June 1982

"Chronicles of Disorder": Reading the Margins of Joyce's Dubliners

Joseph C. Voelker

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 18, no.2, June 1982, p.126-144

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.
"Chronicles of Disorder":
Reading the Margins
of Joyce's Dubliners

by JOSEPH C. VOELKER

LIKE Flaubert's Madame Bovary, Joyce's Dubliners is a book which derives its power from ambivalence. Of the two writers, Joyce is perhaps the more generous, for while Flaubert could qualify his hatred only in the case of his heroine, Joyce found himself to be of two minds toward an entire city. All his life, Joyce oscillated between injured rage at the parochial closed-mindedness of Dublin and a grudging fondness for its inexplicable and unsteady joie de vivre.

It is strange, therefore, that even sensitive readers of Dubliners have agreed to see a very singleminded Joyce lurking behind the realism of his narrative. Perhaps because of the shrillness of his letters at the time, we have come to envision the young Joyce as a malignant artist, crafting maledictory leitmotivs out of coffins, priests, books, and gold florins. In such a view, the book is a clinically detailed diagnosis of hemiplegia, and all conclusions concerning the quality of actions within its pages are necessarily foregone. Dubliners presupposes a world without possibility, a modernist Inferno, a place in which, as Little Chandler puts it, "You could do nothing." Such a reading has historical importance, for it led to new clarity in Joyce studies in the 1950's. In the long run it tempts readers—especially students in the classroom—to impoverish the book by reducing art to pathology.

The "hemiplegia of the will" which Joyce claimed to find in epidemic proportions in Ireland manifests itself consistently in Dubliners as a terrified reaction before two conditions—death and passion. Confronted with a sudden intimation of mortality or the loss of self which accompanies genuinely erotic experience, the coward freezes, seeks self-confinement, accepts a life-long denial rather than face such risk again. But hemiplegia is not the only response to love or mortality among Joyce's Dubliners, and he countered his scrupulous depictions of hemiplegia with the portrayal of anarchic acts and gestures. Characters in Dubliners respond to love and death, not courageously, but certainly in non-paralytic ways. They turn freely to tradition and the past, or they drink,

or quarrel, or meditate. Most often, they wander. It is the most vital, if radically imperfect, act of the Dubliner confronted with the fact of his mortality or the risk of love. Joyce is quick to insist that he does not wander far enough or with sufficient passion, but for every Eveline, who—as failed Eve and failed Emma—can neither taste the fruit nor leave the window, there are numerous characters who evasively respond by a movement beyond the bounds of conventional responsibility. Joyce accords to those who stray a kind of indulgence. Such characters are sources of possibility. Frequently *Dubliners* records evasions of duty or surrenders to temptation which reflect either a compromise Joyce could not wholeheartedly condemn or a surreptitious heroism he could frankly applaud.

Such wandering is intrinsic to his idea of the authentic behavior of the artist. The idea of the “errant,” one who wanders in mazes, is central to the *Portrait* and *Ulysses*, and in both books errancy is an ambiguously rich condition. The homelessness and detachment of Stephen and Bloom provide them with the conditions for mutual discovery. Joyce asserts that it is only when adrift that one makes discoveries, and that assertion grows out of his lifelong admiration for Odysseus. Straying is a *sine qua non*—a not-especially admirable evasion of the confinements—spatial, moral, and perceptual—which prevent real confrontations.

In *Dubliners*, Joyce signals the reader that a character is astray by referring to him as a “vagrant” (e.g. Lenehan and Ignatius Gallaher). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term thus: “1. One of a class of persons who having no settled home or regular work wander from place to place and maintain themselves by begging or in some other disreputable or dishonest way; an itinerant beggar, idle loafer, or tramp. 2. One who wanders or roams about; a person who leads a wandering life, a rover.” Joyce favors the second, looser definition, but his use of the word invariably allows suspicion of the disreputable qualities of the first. At times in the book, vagrancy takes a specialized form, most dramatically stated in “An Encounter,” in the phrase, “a day’s miching.” The *OED* defines “miching” as “in varying senses of the verb: pilfering, skulking, truant-playing, pretending poverty.” While “truant-playing” is the primary meaning in “An Encounter,” the verb’s other senses can be found in abundance in *Dubliners*. Lenehan and Corley skulk and pilfer respectively, and the drinking friends of Farrington, the canvassers for Dick Tierney, and Mr. Holohan and his Committee all pretend poverty.

But it is the concept of “truant-playing” that most richly characterizes the wanderings of Joyce’s Dubliners. The *OED* provides essentially two meanings: “1. One who begs without justification, a sturdy beggar;
a vagabond; an idle rogue or knave. (Often a mere term of abuse.) 2. A lazy, idle person; esp. a boy who absents himself from school without leave; hence *fig.*, one who wanders from an appointed place or neglects his duty or business. Truancy and vagrancy define a *locus*. One enters this *locus* in search of moral vagueness; in it one evades, not only duty, but open conflict with the authority who prescribes that duty. Truancy, at its lower spiritual levels, is a necessary position in a bourgeois world; it gives rhythm to the perception of time and it creates a necessary “play” in the wheel of labor. It is universally held to be less than a crime, because the truant acknowledges tacitly the illegality of his condition, and thus he returns to the duty he abandoned by abdicating the right to question it. For many of Joyce’s Dubliners, truancy is a compromised state. The truant will pay lip service to the idols of his tribe, while he reserves his heart for the wild, anarchic moments of escape. At its higher reaches, however, truancy will lead to a painful and often unwelcome self-knowledge.

At the outset of *Dubliners*, Joyce’s greatest concern is to establish the imagery of paralysis. Whatever qualifications we may find at the margins of “The Sisters,” the center is taken up with the young narrator’s growing awareness of the meaning behind the immobility of Father Flynn. The story’s symbolic structure leads from images of his house, cassock, book of canon law, and coffin to the epiphanic conclusion—the vision of the old priest madly chuckling to himself inside the confession box.

