“Narrative Irony and Identification in ‘A Painful Case’”

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Introduction

A distinguishing feature of a successful writer is their ability to create stories whose subjects transcend the era in which they are written; the stories must be conceptually accessible to subsequent generations. However, this does not mean all stories are written the same way. For the greater part of the 19th century, authors often employed a third-person omniscient narrator. This can be seen through popular authors such as Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, and Jane Austen. The advantages of this form of narration lie its ability to shift between perspectives, identify the unknown, and narrative stability. Rarely, if ever, must the reader question what is being presented to them. The information is assumed to be reliable and shifts in perspective are clearly defined. Conversely, unreliable narration characterizes first-person stories. The reader knows facts are limited to what the narrator knows, and that interpretation of events are subjective. When one thinks of an unreliable narrator, naturally the first-person perspective comes to mind. The subjectivity of this form of narration allows for an unreliable narrator to flourish. The emergence of the Modernist movement of the late 19th century gave the unreliable narrator a common place in literature. However, the use of an unreliable narrator has extended into the third-person perspective. *Dubliners* brings the idea of an omniscient narrative voice as unreliable to the forefront of literature. Some stories are given from the first-person perspective, but as the collection continues the third-person omniscient emerges. Though the narrative style changes, the reliability of the narrators rarely does as well. A prevailing sense that not all the information we are being given is truthful, as it is sometimes contradictory, continues. The omniscience seems selective in that the story is focalized through the main character. The story proceeds by bringing the perceptions of these characters to the forefront of the narrative, even

encouraging the reader to question these perceptions, making the narration unstable. The reader must account for ambiguous details or omission of facts when dealing with an unstable narrator.

Within each story in *Dubliners,* Joyce adds numerous, sometimes conflicting details that force the reader to make a judgment about nearly every character. By following characters of different ages and backgrounds, each story provides vastly different perspectives. Some are children whose naivety floods the narration, others feature morally dilapidated individuals that accentuate the poverty-stricken environment of the stories. It is up to the reader to size up the characters, their backgrounds, and habits to decide if they are morally correct in their decisions, and that's a difficult thing to decide. Joyce's unreliable narration thrusts the responsibility of judgment upon the reader. Our impressions of the characters may not be immediate and are often subject to change. Further, the blurred line between narration and a character's thoughts makes any definite conclusion precarious, as our judgment of a character or situation may be misled by the focalized narrative. Still, no element introduced can be tossed aside, as each detail gained serves as evidence on which to build judgment. The books a character keeps, their choice of words when interacting with their family, or their enjoyment of a particular piece of music contribute to the personality of the character; it is these elements that help piece together how the character views the world. Despite the confusing veil of focalization, the reader's task cannot be avoided. If we are to be responsible readers and moral appraisers, we must carefully analyze how the narrator influences our perceptions of characters, especially since Joyce is such a deliberate and careful writer.

By examining the unstable narration from several stories in *Dubliners*, this paper seeks to identify how interpretive uncertainty arises through the focalization of a particular character. Gerard Genette coined the term focalization to identify a subjective perception through which a

narrative is presented. “The Sisters” focalizes the story through the young narrator in order to extend his feelings of uncertainty to the reader. Likewise, “A Painful Case” focalizes the story through Mr. Duffy which affects the reader’s interpretation of his character, events that occur, and Duffy’s final epiphany. Irony becomes one of the outlying effects of focalization. Because the story is filtered through a particular character’s thoughts and emotions, the details given can seem contradictory to the realities of the situation. This often leads to instances of narrative irony. Narrative irony includes the subversion of a character’s or reader’s expectations based on facts presented by the narration. Narrative irony can also include the omission of facts, as the reader extrapolates meaning from narrative gaps. “The Sisters” demonstrates irony through the naivety of the young narrator, as he knows little more than the reader by the end of the story. Unlike “The Sisters” or “A Painful Case,” “Grace” does not exhibit the same level of focalization. Instead, much of the story is told through dialogue and irony must be extrapolated from the facts of what occurs rather than an interpretation of those events. Still, the story demonstrates an expectation of grace for Mr. Kernan despite his associates lacking the virtue themselves. While the narration does not collude with the characters in this story, they demonstrate a false understanding of what they preach, leading the reader to an ironic interpretation of their intentions. Irony plays a key role in this collection, and by identifying it in other stories the reader comes better equipped to discern the identity of Mr. Duffy.

