, Eveline is presented with the prospect of a new life. However, due to the fact that the reader must filter her understanding of the story through Eveline's eyes, it is possible that neither her father nor Frank are what one might expect them to be, even with previous analysis that includes the suggestion of incest and the potential stranding of Eveline in a foreign country. Very simply, Eveline may be so ready to leave her father's home that she may not be able to see the flaws and gaps in Frank's character and past (Norris, "The Perils of Eveline" 56-57). Therefore, when her father implies a sinister motive on Frank's part when he states, "I know these sailor chaps," it's easy for Eveline to brush Mr. Hill's statement off as either that of an overly protective father or a man who does not want to lose the woman who has taken care of his home for the past several years (Joyce 257). In Eveline's mind, although her father is a malicious figure, he is not wholly bad, as Eveline begins to regret her decision to leave her family with the remembrance that "her father was becoming old lately... he would miss her. Sometimes he could be very nice" (Joyce 257-258). At this point in the story, Eveline is caught in the binary between acting as a simple, devoted daughter and allowing herself to have a more empowering role as a wife of someone who is seemingly appropriate for her in terms of stability and age. Pulled in by a sense of duty tinged with daughterly guilt, Eveline is, even in her thoughts and memories, rejecting any sense of individual power that she has over herself and allowing the possible emotions of an abusive father to dictate her actions, regardless of whether or not Frank is the best alternative to her familial home and the strange comfort it offers.

Validating herself in terms of womanhood and shedding the title of daughter is Eveline's main concern when she leaves her father's home, as she realizes that she has become her mother

(Jackson and McGinley 32). However, Eveline's idea of what a family should be and do is vague and inconsistent at best; she envisions Frank not only removing her from her current situation, but literally transforming her from a frumpy daughter and lethargic woman into a vivacious wife and center of the social circle—all produced from being “fold[ed]... in [Frank's] arms” (258). While Eveline is viewing the idea of wedded bliss through rose colored glasses as she leaves her father's house in a flurry of escapism, the reality of her choices, and the finality of her actions, becomes all too apparent all too quickly (O'Brien 217).

In the final scene of the story, Eveline finds herself on the North Wall in unfamiliar territory of the crowded dock. Here, even though Eveline has at least physically left her father's presence, she acts more and more like a scared and unsure child as she approaches the vessel that will ultimately take her away from home and into marriage. Even in her movements, Eveline reverts to childish behavior and is passive as Frank “held her hand” like a father would direct a child in order to keep her from being parted from him (Jackson and McGinley 32, Joyce 258). Relating back to the idea of the home as a womb, Eveline becomes aware of the fact that in leaving her father's home, she is leaving the guarantee of security and any tangible connection she has to her mother, which as Hazal Kislak notes, makes her aware of the risk she is taking in boarding the boat with Frank (6597). Indeed, Kislak found through her own research that Eveline's “desire for embryonic security and connection to the body of the mother forces her back...into lifelong servitude to an unsollicitous male parent”, and causes her to “repeat the sadomasochistic patterns of her mother's life” (qtd 6597). As she stands at the railing, Eveline is facing the increasingly real prospect of “leaving the watery bliss of the womb,” and mimics the uncertainty of a fetus who is forced out of the womb, a place of comfort, into a place of discord and anxiety (Kislak 6595, Joyce 259). The water, then, in this comparison, that Eveline looks out

upon with trepidation, would represent the breaking of the amniotic fluid that has metaphorically kept Eveline safe within the walls of the womb, and symbolizes the loss of that safety. Eveline then, caught between her womb-like home and the world that she does not know, becomes not only increasingly childlike and debilitated by the reality of her choice, but much like her mother, becomes incoherent, as she begins praying feverishly and silently, but repeating the same phrase over and over again—just like her mother did with the phrase “Derevaun Seraun” (Joyce 258). Jackson and McGinley note that like Eveline, her mother muttered words of seeming nonsense when she too had an “impending passage,” although hers was to the “next world” (32). Eveline’s journey to what she thinks is Buenos Ayres is not just a trip from point A to point B, but is a transition into another life—similar to how Mrs. Hill transitioned from life into death with the muttering of “Derevaun Seraun” on her lips (Joyce 258). The memories and similarities of her mother that float into Eveline’s subconscious and then become manifest in her actions are key to the feelings of uncertainty and guilt that Eveline is plagued with prior to departure. Jackson and McGinley find the semblance of a guilty conscience in the colors and things that Eveline chooses to focus on during her time of anxious reflection— items including a “black mass of the boat” that symbolizes “Eveline’s fear of the unknown and of singing against the responsibilities of the church and family” (Joyce 258, Jackson and McGinley 32). It is that culpability to her family, her father and his charges, which forces Eveline into a position of severe uncertainty.

The last several lines of the story are rife with opacity, but Eveline’s feeling of responsibility to her family, and her desire for independence creates an unresolvable tension and places the reader in a state of cognitive dissonance. The “hand” in the phrase “she felt him seize her hand” seems to have a fair amount of multiplicity, for while it is Frank that may be physically reaching for her hand to pull her along, Eveline may sense that capturing of her hand

as a symbol of her father's almost omnipresent hold on both her life and her heart, as she realizes that she can never truly escape him either physically or mentally. However, the use of a hand may also be symbolic of God being present in the "bell that clanged upon her heart" and guiding her to either action or inaction (Balzano 94, Joyce 259).

At the end of the story, Eveline is still holding on to the railing at the North Wall, paralyzed by anxiety and fear of both leaving her home and breaking a promise to her mother. While this story may not be biographical in nature, Poppie Joyce, who seems to be Eveline's counterpart in reality, *was* able to choose her own individual happiness instead of dedicating her life to a promise that may have already been broken. Poppie Joyce left her family after her mother's death to become a nun, and unlike Eveline, who is left clinging to the railing, Poppie's life had a definitive direction because of the choice she made.

Chapter 2: A Blushing Bride, a Widow in her Weeds, or Just a Shrew? Exploring the Binary of Matrimonial Bliss and Spinsterhood in “The Dead”

Matrimony is a curious ritual of the human being. With the addition, or absence, of a golden wedding band, a human, especially a female, gains or loses a certain status within particular societies. The idea of classifying a person according to marital status, and knowing to which class a person belongs, has been the norm for centuries. From quickly glancing at the left hand of a female to find evidence of a diamond or a golden band, to wondering why an old maid never grasped the bridal bouquet, a woman's marital status has the ability to make someone curious, hopeful, and even uncomfortable. In James Joyce's short story "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy is confronted by both sides of the matrimonial binary by interacting with both single and married women, but it is the idea of the lesser side of the binary, the unmarried side, that makes him most uncomfortable. From his interactions with his spinster relations to his awkward encounters with Lily, Miss Ivors, and even his own wife, Gretta, Gabriel becomes unnerved not only by the idea of a woman without a wedding ring, but also the fact that he may have to re-evaluate the marital binary and his own place in it.

In "The Dead," the binary between male and female weighs heavily into the binary of married and shrewish women. From the very beginning of the short story, Gabriel Conroy is cast, at least in the dimming eyes of his aunts, as the hero who dictates the social survival or destruction of the Morkan Sisters, and by association, of cousin Mary Jane. Gabriel, as Eugene O'Brien states in his essay, "'You Can Never Know Women': Framing Female Identity in *Dubliners*", "can be seen as a substitute father figure: he sits at the head of the table, carves the goose, and makes the speech. As such, he is the locus of patriarchal power without which the

Christmas party cannot proceed (215).²³ The sisters, who are former music teachers, have little power in their own economic future because of the bareness of their now bony and wrinkled left hands, and must rely on the meager income of Mary Jane, a piano teacher, and more consistently, the economic charity of Gabriel, who is their closest male relative.²⁴ The aunts fawn over Gabriel's arrival at the party because he is the center around which every aspect of the Feast of Epiphany party revolves. Gabriel is, as Margot Norris states in her essay "Not the Girl She Was at All," presented as "the center of security and reliability, [a] paterfamilias to a family of women" (193). The aspect that makes Gabriel so sought after by the frantic aunts, at least at the beginning of the story, is the fact that Gabriel is able to physically restrain the drunken Freddy Malins, thereby keeping him from ruining the party, which is the aunts' social nightmare. In addition to making sure that the party goes off without a hitch, Gabriel supports the Morkan family by most likely serving as the economic funder for the aunts' extravagant, taste bud driven, expenditures. In short, Gabriel seems to be the reluctant protector of the aunts by embodying, in a purely platonic sense, not only the role of the nephew, but every male role in the aunts' lives—particularly that of a protective paterfamilias that fends off, or at least subdues, unwelcomed guests and supplies endless coinage for female frivolity. Therefore, as the story centers on

²³ As Margot Norris notes, not only do the women in "The Dead" not have control over most of the events in their lives, they also have very little control over the accuracy of the storyline, as the plot is told from Gabriel's decidedly male point of view ("Not the Girl She Was At All" 193).

²⁴ In the scene where Aunt Julia sings "Arrayed for the Bridal," Gabriel becomes uncomfortable because his Aunt Julia, a spinster, is making reference to marriage, but, in reality, is more arrayed for death than any other stage of life (Friedman 39). Furthermore, Julia's performance of "Arrayed for the Bridal," and the ensuing emotion that it produces in Gabriel can be compared to Joe's reaction to Maria's performance of "I Dreamt I Dwelt" in the short story "Clay" (Friedman 39). However, while Gabriel's reaction to Julia's song seems to be more aligned with annoyance or obligated responsibility, Joe seems to illustrate regret or guilt in reaction to Maria's musical misstep of singing the same verse twice.

Gabriel's perspective, how Gabriel interprets the binary between married and unmarried women is important, given the fact that he is tethered to at least three unmarried women, the two aunts and Mary Jane, and one married woman—his own wife. Gabriel's journey into the binary of married and unmarried stems first from his need to support his aunts, who, in turn, introduce other spinsters, like Mary Jane and Lily, either by family relationship or working relationship, to the treasury of Gabriel Conroy.²⁵

The two tottering and fretful aunts, and their incessant requests, are the driving forces behind many of Gabriel's actions in the plotline of "The Dead," but they are not the only spinsters in the story that can claim relation to Gabriel. While the aunts may be the most dominating and demanding forces on the unmarried side of the binary, Gabriel's middle-aged cousin, Mary Jane, a figure that stands in the shrewish shadows of the aunts, cannot be ignored as she showcases her dimming youth and the inevitability of her spinsterhood.²⁶ Julia and Kate Morkan are "quite grey [and]... modest" and undeniably past common marrying age (Joyce

²⁵ According to Strassmann and Clarke's article, "Ecological Constraints on Marriage in Rural Ireland," it was not uncommon for unmarried siblings in the early 20th century to share their lives with each other instead of a spouse. Sibling cohabitation usually occurred in the instances of wealthier families, as possible spouses would have to have a significant enough dowry or financial stability of some kind in order for a father to allow the offspring to marry at all (40).

