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Interrupting the Cycle: Idealization, Alienation and Social Performance
in James Joyce's "Araby," "A Painful Case," and "The Dead"

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Interrupting the Cycle: Idealization, Alienation and Social Performance

in James Joyce's "Araby," "A Painful Case," and "The Dead"

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The thesis considers Joyce's short stories "Araby," "A Painful Case," and the "The Dead," illustrating how these works present three intellectually and emotionally similar protagonists, but at different stages of life, with the final tale "The Dead" suggesting a sort of limited solution to the conflicts that define the earlier works. Taken together, "Araby" and "A Painful Case," represent a sort of life cycle of alienation: the boy of "Araby" is an isolated, deeply introspective youth who lives primarily within his own idealized mental world before discovering, through a failed romantic quest at the story's end, the complete impracticality of his own highly abstracted desires. In contrast, Duffy of "A Painful Case" is an extremely rigid, middle-aged bachelor who lives in a self-imposed exile from Irish society in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to escape the sort of mental and emotional pain that affects the boy, with his final epiphany being that such ideals still exist within him, but he now no longer has any hope of changing his life or taking part in society. The stories suggest that such idealized desires can neither be ignored nor fulfilled, and it is not until the chronologically final story "The Dead" that Joyce suggests any sort of limited solution to the dilemma. Gabriel of "The Dead" again displays the introversion, emotional fragility and extreme idealism of the earlier protagonists, but he, as a young, adult man, presents a break in the cycle and an alternate path. In contrast to the earlier protagonists, Gabriel refuses to exist within his own mental world alone, and instead takes part in and attempts to accommodate the desires of both society as a whole, and of specific individuals close to him, such as his aunts and his wife Gretta. Though Gabriel's attempts are not an unmitigated success, he earns a degree of satisfaction for his efforts, with his final revelation being of his connection to the rest of humanity, in contrast to the self-absorbed and hopeless reflections of the earlier protagonists.

Keywords: Joyce, Dubliners, The Dead, Araby, A Painful Case, alienation, idealism

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With the composition of “The Dead” (1907), Joyce finally completed his portrait of local Irish life for the collection *Dubliners* (1914). While the earlier works largely focused on individualized tales of alienation and the desire for social intimacy, “The Dead” takes a wider view, presenting a cross section of the local society and showing how, despite the natural alienations inherent in any society, Dublin remains a community filled with genuine social connections. Describing his writings in a letter to his brother Stanislaus dated September 25, 1906, Joyce notes:

Sometimes thinking of Ireland it seems to me that I have been unnecessarily harsh. I have reproduced (in *Dubliners* at least) none of the attraction of the city . . . I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality. The latter “virtue” so far as I can tell does not exist elsewhere in Europe. (*Letters II* 166)

These related senses of insularity and hospitality are overwhelmingly present in “The Dead,” and the story can be seen as an act of reconciliation and a more mature response to the effects of society on the individual. Though Joyce does not deny the difficulties many individuals encounter in navigating social life or the stifling nature of many communities, neither does he ignore the unique benefits that will come with membership in a community, and particularly the community of his youth.

Beyond completing and providing something of a counterbalance to much of the earlier material in *Dubliners*, “The Dead” also suggests completion and reconciliation on a smaller scale in the central figure Gabriel Conroy. Though often noted for the obvious parallels between Gabriel and Joyce himself, Gabriel also especially reminds one of Duffy in “A Painful Case” (1905) and the unnamed adolescent protagonist of “Araby” (1905), creating a triad of male idealization and alienation and illustrating how individuals with these similar desires might

respond to such difficulties at differing stages of life. Despite the superficial contrasts, all three are defined by their withdrawn, internalized personalities, their difficulty understanding others and, as a consequence of these traits, their tendency to project beliefs outward and create a unique social world for themselves. Similarly, these limited perspectives on the world are each tested through a central romantic relationship of sorts, each of which fails to fulfill the initial expectations of the respective protagonists. Taken without “The Dead,” “Araby” and “A Painful Case” present a grim portrait of the social and romantic possibilities available to such individuals. Indeed, they suggest something of a closed circuit: in “Araby” the boy realizes that his own idealized conceptions of romantic love are impossible—so soon as he is initiated into romance he is disillusioned completely. Conversely, Duffy of “A Painful Case” views his life backward, evidently having long ago determined that, because idealized social and romantic relationships are not possible, he will not have human relationships of any sort. His tale ends in bleak revelation, as well, with his realization that his desires for intimacy have not been extinguished despite deliberate attempts to ignore them and his further realization that it is too late for him to return to society. These tales are the beginning and the end of the romantic and social life of the overly withdrawn and sensitive individual, a life where satisfaction is glimpsed only obliquely and is finally revealed to have been an illusion.

With “The Dead,” however, Joyce breaks this cycle and shows the opportunity for a limited reconciliation of these conflicting desires. As an adult man in the prime of life, Gabriel stands between the callow youth of the boy and the rigid maturity of Duffy, and as such he is in an ideal position to live his life properly. He is otherwise, however, no more suited for the challenges that approach him than the other protagonists, and shares the excessive internalization and idealization that most defines the boy, along with the somewhat aloof intellectualism and

social awkwardness of Duffy. Indeed, while the boy is too youthful to fully comprehend his skewed perspective and Duffy has generated an avoidant, impersonal lifestyle that prevents pain, Gabriel is fully aware of his limited skills and yet makes special efforts to interact with society. Similarly, Gabriel's private, fanciful desires are perhaps even more powerful than those of the other figures, and Gabriel maintains the inclination, even after years of marriage to Gretta, to obtain the sort of idealized and impossible relationship that the boy desires with Mangan's sister. Because of these weaknesses, weaknesses that paralyze the boy and Duffy, Gabriel's experiences in "The Dead" are filled with anxiety as he attempts to fulfill his role at the dance and later to obtain a closer communion, both mental and physical, with Gretta. Superficially, Gabriel appears to fail: there is much awkwardness at the dance, and he discovers that he does not have quite the bond with Gretta that he desires. And yet with the tale's end, as Gabriel reflects in solitude, he finds himself satisfied, or as near satisfied as one with Gabriel's desires may be. Though Gabriel remains an outsider and cannot have the sort of romantic life he desires, in this final reverie he comes to feel a bond with humanity as he watches the falling snow unify and homogenize the landscape. Biographer Richard Ellmann writes: "Under its canopy all human beings, whatever their degrees of intensity, fall into union. The mutuality is that all men feel and lose feeling, all interact, all warrant the sympathy that Gabriel now extends to Furey, to Gretta, to himself, even to old Aunt Julia" (261). Each tale ends with an epiphany, but Gabriel's, finally, is positive, is evidence that one can step outside of one's self and avoid perfect insularity. It is only possible, however, to fully comprehend the significance of Gabriel's growth when considering him in context of his youthful antecedent, the boy, and the older, bleaker alternative that is Duffy.