Joyce confounds his readers by offering different perspectives without changing a dominant narrative voice. The first story, “The Sisters,” offers the perspective of a young boy reflecting upon the death of his friend, Rev. James Flynn. The narrative voice throughout the story is clear through the first-person perspective use of “I” and “me”. The reader is limited only to what the boy hears but is not limited by the boy’s youthful naivety. For instance, the boy is

listening to his uncle and another man, Old Cotter, sitting around a table, discussing the keen interest Father Flynn took in the adolescent. Old Cotter repeatedly proclaims his belief that "there was something uncanny about [Flynn]" (3). Later in the conversation, Old Cotter states his discomfort with the young boy's friendship with Father Flynn, citing "It's bad for children [to have too much to say to a man like that]. . . because their minds are impressionable. When children see things like that, you know, it has an effect. . . ," (5) before trailing off his sentence. For the boy, it seems the adults are simply acting strange and hold an unknown prejudice against the man, and this may even be true; however, the reader knows there is a further implication in the words of Old Cotter. What has Father Flynn done to be deemed a man like *that*, what are the things like *that*? The language is intentionally vague to keep the child from discerning particular meaning, though the reader knows Cotter is alluding to something. Afterward, the boy reflects, "though I was angry with old Cotter for alluding to me as a child, I puzzled my head to extract meaning from his unfinished sentences," (5). The reader may wish to further pursue the issue or even be a part of that conversation to learn more about Father Flynn, but as with the boy, this narration withholds this information. Just as quick as the curiosity arises, the story pulls away from that topic, leading the reader in the direction of the narrator's adolescent thoughts. We later see that Father Flynn would wander at night, only to be found laughing by himself in the confession box, assumedly due to mental illness. The nature of his behavior presents an interpretive question that remains unanswered within the text; instead, the writing encourages the reader to discern why Father Flynn acts this way. However, it is ironic that the boy fails to see the habits of Father Flynn despite being close with the priest; the manner of discussion of the topic further shields the boy from the truth.

The story employs irony to highlight the naivety of the child which is impressed upon the reader. Joyce provides two separate perspectives of Father Flynn using a singular narrative voice: that of the adults and the child narrator. The adults provide the details for the story. The information gained is generally hearsay and unverifiable. In her *Suspicious Readings*, Margot Norris emphasizes the gaps between what the reader knows and what might have occured in the story (Norris 14). In line with this thought, the conversing adults create the gaps in knowledge for this story. Since the reader gets the story through the young narrator, it becomes frustratingly difficult to discern what occurs in these gaps, even when the conversations occur directly in front of the reader. Because neither the boy nor the adults have the full story regarding Father Flynn, the narrative style forces the reader to make judgments about the story with incomplete information. Ironically, nearly everyone in the story considers the information definitive despite its inability to be proven. As such, any definitive answer regarding Father Flynn's ailment is mere conjecture. By showing two different perspectives in one voice--the boy's and the adults'--Joyce demonstrates the dualistic nature of narration within *Dubliners*, which negatively affects our ability to make clear judgments about the characters.

"Grace" demonstrates how Joyce may include irony in a story through mere implication. The story follows a man, Mr. Kernan, who falls downstairs, is helped by friends, and then coerced into attending a Jesuit church by his friends and acquaintances. Many stories in this collection begin with objective descriptions. In this way, the narrator establishes a sense of trust with the reader by detailing exactly what has happened. "Grace" exemplifies this technique through its beginning paragraph:

> Two gentlemen who were in the lavatory at the time tried to lift him up: but he was quite helpless. He lay curled up at the foot of the stairs down which he had fallen. They succeeded in turning him over. His hat had rolled a few yards away and his clothes were smeared with the filth and ooze of the floor on which he had lain, face downwards.