²⁶ The defining of Mary Jane as "middle-aged" comes from the fact that Mary Jane had lived with the aunts ever since they had left Stoney Batter thirty years ago (Joyce 22). As Mary Jane is described as being a "little girl" when the pair of sisters left northeast central Dublin, one can infer that Mary Jane could be no more than thirty-five or forty (Joyce 22). According to Tomás O'Riordan, the average marrying age for women in Ireland in 1914, seven years after "The Dead" was published, was twenty-one. This means that, at least thirty years old, Mary Jane, who cannot assert economic independence from Gabriel while she is conjoined with her aunts, is still able to marry according to age and reproductive health, but her chances for matrimony decrease with each passing birthday.

22).²⁷ Mary Jane, though significantly younger than her aunts, has also been labeled a spinster by association.²⁸ While Mary Jane has more of an active presence in society than her aunts, given that she provides piano lessons to young women in the community and has garnered some social admiration and economic credit of her own, she is continually placed into the bounds of spinsterhood because of association with her aunts, even though she also helps to support them economically. Mary Jane, despite her maturity, has spent so much time as part of the spinster trio that she has not developed an identity away from her aunts (Norris “Not the Girl She Was At All” 201). Mary Jane has been with the aunts most of her life, having acted first as a surrogate child for two unmarried sisters and then, as she grew older, the female caretaker of her feeble relatives.²⁹ While Mary Jane and Gabriel both have some similarities in their responsibilities to the aunts, Gabriel is able to escape from the aunts by creating his own family in crossing the marriage divide—going from single to married, bringing with him compassionate, unthreatening, Gretta, who acts as a buffer between Gabriel and the aunts. Mary Jane, however, seems to be forever tethered to her aunts, as she is described as being “the main prop of the house” (Joyce 22). The previous reference to Mary Jane as the main attraction of the Morkan home is due more to her piano skills than her personality. A deeper analysis of the phrase casts the youngest

²⁷ While this work is not biographical of Joyce, it is widely known that Joyce based the characters of Julia and Kate Morkan on his own great-aunts, who in reality, according to Florence Walzl “were both married and had families” (“Women in Irish Society” 44). Therefore, for the purposes of “The Dead,” both the Morkan sisters deviate from reality and are spinsters.

²⁸ According to John Wyse Jackson and Bernard McGinley’s reading of the character of Mary Jane, it is likely that Joyce drew inspiration for Miss Morkan from his own sister Poppie, who has also been compared heavily to Eveline Hill (34).

²⁹ Strassman and Clarke note that during the 20th century in Ireland, when marital prospects were dicey, many females would choose to become “helpers” to an already established family instead of establishing one themselves (37, 42). Therefore, Mary Jane may have made a conscious choice to stay single and care for her aunts instead of getting married. Of course, this hypothesis is debatable, and that fact will be considered throughout the essay.

spinster of the house as the one who is literally, both economically and physically, “propping up” her aunts, and their assets until a more capable rescuer, often Gabriel, arrives (Schwarz 107, Norris “Not the Girl She Was At All” 202). While Mary Jane’s income is not substantial, nor is she physically strong enough to restrain Freddy Malins from a drunken stupor, she has enough money to keep up the basic needs of the household, due to the fact that many of her students come from more distinguished economic backgrounds (Joyce 22, Norris “Not the Girl She Was At All” 202). Furthermore, though this characteristic is never illustrated directly in the text, it is implied that due to her age, Mary Jane is healthy enough to give her aunts, who are described as “too feeble to go about much,” an arm to lean on if they tire out (Joyce 22).³⁰ In this scenario, Mary Jane seems to be Gabriel’s counterpart in caring for the aunts, but just because Mary Jane may serve a purpose to the aunts does not mean that Gabriel sees her as a competent, but unmarried, equal (Norris “Not the Girl She Was At All” 202). Given that Mary Jane’s marital prospects are diminishing as she grows older, it is likely that she too, will eventually become an economic liability.

Mary Jane, who has lived with the aunts since her father’s death three decades ago, is not viewed as a candidate for marriage because of the aura of spinsterhood that surrounds her.³¹ Even though Mary Jane is younger than the two other Morkan women, her physical proximity and devotion to the aunts, who figuratively reek of impending death, effectively secures Mary Jane a place in the spinsterish side of the binary. It is as if, due to her extremely close relationship with

³⁰ Much like Mary Jane, who contributes to the economic and bodily comforts of the Morkan sisters, Eveline, too, must supplement the income of her father with her own wages. Furthermore, like Eveline, who dresses her siblings and makes sure that they have a good foundation for living, Mary Jane acts as a caretaker figure for her aunts.

³¹ It is interesting to note that upon the death of Pat Conroy, Mary Jane’s father, the aunts had to not only physically relocate, but also find another economic benefactor—as the women had been financially supported by their brother.

Julia and Kate Morkan, society has signaled to the eligible men of the city that Mary Jane is not a sexual being that could be considered for marital status; instead, she is something of an asexual spinster, a product that has been molded and created by the smothering influence of the well-meaning, but economically demanding, aunts (Norris “Not the Girl She Was At All” 201-202). Indeed, Mary Jane is described as not only being one of the “three mistresses” of the home, but is grouped together with her aunts by Lily, who notes that all three of the Morkan women are “fussy” (Joyce 22). The use of the adjective *fussy* is interesting when applied to both the aunts and Mary Jane. Usually reserved for very young children or the elderly, the application of this term is understandable when used in reference to the aunts, but also pinning it to Mary Jane shows that she is viewed by others as an extension of her aunts, and therefore, a spinster in the making.³² However, although Mary Jane may be labeled a spinster in the eyes of most of the party guests, and most especially Gabriel, Mary Jane displays behavior that indicates that she is caught between accepting her role as hopeless spinster and marriage, the latter of which makes Gabriel fidgety and uncomfortable.

Mary Jane is the last of the Morkan women who can escape the prison of spinsterhood, and although the idea is not directly stated, the success of the recital has more than the Morkan’s economic stability riding on it. Mary Jane’s recital is not only a showcase of talent and skill to further her business, but also a display of eligibility to possible suitors, and this is something that

³² One might argue that the drive that both the aunts and Mary Jane have to ensure the economic and social success of their party is comparable to Mrs. Kearney’s overbearing concern of the economic impact of her daughter’s singing career. However, if the sisters and Mrs. Kearney are compared, it is worth noting that the “fussy” attitude applied to Julia, Kate, and Mary Jane Morkan, who are all likely to remain unmarried, can also cross the dividing line and be given to married women, like Mrs. Kearney, the matronly character in Joyce’s “The Mother.” Interestingly enough, the socially unattractive traits of these women, married or not, stem from a perpetual insistence on, or need for, money.

unsettles Gabriel, as everyone else has already ripped the bridal veil out of Mary Jane's hands and labeled her a spinster. However, Mary Jane does not entirely accept her station as a woman incapable of marriage, and as Margot Norris states, Mary Jane "attempts to modernize herself [in hopes of escaping spinsterhood]" ("Not the Girl She Was At All" 202). The playing of Mary Jane's recital piece, one that is full of attention-grabbing "runs and difficult passages," serves as her arena to display her mental and technical attributes to a potential husband (Joyce 29). This act, however, seems, at least from Gabriel's point of view, somehow inappropriate for a woman of Mary Jane's unspoken spinster status. As illustrated by the fact that "[he] could not listen as Mary Jane played," Gabriel appears to be embarrassed by Mary Jane's efforts and seeks to hide his shame and uneasiness at Mary Jane's ambition by lowering his face and staring, not at the spectacle of Mary Jane, but at the floor, which he suddenly cannot stand (Joyce 29). Gabriel, at this point, has transferred his impatience and frustration to the floor which "glittered with beeswax [and] irritated his eyes" (Joyce 29). Perhaps, though, it is not the beeswax that has had an unpleasant effect on Gabriel's ocular nerve, but rather what Gabriel glimpsed of Mary Jane's semi-flirtatious behavior before he turned away.

Alan Friedman explains Gabriel's anxiety by contrasting what *should* be happening at the party with what is *actually* happening at the Feast of Epiphany, saying, "Joyce problematizes performances frequently depicting them as awkward, embarrassing, or inappropriate party pieces rather than festive or reassuring. They become moments that epitomize... familial... fissures" (25). Indeed, Gabriel is not bothered by the music, but what it represents: the fact that Mary Jane is trying not only to ensnare the attention of the whole room, but a musically inclined suitor. Indeed, as Friedman again notes, the piece that Mary Jane displays at a "festive [event] [is] inappropriate to its occasion" (39). Although Mary Jane's playing produces the desired reaction

of drawing male responsiveness as “four young men...[had come] to stand in the doorway at the sound of the piano,” that same music produces a “strikingly *inappropriate* response,” as, after hearing the complicated music and glimpsing its provider, the men slink away and withdraw their attention from Mary Jane (Joyce 29, Friedman39). Therefore, even if she sees her piano playing as a potential bridge from singlehood to matrimony, the men in the story have tuned out Mary Jane’s marital melody.³³

The first woman that Gabriel comes into contact with during the evening is Lily, the young girl who, despite her marrying age, is still referenced as “the caretaker’s daughter,” emphasizing her connection to, and implied dependence on, her father (Joyce 21).³⁴ From the interaction between Gabriel and Lily, it is clear that while their social class is not equal, Gabriel has a friendly, although somewhat “patronizing” acquaintance with Lily (Anspaugh 5).³⁵

However, Gabriel’s ease with the young housemaid stems from that fact that, in Gabriel’s mind,

³³ Even though Mary Jane will likely never have children, given the unlikelihood of her marriage, Mary Jane does achieve some semblance of motherhood by “wait[ing] on her pupils and [seeing] that they got the best slices [of food]” (Joyce 39). While Margot Norris contends that Mary Jane is more of a failed modern woman who caters to the needs of a patriarchy by taking care of her students, her actions still show that Mary Jane has something of a nurturing instinct (202).

³⁴ By deconstructing the morphology of the phrase “the caretaker’s daughter,” it seems that the description of Lily as the daughter of the caretaker has more to do with the pervading presence of death throughout the story than with her marital status, given that a caretaker is one who tends a cemetery and a lily is a flower often symbolizing a renewed purity through death (Benstock 48). However, the statement that Lily is a “daughter” and not simply a woman or girl shows that male ownership plays a role in the marital binary.

³⁵ Kelly Anspaugh argues that, as a 20th century version of a Gothic monster, Gabriel is “patronizing” toward Lily because he has rather flirtatious designs on her, but his intentions are skirted by Lily’s verbally violent retort (5). I argue that while Gabriel may be attentive and “patronizing” to Lily, it is not because he is interested in her sexually, but rather because he views her as a final token of innocence. Anspaugh also contends that the phrase “growing girl” does not relate to Lily’s transition from girlhood to womanhood, as I do, but rather notes that this phrase may allude to the fact that Lily is pregnant (5-6).