"Araby" is, in many ways, the most difficult of the tales to analyze, with the flowing, first-person prose contrasting the more concrete descriptions of "A Painful Case" and "The

Dead.” Joyce’s more effusive style, however, reflects the character of the narrator: the boy is not yet fully formed, does not yet have a philosophical underpinning for how he interprets the world; instead, he receives input openly, and translates it unfiltered to the reader. Indeed, this sort of receptive purity is central to the character’s development, as his epiphany is one of self-revelation. With his failure to retrieve a trophy for Mangan’s sister, the boy finally becomes self-aware, is able to step back and reflect upon his actions to see their absurdity. This, as much as anything else, connects the three characters, as both Duffy and Gabriel are hopelessly self-conscious and fearful of what the greater social and philosophical implications of their actions might be. The boy’s experience is, on one level, universal, a simple reflection on the absurdity of adolescent love. Critic Warren Beck writes: “Araby is above all a love story, of instinctive-imaginative passion naively held, unavoidably lost, and recollected as ardor and disenchantment. It is everyman’s puberty rite, imperious desire blunting itself upon limitations, and fragmenting into an opposite despair” (97). As Beck elsewhere acknowledges, however, it is not love alone that transfixes the boy, but a greater conception of reality as filled with romance, a conception that must be lost in the interaction with the physical world. For the romantic boy, reality is a narrative enacted by the individual, but, as Margot Norris notes, by the story’s end “the boy has been transformed by his own narrative voice into a figure, of the mirrored emptiness that is Vanitas” (“Blind Streets” 310). “Araby” is, at the most basic level, a tale of the gulf that exists between the ideal and the real, while “A Painful Case” and “The Dead” move on to consider how similar individuals might respond to the knowledge of this gap.

Though the reader is not immediately given insight into the boy’s larger personality, Joyce establishes the boy’s social isolation through the geography of North Richmond Street: the street is “blind” and largely quiet apart from when the school is released (*D* 20). Further, the boy,

beyond residing on this street, enjoys spending his time in a deserted house at the “blind” end, a house detached from the other habitations. While the other houses are personified and made sociable (they are “conscious” of the humans within them and “gazed” at each other with “imperturbable brown faces” [D 20]), the uninhabited house is a house of decay, death and isolation. The house is not merely abandoned, but the final tenant, a priest, died in the backroom, and it is now in disrepair and filled with useless, deteriorating junk. And yet, to the boy, the house has a certain romance, and he is fascinated by the yellowed books and rusted objects he finds within it. Why, precisely, the boy is so enamored with this decaying abode is difficult to discern, though this fascination illustrates his fanciful tendencies: the boy can project wonder upon even the unremarkable and decayed, those things which would commonly be thought to represent loss and death. Simultaneously, the boy’s affinity for the house predicts the doomed nature of his obsessions; loss is all that will come from them.

After establishing the boy’s affinity for the deserted house, Joyce notes that the boy is to some degree sociable and involved in the lives of the other local children. His perspective, however, is limited and peculiar. The boy explains his daily pattern of play with the other children of North Richmond street, invariably using an abstract “we” or “us” to describe his own actions: “When we met in the street the houses had grown somber . . . The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street” (D 21). The other children, whoever they may be, remain faceless, and are simply outward reflections of the boy’s inner state. Further, the faceless children are separated from the adult world, wish to be separate, in fact: “If my uncle was seen turning the corner we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan’s sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea we watched her from our shadow . . . [and] waited to see whether she would remain or go in and if

she remained we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly" (*D* 21). The boy's description again betrays an insular perspective. The only name mentioned is Mangan, and nothing substantial is revealed about him; he evidently only warrants a title because of his relationship to the boy's love, Mangan's sister. There is, however, no self-awareness in this insularity—it is simply the lack of perspective that is inherent to childhood, albeit in a more extreme form than the reader might anticipate.

The boy's peculiar reference to his beloved as Mangan's sister betokens his apparent alienation. Though "her name was like a summons to all [his] foolish blood," the reader is never allowed to know the name—it is as if the boy is creating a deliberate distance between the reader and himself or, more probably, that he is so totally absorbed in his obsession that it never even occurs that he should present a more complete picture of the girl (*D* 21). The boy is, evidently, too completely absorbed in his desire to truly consider why such desires exist or to justify his longings. The desire simply exists and consumes all. There is nothing shocking about a child or early adolescent displaying an insular worldview, nor is a young male obsessing over an apparently older female surprising, but the depth of his obsession and the strain it evidently places on his day-to-day life is impressive. Of the boy's quest Jim LeBlanc notes in "All Work, No Play: The Refusal of Freedom in Araby" that the boy displays a "grimly purposeful attitude towards an event [the bazaar] that most would consider play rather than work" (229). This compulsive seriousness is a microcosm of his entire worldview, and like his adult counterparts the boy is utterly serious-minded and rather humorless. Though his actions, such as playing in the streets, exploring abandoned houses, and obsessing over a young friend's sister are decidedly childlike, his reflective and purposeful approach to these tasks is strangely adult.

Though adolescent infatuation can hardly be expected to be sophisticated, the boy's desire for Mangan's sister is particularly abstract and shallow or, more precisely, is not apparently rooted in her nature. Beyond desiring her without any understanding of her personality or character, the boy peculiarly divides Mangan's sister into individual parts, fetishizing her. He particularly focuses on her brown hair, how it was "tossed from side to side," and repeatedly reduces her to a simple "brown figure" (*D* 21). Perhaps more tellingly is the connection he forges between Mangan's sister and the surrounding objects, refusing to draw distinctions between discrete parts of the world. He is particularly taken by how she is affected by the light, noting that she is "defined by the light from the half opened door" (*D* 21), and "the light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up the hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing" (*D* 23). Mangan's sister is quite literally an angelic, otherworldly figure, one who does not act in any practical sense but mystically projects the boy's desires outward towards him. This effect the boy feels in response to Mangan's sister mirrors his peculiar interest in the abandoned house: the story gives no real sense if the adolescent girl is, in any conventional sense, remarkable, and the boy has little interest in proving to the reader that she is worthy of his obsession. He is content merely to bask in her perceived radiance. As an extension of this depersonalization, the boy's hushed and reverent response to Mangan's sister denies her physicality and her sexuality. Suzette Henke writes: "perched precariously on the brink of erotic expression, he sublimates burgeoning sexual desire to sentimental fantasies of an ideal, chivalric love" (19). Indeed, though the boy's attraction is assuredly sexual on some level, this is never expressed concretely in the tale. This absence suggests that the boy distrusts the physical, the concretely real, thus pointing towards his

later attempts to court Mangan's sister, not through conventional means, but through an imagined romantic quest which is an extension of this "idealized" and "chivalric" love.

The boy's worshipful state, however, is eventually interrupted, and he is jolted into action by a brief conversation with Mangan's sister. This is the boy's first disillusionment—not in a negative sense so much as it is his realization that the world is not as he had imagined it: "I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration" (*D* 22). Unsurprisingly, it is she who approaches the boy for a brief dialogue regarding the upcoming bazaar that she wishes to attend but cannot. Despite the everyday nature of this interaction, the boy is unable to immediately lift himself from his affected mental state: "At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer" (*D* 22). Beyond his initial bafflement, the boy continues to distance and fetishize the girl, both from himself and the reader; through this brief conversation the boy's narrative gives equal emphasis to her angelic appearance as to the actual content of the dialogue, and he often recounts what Mangan's sister said second hand, rather than merely quoting the phrase: "She asked me was I going to Araby . . . She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent" (*D* 22). Notably, the boy does quote the girl's apparent final statement, "It's well for you," meaning the boy is fortunate he has the opportunity to attend the bazaar, with the boy giving special emphasis to the rare element of the conversation that is more personal, that is referring to the connection between the boy and Mangan's sister. The boy's generally indirect description, however, remains fitting: it is not the unremarkable content of the conversation that matters, but rather the powerful effect that it has upon him.