> His eyes were closed and he breathed with a grunting noise. A thin stream of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. (128)

Not only is this beginning described objectively, but it does so with such clarity that makes the reader forget a story is being narrated *to* them. Instead, the description and lack of rhetoric leaves the reader accepting the words merely as fact, unaware of the subtle, interpretative influence the narrative voice may present later in the story. Unlike “The Sisters,” the narrator is not involved in the story. There is no reason to believe the narrator would alter the facts of the story, and his authority over the story is assumed. As such, the reader is tasked with finding irony through implications rather than bold statements. “Grace” never catches a character in isolation. As a result, the inner thoughts of characters are expressed merely through dialogues that occur in a social setting, as opposed to the self-reflection that is present in scenes of isolation. In “Grace,” the mode of storytelling, despite being centralized around Mr. Kernan, is not based around the character’s perceptions. Instead, a great deal of narration is focused on the dialogues between Mr. Kernan and his acquaintances. Therefore, when the reader looks for potential irony in this story, it makes sense to collectively analyze the characters and their motivations for reforming Mr. Kernan.

Mr. Kernan is both literally and figuratively a fallen man. His social decline is “mitigated by the fact that certain friends who had known him at his highest point of success still esteemed him as a character” (132). Here the narrator gives context to Mr. Kernan’s status, and possibly why his friends are later so interested in his personal religious prospects. While the characters that surround Mr. Kernan expect a certain high-class behavior from him, the narrative explicitly tells the reader that Mr. Kernan is in fact on the path of social (and seemingly physical) ruin characterized by Mrs. Kernan’s statement “he has been drinking since Friday” (132). Mr. Kernan's associate, Mr. Powers, is one those who believes Mr. Kernan was once a respected

man. The Kernan children's accent ironically surprises Mr. Powers, as the accents betray the image of respect Mr. Kernan cultivates with his associates. Thus, the children are a direct reflection of Mr. Kernan's true social position. The vulgar accents of the children slyly demonstrate that Mr. Kernan has likely lied about his social importance. Irony expands throughout the story as the reader realizes the characters that seem to have a moral high ground in the story, such as Mr. Powers and Mr. Cunningham, have faults of their own. Mr. Power, being associated with the constabulary, which may indicate a wavering loyalty for Ireland in exchange for English favor. Mr. Cunningham finds himself in charge of the intervention for Mr. Kernan, assuming an air of "qualified assent" (139) as he seems to be the authority within the group on church matters. However, he is not as knowledgeable as he lets on. The group of men, led by Mr. Cunningham, list off phrasings they've heard and names relevant to the church. Ironically, they incorrectly attribute names to certain quotes. The need to seem knowledgeable despite actually knowing facts uncovers the dogmatic following of the religion. Yet Father Purdon's ending sermon finds the true mission of God to be setting one's accounts right (151), which leads to the question: Are those who worry about Mr. Kernan setting their own accounts right? Unlike in "The Sisters," much of the information is provided to the reader via dialogue. The use of irony does not apply to the limited capacity of a definitive answer, rather it lies in the implied irony of each character's expectations. The title "Grace" implies a divine virtue bestowed upon the characters. Though the characters seek grace for Mr. Kernan, their dialogues do not indicate that they have attained grace themselves. The implication of the sermon questions the companions' mission: how can they deliver Mr. Kernan to grace if they have yet to attain it themselves? The real irony of the story lies in the characters' inability to see their own faults, and the reader discovers their faults through dialogue, not hearsay.