At the margins, however, the story concerns a successful escape from paralysis. The narrator gains his freedom because he understands the story’s epiphany. The source of his understanding, and the anti-type to Father Flynn in the story’s structure, is a garrulous hanger-on in the boy’s household—old Cotter. He opposes the priest’s mysterious book with a dark, incoherent manner of insinuation, and, though the boy rejects his inconclusive observations as the ramblings of a “red-nosed imbecile” and “a tiresome old fool,” he ultimately finds himself in agreement with old Cotter.

In the dinner table scene, in which the boy learns of Father Flynn’s death, old Cotter rivals the priest as a spiritual adviser. In a speech as directionless as the behavior he advocates, old Cotter says, “My idea is: let a young lad run about and play with young lads of his own age and not be . . . Am I right, Jack?”

In the *Irish Homestead* version of “The Sisters,” Joyce informed the reader that old Cotter was retired from a distillery and once owned a number of Irish setters. In the final version there is no accounting for

---


his idleness and no indication of his wealth. He is a frequent guest at the dinner table, and the boy’s aunt knows to bring the mutton to the table even though he seems to refuse seconds (p. 11). He occupies the seat nearest the fire, and his status in the house allows him to pontificate. There is not sufficient evidence to call him a parasite, but in revision Joyce erased the facts that weighed against that suspicion. Since it is he who discovers Father Flynn’s death by “passing the house,” one may surmise that he enjoys walking the streets—the characteristic activity of Joyce’s marginal, unparalyzed Dubliners. Such walking is important in “The Sisters.” Like old Cotter, the narrator is given to “passing the house,” and the story’s second sentence pauses guiltily in a parenthesis because the boy feels required to explain his nocturnal freedom: “There was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke. Night after night I had passed the house (it was vacation time) and studied the lighted square of the window. . . .” (p. 9. Italics mine).

The story’s chief antithesis lies between Father Flynn’s stifling interiority and old Cotter’s recommendation of the idle pleasures of the street. At an important moment, the boy approaches Father Flynn’s house and makes a symbolic choice between the two:

I wished to go in and look at him but I had not the courage to knock. I walked away slowly along the sunny side of the street, reading all the theatrical advertisements in the shopwindows as I went. I found it strange that neither I nor the day seemed in a mourning mood and I felt even annoyed at discovering in myself a sensation of freedom as if I had been freed from something by his death. (p. 12)

“‘The Sisters’” concerns the initiation of its narrator into a new spiritual locus—moral vagrancy. It is frequently signalled throughout Dubliners by a character’s position in or penchant for the street. Old Cotter lounges at the gates of the book as a spiritual guide—in a curiously reversed spatial orientation. While learning is most always signalled in literature by entrance (into a chapel, or wood, or drawing room), in Dubliners the reader must keep a close symbolic eye on exits from—or evasions of—doors. Those who do not enter need not abandon hope. It is by brooding upon old Cotter’s intimations that the narrator of “The Sisters” escapes immobility and flies by the net of religion.

In “An Encounter,” the motif of a walk away from duty shifts from the margins to the center of the narrative, and Joyce establishes a second antithesis—this one between wandering and the reading of books—to operate in close parallel with the antithesis between vagrant play and spiritual duty which orders “The Sisters.” The narrator of “An Encounter” is fascinated by books. He tries to find in them an imaginative release from tedium. In trying to evade the drudgery of his schoolwork, he turns to The Union Jack, Pluck, and The Halfpenny Marvel, because these fantasy magazines appear to open “doors of escape” (p. 20). In fact, they are a cul de sac, and he learns to reject them for direct confrontations. After Father Butler apprehends Leo
("the idler") Dillon with a copy of "The Apache Chief," the narrator decides that book-induced fantasies are dangerous as well as insufficient, and he concludes:

This rebuke during the sober hours of school paled much of the glory of the Wild West for me and the confused puffy face of Leo Dillon awakened one of my consciences. But when the restraining influence of the school was at a distance I began to hunger again for wild sensations, for the escape which those chronicles of disorder alone seemed to offer me. The mimic warfare of the evening became at last as wearisome to me as the routine of school in the morning because I wanted real adventures to happen to myself. But real adventures, I reflected, do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad. (pp. 20-21)

Therefore, with Mahoney and Leo Dillon, the narrator plans a "day's miching." Once adrift, outside the legal confines of school, the narrator enters the Joycean locus of significant learning. The story's title is by no means ironic. The boy meets and talks with an old pervert in a vacant lot and is startled to find the green eyes, which he had expected to play a prominent part in a fantasy-like adventure, to be part of a dreadfully enlightening actuality. The old man's manner of walking—a magnetized movement back and forth over the same ground—mirrors his speech, a repetitious lurching between the poles of erotic imagery and visions of punishment. He is one of Dublin's paralytics, trapped between a futile lust and a hatred for those whose sexuality is untrammeled.