The boy concludes the conversation stating, “If I go . . . I will bring you something” (*D* 23). Though the boy’s initial, overly idealized view of Mangan’s sister has been slightly modified (she is, in fact, a human who can be spoken to), the boy immediately misinterprets actions and creates a new fantasy. Here, even more obviously than elsewhere, the boy fails to understand or take part in social roles: the conversation with Mangan’s sister was merely small talk, serving no more purpose on the girl’s part than to express her disappointment at not being able to attend the bazaar, whereas the boy imagines it to be a call to a sort of quest. This is a significant transition for the boy, as now he must attempt to live his ideals in reality. Previously, the boy had been almost completely isolated—the boy’s fantasies were all that existed in his world, and reality rarely encroached. Now, however, action is inevitable, and conflict and disappointment will soon arise.

The boy’s progression towards his final disillusionment follows a predictable path considering what has been shown thus far. As the bazaar approaches, the boy’s obsessive desires begin to impinge on his day-to-day life even more plainly: “I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now, that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child’s play, ugly monotonous child’s play” (*D* 23). As an extension of the curious inversion of work and play described by Leblanc and others, the boy’s peculiar phrasing suggests a forced maturity: the boy is, in fact, a child. The boy’s quest, then, is evidently a mark of adulthood, at least in his mind. Much has been written on the cultural and historical backgrounds of the bazaar,¹ that these elements are allowed to remain submerged and undefined is noteworthy in and of itself. These romantic notions are not something the boy considers deliberately but simply underlie how he responds naturally to his infatuation. He comes to resemble Duffy and Gabriel more fully in his attempts to enact an

improbable narrative in the world, though the boy is wholly unaware of the difficulties that will confront him.

The boy's quest fails for a number disparate of reasons, but his travails all have a similar flavor: where the boy expected romance, he instead received tiresome, everyday difficulties. Most significant is the reception he receives at the bazaar, with the attendant's unhelpful behavior and flirtations with other patrons inspiring the boy's final revelation. Suzette Henke writes: "the stall attendant flirting with two English gentleman exposes the vulgar side of eroticism, and the boy is forced to acknowledge the profane reality of his own emotional infatuation" (21). The boy's disillusionment was perhaps already dawning in his consciousness, but the dull, unimpressive image of romance he receives at the end is a fitting final proof of his foolishness. Beyond learning that the world lacks the romance he desires, the boy finds that his own nature is different than he had believed and that he, too, is one of the "vulgarians," to use Henke's term. Soon the bazaar is closed, the lights dimmed and the boy accepts the truth: "Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger" (*D* 26). Significantly, the boy's final devastation does not merely come from the failure of his quest but from his epiphany that the quest was utterly foolish. Mangan's sister herself evidently no longer plays a role in the boy's devastation, as he has seen that he was merely responding to his own desires and obsessions all along. This is the truth that, discovered through other experiences, allows Duffy to resign from life altogether and Gabriel to be so completely mortified by social interaction; it is the possibility that not only are one's ideals impractical in reality but that by upholding such unlikely ideals one is deluded, a ridiculous figure.

With the story's abrupt end, it is impossible to say in any concrete sense where the boy might head from this moment on. The story, however, is undeniably initiatory and a coming of age story. "A Painful Case," proves to be both an intriguing continuation and inversion of these ideas in "Araby." Whereas "Araby" is the initiatory tale of an adolescent, "A Painful Case" is a conclusive tale of a rigid, middle-aged man—by the story's end Duffy appears completely resigned to his undesirable position in life. Though there is no direct connection between the boy narrator of "Araby" and Duffy of "A Painful Case," the psychological issues connecting the figures are striking. As I have suggested more generally in this paper, collectively the boy and Duffy suggest a whole or, more precisely, two ends of a single spectrum: the boy realizes the impossibility of idealized love/social interaction, while Duffy represents one man's failed attempt to circumvent this reality, in this case by engaging in what Henke terms "an Irish version of Nietzschean exile" (35). Though little information on Duffy's past exists, the extremity of his alienation is surely anything but natural, as is finally illustrated by his climactic breakdown. Duffy is not merely antisocial but is self-consciously so, and his final epiphany is that his approach to life is false and cannot be maintained: though he wishes to believe himself superior to and separate from Mrs. Sinico, he cannot deny his attachment; he is a part of society and a human after all. Thus, Duffy learns that his purely intellectual ideals are as implausible and ineffectual as the romantic dreams of the boy and, finally, that such dreams were never natural or completely true to his nature; his desires for intimacy never abated in spite of his refusal to acknowledge such desires.

To match the numerous superficial differences between the central characters of the two stories, Joyce's prose style in "A Painful Case" is markedly different from the form he used in "Araby." While "Araby" is in the first person, "A Painful Case" is in the third person, and where

“Araby” was free-flowing and elusive, “A Painful Case” is much more concrete. Moreover, beyond eschewing a first-person narrative, Joyce employs an ironic, detached voice that implicitly mocks Mr. Duffy’s self-absorbed ways: “Mr James Duffy lived in Chapelizod because he wished to live as far as possible from the city of which he was a citizen and because he found all the other suburbs of Dublin mean, modern and pretentious” (*D* 89). As in “Araby,” however, Joyce’s prose style ultimately mirrors the psyche of his central subject: Duffy’s central trait is his detachment from society as a whole. Indeed he is, to the best of his abilities, detached even from himself, and though he lacks the subtle humor that enters into Joyce’s prose, the disdain suggested by such humor remains a central part of Duffy’s character and worldview. Thus, though Duffy does not present his own story, the reader cannot help but suspect he would find Joyce’s impersonal and rather plain presentation of him entirely appropriate.

Duffy’s life, when he is introduced, consists of a precise and wholly unremarkable routine. Before delving into Duffy’s mind, however, Joyce recounts the contents of Duffy’s bland apartment, everything within which “[Duffy] had himself bought” (*D* 89). Like the boy before him, Duffy creates his own world, projecting his traits out onto the physical world. Furthermore, Duffy’s apartment mirrors his inner life in much the way that the dead priest’s home reflects the boy’s, though this abode has been chosen and constructed by Duffy himself: his world of isolation is self-imposed. The severely unimaginative nature of Duffy’s apartment, however, does not suggest that Duffy is any less self-absorbed than the boy; indeed, such a refusal to allow any outside influence suggests a profound narcissism. Cynthia Wheatley-Lovoy writes: “[Duffy] needs to be both author and reader of his life, controlling the language and the representations, as suggested by the fact that his walls bear no picture; his life is free from any representations other than his own” (181). While the boy’s self-obsession was natural, Duffy’s is

self-conscious; he will, through his actions, prove that he is separate from and superior to the rest of society.

After the strangely meticulous overview of the apartment's contents, Joyce establishes Duffy's aloof nature: "A Medieval doctor would have called him saturnine . . . On his long and rather large head grew dry black hair and a tawny moustache did not quite cover his unamiable mouth" (*D* 90). His features and movements suggest coldness, except "there was no harshness in the eyes which, looking at the world from under their tawny eyebrows, gave the impression of a man ever alert to greet a redeeming instinct in others but often disappointed" (*D* 90). This is one of the few concrete signs of Duffy's hidden nature, an apparently curdled and now repressed idealism. In order to escape the hidden idealism within him, Duffy must escape from himself: "He lived a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts with doubtful sideglances. He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time short sentences about himself in the past tense. He never gave alms to beggars and walked firmly carrying a stout hazel" (*D* 90). Duffy's life, in short, is already determined, has already occurred many times, and will repeat endlessly until death with little interference on Duffy's part. And, as an extension of his forced indifference to himself he must display an indifference to others, and continue endlessly in his routine, however insignificant the routine may in fact be. Again there is an inversion of the previous pattern: while the boy's world was pure romance and fantasy, Duffy's life is deliberately and absolutely devoid of any emotion or imagination, though this view is, for practical purposes, as much a fantasy as that of the boy. While the boy imbues the external world with his own meanings, Duffy instead drains it of any and all meaning.