Lily is not a grown woman, but rather a “growing girl... [that] used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll [when she was a child]” (Joyce 23). Joyce describes Lily as a “growing girl,” and in that labeling, there is acknowledgement that Lily is on the path toward marriage, but for Gabriel, Lily’s presence is more of a welcome remnant of the past than a harbinger of the future (Joyce 23). Gabriel is comfortable with Lily because he still views her as a little girl who carries dolls and pretends to take on wifely and maternal characteristics by taking care of her cloth dolls, instead of a woman who might indeed soon wear a bridal veil of her own. Functioning in the marital binary as more of a child than a woman, Lily does not make Gabriel uncomfortable, but rather provides a sense of security for Gabriel by remaining outside of the marriage binary, and therefore, allowing Gabriel to abstain from having to classify her as either a bride or a spinster.

Gabriel is obviously more comfortable viewing Lily as a child, but even he cannot deny that Lily will soon approach the marital binary. Therefore, in an effort to make conversation, Gabriel offers that soon, Lily will marry, and, in turn, join the upper side of the binary where her status, and economic stability, will be secure. However, Lily abandons any shred of rosy innocence of childhood and destroys Gabriel’s view of her as a child by saying, “with great bitterness,” “the men that is now all palaver and what they can get out of you” (Joyce 23). Lily’s retort, as Michael Levenson suggests, shows that she has quite literally “fall[en] from innocence,” and in that moment, changes, at least for Gabriel, from a child to a woman (171). Gabriel’s reaction to Lily’s remark indicates a change in the way that he views her, as he “colored [and] felt as if he had made a mistake” (Joyce 23). Confused by Lily’s sudden transformation in his eyes from child to embittered woman, Gabriel seeks to restore a sense of platonic tranquility to his relationship with Lily by placating her as he would his old maid

aunts.³⁶ Indeed, Gabriel is made uncomfortable by Lily's rebuff of his small talk and tries to rectify his presumptuous marital gaff by "rapidly [taking] a coin from his pocket" and flinging it into Lily's unsuspecting hands (Joyce 24). While Gabriel tosses a coin to Lily as a gift, that same coin is seen as a bribe or as an apology for his misunderstanding. By providing Lily with the coin that is disguised as a guilt-ridden Christmas present, Gabriel is essentially buying himself some peace of mind about where the marital boundaries lie—and where Lily fits within the binary itself.³⁷ Stunned by the vicious reaction of young Lily to well-meaning small-talk, Gabriel retreats from the mental dilemma of Lily by removing himself from her presence and seeking out a woman who has achieved unwavering marital status and is the embodiment of obedience and familiarity—his own wife, Gretta.

Gretta is mature and conceding to Gabriel's material wishes. While Lily tries to refuse Gabriel's economic apology when he gives her a coin, seemingly as penance for his matrimonial misstep, Gretta contrasts the younger woman by allowing Gabriel to dictate her lifestyle, saying in reference to galoshes, "you'll never guess what he [Gabriel] makes me wear now" (Joyce 25). Even though there may be some resentment implied in Gretta's use of the word "makes," Gretta uses this statement jokingly, possibly to heighten the humor of the story for the benefit of the aunts and to make Gabriel more comfortable, which would soothe Gabriel's already bruised male

³⁶ There is no explanation for Lily's retort, but given the context clues from other stories in this collection, it is possible that Lily, like the nameless servant girl in "Two Gallants," has been duped by a young man. In Irish society, servant girls, like Lily and the character in "Two Gallants," could lose their jobs, and their livelihood, if they were found to be sexually indiscreet or there was even a hint of scandal surrounding them. Therefore, many servant girls, like the one in "Two Gallants," pay the young men money in exchange for their silence on the girls' activities (Balzano 83-84).

³⁷ Gabriel's initial reaction to unmarried women seems to be to offer them money, which is a direct antithesis to the protagonists in Joyce's "Two Gallants" who are more interested in swindling money from women than providing it.

ego. Indeed, Eugene O'Brien goes so far as to label Gretta a "possession in need of [Gabriel's] advice on minute details," but later counters that waif personality with the idea that Gretta finds Gabriel "amusing," and not demanding, as might have been suggested by Gabriel's requirement of galoshes (221). In this scenario, Gretta is a warm, personable, witty woman, but seems to always remember that her role is not to entertain, but to support her husband. Gretta acts as a buffer between her husband and the world by bandaging Gabriel's wounded ego with her grace and lightness while also smoothing over the social gaffes that Gabriel makes by "counterbalanc[ing] his slight pomposity with her gentle humour" (O'Brien 221). Unlike Lily or Miss Ivors, Gretta does not intimidate Gabriel or cause him to feel public embarrassment like the aunts and Mary Jane. In contrast, Gretta elevates Gabriel in social situations by providing the lightness and the grace that Gabriel does not have, but still allowing Gabriel to "be the center of attention, the object of gazes of others" (Schwarz 111). While Gretta is termed the "perfect wife for Gabriel" by Eugene O'Brien, Gretta is not as one-dimensional as she may appear (221). Functioning within the largely patriarchal society, Gretta does have the benefit of being married and not being perceived as a shrew, but being married and being Mrs. Gretta Conroy still restricts Gretta to playing a chameleon in her relationship with Gabriel in order fit into the mold of a gracious wife.

Gretta knows her place within the marriage binary, so she placates Gabriel—for she also knows that her status as "Mrs. Conroy" was opposed by one who had held the title before her, Gabriel's mother. (Schwarz 106, 111). Indeed, Gabriel's mother, as Linda Rohrer Paige notes, "had reproached [Gabriel] for his marriage... perhaps [feeling] threatened [by Gretta replacing her]" (330). Gretta also realizes that the effect of Mrs. Conroy, though long dead, is still palpable within Gabriel's life and their relationship, as Gabriel continually allows "his ambivalent feelings

toward his mother to haunt him,” which transcends into his relationship with Gretta (Paige 330). In terms of the characters in the text, Gretta appears to be the most secure in her identity, and her relationship, according to Eugene O’Brien, is one of the “most healthy in the collection [of the stories]” (221). While Julia, Kate, and Mary Jane are passed from one male benefactor to the other, both marriage and children have increased Gretta’s social standing and economic security. However, given the flashback that Gabriel has of his mother’s opinion of Gretta, and Gabriel’s “umbilical cord” connection to the memory of his mother, Gretta’s place within the marital binary is balanced precariously between supporting Gabriel emotionally and serving as a non-threatening figure to Gabriel’s role in the patriarchy and to the cherished memory of the former Mrs. Conroy (Froula 42).³⁸ While Gabriel had, as Daniel Schwarz asserts, “loved [Gretta] passionately enough to overcome his mother’s objection,” his choice in matrimony, Gretta, must now not only act as a lover, but also as a sharer of Gabriel’s familial and social responsibilities (111). As Gabriel is acting as the center of the Morkan and Conroy families, Gabriel “worries about his mother’s dismissal of Gretta” now that the passion that he felt as a young man has cooled and mature restraint and accountability have set in (Schwarz 111).

On the Feast of the Epiphany, Gabriel is overwhelmed and confused by the reality of spinsterhood that he is suddenly confronted with in a short span of time. From Lily’s barb in the hallway to Aunt Julia’s solo performance, Gabriel is made uncomfortable by emotions and behaviors of his charges and those of their household. Therefore, facing the deaths of the aunts and the social changes taking place in the country, it is only natural that Gabriel begins to

³⁸ According to Christine Froula, Gabriel’s life, as it is, in terms of education and social standing, is thanks largely to his mother’s planning and insistence, which obligates a now successful Gabriel to cherish her memory (42). By defining Gabriel’s relationship with his mother, even though she is now deceased, as an “umbilical” one, Mrs. Conroy’s worries of Gretta’s abilities as a wife and future matriarch still feed into Gabriel’s thought process (Froula 42).

question whether or not he has chosen the right partner to assist him with these disconcerting familial and societal changes. Given that “a shadow passed over Gabriel’s face when he thought of her sullen opposition to his marriage,” it is possible that Gabriel bristles at his mother’s comments not only because they anger him, but also because he fears that she was right to oppose a marriage driven by instinct rather than duty (Joyce 30). Therefore, Gabriel views Gretta’s place in his marriage with apprehension, even though she has risen to be a much gentler and compassionate matriarch than her predecessor. Gabriel’s worries about Gretta’s capabilities stem from the fact that he views her, again, as an object that he has *chosen* to possess rather than a woman who is a subject in her marriage. Due to the fact that Gabriel views Gretta as more of an investment and an object that he can use to his benefit, as is seen when Gretta continually covers for Gabriel’s social missteps, he is apprehensive about his choice in marital partners (O’Brien 221).³⁹ During the party, when Gabriel interacts with Gretta, he views her as an accessory, something that he can use to enhance his ego, his social standing, and to nurse his pride. At this point, Gabriel believes himself to be Gretta’s savior from the depths of spinsterhood because he doesn’t see her as a person that has had a life away from him and his role in the patriarchy.

While Gabriel may seem arrogant in the way he views Gretta, each woman that he has come into contact with, with the exception of Molly Ivors, depends, in some capacity, upon him to survive. To his spinster aunts and cousin, he is quite literally their savior, the one whom they depend on for everything. Gabriel sees Gretta, too, as *something* he has to possess and take care of (O’Brien 221). As Michael Levenson puts it, the female life within the patriarchy becomes visible...as something that is *staged* by fate, rather than articulated by the story” (193). Gabriel’s

³⁹ The way in which Gabriel worries about whether or not he should have ignored his mother’s warning about Gretta is reminiscent of the way Little Chandler comes to resent Annie’s eyes at the end of “A Little Cloud.”

comprehension of female survival is simply that a woman seeks, and is then supported by, a husband and the offspring she produces; Gabriel is not able to fully realize the depth of individuality that each woman, Gretta included, conceals from society. Indeed, unbeknownst to Gabriel at this point in the text, Gretta is a woman who has repressed her past experiences and transformed herself into the paragon of assurance and gentleness in order to build up Gabriel's own sense of worth (Schwarz 106, 111). The marriage binary, then, at this point, if one compares Gretta and Lily, seems very clear-cut. While Lily, the younger and more ill-tempered of the two, shifts from benevolent to shrill in a matter of seconds, Gretta seems to maintain a more grounded and even personality that allows Gabriel to feel more at ease and in control.⁴⁰ However, Lily, and even Miss Ivors, represent the shrew that Gabriel feels Gretta might have become if she had not married him, and the "shadow" that passes over Gabriel's face may illustrate that he is at least semi-aware of how close he came to losing Gretta to the abyss of spinsterhood (Joyce 30).⁴¹ Even though Lily and Gretta are in different categories of the marriage binary and seem to have different reactions to the idea of marriage, Gabriel, through his scarring encounters with both Lily and Miss Ivors, is aware that the line that separates the married and unmarried women in the matrimonial binary is a fine one indeed.