The encounter with such a figure teaches the narrator something about himself. The old pervert combines an onanistic sexual distortion with a love of books, and that love provides an ugly bond between the boy and him. The boy sees in the old man a mirror image of his own tendency to manipulate himself by means of fantasy, and he perceives thereby the peculiar viciousness and self-betrayal inherent in such an abuse of the imagination:

He asked us whether we had read the poetry of Thomas Moore or the works of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Lytton. I pretended that I had read every book he mentioned so that in the end he said:
—Ah, I can see you are a bookworm like myself. Now, he added, pointing to Mahoney, who was regarding us with open eyes, he is different; he goes in for games. (p. 25)

The old man's condemnation of Mahoney inadvertently informs the narrator of the falseness of his sense of his own superiority and points out to him the preciousness of his friend's natural, unintelligent spontaneity. Mahoney's anarchic lunacy, his untiring fondness for chasing cats, his unashamed avowal of his "three totties," are things to be treasured, and the story ends by making him the center of an epiphany. By "going in for games" Mahoney constitutes the ideal youth according to old Cotter, who urged that a boy should "run about and play with young lads of his own age." The narrator tells us: "How my heart beat as he came running across the field to me! He ran as if to bring me aid."
And I was penitent; for in my heart I had always despised him a little’’ (p. 28). Like old Cotter, Mahoney is kept in the margins. As the narrator of “The Sisters” felt contempt for old Cotter, so the boy here “had always despised” Mahoney. Such characters, lacking the precocious intelligence of Joyce’s narrators, possess a secret, a skill at vagrancy, which the more perceptive are likely to have filched from them by Dublin’s system of rewards and punishments. For, as the narrator of this story learns, skill in schoolwork, especially in literature, is the first insidious step toward becoming an old josser. It is the city’s way of co-opting its children—inventing them to indulge in a smug pride for their inability to live.

It is significant in this light that the narrator of “An Encounter” is an inveterate liar. He leads the old man to believe he has read far more than he has, and he falsifies Mahoney’s name, calling him Murphy, when he cries to him for rescue. Evidently, survival within the city requires mendacity. The reward for deceit is heightened perception. For the “micher,” objects and events burn with a new intensity, and encounters, though unromantic, are educational. The narrator of this story is momentarily one of Joyce's artists because he is an outlaw. By means of his cunning, he dupes the green-eyed enforcer of Dublin’s first ordinance—that all experience be surrogate.

“Araby” operates on a lower level of spiritual development than “An Encounter.” The young narrator’s teacher mistakes his distractedness in class for a truant impulse: “I watched my master’s face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle” (p. 32). In fact, however, the boy suffers from a Bovarian longing, a need, not to drift, but to transform life into a pre-fabricated narrative. Truancy in Dubliners is random, chaotic, unarranged. The narrator shows some awareness of the joys of that condition when he hides with his friends out of the light of the lamppost to evade being called in to dinner or sleep. More characteristically, however, he seeks out dark interiors—the dead priest’s old room, the upstairs room from which he conjures the vision of Mangan’s sister in the lamplight, and finally the upper vaults of the bazaar, where the nature of his delusion is finally revealed to him and the pressures of actuality become sufficient to shatter his dream. The story, then, concerns the bitter moment of self-realization when a boy who longs for heroic labor and the egocentrically ordered landscape of a quest finds that his longing itself has been misdirected. “Araby” is not a condemnation of a trivial world which fails to arrange itself to support literary quests and thereby disappoints its romantics. In his epiphanic moment, the narrator blames himself, not Dublin—“Gazing up into darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger” (p. 35).

Having learned so much, the boy does not step forth to discover the joys of a vagrant life. On the margins of the story, however, truants and
confidence-artists abound, and they recommend other, non-delusory styles of escape.

Of the books the dead priest left behind, the boy’s favorite—because of its romantically yellowed pages—is The Memoirs of Vidocq. He does not read it. The book is purportedly the autobiographical account of one among numerous sociopaths who fascinated Joyce (Florence Maybrick and Leo Taxil are two others). I quote from Scholes and Litz’s notes to the Viking critical edition of Dubliners:

Francois Eugene Vidocq (1775-1857), a French detective, was imprisoned early in life and spent some time in the company of criminals, making a study of their methods. In 1809 he offered his services to the Paris police, and subsequently became chief of detectives. He retired in 1827, but in 1832 he returned to the police service and sought to re-establish his reputation by arranging and then “discovering” a theft. He was dismissed from the service, and after an abortive career as a private detective he died in great poverty. It is doubtful if Vidocq had a hand in writing the memoirs.

The marginal relationship with duly constituted authority which Vidocq exploited was paradigmatic for Joyce in his evolution of the concept of the artist. The serpentine manoeuvrings of the confidence-man, who, disguised as a good bourgeois, enjoys all the freedoms of the radically disaffected, underlie his mature self-conception, which finds early and tentative expression in Dubliners. It must have delighted Joyce to know that Vidocq did not write his own memoirs. His characterizations of Finnegans Wake as forgery and hoax are in the same spirit.

Another relationship similar to that between Vidocq and the Paris police inheres between the “Arab” of the boy’s uncle’s song and the legitimate buyers of the Arab’s horse. “The Arab’s Farewell to his Steed” is a grievously mistitled poem. Joyce is careful to tell the reader that the boy heard only the opening lines of the poem as he left the house. He might better have spent the evening by staying for its conclusion. Like Vidocq, the Arab is guilty of a splendid act of bad faith. After selling the horse, he changes his mind and rides off on it:

Who said that I had given thee up?—
Who said that thou wert sold?
'Tis false,—'tis false, my Arab steed!
I fling them back their gold!

Thus, thus, I leap upon thy back,
And scour the distant plains;
Away! who overtakes us now,
Shall claim thee for his pains.6

The poem’s climactic gesture is a renege.

Both Vidocq and the Arab are extremely marginal. In the narrative texture of “Araby” their truanacies are buried deep in allusion and receive no direct presentation in the story. The only overt model for mich-

6. Ibid., pp. 468-69.
ing is the boy’s uncle himself, who comes home three hours late with the money the boy needed to buy Mangan’s sister a present. The uncle, like the Arab he admires, indulges his own freedom and pleasure at the cost of an agreement. Life in Dublin is best undertaken as a series of broken or half-kept promises, and, while it offers some joys, they are at the cost of considerable bad faith. With time, Joyce came to see a great deal of his father in his own psyche, and to forgive in ways that his brother Stanislaus never could. The irresponsible uncle in “Araby,” with his selfish good will and his love of song and drink, is a portrait of the artist’s father, rendered in ambivalence.