The narrative voice in *Dubliners* is often elusive, and it is difficult to discern when a shift occurs. Some stories merely demonstrate alternate perspectives, such as “The Sisters.” Other stories demonstrate multiple characters giving vital information, which can be seen as a form of multiple narrations, or a story “twice-told” as Margot Norris puts it (Norris 11). Of course, the narrator’s biases must be taken into account when reading a story, but the task of identifying the narrator can often be challenging. Further, the irony included in stories changes based on how the story’s narrative style. In “Grace,” the reader finds a fairly objective narration and the irony falls upon the reader’s own conclusions drawn from the characters’ dialogues with each other.. In order to correctly identify irony, the reader must identify who is telling the story. “A Painful Case” offers a story whose narrative perspective seems to shift, making it unclear if the information is reliable or unreliable. As such, deciding whether the information provided is ironic or should truly be applied to the identity of Mr. Duffy becomes increasingly difficult.

“A Painful Case of Self-Realization”

“A Painful Case” follows Mr. Duffy, a man who lives deliberately distanced from society, through an encounter with Mrs. Sinico, a lonely housewife. Eventually, Mrs. Sinico makes a gesture of affection towards Mr. Duffy by placing his hand on her cheek, prompting him to end their meetings. After a week's reflection, he arranges a final meeting to ensure an amicable end to their interviews. Four years later he reads in a newspaper that Mrs. Sinico was hit by a train, which leads him to reflect upon his own life and relationship with the woman. He runs through emotions of despair and disgust, but by the end he finds that he was wrong to refuse her extension of affection and resigns himself to a lonely life. The reader is given a limited third-

person perspective of Mr. Duffy. Thus it is natural that the reader would be closely acquainted with the thoughts of this particular character. Yet, as noted in "The Sisters," our interpretation of events in this collection is often influenced by the narrative voice. In this story, the main character is particularly intimate with the concept of narration as "[Mr. Duffy] had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the first person and a predicate in the past tense" (90). Because the narrator discloses this habit, the reader is cued to pay particular attention to subjectivity in the narration. Margot Norris introduces the idea of unstable, unreliable narrators driving the stories of *Dubliners* referring to "a story-telling voice not to be trusted to be as objective, impartial, or faithful to the events narrated as it appears to be" (Norris 8). She places a special emphasis on what the writing deliberately omits from the narration. This necessarily includes moments when the narrative encourages the reader to make their own inferences in lieu of stated facts about given situations. "A Painful Case" deals with narrative instability with the story focalized through Mr. Duffy. This focalization presents the reader with two possible interpretations of the man. First, the descriptions present a man who maintains pride in isolation and unsurprisingly spurns romantic interests. The other presents the possibility of a man who yearns for companionship but pushes it away. While the narration implies the first, an ironic interpretation of Mr. Duffy's attitudes and descriptions present the second possibility as more likely.

By reviewing his personal items presented early in the narrative, the reader gains the opportunity to see what he reads, how he organizes items, then use this information to form an initial impression of the man. Though the items in his home are simple, the narrator notes, "He had himself bought every article of furniture in the room" (89). This frames Mr. Duffy as

someone who lives alone and is quite proud of having bought every article, even if those pieces are not the most extravagant. It marks his independence from the "mean, modern, and pretentious" (89) suburbs of Dublin by denying any reliance upon his fellow inhabitants. An intimate description of his apartment gives the reader a perspective that no one else has seen, which places them in a unique position to understand Mr. Duffy. He reads Wordsworth, a pioneer of literary Romanticism which posited that emotions are more important than rationality in understanding the world. Though the books are arranged according to size, its position on the bottom shelf does not allow for easy access. Holding emotions over rationality does not seem to fit the structured, well-organized life that characterizes Mr. Duffy so its placement seems fitting. Maynooth catechism sits at the top shelf, a book which was the "standard text for Roman Catholic religious instruction in Ireland" (Gifford 82). This would be a dutiful read, rather than for pleasure. It's later revealed that he has neither "church nor creed" (91), possibly indicating conformity to established norms in the name of duty. It is *Michael Kramer*, however, that stays at his desk for easy access. In his *Joyce Annotated*, Don Gifford presents a synopsis of *Michael Kramer* that presents two key insights as to why Mr. Duffy felt so compelled to read it: "Kramer wonders whether he has failed in life to give the warmth and love that would have redeemed his son" and "Kramer's commitment to high arts has rendered his life sterile" (Gifford 82-3). The events of "A Painful Case" invoke both of these notions in Mr. Duffy's life. First, Mr. Duffy, though an occasional patron of concerts and opera, allows few extravagances in his life. Second, he later admits that he "withheld life from [Mrs. Sinico]," (98) paralleling Michael Kramer's revelation. The play sits upon Mr. Duffy's desk ready to be read and has personal reading notes "inscribed from time to time" (90). Mr. Duffy's close reading of the text indicates he sought to discern something from it. Based upon Gifford's two observations, it seems that--before the