That line of the binary seems impenetrable to spinsters like Aunt Julia and Aunt Kate, but to younger women who are not as accepting, or that respectful of the term "spinster," the barrier

⁴⁰ Gabriel's encounter with Miss Ivors is similar to the way that Lily turns on Gabriel for an action or comment that would have seemed insignificant to a married woman.

⁴¹ At this point in the text, Gabriel is not aware of Gretta's previous romantic relationship with Michael Furey and I think that Gabriel does not even realize that Gretta could have had a romantic past—he truly believes the patriarchal idea that woman exists solely to be man's "other" (O'Brien 213). Gabriel's limited vision of Gretta also relates back to the idea that, in 20th century Ireland, women were expected to be sexually pure while men did not have to carry the burden of proof of any sexual immorality; Gabriel, then, may have extended the idea of sexual purity to romantic purity as well.

between married and unmarried women seems paper-thin. Molly Ivors is placed within the binary by the patriarchal society that she lives in, but unlike the other female characters who *seem* to accept the role of a demure and submissive female, Miss Ivors actively refuses to stay within the confines of acceptable behavior for a single woman; in fact, she tries to demolish the line between married and unmarried altogether. Indeed, as Eugene O'Brien notes, Miss Ivors "reflects her own independent sense of self-hood, which at the same time, undermines Gabriel's sense of his own subjectivity" (221). In short, Miss Ivors serves as the most critical threat to the patriarchy, but Gabriel, envisioning himself as heroic and gentlemanly, as well as intellectual and witty, does not know how to respond to Miss Ivors's statement of "Well, I'm ashamed of you" (Joyce 31). Molly Ivors's singlehood and strong personality put Gabriel in a state of cognitive dissonance, as he "did not know how to meet her charge" (Joyce 31). Miss Ivors unnerves Gabriel, not only because he is perplexed by her reaction to his writing, but also because Molly is a single woman, a woman who is likely destined for spinsterhood, but at the same time, she is also an educated, self-assured woman who is Gabriel's intellectual equal (O'Brien 220). Even though Miss Ivors tries to calm a flustered Gabriel by stating that she was "joking" when she reprimanded him, the line separating married and unmarried women has already shifted and been severely re-drawn (Joyce 30). As Eugene O'Brien highlights, no other female character in the *Dubliners* collection would "earnestly critique" a member of the patriarchy and the male center of the host family (220). Indeed, with Miss Ivors purposefully stepping outside the bounds of acceptable social behavior and "deconstruct[ing] the power relationship," Gabriel is unsure how to react (O'Brien 220). The transcendence of Miss Ivors to a place of intimidation moves Gabriel to a place of semi-submission as he is "avoid[ing] her eyes" and having a "blush invade his forehead" (Joyce 32). The social roles of Miss Ivors and Gabriel have, for a moment, been

reversed; Miss Ivors holds power over Gabriel and Gabriel, to his surprise, cannot restore the balance. For all his male standing as the paterfamilias and the economic supporter of two different families, Gabriel's witty retorts and defenses are rendered ineffective by the shrewish voice of Molly Ivors. As Miss Ivors has created an imbalance of power and decomposed Gabriel to the point of silence and embarrassment, it is up to Gretta to elevate Gabriel back up to a position of authority and become Gabriel's defender against the threat of Miss Ivors (O'Brien 220-221).⁴² Throughout the story, Gretta Conroy, from Gabriel's perspective, acts as the anchor of marriage by embodying the traits of a dutiful wife and restoring Gabriel's ego after the encounter with Miss Ivors. From serving pudding at the Feast of Epiphany to bearing the children that Gabriel can mold into versions of himself, Gretta does everything that a spinster, like the educated, but still unmarried Molly Ivors, cannot do.⁴³

Mrs. Conroy, in comparison to Molly Ivors, may not have the esteemed intellectual background that Miss Ivors does, but Gretta is valued more highly because she is a wife and is able to reorient Gabriel to his position of power within the patriarchy, which increases Gabriel's

⁴² Many analyses of "The Dead" draw attention to the fact that both of the men who have a romantic connection to Gretta are named after archangels—one of whom is a deliverer of news and the other of whom is the protector. However, Florence Walzl makes the assertion that instead of an archangel, Michael serves more as a Christ figure who gives himself up for Gretta's happiness ("Gabriel and Michael" 438-439). While Walzl's point is valid, I suggest here that Gretta, not Michael, serves as both the protector of Gabriel and society, as she has been affiliated with the namesake of the avenging angel. (438-439). Furthermore, Gretta, and not Michael, contrary to Walzl's essay, acts as a Christ figure to both her husband and society by giving up her identity and happiness in order to truly become a member of the marital binary and carry Gabriel's familial burdens—both literally and figuratively.

⁴³ As Bernard Benstock points out in his essay, "James Joyce's 'The Dead,'" the names of the Conroy children, Tom and Eva, while stated almost in passing, mirror the names of physically or emotionally abused characters in *Dubliners* (58). Even though there is no correlation between the paternal violence committed upon Tom from "Counterparts," Eveline from the short story by the same name and Gabriel Conroy's actions toward his own children, the similarities in names do raise questions in the mind of a close reader. Furthermore, as Daniel Schwarz notes, "Gabriel loves [his wife and children] by controlling [them]" (106).

gratitude for his wife.⁴⁴ The structure of the patriarchy, in Gabriel's case, has started to crumble because Miss Ivors has made him unsure of himself, and Gabriel begins to doubt Molly Ivors's "womanhood", as he struggles to match her behavior with that of a mature woman, but Gretta realigns that structure by terming Miss Ivors as nothing more than a "comical girl" (O'Brien 220, Joyce 37). Even though Miss Ivors's words cause Gabriel to question himself, Gretta is able to restore Gabriel's ego by reminding him of Molly Ivors's status as an educated, but still unmarried girl. While Miss Ivors may have started to influence Gabriel, Gretta Conroy firmly reestablishes the dominance of the wife, and by extension the patriarchy, by pushing Molly Ivors down to the level of a "girl," and reinforcing the idea that Molly Ivors's behavior should be taken as a joke, even though Molly seems to be a highly capable intellectual. Through Gretta's description of her, Molly Ivors is not only pelted with something of an insult after she has left the Morkan house, but has been relocated back into the unmarried binary where she will stay, at least for the course of the story.

After having run away from all of the potential spinsters in the story, Gabriel, at the end of the party, is assured that not only have all the spinsters been properly dealt with, but that his marriage is secure. With the exception of Mrs. Malins, who remains in limbo between marriage and spinsterhood due to her widowed status, the categories of spinster and wife have been defined and the women of the party, at least in Gabriel's eyes, have been properly labeled. Toward the end of the party, Gabriel begins to see the value of his wife as an ally on whom he can lean and use to restore his vision of the patriarchy, and marital binary, if they ever escape his

⁴⁴ In Florence Walzl's essay "Gabriel and Michael: The Conclusion of 'The Dead,'" she notes that while Gretta's demure actions are associated with a male "utopia," Gretta comes from the West, which automatically places her at a social disadvantage (433). Even though Molly Ivors may sing the west's praises, it is doubtful that both she and Gretta, given the divide in their educational resumes, have come from similar backgrounds.

control again (Tate 407). As Gabriel begins to view his world as a continuing set of binaries that he can constantly control, the color scheme in which Gretta is presented as a renewed and mysterious being to Gabriel reflects his ease and confidence in the social order of things. Gretta's enigmatic figure, bathed in contrasting shadows, is illustrative of how Gabriel wants to view the world, and how he sees his own Irish society. Furthermore, Joyce describes Gabriel as being "surprised at her stillness," as if Gretta suddenly serves as a symbol of *something* that has gone placid and tranquil at Gabriel's request—there are no more spinsters trying to sneak into the married part of the binary, nor is there uncertainty surrounding what label each woman should wear (Joyce 48, Tate 407).

The awakening that Gabriel feels toward Gretta when he exits the home of the perpetual spinsters is, while strange, not entirely unexpected. The Conroys have spent the evening figuratively coaxing and wrangling both old and young unmarried women back into the proper side of the binary, and Gabriel, at least, needs to physically reassure himself of the security of his marriage. Furthermore, the fact that Gretta has emerged from the Feast of Epiphany as a more competent and attractive woman in Gabriel's eyes signifies that Gabriel may not only see intercourse as a way to cleanse himself of lingering doubts about his role as a husband and as a provider, but also as a symbol of a fresh start within the Conroy marriage. Indeed, as Foucault notes in his introduction to *History of Sexuality*, it is the heterosexual couple that is able to privatize sexuality, "sexuality was carefully confined and... moved into the home" and away from the prying eyes and needy personalities of familial dependents (3).⁴⁵ To support the idea that Gabriel views the hours after the gathering as a sort of rebirth of the passion in his

⁴⁵ As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the public view of sexuality transitions during the Victorian Era from a view of openness and acceptance to one of marital discretion and secrecy.

relationship with Gretta, he acts giddy, hopeful and “felt as if they had escaped from their lives and duties and... run away together... to a new adventure” (Joyce 51). The phrasing of Gabriel’s feelings toward Gretta suggests that Gabriel seeks to reinvent his marriage after he and Gretta have left the house of the Aunts and gone to their hotel. (Burke 413, Levenson 175). Michael Levenson reinforces the idea that Gabriel Conroy has renewed his commitment not only to the institution of marriage but to Gretta in his essay, “Living History in ‘The Dead’” saying, “[Gabriel] not only anticipates a passionate night, he anticipates a new personal history within which to locate the events of his marriage” (175). Here, Gabriel again envisions himself with the use of the *he* pronoun to be the center of attention, that his needs are automatically those of Gretta, and that his desires supersede any physical or emotional necessities on Gretta’s part (Schwarz 111). Even though Gretta is his wife, and has more societal standing than a spinster, Gabriel still views her as an object, or as Margot Norris describes, his “objet d’arte” (195). In marrying Gretta, Gabriel gave her the title of wife and has molded her into his vision of what a wife should be; in a sense, Gabriel believes that he “created” Gretta as a wife and continues to see himself as her savior, hero, and, metaphorically, the artist that created Mrs. Gretta Conroy (Norris “Not the Girl She Was At All” 197). During the evening, Gabriel’s “admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and hair,” as if taking stock of the woman that he has created in order to maintain a central place in the patriarchy (Joyce 25, O’Brien 220-221, Schwarz 111). However, when Gretta reveals her memories of Michael Furey to Gabriel, he realizes that Gretta never saw him as the center of attention, nor did she see herself as Gabriel’s creation; everything that Gabriel believed to be true about his role in Gretta’s life is uncertain.