Perhaps most significant for our purposes is Joyce's description of Duffy's unvarying, meticulous routine:

He had been for many years cashier of a private bank in Baggot street. Every morning he came in from Chapelizod by tram. At midday he went to Dan Burke's and took his lunch, a bottle of lager beer and a small trayful of arrowroot biscuits. At four o'clock he was set free. He dined in an eatinghouse in George's street where he felt himself safe from the society of Dublin's gilded youth and where there was a certain plain honesty in the bill of fare. His evenings were spent either before his landlady's piano or roaming about the outskirts of the city. His liking for Mozart's music brought him sometimes to an opera or a concert: these were the only dissipations of his life. (*D* 91)

As with his physical appearance, Duffy's actions suggest an absolute aloofness, though he again allows a small divergence in his fondness for the occasional concert and music generally. The indifference of Duffy's actions, however, is astonishing, and through this routine is Duffy's single-mindedness revealed. Benjamin Boysen writes: "His life is discretely organised around solitude and he has in this manner systemised his exile from his fellow human beings by giving his existence a static and routine order" (396). This is, again, a representation of Duffy's pure intellectualism. His life must be efficient and orderly, if nothing else. Joyce soon reveals that Duffy attempts to maintain this distance in his personal relations as well, such as they are:

He had neither companions nor friends, church nor creed. He lived his spiritual life without any communion with others, visiting his relatives at Christmas and escorting them to the cemetery when they died. He performed these two social duties for old dignity's sake but conceded nothing further to the conventions that regulate civil life. He allowed himself to think that in certain circumstances he

would rob his bank but as these circumstances never arose his life rolled by evenly—an adventureless tale. (*D* 91)

Duffy's iconoclasm is shown to be simultaneously deep and hollow. Though he claims no interest in or any particular attachment to social conventions, he feels a need to maintain a certain propriety, illustrated in his continued willingness to perform basic social rites of visitation and burial. To abandon convention entirely would perhaps arouse suspicion, and this bowing to custom reveals Duffy's antisocial nature to be ultimately defensive: he maintains a minor willingness to take part in a few old rituals because to refuse would be too shocking and shaming or, at the very least, would cause others to notice. Through this description, Joyce shows that Duffy's life, presumably for many years by this point, has been as much a fanciful, imagined quest as the boy's relatively brief infatuation with Mangan's sister. Where the boy imagines he is an Arthurian hero, Duffy asserts he is a Nietzschean over-man, as evidenced by his copies of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Gay Science*. Duffy does not, however, rise above society or create his own narrative, but merely hides from humanity. He is a rather pitiful example of an iconoclast, content with his unproven supposition that, if it were absolutely necessary, he could defy social norms. Even before the core narrative, then, the reader can perceive that Duffy's life is an elaborate self-deception. He must deny that he desires human contact and further deny the reasons why he cannot accept such interaction—his life consists entirely of false actions justified by false reasons.

As with the boy, Duffy's life is transformed by the arrival of a romantic interest. Duffy's relationship with Sinico begins innocuously, with simple conversations at the Rotunda extending into an acquaintanceship that moves to other meetings in public venues. He soon learns of her husband and daughter, but thinks little of them, and the seduction, such as it is, begins

unintentionally for both parties: “Little by little he entangled his thoughts with hers. He lent her books, provided her with ideas, shared his intellectual life with her. She listened to all” (*D* 92). Sinico’s response is minimal, suggesting she understands Duffy’s vulnerability: “Sometimes in return for his theories she gave out some fact of her own life. With almost maternal solicitude she urged him to let his nature open to the full; she became his confessor” (*D* 92). Duffy’s view of Sinico is, then, quite impersonal; he is not so much learning about her inner world as he is presenting himself to another. Duffy’s insularity is shown to be quite profound: he can interact with another, but only with the other functioning as a student or mirror to Duffy’s psyche. As he pursues it, Duffy’s relationship with Sinico is a sort of proof of his philosophy: if he can maintain the kind of formal, unemotional relationship he desires with another, he has demonstrated that his ideals are real.

Despite his initial reticence, Duffy is evidently elated by this relationship, and he slowly allows more meetings, more personal revelations and even changes in his personality:

This union exalted him, wore away the rough edges of his character, emotionalised his mental life . . . He thought that in her eyes he would ascend to an angelical stature; and as he attached the fervent nature of his companion more and more closely to him he heard the strange impersonal voice, which he recognized as his own insisting on the soul’s incurable loneliness. We cannot give ourselves, it said; we are our own. (*D* 93)

Duffy has come, perhaps without fully realizing it, to a crisis point: his recent personal experiences have suggested that his view of the world is not accurate, that he can choose to live as a part of human society. Simultaneously, however, he cannot deny his ideals. He does not

want to be seen as a friend or lover to Sinico, but instead to be inhuman, to earn the aforementioned “angelical stature.”

Duffy’s softening is short lived, however, and the relationship ends abruptly one night when “Mrs Sinico caught up his hand passionately and pressed it to her cheek” (*D* 93). Duffy’s response is blunt: “Mr Duffy was very much surprised. Her interpretation of his words disillusioned him” (*D* 93). With this first break in the narrative, Duffy’s response is impressively cold and blunt, and he reverts back to his defensive form instantaneously. Duffy soon breaks off their relationship, and Sinico’s distress is as evident as Duffy’s overt attempts at detachment: “When they came out of the Park they walked in silence towards the tram but here she began to tremble so violently that, fearing another collapse on her part, he bade her goodbye quickly and left” (*D* 93-94). Duffy, having briefly flirted with alternate possibilities, quickly returns to his old life, and submerges himself within his routine, apart from his concert attendance, which now must be avoided.

The whole of the Sinico episode illustrates Duffy’s inability, an inability shared with the boy, to play or even understand a social role. Duffy is both oblivious and headstrong: he is incapable of understanding the expectations of others and utterly unwilling to abide by them should he encounter a conflicting desire. Indeed, Duffy’s obliviousness far surpasses the boy’s, which can be justified somewhat by age. Conversely, that Duffy could imagine that his numerous overtures towards Sinico would not be interpreted as being at least somewhat romantic suggests an extraordinary ability for self-deception. As Margot Norris notes in “Shocking the Reader in James Joyce’s ‘A Painful Case,’” the story’s narrative and increasingly personal prose contain all the hallmarks of an adultery narrative until Duffy withdraws, to the great surprise of both Sinico and the reader. Norris writes: “The narration had clearly interpreted Duffy’s words, gestures, and

feelings in precisely the same way that Emily Sinico interpreted them, and the narrative voice, deeply imbedded in Duffy's feelings during this culminating discourse, suggests that Mrs. Sinico misinterpreted nothing" ("Shocking the Reader" 67). Norris's insight suggests even greater depth to Duffy's self-deception: he acts so as to seduce, but again cannot accept the significance of his actions.² Considering the changes that had come over his personality throughout the relationship, Duffy may have eventually come to acknowledge his desires, but Sinico's initiative destroys the narrative in Duffy's mind. Previously she had been purely receptive to his overtures, implicitly acknowledging that "she represent[ed] to him only a reflector of his own image" and allowing him to "[attempt] to create in her a likeness of himself" (Wheatley-Lovoy 184). She evidently underestimates, however, just how strongly Duffy refuses any other human autonomy, and just as the boy's resolve crumbled at the first sign of resistance, so Duffy dissolves the relationship the instant his narrative collapses. He discovers, once again, that the outer world does not reflect his inner world. Duffy was not yet ready to acknowledge that the relationship could be romantic or sexual in nature; therefore, Sinico should not have acknowledged this either. This mirrors the boy's evident dismay at the female attendant's flirtatious behavior—any sign of the mundane, vulgar or unexpected nature of reality must be shunned and hidden away from.