“Eveline” concerns a failed opportunity for a truant life. The story’s heroine has the chance to escape the labor of “keeping the house together”—a prison sentence to which her dead mother condemned her. The story’s central antithesis, once again, is between duty and wandering, this time personified in Eveline’s father and her lover, Frank. Eveline’s father is brutal when drunk, but capable of moments of genuine affection. His outstanding characteristic is his hatred of mobility. He disapproves of her sailor boyfriend, and he chases the organ grinder away with the comment: “Damned Italians! coming over here!” (p. 40). Itinerancy offends him because it qualifies poverty with freedom.

Joyce skillfully relegates Frank to the story’s periphery. If he allowed Frank to engage the reader directly, as a full-blown characterization and not just a temptation for Eveline, we would quickly conclude that paralysis only afflicts some Dubliners, for Frank is a native. Like Odysseus, Frank arrives bearing “tales of distant countries” (p. 39), and only Joyce’s skill at summary narration keeps our attention on Eveline’s dusty plight:

He had started as a deck boy at a pound a month on a ship of the Allan line going out to Canada. He told her the names of the ships he had been on and the names of the different services. He had sailed through the straits of Magellan and he told her stories of the terrible Patagonians. He had fallen on his feet in Buenos Ayres, he said, and had come over to the old country just for a holiday. Of course, her father had found out the affair and had forbidden her to have anything to say to him. (p. 39)

“Eveline” is not a story about a girl whose cowardice destroys her chance to hang cretonne curtains in a little house in Buenos Ayres. Frank promises an escape from home and the stores to a vagrant life. The allusive level of the story reinforces that idea. Frank takes Eveline to Balfe’s Bohemian Girl, a sentimental opera about a young girl abducted by gypsies. The title alone suggests vagrancy, but a look at the plot implies that Frank is not unlike the outlaw Thaddeus, who, when Arline discovers her noble birth, acknowledges that he too is an aristocrat, and they marry and settle down. “The opera’s romanticism renders Frank suspect. His plans for Eveline probably parallel the early events of the opera, but not its implausible conclusion.

7. Ibid., p. 471.
The second instance of allusion in the story is Frank's favorite song, "The Lass that Loves a Sailor." The choice indicates that his love of the unestablished life runs deep. The song tells of sailors drinking on shipboard on a Saturday night and toasting various noble things—patriotism, chivalry, etc. But as each verse ends the chorus returns to contradict what has come before. Finally, what a sailor loves is freedom:

But the standing toast that pleased them most
Was the wind that blows, the ship that goes,
And the lass that loved a sailor. 8

From a bourgeois point of view the story is amoral. Joyce implies that an Eveline abandoned in Buenos Ayres, or the Canaries, is a happier woman than the one at the barrier in Dublin harbor. He congratulates those who have the courage to renege on their promises and freely meet experience, adrift.

"After the Race" constitutes a variation in texture from most of the stories in *Dubliners*. It exchanges claustrophobia for a false sense of spaciousness, paralysis for a feverish and futile mobility. Still, it is consistent with the rest of the book in its symbolic opposition of a central character defined by duty and a marginal vagrant.

Jimmy Doyle, the scion of a *nouveau riche* Irish family, ironically re-enacts the myth of the prodigal son. His truancy, unlike that of his biblical prototype, is licensed and approved by his father. Jimmy has conspired with paternal authority to live what looks like a vagrant existence. His father sees his excesses as the signs of the family's entrance into high culture, and he pays the bills. Their collusion is sinister because pseudovagrancy, as the father knows, does not touch the spirit. It obviates learning because it provides surrogate adventures for real experience. Jimmy is "the inheritor of solid instincts" (p. 44). He keeps his bills "within the limits of reasonable recklessness" (p. 44). Joyce hints that there can be no such thing. The reader overhears Jimmy's thoughts, and they are not the thoughts of a Vidocq, or an Arab, or even an old Cotter. Jimmy has effected no escape at all: "Moreover Segouin had the unmistakable air of wealth. Jimmy set out to translate into days' work that lordly car in which he sat. How smoothly it ran. In what style they had come careering along the country roads! The journey laid a magical finger on the genuine pulse of life and gallantly the machinery of human nerves strove to answer the bounding courses of the swift blue animal" (p. 45). The confusing chiasmus in Jimmy's metaphor indicates the falseness of his position. His excitement is somehow mechanistic, frenetic, out of synchronization. Joyce meticulously charts Jimmy's hectic movements through the day, and in each scene its pleasures recede before him.

Joyce also plants the suspicion that Jimmy is the victim of a confi-

8. Ibid., p. 471.
dence game. As Zack Bowen has observed, both the card game and the acceptance of Jimmy's "small" investment smell of a swindle.9 Jimmy is very likely the one-man audience for a staged show of opulence and culture designed to persuade him that real financial substance lies behind Segouin's magnificent front.

Bowen has also pointed out that Joyce has designed the story to contrast the gullible, bourgeois Jimmy Doyle and the musical vagabond, Villona, who, while he travels with a fashionable international set, is himself destitute. Bowen is probably right in thinking of him as another of Joyce's portraits of the artist:


It is the musician, Villona, who shares the back seat with Jimmy, who stays at Jimmy's house, and who is the one foreigner with whom Jimmy seems to have something in common. However, Villona's more basic attitudes toward food and survival ("Villona was in good humor because he had had a very satisfactory luncheon" . . . "the Hungarian . . . was beginning to have a sharp desire for his dinner") contrast strikingly with Jimmy's nebulous aim of social prestige.10

This "basic attitude" is common to Joyce's vagrants. Abstraction is a danger to the Dubliner unless he is cunning enough to maintain a sense of fundamentals.