events of the story--Mr. Duffy heeded the warning of overindulgence in art. Ironically, he has glossed over Kramer's folly: lack of affection in his life. Thus, Mr. Duffy's favorite play provides the necessary revelation long before Mrs. Sinico's death.

Mr. Duffy's desk represents obscurity within the narrative voice. His desk, when lifted, emits a fragrance of "new cedarwood pencils or a bottle of gum or of an overripe apple which might have been left there and forgotten" (90). Notably, the use of "or" in each sentence shows that only one of these possibilities may be realized at one time. As Tim Cook acknowledges, "it is up to the reader to choose which object has left its 'faint fragrance' behind" (3). Further than just the books that don Duffy's shelves, the narrator encourages the reader to extrapolate the details from Duffy's room which they do not know concretely know. What is the significance of the possible items in the desk? Cook places an emphasis on the spaces created throughout the story, and the potential of items creates a space for multiple versions of Mr. Duffy. For Cook, the pencil represents the potential of the future--its use is undefined as they are new. The bottle of gum (an adhesive) "merely indicates an unchanging present, like Mr. Duffy's routine" (Cook 3) most likely due to glue's tendency to preserve. His interpretation of the apple, while insightful, can be taken a step further. He posits the apple signifies future neglect because it is past ripeness. However, we must look at how the apple fits into Mr. Duffy's lifestyle because it seems to be the most out-of-place for Mr. Duffy. He "abhors anything that betoken… disorder" (90) making the apple out of place. Its potential presence contradicts Duffy's *modus operandi*, serving as a threat to his image and expectation of himself. The apple is only a possibility, though the notion of possibility pervades the story as Mr. Duffy continues to make definitive choices he feels best reflect the self-image he cultivates.

The illustration of his appearance provides further interpretation for the reader. His eyes are described as not being harsh but “gave the impression of a man ever alert to greet a redeeming instinct in others but often disappointed” (91). Despite his isolated lifestyle, it seems that he does search for a connection with others. The reader must ask whose impression we are getting in this description. His autobiographical habit puts into question whether others would describe his eyes in this way, or if this is the impression he wishes others to see. The unflattering description classifying his mouth as unfriendly, and that he “lives at a little distance from his body” (91) suggests that welcomes self-criticism. As such, critical descriptions of himself do not discount his influence on the narrative. It is noted “he never gave alms to beggars and walked firmly, carrying a stout hazel” (91). His firm gait and grip on his stick represent the strength of his resolve in independence. The inclusion of beggars and the stick in the same sentence indicates an authoritative attitude and negative impression of them. This continues to characterize Mr. Duffy as prideful in his lack of interaction with people and perpetuated his perceived superiority over Dublin. That he disdains disorder supports his belief in his own superiority over beggars, but implies that his attitude extends to the whole of Dublin. The city-- nicknamed *dirty Dublin* in Joyce’s story “A Little Cloud”-- is undoubtedly repulsive to Mr. Duffy, causing him to further distance himself from its inhabitants. He swiftly removes things that are considered unrefined or overly indulgent He even considers his occasional visits to concerts and operas a form of dissipation. Since he deliberately distances himself from displays of emotions and other Dubliners, it is ironic that he visits concerts and operas-- places that encourage open expression of emotions and interpretive discussion from other patrons. Despite his distance from these things, he habitually searches for a redeeming quality in others, and

though subtle, his habits demonstrate a desire for the things he seems to reject. Thus, Mr. Duffy presents two conflicting images: the pridefully isolated man and the hopeful observer.