In the final scene of *The Dead*, Gretta passes through all the stages of the matrimonial binary—from unmarried girl, to a passionate woman, to passive, if not detached, legal wife—all

because the lyrics of “The Lass of Aughrim” allow her to remember all the various romantic statuses that she has had.⁴⁶ Consequently, as Gretta reveals her romantic history prior to becoming Mrs. Gabriel Conroy, she destroys the illusion that Gabriel has of her as a virginal and innocent bride and of himself as being the center of Gretta’s world (Burke 414). The revelation of Michael Furey “place[s] Gabriel in a rival setting” and forces him to reevaluate how he views his marriage, his wife, and himself (Levenson 176). The idea that Gretta believes that Michael Furey, a socially insignificant boy from the gasworks, would lie forever in his grave for just a glimpse of Gretta, makes Gabriel realize with a sudden “vague terror” that in terms of ardor, his relationship with the woman that he has called his wife for a multitude of years pales in comparison to a simple adolescent romance she had with a boy (Joyce 57). Indeed, the “shock of confronting his wife’s secret love, and the recognition that she does not perceive him as he perceives himself, forces him to refine his self-image into a transcendent epiphany of his own fallibility and mortality” (Levenson 194). Gabriel’s vision of himself as gallant and heroic is dashed by the fact that Gretta was never truly his creation, that her experiences in love and life were first shaped by someone who was socially insignificant, but incomparable in terms of the gesture of romance. However, even though the possibility that Gretta might have loved another more fiercely than she loved Gabriel rattles him and disorients him in terms of how he views

⁴⁶ The lyrics of “The Lass of Aughrim” are in direct contrast to “I Dreamt I Dwelt,” the song that Maria sings in “Clay.” While the female character, and by extension, Gretta, has known what it is like to be physically and emotionally intimate with someone, as is reflected in the song’s text, Maria’s repetition of the first verse of “I Dreamt I Dwelt” shows that not only has she not had a romantic relationship, but the very suggestion of one is foreign to her. Therefore, the events in the songs produce a reactionary chain in both Gabriel and Joe, as Gabriel feels anger and jealousy toward his wife and her deceased lover for having a relationship, while Joe feels guilty for never seeing, or understanding, that a romantic life might have been outside of Maria’s reach.

both the patriarchy that he defends and the binary through which he views married and unmarried women.

The suggestion that Gretta may have done more with the fiery-eyed Michael Furey than innocently “implore him to return home” looms over Gabriel’s state of rapidly unraveling wedded bliss (Joyce 57). While the extent of Gretta’s relationship with Michael is not directly stated, Gabriel’s thought that “perhaps she had not told him the whole story,” could allude to a great many possibilities of what Gretta may or may not be leaving out of the story that she tells Gabriel, and what Gabriel may interpret his wife’s supposed omission to mean (Joyce 58). The implication of a relationship with Michael Furey, then, threatens to demolish not only the marital binary and the patriarchy that Gabriel has established, but Gretta’s status in it as well (Joyce 57). If Gretta had been physically intimate with Michael, her actions as a young woman would place her in direct contradiction with the terms of the marital binary, as according to Foucault, sexuality was only properly displayed within the confines of marriage (3). The hypothesis that Gretta might have been pregnant with Furey’s child, therefore destroying Gabriel’s image of her as his creation, is supported by two statements from the text. As is noted in the introduction, many unwed women who found themselves with child were quietly sent away in order to give birth without inciting a scandal (Luddy 110).⁴⁷ Mirroring the actions of the Magdalens, Gretta notes that “it came time for me to leave Galway and come up here to the convent” (Joyce 57). Another indicator that Gretta may have been pregnant with

⁴⁷ It was socially acceptable for “sexually unsound” women, barely even past girlhood, to be hidden from public view for a menagerie of reasons—the chief among them being pregnancy outside of wedlock (Finnegan 3). Some of these women were placed in the care of the church for brief periods of time, just long enough for the female to deliver the child, and were then retrieved by family, but other women spent lifetimes in service to the Asylum for a deed they could barely remember (Finnegan 4). The last Magdalen Asylum in Ireland was closed in the 1990’s, according to Frances Finnegan’s book *Do Penance or Perish*.

Michael Furey's child before she was a married woman is indicated by Gretta's own words when she responds to Gabriel's question of her having loved Michael with the statement, "I was great with him at the time" (Joyce 56).

While Gretta's comment, to the more naïve reader, might seem to reflect her unquenched passion for Michael as a person, and not the physical weight of a growing fetus, Kenneth Burke, author of the essay "Stages in 'The Dead'" tentatively asserts that Michael might have sacrificed his life, not only for Gretta, but so that "something [else]," like the child of Michael and Gretta's sexual, but not matrimonial union, "might live" (414). Furthermore, adding to the idea that Gretta could have been with child, Mary Lowe-Evans notes that the rainy and wet atmosphere in which Michael Furey catches his death is reminiscent of a "discharge of amniotic fluid which heralds [either] the termination of a pregnancy [or] an imminent birth" (61). Therefore, if Gretta had borne or even miscarried a child prior to her marriage to Gabriel, she had stepped beyond the bounds of acceptable behavior for a single woman and engaged in actions that were only deemed respectable for married women.⁴⁸ The addition of the possibility of a child in the relationship between Gretta and Michael not only highlights Gabriel's misconception of being the center of Gretta's life, but it also explains Gretta's inconsolable grief upon hearing "The Lass of Aughrim" for the first time in years.

Hearing of the song in the Morkan household creates a collision of past and present for Gretta Conroy. Indeed, the song resurrects Gretta's memories of him, as she "said in an outburst

⁴⁸ Even though some critics of the theory of Gretta's pregnancy may attest that no child of the union between Michael and Gretta is present within the text, it is possible, as was common from the 1880's to at least the 1930's, that an illegitimate child could have been abandoned by his or her mother at a workhouse. Another suggestion for the fate of the Furey child is that it was "informally adopted" by a family, although that practice was not recognized by the law until 1952 (Luddy 118).

of tears: ‘I am thinking of that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*.’ (Joyce 55) Upon hearing the song, Gretta is not only reminded of her lost love, Michael Furey, but she seems to feel the grief of his death anew, as is illustrated by the fact that she “broke loose from him [Gabriel] and ran to the bed and, throwing her arms across the bed-rail, hid her face” (Joyce 55). Given Gretta’s behavior, it is clear that not only has Gabriel misjudged Gretta’s identity in terms of the marriage binary, but also that Gretta is experiencing repressed emotions that will affect her future relationship with Gabriel. While it is understandable that Gretta would cry for the memory of Michael Furey, the possibility that Gretta conceived, and possibly lost, a child by Michael Furey adds to her emotional distress (Wawrzycka 70). Playing upon the idea of inhibited memories and emotions, Jolanta Wawrzycka suggests in her article “Apotheosis, Metaphor, and Death: John Houston’s *The Dead Again*,” “perhaps the child was miscarried or stillborn given the mother’s grief when she had learned about her lover’s death: why else would “The Lass of Aughrim” cause such a crisis in Gretta?” (70). Connecting the song to long-dormant memories adds to the list of epiphanies realized throughout the text, but Gretta’s theorized comprehension of her lost lover and child creates a new meaning behind the dead that Gabriel turns his thoughts to, instead of his wife, at the end of the text (Wawrzycka 70).⁴⁹ Gabriel is left, after Gretta’s revelation, unsure of where he fits in his own marriage, let alone a married/unmarried binary, holding broken pieces of a binary that is no longer feasible. In the end, Gabriel’s matrimonial identity and the binary that he worked so hard to organize crumbles around him, all because Gretta, the woman who he thought was the paragon of purity and grace, Gabriel’s perfect example of what a married woman should be, usurped the entire system.

⁴⁹ The lyrics of “The Lass of Aughrim” make reference to the fact that “my babe lies cold,” which as noted by Wawrzycka, is an allusion to the cold flesh of a dead child (70).

By the end of the short story “The Dead,” Gabriel Conroy is a man who is lost within the marriage binary due the depths of his own misconception of the women that he has interacted with. As John Paul Riquelme notes, Gabriel’s downfall in terms of classifying the binary is that “he habitually resists admitting that his desires and reality do not and cannot coincide” (230). Therefore, due to the venomous retort of Lily, the awkward display of showmanship by Mary Jane, an insult by Miss Ivors, and the obliviousness of the soon to be dead aunts, Gabriel has lost all sense of security in being able to define someone by a simple glance at her wedding ring. However, while Gabriel may be able to reconcile himself to the idea that the marital binary has to be flexible as society changes, his relationship with Gretta, due to her revelation that she has never truly belonged to just *him*, has a much bleaker outlook. The final scene of the story mirrors the marital binary that Gabriel had always pictured—the married people on one side and the unmarried people on the other—firmly, stoically isolated from one another. With Gretta lying on the bed, asleep, dreaming of the boy she had once loved, and likely still does love, she embodies the married side of the binary, but Gabriel, staring hopelessly out the window, with the knowledge that his wife was never truly his alone, takes on the identity of a bitter singleton waiting for some higher entity, maybe even death, to decide his fate. Thus, staring out at the “living and the dead,” Gabriel Conroy, paterfamilias, husband, and father descends into the lower side of the marital binary and must face the immediate future as a man who is uncertain of himself and his own importance in the marital binary (Joyce 59).

Chapter 3: How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?: “Clay’s” Maria as a Fluid Symbol of Irish Spinsterhood

Ireland’s spinsters in the 20th century emerged as a result of a great variety of causes that include the creation of the “stem family” in contrast to a nuclear one, to the punitive culture of the Magdalen Asylums and the dearth of men willing to marry during the Great Famine. As a result, spinsterhood was a lifestyle, whether embraced willingly or begrudgingly, for many of Ireland’s women. While spinsterhood may have been tolerated due to social and economic constraints during the 20th century, the classification of spinster has never been celebrated within the binary, and the degradation of the spinster in all her forms is illustrated by the perception and treatment of the good-hearted, but aloof, main character in “Clay.” In Joyce’s “Clay,” Catholic Maria is an older woman who works within *Dublin by Lamplight*, an institution similar to a Magdalen Laundry, which houses Dublin’s women who have nowhere else to live. Whether the sinning Magdalen laundress, the woman who attaches herself to a stem-family, the intellectually disabled woman deemed unfit for marriage, or the woman who came of age during the Great Famine and gave up marriage for a civil cause, Maria displays characteristics of all of the causes for spinsterhood.

Critics have long found it a challenge to pinpoint the character of Maria. Margot Norris accuses Joyce of “blindfolding” and misleading the reader while others have labeled “Clay” to be deceitful in its seemingly straightforward approach (206, Walzl “Fact and Fiction” 119). The different ways in which Maria is viewed, both professionally and socially, create a fluidity in her character. Though Maria is a small, older, unmarried woman trying to function within a world that regards married women as the norm, the reasons for Maria’s spinsterhood are ambiguous. In critical studies, Maria has been viewed in multiple ways, leading experts to come to opposite

conclusions and hypotheses that are both “extreme and unconvincing” (Walzl “Fact and Fiction” 119). Because of the contradictory nature of Maria’s personality, the only thing that is clear about Maria and her actions is that Maria’s reason for spinsterhood is not easily classifiable or traceable to one particular cause, such as being only a Magdalen woman, being hungry for independence, or even being too intellectually compromised to see marriage as a viable future for herself. Maria, unlike the other women that have been examined in this thesis, presents multiple possibilities for why she is a spinster, and as such, embodies the various limitations to marriage that the 20th century Irish woman faced.