As with all his vagrants, there are moral ambiguities about Villona which Joyce leaves unresolved. While he does not participate in a crooked card game, he remains at its periphery, playing the piano, and brings the epiphanic light of day to a young man who—because his own prodigality is a lie—does not wish to see it.

Joyce's portrait of Lenehan bears witness to the depth of his ambivalence toward his vagrants. In the early stories, truancy holds promise, but the motif darkens with "Two Gallants." Because the story deals with late "adolescence," Joyce's point may be that the joys of evasion lessen with age, that the flexibilities of even the most cunning Dubliners stiffen with time.

Thus, although "Two Gallants" is Dubliners' most peripatetic story, it does not recommend Lenehan and Corley as nobly scorning burgerhood for a rich Bohemianism. Still, a distinction must be drawn between the two young men. Corley is an icily egotistical parasite, unredeemed by imagination, sympathy, or irony. He considers his success at suborning a slavey to pilfer a florin as evidence of his immense charm, and his monolithic love of himself blinds him to both the joys and the self-discoveries that vagrancy can afford.

Lenehan is more intelligent. His ironic answers to Corley's self-praise, which invariably go unacknowledged, suggest that he perceives the paltriness of the man whose disciple he pretends to be. Further, Joyce acknowledges artistry in Lenehan's sycophantic style. He permits Lene-

10. Ibid., p. 60.
han to share qualities with characters he considers artists—adroitness, eloquence, marginality: “Most people considered Lenehan a leech but, in spite of this reputation, his adroitness and eloquence had always prevented his friends from forming any general policy against him. He had a brave manner of coming up to a party of them in a bar and of holding himself nimbly at the borders of the company until he was included in a round” (p. 50). Further, Joyce associates Lenehan with game-playing and poetry, linking him to the evaders of work we do not despise: “He was a sporting vagrant armed with a vast store of stories, limericks, and riddles. He was insensitive to all kinds of discourtesy. No one knew how he achieved the stern task of living, but his name was vaguely associated with racing tissues” (p. 50). That Lenehan’s means of survival are mysterious is another hint that he deserves qualified admiration. He is the modern bourgeois debasement of the bard, a human compendium of fictions. In an earlier age, his parasitism would have been licensed, for he performs a cultural function.

But modern Dublin is somehow antagonistic to the prosperity of its bards, and Lenehan has found it a more strenuous labor to maintain his vagrancy than to find a job. At thirty-one, his condition promises no new encounters, only tiresome repetitions, and he longs to escape the truancy which the city’s children enter upon with such bright expectations: “He found trivial all that was meant to charm him and did not answer the glances which invited him to be bold. He knew that he would have to speak a great deal, to invent and to amuse, and his brain and throat were too dry for such a task. The problem of how he could pass the hours till he met Corley again troubled him a little. He could think of no way of passing them but to keep on walking” (p. 56). We follow Lenehan’s route precisely and overhear his wayward thoughts. His introspections are both opportunistic and truthful. He observes himself in his travels, and, like Odysseus, he wants a nostos on his own terms. He envisions, first Corley and his slavey, and then a life of domesticity for himself:

In his imagination he beheld the pair of lovers walking along some dark road; he heard Corley’s voice in deep energetic gallantries and saw again the leer of the young woman’s mouth. This vision made him feel keenly his own poverty of purse and spirit. He was tired of knocking about, of pulling the devil by the tail, of shifts and intrigues. He would be thirty-one in November. Would he never get a good job? Would he never have a home of his own? He thought how pleasant it would be to have a warm fire to sit by and a good dinner to sit down to. He had walked the streets long enough with friends and with girls. He knew what those friends were worth; he knew the girls too. Experience had embittered his heart against the world. But all hope had not left him. He felt better after having eaten than he had felt before, less weary of life, less vanquished in spirit. He might yet be able to settle down in some snug corner and live happily if he could only come across some good simple-minded girl with a little of the ready. (pp. 57–58)

There is an indefatigable unscrupulousness beneath Lenehan’s exhaustion. His claim that “experience had embittered his heart against the
world” is inflated comically, but the experience, though not hard-
eared, is real. From Lenehan’s thoughts, we gain a darkly comic sense
of a clever man who at once knows and evades the truth about himself.

Allusion in the story verifies Lenehan’s apprehension that he is some-
how condemned to wander. As he and Corley approach a street harpist,
Lenehan is genuinely moved by the melancholy strains of “Silent, O
Moyle.” The tune reverberates through his artist’s sensibility: “The air
which the harpist played began to control his movements. His softly
padded feet played the melody while his fingers swept a scale of varia-
tions idly along the railings after each group of notes.” Finnuola’s song,
which “controls Lenehan’s movements,” delineates the spiritual condi-
tion of the vagrant Dubliner. Scholes and Litz provide Thomas Moore’s
note on the poem from his Irish Melodies in their edition of Dubliners:
“Finnuola, the daughter of Lir, was by some supernatural power trans-
formed into a swan, and condemned to wander, for many hundred
years, over certain lakes and rivers in Ireland, till the coming of Chris-
tianity; when the first sound of the mass bell was to be the signal of her
release.” 11 Lenehan is a condemned vagabond, and a matrimonial mass
bell would most likely signal no release. He is a sterile artist trapped by
his own love of license, and possibly an alternative self for Joyce—the
good fellow he would have had to become had he remained in Ireland.
There is, all the same, a qualified validity in Lenehan’s wit and observa-
tion, and in his buoyancy as well. He is by no means simply a portrait of
paralysis. If his movements are controlled, it is in part by music.