The reader enters the story with two possible interpretations of Duffy, but with no way to confirm either one. Steeped only in expectation, the reader has not yet been given an opportunity to apply an identity to Duffy based on his actions. The plot moves towards one of his visits to a fairly empty opera house where Mr. Duffy starts a conversation with Mrs. Sincio. What follows is a detailed, almost probing description of Mrs. Sinico. This marks a narrative shift, as the descriptors no longer read as possibilities but as definitive statements. Rather than exploring the details of their conversation, the narrative explains Duffy's attempts to "fix her permanently in his memory" (91). For the first time, Duffy seems to drive the narrative through his descriptions. He sees intelligence in her face and her eyes demonstrate her sensibility. The narrator does not comment on her present beauty, only that she "must have been handsome" (91). His observations of her face omit effuse emotions, instead emphasizing the rational qualities he cultivates within himself. Usually, describing a woman's face in detail and noting her temperament through the "swoon of the pupil" (91) evoke images of romance. The process seems inherently sensual. Yet the description strips the moment of any romantic intimacy that Mr. Duffy may considered to be a dissipation. The emphasis on her intelligent and sensible nature demonstrates a quality much more important to Mr. Duffy: that of intellectual connection. The astrakhan jacket displays her sophisticated taste, as the garment has historically represented luxury and refinement often donned by royalty and upper-class women (Oakes 2012). Mrs. Sinico presents precisely the type of person Mr. Duffy wishes to associate with. A few paragraphs later, Mr. Duffy finds the courage to make an appointment with her, showing for the first time a deliberate attempt at fostering human connection and a departure from the status quo of his life. As the two become

closer, Mrs. Sinico mentions her husband but not in a manner to dissuade Mr. Duffy's visits; this leads Mr. Duffy to infer that she is unhappy with her relationship. He later infers "[Mr. Sinico] had dismissed his wife so sincerely from his gallery of pleasures that he did not suspect that anyone else would take interest in her " (92). He does not apply this inference to discern her intentions for their relationship, nor does he care to investigate what he may gain from Mr. Sinico's inattention; he appears to simply enjoy her company, unconscious of the budding affair. As in "The Sisters," the reader is limited to merely the main character's knowledge and line of thought. The critical reader has to balance the clearly intimate nature of their relationship with Duffy's conflictingly chaste descriptions. Nonetheless, Mr. Duffy has undoubtedly emerged from his isolated life to meet Mrs. Sinico in some form of companionship, as well as reveal his thought process directly to the reader.

The reader must tread lightly at this junction of the story, as the question of "Whose voice are we getting?" becomes paramount. The implementation of Mr. Duffy's assessments of Mrs. Sinico and their relationship obscures the clear narrative descriptions that began the story. While the writing encourages the reader to make their own inferences, those inferences are grounded in facts that provide likely possibilities regarding Duffy. It places the character's opinion and observations as the basis for extrapolation. Through a close intellectual relationship, Mr. Duffy recognizes that he enjoys companionship, something he never sought before either from co-workers or family; perhaps none of his family fulfilled the sophisticated connection he craved. Still, neither the narrator nor Mr. Duffy indicates that this is a romantic relationship. Their encounters are characterized solely through their intellectual exchanges. In fact, Mr. Duffy, having "a distaste for underhanded ways," (92) demands that she invite him to her home with her husband's knowledge. Mr. Duffy's insistence on this point indicates a hope to avoid insinuations