Before analyzing the character of Maria as the epitome of spinsterhood in Ireland, it is important to see the context of spinsterhood that Maria exists in, both in the internal structure of *Dublin by Lamplight* and in Dublin as a whole. In the laundry establishment, Maria is presented as a confident woman who is comfortable with herself and her position in “society.” But the definition of society in this particular story switches between the social hierarchy of the laundry where Maria functions as something of an “assistant matron” and Irish society as a whole, where Maria is defined as a simple, pitiable spinster (Walzl “Fact and Fiction” 134). Within the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry, Maria, though she is unmarried, is elevated, praised, and admired, as she soothes and placates the women of whom she has charge. To emphasize Maria’s high standing at the laundry, Maria is described as a “veritable peace-maker” and is “always sent for when the women quarreled over their tubs” (Joyce 88). Placing Maria, a woman whom many scholars have likened to the Virgin Mary in the midst of women who are likened to Magdalens, which Joyce himself described as “wicked and lost,” creates cognitive dissonance in the understanding of Maria’s personality (qtd Walzl “Fact and Fiction 127). Given that Maria has been repeatedly compared to the Virgin Mary, the placing of an angelic figure among the sinners of the

laundresses emphasizes the clash of internal and external viewpoints in terms of Maria's character (Eide 59). In the laundry, Maria is esteemed and revered, almost like the Virgin Mary, but outside of those walls, Maria is termed by society to be a lowly spinster, a woman who is only a step above a Magdalen, even though she is never specifically classified as a Magdalen laundress (Eide 59). There is uncertainty and instability surrounding Maria's status, as Maria is never classified as one type of spinster, she is never solely a Magdalen woman, an independent woman who rejected marriage, or a woman who became part of a stem family, but rather, she seems to be a conglomeration of all of these types of spinsters. Marian Eide notes the contradictory standing of Maria in both female and social roles by asserting that "Maria's slight body is a screen for each of these [Madonna and Magdalene] projections and the screen on which Joyce projected the story of the Magdalene as both provider and fallen woman, sinner and peacemaker" (59).

The first part of "Clay" shows Maria as a woman with a semblance of power and independence, a woman who has eschewed marriage and does not regret her choice. While Maria does live and work within the *Dublin by Lamplight* Laundry, she is able to move about freely in the story, she has a stable income, as is noted by her calculation of how much money she has and can spend, and she has people who, at least on the surface, care about her, since the purpose for her outing is to fellowship with the Donnelly family. Maria's situation then is unique and contrastingly dissimilar from the fates of the laundresses, for they are not allowed to move independently as the women come in to have tea "by twos and threes" (Joyce 89, Eide 64-65). In the community of the Magdalens, Maria's role is one of esteem, and Maria has, unlike the women she supervises or many of the other women in *Dubliners*, independence from marital rules and the patriarchy. (Eide 64). While serving tea and barmbrack to the women, one of them,

Lizzie Fleming, brings up the idea of marriage infringing upon that autonomy, saying that “Maria was sure to get the ring, and though Fleming had said that for so many Hallow Eves, Maria had to laugh and say she didn’t want ring or man either” (Joyce 89).⁵⁰ In this passage, Maria openly rejects both the social construction of marriage and the more private and personal notion of a husband. By stating that she is not looking for, nor does she want, even the symbolic ring that would superstitiously offer her a hope of marriage within a year, Maria is illustrated here as a spinster by choice, not because no one thought to ask her, making her immune to societal ridicule. Maria, at least in this scene, is like the Irish women who saw spinsterhood as a duty, and has *actively chosen* to remain single (Eide 69, Jackson and McGinley 90). Maria, reacts with a “disappointed shyness” to the ribbing she receives from Lizzie Fleming, but Marian Eide highlights Maria’s “disappointed shyness” not as one of longing for a husband, but rather a disappointment in the “expectations of marriage and childbearing imposed on her by her community” (69). In the Magdalen-like community in which she lives, Maria is one, at least in the eyes of the other laundresses, who *could* achieve marriage, given that she has the freedom and economic means to find a suitor. Given that Lizzie Fleming continually jokes with her about marriage and possibly sees her as a viable candidate for marriage, Maria has likely had her personal life scrutinized by the Magdalens as means of both entertainment and camaraderie (Eide 71). Indeed, given that “Fleming had said that [she would get the ring] for so many Hallow Eves,” there is the implication that this group of women have been living, interacting, and

⁵⁰ Barmbrack is a culinary concoction of sweetened bread with dried fruit, particularly raisins, added in. During Halloween, which is the time at which this story takes place, if a woman found a ring hidden in her slice of barmbrack, it meant that she would soon wed (Fluet 217, 220, Jackson and McGinley 89). The use of raisins, which are dried up and shriveled forms of grapes, may symbolize Maria’s own spinsterhood and sterility when contrasted to the “apples and nuts” that the Donnelly’s are “sure to have,” which Jackson and McGinley connect to fertility (Jackson and McGinley 90, Joyce 90).

possibly atoning for sins together for an extended amount of time, which would allow them to see the progression or stagnation of Maria's personal life (Joyce 89, Walzl 134). If Maria is a willing spinster, which is the conclusion that she projects to her Magdalen companions, Maria has successfully navigated and escaped the side effects of spinsterhood that befall her *Dubliners* counterparts, like paralyzed Eveline or bitter Lily (Eide 67).⁵¹ Instead, Maria functions as an independent, and in her own mind, a happy woman who rejects marriage and does not seem to mind highlighting her standing as a spinster.⁵²

Another possibility for Maria's spinsterhood combines willing singleness and the decision to attach oneself to an already created family. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the Great Famine created an imbalance between the amount of food that was available to be consumed and the number of people that resided within the nation. Due to the scarcity of food, then, many young women either remained single in order to help raise their brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, or found employment as family helpers where they would help raise children to which they were no relation (Strassmann and Clarke 38). Given Maria's attachment to the Donnelly family, and Joe in particular, it is likely that Maria served as a familial helper of some kind, but was of no direct relation to the children that she helped rear (Walzl "Fact and Fiction" 129-130). Of course, Maria's memory of a young Joe saying, "Mamma is mamma, but

⁵¹ Despite their difference in age, Maria has been thought of as an older, failed version of Eveline, but contrary to Eveline's actions, Maria is constantly moving, doing, and interacting, so much so that Jackson and McGinley note that Maria is purposefully riding the tram "north backwards," which is a sign of bad luck (90).

⁵² Many of the images and superstitions put forth in "Clay" make it abundantly clear that Maria's role in the story is to be that of a spinster, regardless of how she became a spinster. According to Jackson and McGinley, a common Halloween practice is to look in the mirror at "moonrise" and the face of one's future husband, but true to her title as a spinster, the only reflection that Maria sees is her own (90). Furthermore, in order to prepare for All Saints' Day, Maria lays her clothes for the next day out on her bed, which, according to superstition, would invite one's future husband to come and flip them over (Jackson and McGinley 90).

Maria is my proper mother,” creates confusion as to Maria’s maternal status and her role in the family (Joyce 89). This cognitive dissonance is continued by the statement that, “She [Maria] had nursed him and Alphy, too,” but even though the use of the word “nursed” gives a connotation of breastfeeding and maternal contact, it is far more likely that Maria only helped look after the children and maintained a close relationship with Joe, especially (Joyce 89, Jackson and McGinley 89, Walzl 130).

Indeed, according to Florence Walzl’s article, “Joyce’s ‘Clay’ Fact and Fiction,” given the historical context of the time, Maria could be an extended family member, as unmarried daughters were a “concern” and often an “attempt was made to find a useful niche for... [unmarried daughters] within the family relationship. That might explain Maria’s position in the Donnelly family” (130). While Maria’s relationship to the Donnelly family is not specified, the statement that “after the break-up at home the boys had got her that position in the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry and she liked it,” shows that whether she was a nanny, a distant relative, or just a neighborhood spinster, Maria made an impression on Joe Donnelly that has lasted years and carried over into the next generation of Donnelly children (Joyce 89, Jackson and McGinley 89).⁵³ The hypothesis that Maria may have been a nanny or distant family to the Donnelly brothers is supported by Marian Eide’s notion that Maria’s place of residence is one where “women might reside and work between domestic engagements as nannies and housemaids” (63). However, it seems that Maria’s presence at the laundry, given the number of barmbracks

⁵³ Maria only gains the position at the laundry as a result of Joe and Alphy securing it for her, which again, highlights, as one of the main themes of this thesis, the dependence of the unmarried upon the married, whether that dependence is conscious or not (Jackson and McGinley 89). It is far more likely that any recommendation on Maria’s behalf came not from Joe Donnelly, but rather his wife, which would mean that Joe has transferred his affection for Maria to the family that he has created (Jackson and McGinley 89).

she has cut for Hallows Eve, is to be one of permanence, suggesting that if Maria had been a nanny or part of a stem-family, she retired to the laundry after her services were no longer required (Eide 63). Even though Maria connects herself rather intimately to Joe's family by recalling that "he had wanted her to go and live with them," it is important to note that regardless of how powerful Maria might be within the laundry and how devoted Joe Donnelly and his family may be to her, Maria is not a reliable narrator (Joyce 88, Norris "Narration Under a Blindfold" 208).

The narrative of Maria's Hallows Eve is split into two parts: the first as she prepares for the party at the Donnelly's and the second when she arrives at their home. In the first part of the story, Maria is portrayed as an assured woman, a woman with control and respect, but once she leaves the laundry and goes out into society, she transforms into an awkward slip of a woman, a woman who bumbles and babbles her way to, and through, the party. One reason for Maria's sudden and noticeable change in behavior from laundry to the streets of Dublin, though it has not been supported openly in scholarship, is that Maria has some kind of intellectual disability that has both affected her qualifications to marry and her ability to interact outside of a routine, which the job at the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry has provided for her (Eide 64). As Marian Eide notes "'Clay' is haunted by paralytic gaps and omissions in information" (64). Eide does not rule out the possibility of an intellectual disability on Maria's part and a hint of some, small mental defect on Maria's part is alluded to by Jackson and McGinley's notation of the Ben Johnson piece, which states, "Lady, it is to be presumed,/Though art's hid causes are not found,/All is not sweet, all is not sound" (90, Eide 64). In applying these lyrics to Maria, and stating that Joyce was aware of this song, there could be a reference to the fact that though Maria is treated kindly by

the Donnelly family, though nothing is obviously wrong with her, Maria may not be of the sound mind that the reader has been led to believe up until this point (Jackson and McGinley 90).⁵⁴

In investigating Maria's mental state, Margot Norris makes the observation that Maria is very rarely given dialogue in first person, which "makes us question whether Maria could speak for herself. She is, after all, quoted directly only in her reactive speech, as affirming or disclaiming the statements of others, 'Yes, my dear' and 'No, my dear'" (Norris "Narration Under a Blindfold" 208). Furthermore, Maria's memories of Joe and of her own happiness are also called into question by Norris, as she notes that all of Maria's actions and thoughts "create a version of Maria's condition that she presumably would like to believe but that the narration does not ultimately succeed in making tenable" ("Narration Under a Blindfold" 208). Prior to the party, Maria sees herself as a woman in control of herself and others, a woman who rejects the idea of marriage in return for independence, and a woman who is sought after as a member of the family by the Donnelly's. Like Eveline, Maria seems to live in a dreamily unrealistic world where she can make herself out to be "a well-bred, middle-class maiden lady living on a small but independent income from a job that earns her the respect of co-workers [and has surrogate children who] still cherish her as a favorite sort of godmother who visits them laden with gifts" ("Narration Under a Blindfold" Norris 208). Whether Maria's projection of her life is related to a possible disability or just her inability to react to social cues from those around her, the void between how Maria is treated within the laundry and how she is treated outside of it creates a discrepancy in Maria's view of herself.