After the final confrontation, Joyce moves quickly to Sinico's demise. The reader is given no sense of how much time has passed, as time has no evident meaning for Duffy, who has reentered his old routine effortlessly. Perhaps Duffy would have continued this way indefinitely had he not learned of Sinico's death, which he reads about in the evening newspaper while eating his solitary dinner alone. Duffy's initial response is bafflement bordering on incomprehension, as he reads the paragraph again and again, unable to eat until he walks home in distress and attempts to read the story once more (*D* 94-95). Duffy's evident confusion again suggests his

propensity for creating his own narrative: the facts of Sinico's death do not align with his conception of reality, and therefore cannot be accepted immediately. Joyce reproduces the story in whole, and while the details are perhaps not especially lurid or shocking to the reader, Duffy is deeply disconcerted. This unemotional distancing cannot protect Duffy now, and the bleak truth must come through: Sinico has died, her final days spent in ignominy as a drunkard, and all of this is rooted in his relationship with her. The finality of this tragedy leaves Duffy vulnerable; to simply disengage is not an option, because he has already done so, and yet the awful reality of Sinico's fate remains. Death has come, and no amount of detachment, no refusal to accept reality can avoid this horrible truth.

Unsurprisingly, Duffy initially attempts to maintain his narrative, to distance himself from Sinico, quickly determining that he is disgusted that "he had ever spoken to her of what he held sacred" (*D* 97). Duffy soon imagines that Sinico must never have been the woman he thought she was and further that he "had no difficulty now in approving of the course he had taken" (*D* 97). The spell begins to break, however, when Duffy senses "her hand [touching] his" (*D* 97). The return of the touch, albeit of a different sort, speaks of the falsity of Duffy's perspective. In imagining that she touches him from beyond death, he cannot help but acknowledge the real truth: they had connected; he had shared the sacred with her; and now she was gone from the earth. The first touch exposed him to the truth he could not accept (that Sinico was not a being of pure intellect), and this second touch reveals the deeper, more troubling truth: Duffy is not a being of pure intellect either but now is hopeless to fulfill any emotional desires. Thus the final irony—Duffy, who had been completely self-obsessed and unwilling to interact with humanity generally, finally comes to better understand his true nature through considering the fate of another.³

With these revelations still in mind, the previously calm, routine-oriented Duffy begins a physical flight, returning to the pub, reflecting on his past and contemplating the finality of death. Duffy continues his attempts to rationalize, thinking “what else could he have done. He could not have carried on a comedy of deception with her; he could not have lived openly. He had done what seemed to him best. How was he to blame?” (*D* 98). That Duffy, the self-styled iconoclast, should try to find justification in social expectations is peculiar, and he finds little solace in this approach. Moreover, Duffy’s practical, intellectualized take is shortly countered by a human response: “Now that she was gone he understood how lonely her life must have been, sitting night after night alone in that room. His life would be lonely too until, he, too, died, ceased to exist, became a memory—if anyone remembered him” (*D* 98). Duffy has finally been wrenched free of his routine-oriented narrative; he can now see forward and backward, acknowledging his own inevitable fate. His epiphany is much the same as the boy’s—he now understands that the narrative he created for his life is false, was simply a disguise and a way to avoid the dangers of society. The story ends, as did “Araby,” with the protagonist out in public at night yet utterly alone. Duffy can see others, loving couples, but he is not one of them, and they “wished him gone. No-one wanted him; he was outcast at life’s feast” (*D* 98). Soon even his delusions escape him; he no longer senses the haunting presence of Sinico and begins to doubt that such perceptions had been real. Joyce concludes: “He could not feel her near him in the darkness, nor her voice touch his ear. He waited for some minutes, listening. He could hear nothing: the night was perfectly silent. He listened again: perfectly silent. He felt that he was alone” (*D* 99).

Though disillusionment and the loss of love are key to both the boy and Duffy’s conclusions, the contrasts between the ends are again noteworthy. Both accept a certain change

in their self-image, but the boy's revelation is far more complete: he accepts his vanity and the foolishness of his quest. Duffy accepts responsibility for Sinico's death and further accepts that he desires some sort of human companionship. Duffy, however, does not seem to realize one more fundamental truth—that he is overwhelmingly responsible for his anguished position. Duffy imagines that he is an outcast, but he has not, as far as the reader can tell, been pushed away but instead chose his life. Though he correctly acknowledges Sinico as his best opportunity for human connection, he believes this was his only chance: "One human being had seemed to love him and he had denied her life and happiness: he had sentenced her to ignominy, a death of shame" (*D* 98). Though this is the only potential companion the reader is aware of, it seems highly improbable that he was universally loathed by all but Sinico. In these final moments, Duffy can acknowledge that he denied Sinico life, but he cannot seem to accept that he denied life to himself as well. As an extension of this denial, Duffy further insists that he could not conceivably change his life. Though one like Duffy would understandably fear changing his lifestyle, the assumption that he could not possibly do so seems unreasonable. He had, after all, effectively charmed Sinico, presumably only a few years ago, even without fully accepting what his actions suggested. The idea of change, however, is impossible for Duffy, and this demands that the story's end be the effective end of Duffy. Duffy's utter defeat here suggests a finality to his condition, making the conclusions of "Araby" and "A Painful Case" a sort of life cycle of alienation, a life cycle of the bleakest, most painful sort. Through these tales, the reader sees that idealized desires can neither be lived nor denied. This begs the question—what, then, should one who perceives reality in such a way do? The answer comes, finally, in "The Dead."

With "The Dead," the collection's final, late-arriving tale, however, Joyce steps within this life cycle and suggests an alternate path for this particular kind of individual. Appropriately,

Gabriel of “The Dead” comes in between the other two figures: neither a confused boy nor an overly rigid late-middle aged man, Gabriel is a relatively young man in the prime of his life. The cores of their characters, however, remain much the same, and Gabriel is further able to combine the differing traits within Duffy and the boy to suggest how they are connected, embodying both Duffy’s intellectualism and interest in the artistic and the boy’s inclination towards reverie and excessive idealization.⁴ Moreover, with “The Dead” the reader receives a fuller picture of the practical difficulties that such an individual faces, as Gabriel repeatedly embarrasses himself and fails to comfortably interact with the rest of the party attendees. More centrally, “The Dead” again turns on a misunderstood relationship and concludes in a final revelation to the protagonist that his understanding of the relationship was false. “The Dead,” however, while still a rather melancholy tale, lacks the extreme alienation and sorrow found in the earlier works. Gabriel, though he is not wholly satisfied with his social world, has come to accommodate it, and earn whatever satisfaction he may from it, as exemplified by his family and his willing participation in the local society. The more intriguing issue, for this essay, is why Gabriel is able to succeed where the boy and Duffy have failed. Put most bluntly, Gabriel actively tries to step outside of himself, refusing to accept pure egoism, either inherent, as in the boy’s case, or self-consciously imposed, as with Duffy. All three characters are inclined to view society through a distorted lens, but Gabriel alone insists on confronting alternative views, refusing to fall back, and eventually he is able to receive something from the other, to take part in another world, rather than simply projecting his own outward. Gabriel, in short, acknowledges the primacy of society: one cannot live one’s own reality, unless one accepts that such a reality will be completely isolated.