of romance in their relationship. Nonetheless, the relationship became inevitably more intimate as "little by little he entangled her thoughts with hers" (92). The language of this line is imperative to understanding Mr. Duffy's role in the conversation. He has taken note that she is intelligent, that she is not like the other Dubliners whom he considers, "Phrasemongers, incapable of thinking consecutively for sixty seconds" (93). In other words, he can supplant her knowledge with his because she is intelligent enough to receive it. Therefore, it is less of an entanglement, instead "*he* lent *her* books, provided *her* with ideas, shared *his* intellectual life with her. She *listened* to all, [emphasis added] (92). He is not interested in sharing his ideas merely for discussion sake, but to be heard. This is not to say that he does not care for Mrs. Sinico's opinion, but that he is the provider of thoughts and ideas. It is easily imaginable that, having not had a companion for many years (if ever), that he would pour his thoughts to his conversational partner without regard for politeness. As such, his supply of ideas is not an insult to Mrs. Sinico's thoughts, but a way for him to spill years of emotion and thoughts he has suppressed. It is briefly mentioned that she would, in turn, provide a fact about herself before the reader is thrown back into Mr. Duffy's thoughts and theories. The writing consistently exhibits narrative instability by revolving around *his* ideas and thoughts rather than Mrs. Sinico's input upon those thoughts, or even an objective interpretation of events; it lingers heavily on his perspective. In fact, when she asks why he does not write out his thoughts, he sharply replies with a monologue denouncing the "obtuse middle class" and their inability to comprehend his intricate thoughts and he would not allow himself to be criticized by them. He is not looking for a critical discussion on his thoughts--he has already established himself to be right-- he's merely looking for someone that would listen to them. It is here that his relationship with Mrs. Sinico is clarified to the reader as a transactional one. Further, the information is not provided in dialogue

but through observations of what occurred, thereby removing a key element that would add some objectivity to the story. Thus, this section solidifies the control Mr. Duffy has over the conversations with Mrs. Sincio and the direction of the story.

Despite his self-absorbed nature, a hint appears that Mr. Duffy's companionship with Mrs. Sinico may provide a positive influence over him. He still prefers life on the outskirts of society, and there is no indication that this companionship inspired him to take a keen interest in Dublin or its inhabitants. However, the narrator makes an observation that Mr. Duffy, with his authoritative mental fortitude, becomes less rigid: "This union exalted him, wore away the rough edges of his character, emotionalized his mental state," (93). In other words, it seems that companionship has humanized Mr. Duffy. The word "exalt" implies being held in high regard; it can also be a synonym for elation. The narrator continues to say his mental state was "emotionalized," pressing a romantic notion of happiness found in Mrs. Sinico's company. However, contextualizing the line uncovers the irony behind the romantic image. We necessarily return to the emphasis on entangling their thoughts, which requires two observations. First, a "romantic entanglement" involves two parties who are not married to each other. The narrator emphasized Mrs. Sinico's marriage a few paragraphs before, leading the word "entangle" to conjure images of a love affair. Second, entanglement (as previously stated) involves a cooperative action between the two. His "providing her with ideas" does not project a symposium of thought, rather it seems more like a lecture where information flows from teacher to student. Further, the lines that follow return the reader to Mr. Duffy's self-absorption. Mr. Duffy "sometimes caught himself listening to his own voice. He thought that in her eyes he would ascend to an angelic stature," (93). Mr. Duffy seeks validation through his meetings with Mrs. Sinico, which is perhaps why his ideas are ever-flowing. Each meeting seems to confirm

her interest in him and his ideas. "Exalted," in this case, more likely means he was placed in a position of authority in her eyes. Further, "emotionalized" creates a disembodied atmosphere of emotion. The wording follows Mr. Duffy's tendency to dispel romantic notions in place of practical reason. Irony informs the passage as the narrator attempts to convince the reader of a real change in Mr. Duffy. It takes four more years and several more pages before Mr. Duffy glimpses a self-realized emotionalization of his mental state.