⁵⁴ While Jackson and McGinley leave the lyrics of Johnson up for interpretation, there are a few possibilities as to their meaning. The first meaning could be that Maria is a victim of an intellectual disability, but another, more plausible, reason might be that there is an allusion to Maria being a Magdalen by contradicting her sweet nature.

In the transition between Maria in the *Dublin by Lamplight* and her actions on her way to and at the Donnelly party, Maria becomes less self-assured as the initial image of herself begins to erode. The characterization of Maria outside of the laundry is quite unlike the personality that she projects within the company of the laundresses where she is in a position of power and authority. When Maria ventures out into the larger society of Dublin, Maria ceases to be a pure woman among sinners, but is viewed as a spinster who has little value to the community, as is seen in the way that she is treated by those she comes in contact with on her way to the party.

Concurrent with Norris's idea that Maria seeks to create a world for herself that is based on others' admiration for her, Maria buys "a dozen of mixed penny cakes... [and] came out of the shop laden with a big bag (Joyce 90). Here, Maria's actions correspond with the image that she has created of herself as a guardian angel, a "fairy godmother" as Norris puts it, but it seems that Maria's illusion of herself only lasts if she does not interact with others who ground Maria in reality, and in her side of the spinster binary (Norris "Narration Under a Blindfold" 208, 210). Upon deciding that she would buy "something really nice" for Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly, which manifests itself in a plum cake, Maria is forced to interact with the "stylish young lady behind the counter, who was evidently a little annoyed by her" (Joyce 90).⁵⁵ In the quick exchange that Maria has with the clerk, who embodies society's view of her, Maria's actions become awkward and clunky, and, when the clerk "asked her whether it was a wedding-cake she wanted to buy, her social status as a spinster made her see herself as less wonderful and self-aware than she has made herself appear in earlier paragraphs (Joyce 90, Jackson and McGinley 90). Margot Norris

⁵⁵ Plum cakes are associated with, and usually served at, weddings in Ireland, but Maria's inability to choose a particular kind of cake for a long period of time likely prompts the sales girl's rude behavior (Eide 66). Furthermore, Maria's particularity about the type of cake she will buy and her need for a certain type and amount of almond icing shows a characteristic of pickiness that could have carried over into her inability to decide on a mate.

notes that in seeing Maria's "dither[ing] between cake shops," her mental acuity comes into question and her decision to leave one cake shop for another, regardless of the amount of icing on the plum cake, seems too excessive for a simple Hallows Eve party.

When Maria arrives at the Donnelly household, the reaction that she is met with is consistent with the idea that while she is welcome, her social status, and even her status within the family, is not what she made it out to be in the beginning of the story. Indeed, when Maria is greeted by "Everybody" with "O, here's Maria," but Jackson and McGinley note, "Joyce's careful punctuation suggests that her welcome is unenthusiastic," and more of an obligation than a pleasure (91). Perhaps, given the greeting she is met with, Maria has over-estimated her role in the Donnelly family, just as she seems to have mistakenly given herself a superior place in society based on her position in the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry. Maria's presence among even the young Donnelly children seems to be received with such compulsory attitudes as "Mrs. Donnelly said it was too good of her to bring such a big bag of cakes and *made* all the children say: 'Thanks Maria'" (Joyce 91; emphasis added). The children "are prevented from expressing their obvious dislike of her [Maria] except through the veil of ambiguity" (Norris "Narration Under a Blindfold" 211). Norris also notes that the adults, too, are kept from expressing any external reaction to Maria except through the words that could either be interpreted as excitement or dread.

Norris continues her analysis of this comment by saying, "While the narrator nudges us to interpret "O, here's Maria!" as a joyful welcome, we can, in retrospect, hear in it the inaudible expletives and qualifications of resigned hostility and displeased surprise, as in "O god, here's

Maria already (“Narration Under a Blindfold” 211).⁵⁶ Maria has been pelted with rudeness and “indifference” during her trip to the Donnelly’s, a display of unfeeling that would be expected by nameless individuals on the tram or in the cake shop who view her as only a spinster, but, being confronted with this same behavior from the unenthusiastic adults and children showcases the difference in Maria’s perception of herself within the family and how she is actually viewed by the family, as Maria has envisioned herself as cherished and revered while Maria is received with less excitement and more annoyance (Deneau 34).

It is not until Maria realizes that her “little surprise”—the plum cake—has been thwarted by her own preoccupied nature on the tram that she becomes the center of attention (Joyce 91). At first, Maria seeks to retain a bit of control over the situation of the missing plum-cake by hoisting the blame upon the children that she has just gifted with other cakes, asking them if “any of them had eaten it—by mistake of course—but the children all said no and looked as if they did not like to eat cakes if they were accused of stealing” (Joyce 91). Confronting the children with the whereabouts of the cake does two things for Maria: looking to the children as the culprits of the vanished cake secures her social image as a shrew-like witch instead of the fairy godmother that Maria envisions herself as when she buys the smaller cakes for the children and it gives the children even more reason to not like Maria’s continual presence (Norris “Narration Under a Blindfold” 211, Jackson and McGinley 89). Jackson and McGinley quickly term Maria’s appearance as being similar to that of a “Halloween witch” and by blaming the children for her own, though unrecognized, wrongdoing, Maria emphasizes her similarity to the witches in fairytales who see children as mischief-makers (Jackson and McGinley 89). Indeed, Margot

⁵⁶ The contrast in form of address between Maria and Mrs. Donnelly highlights that even though Maria is probably around sixty, and older than her host, it is the marital status, and not age, that dictates formality, or a lack thereof (Jackson and McGinley 89, 90).

Norris notes that Maria's behavior toward the children, after she questions them, adds to her stereotypical image as a shrew because:

the narration obscures the significance of the injured feelings of the children (who receive no apology from Maria and no sympathy from the narrative voice) by immediately turning to the attention lavished on Maria, who is plied with stout, nuts, and entertaining anecdotes-ostensibly to distract her from her loss.” (“Narration Under a Blindfold” 211)

Furthermore, while the children may feel that, having been wrongly accused, they should be the center of adult attention instead of Maria, Maria redirects attention away from the children and onto herself, which gives those children “motive” for later giving her a less than kind Halloween fortune (Norris “Narration Under a Blindfold” 211). In displaying more emotion over the loss of the cake than she has throughout the entire story, Maria, either verbally or non-verbally, demands the attention of both the married men and women in the story (“Narration Under a Blindfold” Norris 211).

Like Gabriel, who placates his spinster aunts in “The Dead,” Joe turns all of his attention to Maria, rescuing her from what she sees as a crisis. It is obvious that in this situation, Joe is trying to occupy the distraught Maria so that she forgets about the cake and the party doesn't become a disaster because of Maria's emotion. While Maria sees Joe as being “very nice with her” and genuinely caring for her, Joe could seek out Maria for a variety of reasons, one being that the party shouldn't be dismantled by a tiny spinster that guests can hardly stand (Joyce 91).

In the climax of the story, Maria takes part in games of divination, where various saucers of liquid and objects have been placed for blindfolded selection.⁵⁷ Oddly, but likely on purpose as possible revenge for her earlier accusation of cake thievery, Maria is enticed to join the game, in which she is the only adult competing among the children and adolescent females (Jackson and McGinley 92, Norris “Narration Under a Blindfold” 211). The fact that the children, and the neighbor girls in particular, want Maria to play with them is curious. Due to the fact that “they led her up to the table amid laughing and joking,” there is the possibility that the girls intend to make fun of her (Joyce 92). Adding to the possibility that Maria’s presence in the game is solely for humor, the laughter that Maria hears could stem from the fact that there is a one in four chance that Maria could actually grasp the ring, indicating marriage, something that no one, not even Maria herself, would find plausible. The second reason that Maria may have been invited to play is that she has an intellectual disability, which would explain why she “laughed and laughed again till the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin” (Joyce 92). Maria does not comprehend that her participation in the game could be a malicious trick, which, if she is indeed disabled in some way, would make her an easy target.

When a blindfolded Maria touches the “soft wet substance with her fingers” and hears Mrs. Donnelly’s whispers to the girls to throw “the substance” out right away, she realizes that she must repeat her turn (Joyce 92). Unknowingly, Maria has chosen the fate of death for herself, but the dirt that Maria receives as a symbol of her death also relates back to her work in the

⁵⁷ The objects on the table include a prayer book, which obviously symbolizes a calling to the religious life, a ring, which symbolizes the achievement of marriage and wifhood, a cup of water, which symbolizes the receiver will soon emigrate from Ireland, and finally, the cup of dirt/clay, which symbolizes impending death (Jackson and McGinley 92). According to Jackson and McGinley, the clay, with more juvenile audiences, was often purposefully left out of the game (92).

laundry, as according to Marian Eide, “Clay is... also associated with the bodily and allows the girls to present a malicious reminder of Maria’s Magdalene residence, both through the bodily work of prostitutes and through their reformatory labor removing dirt” (68). Regardless of why the girls wanted Maria to play the game, their trick, if there was one, has turned out to be ineffective because of Maria’s mental denseness. As Margot Norris highlights, “The remarkable thing about the trick is not only that it fails, that Maria does not get it, but that a trick, as such, is never mentioned in the story at all, meaning that the narrative voice does not ‘get it’ either” (“Narration Under a Blindfold” 211). In the narrative, Maria’s third person voice never connects what she touched to death, but the reader, and the other characters in the story, like Mrs. Donnelly, have to surmise what the clay represents from previous experience and the knowledge of others. Adding to the suggestion that Maria is intellectually disabled, not only does Maria not understand why she is given a do over, but Mrs. Donnelly, in protecting Maria from learning her true symbolized fate, treats Maria like a child who would not have the mental or emotional capacity to understand what had just been revealed to her. Therefore, because of the compassion that Joe and his wife apparently have for Maria, she has two possibilities for her fate, but only one that has yet to occur.