Appropriate for the change in perspective, “The Dead” presents Irish society in a markedly different light from the prior stories. While the boy and Duffy dominate their

narratives, with society pushed into the background, “The Dead” is rooted not in an individual but in a single, traditional event: Gabriel’s aunts’ Christmas dinner-dance. Though Gabriel is the most significant figure and his culminating epiphany remains the key moment in the narrative, he is, to a large degree, subordinate to the larger narrative. Similarly, while the bulk of society was obscured in the earlier works, here Joyce gives a much more complete view of Dublin and the Irish people, allowing the various party guests to speak and establish their characters, rather than being pushed aside by the central figure’s obsessions. These pictures are not always terribly flattering, as when Miss Ivors mockingly accuses Gabriel of being a “west Briton,” but Joyce suggests a greater awareness by portraying them, reminding the reader that they do indeed exist and cannot be ignored merely because they are inconvenient. More practically, these characters exist because Gabriel willingly engages with them in order to fulfill a social role. This is, however, not some easy answer on Joyce’s part: Gabriel’s social awkwardness is ever present, and he is not able to fulfill his greater desires and ideals in life. He is not, however, so utterly alone as are the others and is far better able to cope with the various disappointments that confront him.

To match the widened focus, “The Dead” does not immediately introduce the reader to Gabriel but, instead, sets the stage for the year’s iteration of the Misses Morkan’s annual dance, which has been a local fixture for decades: “it was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan’s annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family . . . Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style” (*D* 152). Thus, “The Dead” focuses not merely on society generally, but on one of the great social events of the year within this particular circle, a moment where the disparate elements of a community come together to openly acknowledge they are connected. And, found amidst this

great throng of people is Gabriel Conroy, an awkward intellectual who is acutely aware of his separation from the rest of society. And yet Gabriel comes of his own free will and plays a significant role, carving the goose and toasting his aunts, allowing himself to be made the center of attention. Gabriel, unsurprisingly, is uneasy about his position at the dance, and Joyce takes pains to illustrate the small conflicts and worries that come with such an event, such as the possibility that Freddy Malins may arrive drunk and that minor squabbles might arise between guests. And yet, nothing that occurs within the story suggests that there is any falseness in the claim that the dance is, as always, a great affair.

Gabriel arrives at the party shortly after the story begins, and immediately generates an awkward moment for himself. Gabriel's *faux pas* is, in this case, fairly minor: in attempting small talk with the maid, Lily, Gabriel casually suggests that Lily may be married before much longer and receives a bitter, somewhat brusque retort: "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you" (*D* 154). Gabriel immediately collapses into himself, ending the conversation and looking away before attempting to regain composure by offering Lily a tip. This is of little help, with Lily surprised and reluctant to receive the money, and Gabriel is forced to flee, "almost trotting to the stairs and waving his hand to her in deprecation" (*D* 155). This incident in particular highlights Gabriel's hypersensitivity and difficulty in predicting the responses of others: Gabriel made a remark in light and receives a serious retort, so he is immediately thrown off balance. There is no reason to suppose that Lily is directly upset with Gabriel himself, but the unexpected bitterness in her voice cannot help but unsettle him—any break in the calm is bound to affect Gabriel negatively. The incident mirrors, on a much smaller scale, Duffy's disillusionment with Sinico; once the narrative has been broken, the only choice is to flee.

Though a seemingly small incident, Gabriel is disturbed, and he becomes generally self-conscious of his social presentation: “It had cast a gloom over him which he tried to dispel by arranging his cuffs and the bows of his tie” (*D* 155). This confrontation brings to mind future concerns Gabriel has, as he reviews the night’s speech, thinking perhaps that he should replace the Browning quotes with a more familiar passage, such as from Shakespeare or something traditionally Irish: “He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail them as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. He had taken up a wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure” (*D* 155). Joyce efficiently establishes that Gabriel is socially ill-at-ease, and how, if not properly suppressed, this fragility unsettles his whole being: the simple misunderstanding with Lily begets an interest in physical appearance which inspires an interest in his speech which in turn inspires a fear that his quotes are too obscure and finally causes Gabriel to despair for the speech as a whole. Benjamin Boysen explains: “Gabriel is caught between an arrogant cultural feeling of superiority and latent feelings of inadequacy, and he projects this inner drama out into the social world, which thus becomes a stage for his continuous strivings for self-affirmation” (401). Though it is this self-doubt that most troubles his social interactions, it is also through these doubts that Gabriel is able to reach outside of himself; because Gabriel doubts, he must respond and interact with others, he must place himself within the social milieu, rather than simply creating an alternate reality. Moreover, though quite powerful, Gabriel’s social difficulties are more conventional than those of the prior protagonists—the boy’s utter obliviousness to social reality and Duffy’s pseudo-iconoclasm seem far more crippling and paralyzing than Gabriel’s powerful fear of embarrassment.

Gabriel's fears are, to some degree, justified, as he has no small amount of difficulty interacting with the other party guests. Most obvious is the dance and conversation with Miss Ivors, when she confronts Gabriel with the knowledge that he writes literary criticism for the *Daily Express*, a conservatively-minded paper that is skeptical of Irish independence (*D* 163, note 1). Ivors sees associating with this publication as insufficiently nationalistic, and she labels Gabriel a "west Briton" (*D* 163). Ivors's tone is somewhat obscure, and Gabriel is confused, responding to her joking questions in a defensive manner and finding himself afraid to explain his belief that "literature was above politics" (*D* 163). Though Gabriel is clearly uncomfortable, the circumstances require that the conversation continue for some time, and Gabriel's less than nationalistic views continue to emerge, culminating in the statement: "O to tell you the truth . . . I'm sick of my own country, sick of it" (*D* 165). This evidently ends the conversation, though Miss Ivors nevertheless whispers her prior accusation, "west Briton," in his ear before they leave the dance floor.

Far more than the incident with Lily, this pained conversation illustrates Gabriel's difficulty in interpreting social signals, in aligning his own requirements and expectations with those of another individual. Though he is not self-absorbed in the manner of the boy or of Duffy, he is sadly incapable of matching the tone presented by Miss Ivors, which moves from subtly mocking, to complimentary, to indifferently conversational, all of which Gabriel can only respond to in an excessively literal manner. Beyond the embarrassment the conversation causes Gabriel, Ivors' specific accusation points to Gabriel's insecurity: after Gabriel demurs from an invitation to visit the Aran Isles, saying he already intends to and prefers to visit the continent, Ivors states, "And haven't you your own land to visit . . . that you know nothing of, your own people and your own country?" (*D* 164-65). Gabriel's discomfort, which haunts him throughout

the remainder of the dance and causes him to again reflect on his speech, suggests that there is truth in Ivors's statement; he does not know his own people or his own land because he does not have a people, neither in Ireland nor anywhere else. The conversation with Ivors is a plain example of his estrangement—it is not so much that he dislikes or finds himself in opposition to Ivors, but rather that Gabriel simply does not understand what she wants, what she expects of him. This disconnect is especially distressing because Ivors seems like more of a peer to Gabriel than most other individuals—Ivors is educated, having undertaken a career path parallel to Gabriel's, and they had been "friends of many years' standing" (*D* 163). And yet he cannot effectively communicate with her and, perhaps more disturbingly, cannot bring himself to make a genuine attempt, instead insisting that "he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her" (*D* 165). And yet, in spite of Gabriel's clear discomfort, this incident well illustrates his willingness to engage society. Gabriel is taking part in a social ritual, one he does not apparently enjoy, and this incident has no real parallel in the other stories—he plays this role at the dance simply because this is what one does, a notion that would not have occurred to the earlier protagonists.