After “Two Gallants,” the motif of vagrancy continues to move in
and out of the narrative center of the stories. Also, the margins continue
to hold shadowy, half-delineated travelers, like the itinerant priest,
Father Keon, in “Ivy Day,” and the man with the moustache in
“Clay.” Of these beings, all of whom in some way anticipate M’Intosh
and the ghosts of “Circe,” the Committee to which Hoppy Holohan
repeatedly adverts in “A Mother” is most curious. It is a semi-fictional
entity which allows Holohan to slip in and out of the facts in order to
dupe the stolidly bourgeois Kearneys. This attainment of a privileged
metaphysical status is the goal behind many of the truancies in Dublin-
ers. In “Counterparts,” for instance, Farrington strives to achieve a
temporary slippage between the cogs of his mechanized existence, only
to find that vagrancy is available only to the young.

Other truants mark the darkening possibilities of the condition. Emily
Sinico begins to wander Dublin after Mr. Duffy rejects her. Her search
for emotional contact leads to the crossing at Sydney Parade, and the
story ends with Mr. Duffy—now himself a condemned wanderer—dis-
covering that his refusal to love in a manner outside the bounds of con-
ventional morality has exiled him from “life’s feast.” Vagrancy is a

state that must be entered courageously. In the later stories it is frequently solitary confinement, a punishment for cowardice.

The stories, after “Two Gallants,” then, continue to rely upon the vagrancy motif and to develop its darker side, and many of them find their structure in the antithesis between burghers and michers. Three stories (“A Little Cloud,” “Grace,” “The Dead”) merit individual comment.

In “A Little Cloud,” Joyce explicitly employs the burgher/micher and the books/freedom polarities. Little Chandler has vague poetic aspirations, but he is tied to a conventional wife and furniture payments. He lacks the arrogance to demand of experience that it conform to his fantasy. Ignatius Gallaher is a journalist who travels and who made a daring scoop on the Invincibles murder story by coding the map of Dublin and wiring the escape route to the *New York World*. The streetwise Gallaher leads “a vagrant and triumphant life” (p. 80), and he often finds himself embroiled in dubious financial and amorous affairs. His stories, the lights, and the whiskey at Corless’s overwhelm Little Chandler, and he returns home deeply dissatisfied, yet unaware of the extent of his immobility: “Could he not escape from his little house? Was it too late for him to try to live bravely like Gallaher? Could he go to London? There was the furniture to be paid for. If he could only write a book and get it published, that might open the way for him” (p. 83).

In his design of the story, Joyce marks a key opposition by placing Little Chandler in the street and recording his thoughts as he moves to his rendezvous with Gallaher. Little Chandler is out of his element in the street—his thought has no rhythmic connection with his walking: “He pursued his rvery so ardently that he passed his street and had to turn back” (p. 74). Little Chandler’s claim to artistic skill is judged by his ineptness in the street. It both frightens and fascinates him, but he can not encounter it frankly. Instead, he flirts with its terrors:

He had always passed without turning his head to look. It was his habit to walk swiftly in the street even by day and whenever he found himself in the city late at night he hurried on his way apprehensively and excitedly. Sometimes, however, he courted the causes of his fear. He chose the darkest and narrowest streets and, as he walked boldly forward, the silence that was spread about his footsteps troubled him, the wandering silent figures troubled him; and at times a sound of low fugitive laughter made him tremble like a leaf. (p. 72)

According to Joyce, the genuine poet experiences no fear in the street; it is the *locus* for meditation. Numerous passages in *Stephen Hero* testify to that youthful conviction. To underscore Little Chandler’s non-membership in that streety group, Joyce allows him an epiphany upon Grattan bridge. Throughout the book, houses have operated as symbols of confinement and paralysis; vagabonds have suggested partial escape from the city’s worst fate. Chandler, looking down the Liffey, experi-
ences a moment of poetic vision, but a delusory one. His incomprehension of the poet’s direct relation to experience renders his epiphany a mistake:

As he crossed Grattan Bridge he looked down the river towards the lower quays and pitied the poor stunted houses. They seemed to him a band of tramps, huddled together along the river-banks, their old coats covered with dust and soot, stupefied by the panorama of sunset and waiting for the first chill of night to bid them arise, shake themselves and begone. He wondered whether he could write a poem to express his idea. (p. 73)

Such a poem, if Little Chandler were to write it, would be metamorphic, and in clear violation of the texture of *Dubliners*, where houses do not rise and go away, although Little Chandler has ample reason to wish they might.

“Grace” is a pocket encyclopaedia of vagrant Dubliners and their devices. The cast of disorderly characters is framed by Dantean eschatology and conveyed in a language of such pomposity that it neatly belies everyone’s pretensions to learning and respectability. The story is funny, and Joyce’s fondness for the do-noughts he portrays is palpable.

Tom Kernan, whose language is orotund and whose dress is at once shabby and pretentious, is a vagrant at heart, with an enduring love of drink and shady companionship. He is in commercial decline. He is in debt to his grocer, Mr. Fogarty, whom he considers his social inferior, and who, while remaining unpaid, provides him with free whiskey. With Kernan, style operates in lieu of substance, and style is a silk hat and a pair of gaiters: “By grace of these two articles, he said, a man could always pass muster” (p. 154).

Kernan’s peculiar brand of bad faith hovers over all the relationships in the story. As the narrative center concerns a false repentance and a false absolution, so the margins contain a number of characterizations, all of which rest on bad or broken contracts. Kernan’s companions in the bar abandon him after his fall. We never learn the name of one of them. The other is the notorious Harford, whose habit it is of a Sunday to walk outside the city limits and thereby qualify as a traveler and buy drink legally (a ploy of Stephen’s father and his Uncle Charles in *Portræit*). Harford shows up among the men at the retreat, and, as Marvin Magalaner pointed out, the congregation of respectable businessmen at Father Purdon’s church is comprised largely of goats: “Among the respectable churchgoers present, Joyce is quick to point out Mr. Harford, the moneylender, Mr. Fanning, the mayor maker, and the sinister campaign treasurer of ‘Ivy Day in the Committee Room,’ and Michael Grimes, the owner of three pawnbroker’s shops. It is a usurer’s heaven.”