The clay that Maria receives as the indicator of her future, coupled with the prayer book that she touches during her second turn, symbolize, respectively, death and a call to the religious life. However, given that Maria already serves in a kind of religious capacity by helping supervise the Magdalen-like women, the only true fate left for Maria is death. However, unlike the religious life signified by choosing the prayer book and becoming a nun, Maria is not a nun, nor will she ever be. Instead, Maria currently lives a “celibate life, not in a peaceful nunnery, but among coarse women in a reformatory” that, no matter how enjoyable Maria finds it, showcases

her own “diminishment of vitality and spirit, the death in life she is already experiencing in her constricted life” (Walzl “Fact and Fiction” 122). Having no family, no true connection outside of the Donnelly’s, Maria leaves no legacy in her wake. Symbolically, Maria has become dead to the society that she lives in because she has nothing to remind society that she lived within its borders (Walzl “Fact and Fiction” 122). While some might argue that Maria’s presence in the *Dublin by Lamplight* had some kind of lasting impact, Irish society was slow to acknowledge those who lived and died in such institutions, often burying them without thought or leaving them with a marker as a remembrance of their life. Furthermore, the 1879 census report on Magdalen women details that the women are “safe in the arms of Jesus,” a euphemistic phrase that calls to mind death, which may indicate that society saw these women as dead, regardless of how many years their bodies continued to live (qtd. Walzl “Fact and Fiction” 124). Maria’s final relation to death is that she touches the dirt on Hallows Eve, which is the night when the dead return to their families and favorite places (Jackson and McGinley 89). As if foreshadowing her impending death, Maria’s visit to the Donnellys’, a place where we are not entirely sure that she is wanted and welcomed sincerely, “can be seen as one of these visits—a ‘dead’ ancestor appearing at her old home” (Jackson and McGinley 89).

The final scene in this story cements Maria’s place as a spinster and illustrates the fact that Maria must soon depart, both in an immediate sense and in relation to death. Maria’s singing of “I Dreamed I Dwelt” focuses on what Maria’s perception of herself in society has been—a dream. While Maria fancies herself to be loved by the Donnellys, the condition for her singing is that “would she not sing a little song before she went” (Joyce 93). Margot Norris asserts that “perhaps the family asks Maria to sing less because her singing gives them pleasure [than because] the request is an effective way to get rid of her, to hint that she has overstayed her

welcome” either that night or in life itself (“Narration Under a Blindfold” 213). By singing “I Dreamed I Dwelt” and forgetting to sing the second verse, which deals with love and courtship, Maria effectively recaps the life she has lived—one void of love and intimate human companionship and one that she will leave without having known those things. Indeed, in reflecting on the lyrics that Maria sings, we can see how Maria might feel “trapped” or “displaced” in the realm of spinsterhood and longs for something that she cannot have, just like the persona in the song dreams of a higher social class and a better life for herself (Norris “Narration Under a Blindfold” 213). Regardless of what Maria may envision for herself as a result of the song, it is too late to rectify her spinsterhood; her singing only draws tearful regret from Joe Donnelly; “his eyes filled up so much with tears” as, he, too, possibly realizes that Maria’s life has been hopeless and it will remain so until her death.

There have been many lenses through which Maria, the awkward spinster, has been viewed, but in most of the scholarship that surrounds this story, Maria has been labeled as either a Madonna or a Magdalene character, either a strumpet or a spinster, never a conglomeration of all of the marital and social circumstances that led to spinsterhood in 20th century Ireland. Throughout this story, Maria, the woman who has lost out on courtship and finds family only in someone else’s, illustrates some of the reasons why spinsterhood thrived within Ireland in the 20th century. From working as part of a stem-family and possibly over-attaching herself to that family in a more maternal way than necessary, to having an intellectual disability, to having wanted to avoid marriage, the ambiguous Maria showcases reasons for spinsterhood in her situation and how society is affected by the presence of the spinster.

Conclusion: “If I am a Bastard, Who Made Me One?”: James Joyce’s Marriage and Cultural Implications of his Work

On their marriage certificate, issued in 1931, James Joyce is listed as a bachelor in his late forties, while Nora, the woman who had borne him two children by this time, is recorded as a spinster (Bowker 420). Despite having lived as husband and wife for almost thirty years, supposedly having wed in an Austrian ceremony in 1904, Joyce stated, on the advice of his lawyer, that he and Nora were required to remarry because Nora had registered herself under a pseudonym of Gretta Greene during the ceremony, which nullified the marriage in the eyes of the British government (Bowker 419). While Joyce, when asked to come clean about the background of his liaison with Nora, asserted that he “had nothing to confess,” the statement to the public about the 1931 wedding of Nora Barnacle and James Joyce was short, rehearsed, and obviously meant to keep a prying, gossip-hungry society away from the truth that Joyce and the woman the public saw as “Mrs. James Joyce” had never been legally wed (Bowker 419-420). Even though the impetus for the wedding was, as Joyce acknowledged, “testamentary reasons,” meaning the couple’s descendants could now be legally recognized as legitimate offspring of the couple, Lucia Joyce’s discovery that she was illegitimate was also a factor. When Lucia, Joyce’s treasured daughter, was informed that she was not a legitimate child of her parents, given that there had never been a marital ceremony, she raged against her mother, prompting Nora to call her, without meaning to imply questionable parentage, a “bastard” (Bowker 414). In response to her mother’s verbal outrage Lucia replied, “If I am a bastard, who made me one?” (qtd Bowker 414).

Despite what Joyce had released to the public, the legitimacy of his Austrian marriage was dogged with reports that Joyce and Nora had quickly wed before leaving Ireland in 1904.

While he did leave Ireland with Nora, they were not married, nor did Joyce and Nora depart together in order to avoid suspicion (Bowker 132). Even to the day of his death, the rumor spread that Joyce had eloped with Nora while still in Ireland, but the tired rumor was never able to become anything more than what it was, as Joyce never acknowledged or refuted the rumors of his elopement with Nora on October 8, 1904 (Bowker 133). Marriage to Joyce was inconsequential in terms of personal belief, as indicated by the fact that Joyce had no qualms about living with a woman for twenty-seven years before he married her. In fact, it was only Joyce's concern for the well-being of his family that Joyce did consent to marry in 1931, seeing his marriage to Nora as not a covenant, as the majority of society no doubt saw it, but rather as a step to making sure his family could be taken care of after his death. Given that Joyce had little regard for the institution of marriage, the magnitude of marriage and consequences of spinsterhood in *Dubliners* seems hypocritical at worst and satirical at best, but the "mirror" that Joyce used to show social injustice was not focused on himself, but Irish society (Walzl "Women in Irish Society" 32).

As with any work of fiction, it is important to separate the work from the author, and even though Joyce lived his life with total disregard for the idea of marriage, his work in *Dubliners* reflects his own perception of Irish society, which held marriage in the highest esteem. Joyce, as noted throughout this thesis, viewed *Dubliners* as a way to reveal the cracks and seams of Ireland's social consciousness, which often led to an examination of the societal ideals of marriage and its treatment of those citizens, often female, who did not marry or had children before marriage. By critiquing Ireland's treatment of unmarried women, though in a backhanded manner, Joyce began a conversation about the women that society ignored long before anyone fully realized the part that spinsters could, or even would, play in Ireland's history. In the century

since *Dubliners* was published, spinsterhood has become far less of a spectacle and creating life outside of wedlock has become less taboo. Even though the characters analyzed in this thesis were subjected to relying on male family members for social and economic support and being sent to a Magdalen Asylum for their inability to adhere to societal norms, the women of the 21st century in Ireland have, like Joyce, been able to shun the marital requirements that loomed over their ancestors. While Ireland still has a high percentage of single and celibate citizens in terms of statistics, with the percentage of unmarried women at age thirty-four being greater in 1996 than in 1961, the stigma around singlehood has changed (Hannan 42). By as early as 1981, fifteen years before the last Magdalen Asylum closed, data suggested that there was, as Carmel Hannan notes, a “highly significant positive correlation between non-marriage and fertility rates across social groups,” which meant that more children were being born outside a marital union with less drastic consequences (48). While more nuclear families continue to make up the majority of households in Ireland, with almost 80% of children coming from homes where their biological parents are married, there is an acknowledgement of the fact that not every family adheres to the societal idea of marriage, with almost 18% of children surveyed coming from single parent homes and almost 4% coming from blended families (Fahey para. 6-7).⁵⁸ Even though Ireland has been more benevolent toward various forms of spinsterhood and illegitimacy, on an international front, Ireland still has one of the lowest averages of children born out of wedlock, with illegitimate births being at an all-time high at 35% in 2000, while for comparison, the United States listed its percentage of children born out of wedlock as close to 45% in 2013 (Fahey para. 12, Hamilton et. al 4). Scholars have noted that it is likely that the lower number of

⁵⁸ The data given comes from the Growing Up Survey initiated in 2007 and 2008, which tracked the family dynamics of children in the 9-month- and 9-year-old age range (Fahey para. 5).

illegitimate births corresponds with the memory of the reaction to unwed mothers in the past (Fahey para. 9).

Today, there is more of a cultural awareness and acknowledgement of the issues that Joyce highlighted in *Dubliners*, much of that attention coming from the popular media. In 2013, the movie *Philomena*, which tells the true story of a Magdalen's search for her child, was nominated for four Oscars and brought a cultural travesty to the silver screens all over the world and to the minds of thousands. The sudden media interest in Ireland's spinsterish past, with docu-films like Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters*, has created a firestorm of emotions regarding an issue that Joyce was trying to draw attention to a hundred years before. However, unlike Joyce, the films were not restricted by laws of obscenity, laws that forced Joyce to place meaning between the lines. Able to plainly reveal more than Joyce could about the Magdalen Asylums and the general treatment of spinsters and unwed women, "The films," as James Smith notes, "broke silence on a secretive past not available in official versions of Irish history" (117). While Joyce's marriage, and the classification of him as a "bachelor" after twenty-seven years of life with Nora Barnacle attracted attention and scandal, it was the social issues that Joyce wanted at the center of the national consciousness, and now, thanks to a progressive society and the media, people are starting to catch on to issues that Joyce was concerned about all along.

Even though Joyce wrote about spinsterhood in the confines of society, which often portrayed single women as defunct or even radical, Joyce, in his own personal life, regarded marriage as something that was unnecessary. Much like the societal mindset today that values independence and ability over marital status, Joyce's thinking on the idea of marriage was definitely before its time. In the 21st century, it doesn't matter whether one's husband is a tinker, a tailor, a soldier, or a sailor, just like it doesn't matter if a woman chooses to be a spinster, and

this sentiment is echoed through Joyce's life and through the messages that he placed between the lines for his readers.

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