As the party continues, Gabriel fades somewhat into the background until the time comes to carve the goose, a role he relishes: "Gabriel took his seat boldly at the head of the table and . . . plunged his fork firmly into the goose. He felt quite at ease now for he was an expert carver and liked nothing better than to find himself at the head of a well laden table" (*D* 171). The physicality and simplicity of the act appears to calm him—there is little interpretation needed, nor much speech. Here Gabriel is of simple, practical use, and he seems quite hesitant to relinquish the role. With the carving complete, however, Gabriel soon finds that he must attempt his most dreaded activity, the delivery of an extended toast. The content is much as one would expect, reflecting on the importance of hospitality and camaraderie, about how the simple bonds

of community must survive in spite of the political turmoil of the age and the new views of much of the younger generations. Though the toast itself is aimed most directly at his aunts, who host the party, and more generally at everyone in attendance, the speech's content reflects most positively on Gabriel; for few would the call for hospitality be more difficult than for Gabriel, who feels so inadequate in his attempts at social interaction that he would wish to flee, as he does briefly earlier, longingly staring out the window. But Gabriel does not and, instead, takes part in the grand tradition. Gabriel says, perhaps most significantly, "We have all of us living duties and living affections which claim, and rightly claim, our strenuous endeavors" (*D* 177). And Gabriel's actions are, by all appearances, rewarded, and the party ends with extended, heartfelt singing, leaving the two aunts visibly moved. Perhaps Gabriel is an outsider in his home country, but he can still acknowledge the positive aspects of Ireland. Further, the toast, for all of Gabriel's fears, is executed skillfully, though whether or not Gabriel takes any pleasure in this execution is uncertain.

The whole of the dance narrative illustrates the key functional difference between Gabriel and the two prior protagonists. Though Gabriel is acutely aware, as acutely aware as either the boy or Duffy, of the complications inherent in his attempts to socialize or become part of a community, Gabriel actively seeks to do so. Though it is unclear if he receives much, if any, enjoyment from these efforts directly, he is rewarded with greater social attachments, particularly his wife, Gretta, and their unseen children. Though Gretta is a fairly minor figure during the actual dance, as the narrative continues later in their hotel, her relationship with Gabriel becomes the story's core issue, and reveals Gabriel's immaturely idealistic core. As with the boy, Gabriel finds that his idealizations of his beloved are dubious and impractical, but Gabriel is again able to adjust to these revelations in a manner far different from the earlier protagonists.

Early the next morning, as the various guests prepare to return to their homes, Gabriel is transfixed by the sight of Gretta at the top of the stairs, her image abstracted by Gabriel's description: "A woman was standing near the top of the first flight in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmonpink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife" (*D* 182). Gabriel determines she is listening to music, but he knows no more for certain, instead entering a reverie wondering of "what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol," and reflecting that, were he a painter, he would portray Gretta as he sees her now (*D* 182). As they begin their journey to the hotel, Gabriel senses that Gretta is peculiarly affected as well, and he reflects on their life together. Gabriel grows increasingly joyful as he remembers more and more: "A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries. Like the tender fire of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illuminated his memory" (*D* 186). Now that Gabriel is no longer bound by social obligations, he may act as he wishes, with the intensity of his fancies suggesting the extremity of his discomfort in playing a social role—now that he is free he will slip deeply, effortlessly into his own mind. Unsurprisingly, Gabriel does not speak of his longings, though he comes to believe that Gretta must share them as well, and fantasizes about how he will approach her when they are finally alone. Gabriel's desires, as portrayed in these passages, suggest a peculiar mixture: his substantial flights of fancy are impressive for an adult individual who is long married, speaking again of the idealism found within the prior protagonists. Wheatley-Lovoy writes: "After the party, Gabriel's journey to the hotel is dominated by his attempts to control the course of future events by creating a script in his mind of which he is both actor and director" (*D* 187). Though naturally obsequious in social situations,

when left in his mind alone, Gabriel takes immediate control—he is the undisputed master of this particular realm.

As they finally arrive at their hotel room, Gabriel's fancies have grown overwhelming, but Gretta's behavior begins to disturb him. He hopes for her to come to him, rather than requiring him to initiate the sexual overtures alone, and Gretta soon obliges, kissing Gabriel and inspiring his fantasies to reach their peak: "Just when he was wishing for it she had come to him of her own accord. Perhaps her thoughts had been running with his. Perhaps she had felt the impetuous desire that was in him and then the yielding mood had come upon her" (*D* 189). Having retreated into his mental world, Gabriel has come to hope that this reality is, perhaps, every bit as tangible as any other. Gabriel finally finds courage and presents his most personal question: "Gretta dear, what are you thinking about?" (*D* 189). This is a significant action on Gabriel's part, though perhaps he does not realize why; he is trying to bring the other into his fantasy, to prove its reality. At the very least, this suggests a greater boldness on Gabriel's part, as compared to the other protagonists—Gabriel will push the moment to the brink.

With this phrase, Gabriel finds that he was utterly mistaken regarding Gretta's thoughts: she has been reflecting on Michael Furey, a young, long-deceased suitor who had sung the same song she heard just prior to their return journey. Soon she recites the whole sad tale before falling asleep, leaving Gabriel with his thoughts. The course of events could very easily have proven to be truly disillusioning for Gabriel—not only were he and Gretta not privy to some special communication, he has discovered that she contains depths he has never known. Moreover, the specific nature of the revelations could be seen as particularly bitter: not only was she not reflecting upon her love for Gabriel, she was remembering another romance long ago with a man not her husband.

With Furey's death first revealed, Joyce writes: "A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable vindictive being was coming against him . . . But he shook himself free and continued to caress her hand. He did not question her again for he felt that she would tell him all herself" (*D* 191). Gabriel arrives at the crisis moment—his narrative has been broken utterly. And yet, he does not flee or even reveal his own desires to Gretta but, instead, allows Gretta to tell her story and enact her grief. Though his narrative is lost, he does intrude upon Gretta's, but instead participates, if only mildly, listening to her speak and, after she finishes speaking and simply weeps, "[holding] her hand a moment longer and then, shy of intruding on her grief, [letting] it fall gently" (*D* 193).

Gabriel receives this disillusionment with equanimity: "So she had had that romance in her life: a man had died for her sake. It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life" (*D* 193). This reversal is impressively complete considering Gabriel's prior desires. But he has, in a sense, earned this sympathetic connection with Gretta—rather than imposing his will, he simply allows her to continue, allows the truth to triumph over fantasy. This outward-looking act soon begets Gabriel's transcendent moment as he watches the snow fall: "His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling" (*D* 194). Having earned a connection with Gretta, he feels, however briefly, the transcendent connection with all of humanity, even his unseen, deceased rival Furey.