Jack Power is another supposed penitent. He aids in the rescue of Kernan at the bar, and, although Kernan ought to have been arrested,
Power uses his influence to persuade the constable to overlook the matter. Power has "inexplicable debts." They are a "byword in his circle. He was a debonair young man" (p. 154). The narrator's euphemisms ring of false gentility. Jack Power maintains a barmaid as his mistress.

Martin Cunningham leads the movement to rehabilitate Kernan. He is a sympathetic and highminded burgher, whose most celebrated quality is his facial resemblance to Shakespeare. But he too is party to a bad contract. On six occasions his alcoholic wife has pawned the household furniture to buy drink.

The most aggressive practitioner of acts of bad faith in "Grace" is C. P. McCoy: "His line of life had not been the shortest distance between two points and for short periods he had been driven to live by his wits" (p. 158). McCoy's favorite device is to borrow valises on the pretext that his wife has a singing engagement outside the city, and then to pawn them and drink the proceeds. Marvin Magalaner has linked McCoy with Leopold Bloom in Joyce's imagination, and his observations hint at the complex way in which vagrancy will operate as a motif when Joyce writes Ulysses. He notices that both men have wives who are sopranos, both take a hand in encouraging their wives' concert tours, both are socially isolated and work as ad canvassers. Bloom does possess an element of McCoy's deviousness. On June 16th he has hopes of cadging a free train ride to Mullingar from McCoy himself and free tea from Kernan. Hugh Kenner has suggested that Martin Cunningham, in an unwritten scene in Ulysses, employs Bloom to cheat Paddy Dignam's insurance company and secure a larger premium for Dignam's survivors than they merit. But it is only in his fantasies that Bloom is a full-blown confidence artist. In "Circe" we see him rise to kingship only to be unmasked as a trickster and a pervert. And in "Ithaca" Bloom foolishly meditates a scheme whereby results of a horserace can be intercepted prior to their arrival at the betting office.

Joyce's view of his own art has elements of the con-game in it. In the Portrait, the reader continually finds himself in doubt as to the substantiality behind Stephen's posturings. In Ulysses doubt hardens into near-certainty. In Finnegans Wake, Shem's character is based on Sir Charles Young's play about a forger, Jim the Penman, and the artist dovetails with the sociopath. A part of Joyce identified with the slipperier souls of his native city, and he spent a lifetime exploring them. "Grace" is the first leg of that exploration, and Joyce's first attempt at turning ambivalence into encyclopaedic comedy.
Like many of the stories in *Dubliners*, "The Dead" has a number of truants at its narrative margins. However, they do not possess a secret knowledge which the protagonist must discover. Rather, the venial truants of "The Dead" participate in a common waywardness from which Gabriel Conroy struggles wrongly to separate himself. The impact of these minor characters is twofold. First, they establish the tone of Irish social life with its shabby elegance and parochialism, and second, in Gabriel’s final meditation, they fuse into a powerful impression of limited but tragically genuine humanity. The two most precisely delineated guests at the Misses Morkan’s party are Mr. Browne and Freddy Malins. Mr. Browne’s social demeanor is oily; his status is that of near-permanent guest. He intimidates virgins and drinks ostentatiously. Freddy Malins took the pledge on New Year’s Day and is drunk on the Feast of the Epiphany. Everyone at the party agrees that the best corrective for his drinking is a trip to Mt. Melleray, where monks sleep in their coffins. The Dubliner characteristically deals with the vagaries of impulse by resorting to confinement. While Joyce’s truants accept such moral correction in theory, it is their good fortune not to live up to it in practice.

Gabriel Conroy, however, is different, and while he would probably observe that sleeping in coffins is one of the more embarrassingly superstitious practices of the Irish Catholic Church, he is in reality more devout in his self-confinements than his less complicated fellow citizens. Gabriel is a man strangely isolated and enclosed by a liberal education, the continental aspirations with which he resists provincialism, and the regularity of his habits. Better read than his fellow guests at the party, he does not seem to experience passions of greater profundity than the petty lusts and angers of those about him. Rather than freeing him, Gabriel’s education has cost him a fundamental sympathy with Dublin, but it has not unleashed a brand of genius that would justify his alienation.

Throughout the story Gabriel reveals an habitual tendency to shelter himself from experience. As he gives Lily his coat on arriving, he makes an effort to engage her in banter, and his accidental probing beneath her social surface discomforts him. By this point in *Dubliners*, the reader is by no means startled at the news that young men are "all palaver and what they can get out of you" (p. 178). Gabriel’s withdrawal signals his unwillingness to confront the disorder of sexual life.

And his efforts to shelter himself are outdone by his concern for his wife. His insistence that Gretta wear "goloshes" symbolizes the protectiveness against experience he longs to exert. Just as he takes a room at the Gresham to avoid the late-night journey to Monkstown, so he requires that Gretta wear "guttapercha things" to seal her off from the elements: "—Goloshes! said Mrs. Conroy. That’s the latest. Whenever it’s wet underfoot I must put on my goloshes. To-night even he wanted
me to put them on, but I wouldn’t. The next thing he’ll buy me will be a diving suit” (p. 180). The word “goloshes” reminds Gretta of “Christy Minstrels” (p. 181)—vagabond musicians. The association reveals the gypsy in Gretta’s soul, for Gabriel’s purpose in buying them is most un-Bohemian. For Joyce, rainwear seemed always to signify an avoidance of full emotional life. A sign in the window of Father Flynn’s house reads “Umbrellas Re-covered” (p. 12). In *Ulysses*, M’Intosh’s name derives from his raincoat.