Gabriel's final reflections could, no doubt, have been devastating, with a particularly narcissistic individual potentially viewing Gretta's memories as quasi-adulterous. And yet Gabriel, who has been so overwhelmingly self-conscious throughout the tale, finally steps outside of himself emotionally—though he is not and never has, at least he believes, been part of

the sort of romance he desires, he can now find satisfaction vicariously through Gretta's memories. While arguably lesser revelations left the boy and Duffy severely distraught, trapped in their own self absorption and lack of perspective, Gabriel finds that he can sympathize, that he can finally understand the connection between himself and Gretta and the world even in spite of the gaps that necessarily exist. The concept of reconciliation returns: rather than shun the world or effectively refuse to acknowledge its existence, Gabriel throws himself into the fray and insists that he and society find some form of compromise. Just as he finds some compromise, however awkwardly, with the varying requirements of the party guests, Gabriel is able to bridge the gap between Gretta and himself as well; the sacrifices he made the previous night have been rewarded, if not in precisely the manner he desired. Though he cannot experience the romance that he desires with Gretta, he can now see within her more clearly and experience some shadow of the world that she experiences—he is sympathizing with her, rather than demanding that she accept his internal world. Though Gabriel's relationship is not idealized and does not match up to his fantasies, it is real and meaningful—it has a tangible reality wholly lacking from the other protagonists' fantasies. It is perhaps ironic, then, that Gabriel's final communion is in some sense imaginary—he is not, in any literal sense, connected with anyone at the moment of his epiphany, but is actually quite alone. But, for at least a moment, he is no longer sick of his country, no longer feels that he has no country at all; because he has given something to society, he is finally able to receive something in return.

Notes

1. For more historical/cultural background on “Araby” see Donald Torchiana’s *Backgrounds for Joyce’s Dubliners* and Heyward Ehrlich’s “ ‘Araby’ in Context: The ‘Splendid Bazaar,’ Irish Orientalism and James Clarence Mangan.” Torchiana goes into great detail concerning the historical reality of the Araby bazaar, which was evidently an extremely popular and highly anticipated event that was heavily advertised throughout the British Isles, attracted over 92,000 individuals and inspired a great deal of grotesquely effusive praise in response to the grand “Oriental City” (57-59). Torchiana further suggests that Joyce’s use of the overblown and self-congratulatory “charity” event deliberately mirrors the improbable and self-deceiving nature of the boy’s quest, though the parallels are, again, left under the surface of the text. Ehrlich’s essay covers many of the same historical aspects, but in greater detail, and also presents an explication of Joyce’s notion of “Irish Orientalism” as developed in his essay on the poet James Clarence Mangan. Joyce attempted to conceptualize Mangan, a poet also known for translating Eastern works, as a sort of prototypically Irish hero, one who invented an identity separate from either Britain or Europe (279-83). Ehrlich’s essay also provides an alternate interpretation of the boy’s revelation, suggesting this is not so much a disillusionment as a further opportunity for self-reinvention as attempted by James Clarence Mangan.

2. Of course, there remains another explanation for Duffy’s reticence: Duffy may secretly experience homosexual desire. See Roberta Jackson’s “The Open Closet in *Dubliners*: James Duffy’s Painful Case.” This interpretation hinges most on Duffy’s aphorism: “Love between man and man is impossible because there must not be sexual intercourse and friendship between man and woman is impossible because there must be sexual intercourse” (*D* 94). Jackson sees this not as a lament on practical difficulties in human relationships, but as an outcry against

social requirements. Jackson further notes that the composition of “A Painful Case” was completed within a decade of Wilde’s famous “gross indecency” trial and marked a period of particular interest in and growing concern regarding homosexuality in the British Isles (88-89). This growing public awareness of homosexuality transformed the notion of homosexuality from an act one performed to a medical condition one suffered from, thus creating the sort of alienated identity Duffy maintained (90). Ultimately, the interpretation of Duffy’s actions remains much the same with the homosexual reading, even though the causes differ—in both cases Duffy must deny his own desires, refusing to acknowledge their very existence and thus live his life in a cold, detached manner.

3. Duffy’s relatively quick acceptance of blame in Sinico’s death, however, need not be interpreted solely as a self-aware act. See Mary Lowe-Evans’s “Who Killed Mrs. Sinico?” Lowe-Evans’s feminist reading challenges the notion that Sinico’s distress at failing to maintain a relationship with Duffy was the true cause of her death. Lowe-Evans’s essay focuses on the briefly considered husband and daughter of Emily Sinico, with the husband constantly absent and the daughter Mary evidently of marriageable age and acting as a music instructor. Lowe-Evans suggests that the apparent conflict between Sinico and Mary in her final years, most particularly with regards to Sinico’s new-found fondness for alcohol, was the greatest cause of Sinico’s distress. This culminates in Mary’s attempts to have Sinico stop drinking and receive help from others, making Mary a “facilitator of patriarchal arrangements” (399). While Sinico tries to cross gender lines, Mary seems more content with a middle position where she is given perhaps more freedom than prior women but still accepts her general position in society. (Mary leaves home, but to do a “woman’s job [give music lessons]” [401]). In short, Sinico is distressed at Mary’s general acceptance of patriarchal society and (according to Lowe-Evans) commits

suicide in distress. Though this interpretation draws an enormous amount of material from little text, it points to a concern common to any interpretation: Duffy never considers the possibility that the causes of Sinico's death could be highly complicated or fundamentally unrelated to himself. Failing to even consider the alternative further suggests Duffy's impressive self-absorption.

4. Though, from my reading, no one has yet attempted to constitute the boy, Duffy and Gabriel as a triad, various scholars have considered the more obvious parallels between the latter two protagonists. See Cynthia D. Wheatley-Lovoy's "The Rebirth of Tragedy: Nietzsche and Narcissus in 'A Painful Case' and 'The Dead,'" and Benjamin Boysen's "The Self and the Other: On James Joyce's 'A Painful Case' and 'The Dead,'" both of which are cited elsewhere within this essay. Wheatley-Lovoy reads Duffy and Gabriel in light of Ovid's pairing of Narcissus and Echo and Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. This dense reading covers much material, but the Ovid connections are most intriguing for the purposes of this essay, with Wheatley-Lovoy viewing Duffy and Gabriel as Narcissus figures, emphasizing their lack of accurate perspective in noting that the isolated Narcissus loves his reflection "not because he recognizes himself but because he does not recognize himself as both object and subject of perception" (178). This worldview leaves Sinico and Gretta as Echo figures, those who can only repeat the phrases that originated elsewhere (within Gabriel and Duffy), though these repetitions distort the prior meaning, potentially allowing the original speaker to either change or reject her as an imperfect reflection. Wheatley-Lovoy further considers Duffy and Gabriel as pure Apollonian individualists who must create and control their own narratives. This view is somewhat harsher than mine regarding Gabriel, suggesting that he is more controlling during the dance than my reading would suggest, though Wheatley-Lovoy notes that Gabriel is finally able escape his

narcissistic perspective when he, after hearing Gretta's Furey tale, "experientially takes the attitude of another toward himself. In that moment, Gabriel becomes the chorus in Gretta's alternate reality" (189). Boysen's reading more closely resembles my own, first noting that Duffy is a pure narcissist who is only able to step outside of himself even slightly after Sinico's death: "But now that [Sinico] is dead, he listened for the first time to a voice other than his own, and now he is for the first time touched by another than himself, since she becomes present amidst the emptiness" (399). Boysen's much more elaborate consideration of "The Dead" covers much familiar territory, noting Gabriel's self-doubt and awkwardness in dealing with Lily and Ivors, and finally interpreting Gabriel's epiphany in a positive manner that reflects well on Gabriel and that, again, reflects my own reading of Gabriel's actions: "The acknowledgement of the other, i.e. the solidarity and love, is thus caused by the recognition of one's temporality and the derived dependency on the other . . ." (413).

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