This urge to control and protect dominates Gabriel’s thoughts of Gretta. He remembers the time she had called impulsively to a man making bottles in a furnace, and the relief he had felt when the man had not heard her, for he “might have answered rudely” (p. 213). His solicitude enters the realm of fantasy in the cab on the way to the hotel, and he longs to “defend her against something and then to be alone with her” (p. 213). This is the kind of suffocatingly literary heroism the narrator of “Araby” learns to reject.

Gabriel, then, looks to elegance, order, safety, and solicitude for the controlling values in his life. Although he dislikes the insularity of Ireland, his own characteristic gesture is one of insulation. Until this night, he has been unwilling to perceive the extent to which he has concealed emotional cowardice beneath his virtues. He has married a woman from the West of Ireland, and yet he strives to deny the qualities in Gretta—her impetuousness and passion—which he himself associates with Irishness and the West. Molly Ivors, who quarrels with Gabriel over his continental aspirations, is a nationalist and plans to travel to the Aran Isles, and, restless at the party, she runs out into the snow. Gabriel sees this same readiness to embrace disorderly experience in Gretta, and observes, “She would walk home in the snow if she were let” (p. 180).

“The Dead” operates with extraordinary psychological economy, for it is precisely Gabriel’s need to insulate himself and Gretta which brings about his realization that he is a pitifully self-encapsulated being. As they travel to the Gresham, Gabriel, excited by Gretta’s wistfulness, paints the unremarkable journey in the colors of romantic vagabondage. The language of his fantasy echoes scenes of real truancy in *Dubliners*, and it demands scrutiny, for Gabriel’s self-deceptions are those of a highly intelligent man:

Under cover of her silence he pressed her arm closely to his side; and, as they stood at the hotel door, he felt that they had escaped from their lives and duties, escaped from home and friends and run away together with wild and radiant hearts to a new adventure.

An old man was dozing in a great hooded chair in the hall. (p. 215)

The passage is ironic. For one thing, Gretta’s heart is not wild and radiant. Its rhythm is disturbed by memory. For another, it is to no adventure they travel, but an insignificant break in a life of routine, and, in Joyce’s careful design of the passage, it is the *entrance* into the
hotel that inspires Gabriel’s fantasy, and not a street or a gangplank. Also, the Flaubertian juxtaposition of paragraphs associates Gabriel’s wild mood with the snoring concierge, sheltered under the hood of his chair. Finally, the idea of escape evaporates quickly as Gabriel locks himself and his wife into the unlighted hotel room. He has desired a total confinement, and he fails. Gretta does not share his version of their stay at the Gresham, and her distance precipitates the acknowledgment that he has long ago smothered his own soul.

The story’s central dichotomy is between various interiors and the ambiguous snow, with its combined menace and invitation. Gabriel learns that there are two ways to love—as burgher and as vagrant—that both end in oblivion, but that the vagrant experiences boldly the bitter paradox of human emotion. As Gabriel learns from Gretta, Michael Furey wandered out into the killing rain to embrace his loss. Until this night, Gabriel has pretended that loss is not real, or indefinitely avoidable. It is a costly delusion. Its futility is best captured in the word Gretta uses for the porridge Gabriel forces his daughter to eat—“stir about”—and it is reflected in the story Gabriel tells about Johnny the horse, whose years of labor as a good bourgeois animal rendered him incapable of travel.

“The Dead” is far more than a middle-aged “Araby.” Its discriminations are finer. It establishes a rich ambivalence toward romanticism, opposing Gabriel’s adult tendency to spice bourgeois regularity with bookish delusions—his acceptance of safe, surrogate adventures—to the genuine but immature passion of Michael. The story sets Gabriel’s enlightenment against a lyric background of the passing generations of men and women. What he learns is not anti-romantic. It is a raising of vagrancy to a higher plane, where the genuine response to mortality is not confinement but waywardness of spirit—“Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age” (p. 223). Gabriel discovers that loving is fatal because it tempts one into immediacy and disorder. Gretta did not go into the rain the night Michael stood in the corner of her garden, and now she keeps “locked in her heart . . . that image of her lover’s eyes when he told her he did not wish to live” (p. 223). The prison metaphor is highly appropriate. Gretta too has betrayed the anarchic dimension in herself. Her life with Gabriel is to some extent her own compromise, an acceptance of less than a freedom circumscribed only by death.

Like other stories in *Dubliners*, “The Dead” relies upon allusion to elaborate the motif of vagrancy. As a parallel to Gretta’s lover, Joyce introduces the song “The Lass of Aughrim.” In it, a young girl stands in the rain with an illegitimate baby in her arms and asks for shelter from the nobleman who betrayed her. It is the Lass of Aughrim’s exposure as a result of passion (and the fact it was Michael’s song) which disturbs Gretta. The scene in which the allusion enters the story is
an important one. Gretta’s own epiphany on the stairs as she confronts her loss precipitates Gabriel’s insight. But he misinterprets the scene at first, and, once again, he enwraps Gretta, this time in sentimental clichés. He thinks of this vision of Gretta, which he turns into a Pre-Raphaelite painting, as an epiphany. It is not:

He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stair in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels would show off the light ones. Distant Music he would call the picture if he were a painter. (p. 210)

The deliberateness with which Gabriel interprets his painting indicates its falseness. Such coolheaded rationalism does not accompany real vision, nor is real vision pleasurable. Nevertheless, it is to Gabriel’s credit, and a powerful argument against the notion that Dubliners is a book about paralysis, that, by the time he sleeps, he has learned what the picture means. Joyce ends Dubliners with a pronounced shift to the higher dimensions of vagrancy, where wisdom lies in refusing self-confinement and drifting in the unfrightened knowledge of a dark affinity between love and death.

Franklin and Marshall College
Lancaster, Pennsylvania