Margot Norris explores the possibility that the narration "obliges 'us' to vicariously [experience] the shocks to her heart" (Norris 158). In other words, the narrator treats the reader much like Mr. Duffy treats Mrs. Sinico. Her interpretation reads Mr. Duffy's surprise as a surprise to the reader because she reads the narrative as an "adultery story" (SR, 160). Citing the intimate moments the two characters share, she believes the narrator has "interpreted Duffy's words, gestures, and feelings in precisely the same way Emily Sinico interpreted them" (SR, 162). While it is true that romance may naturally be inferred from their meetings, the language utilized by the narrator equally shows Duffy's romantically detached views of the situation. We must remember that Mr. Duffy "lived at a little distance from his body, regarding his own actions with doubtful side glances" (90). Norris proposes that the reader is "deeply embedded in Duffy's feelings during this culminating discourse," (SR, 163) but that is a strong claim considering Duffy is rarely embedded in his feelings at all. There is no question that the limited third-person narration focalizes the story through Mr. Duffy. However, if we are to recognize the story as being told from Mr. Duffy's perspective, then we must also consider the way Duffy regards his own thoughts. Norris rightly notes sexual imagery presented through botanical notions "infused with allusions to temperature, nurturance, and gestation," (SR, 162) but if these thoughts were to appear to Mr. Duffy, we already know that he would be skeptical of them. As their romance

reaches a boil, he further retreats as an impersonal voice asserts, “We cannot give ourselves: we are our own” (93). This line indicates a refusal to relinquish control on Mr. Duffy’s part. Mr. Duffy’s narrative authority, the events that occur, and the information provided about those events highlight the very first observation made of the man: he lives an arm’s length away from others. By doing so, he decides what enters his life. Demaria-Leibel notes that Duffy “fears being *mastered* by inexplicable passions, [emphasis added]” (Demaria-Leibel 53). He only reveals to Mrs. Sinico what he wants her to know, keeping her at a distance. Thus, her surrender to her passions represents the antithesis of Mr. Duffy’s life philosophy, leading him to recoil from the relationship. The narrator has already given the reader plenty of reasons to be doubtful of this romance. In light of the information allowed to the reader, it should not come as a shock that Duffy spurns her romantic advance.

The romance may be lost upon Mr. Duffy, creating an ironic situation in which Mr. Duffy unwittingly engages in a deeply intimate relationship. Yet the romance is all but real for Mrs. Sinico. Nearly all hints at romance are propelled by her actions. The first impression the reader gets of Mrs. Sinico is her sensibility, which is provided because of Mr. Duffy’s analysis of her. Sensibility, in the form which Duffy desires, constitutes a strict affinity for reason; yet her actions characteristically invite romantic satisfaction. In her second conversation with Mr. Duffy, she notes that she has a husband, but there is no sign of warning in her words. Mr. Duffy, oblivious to the implication that her husband is not an obstacle, marks this as an off-handed comment regarding her life. The narrator reports “many times she allowed the dark to fall upon them, refraining from lighting the lamp” (93). Mrs. Sinico initiates each advancement, hints at romance, or diversion from the intellectual discussion. This all culminates in her final move which “one night, during which she had shown every sign of unusual excitement, Mrs. Sinico

caught up his hand passionately and pressed it to her cheek" (93). The paragraph ends here, leaving the romantic reader a brief second to ponder the outcome of this maneuver. The ironic reading readily provides an expectation of Mr. Duffy's rebuff. While the next paragraph confirms Mr. Duffy's rejection of her romantic gesture, the reader need not look any further than a few paragraphs earlier to see why an ironic reading predicts this. He characterizes her encouraging presence as "maternal solicitude," (92) as he seeks the warm, entreating nature a mother would provide. The language also exposes Mr. Duffy who, like a child with a head full of ideas, seeks maternal affirmation towards his inquiries. Mr. Duffy's omission of intimacy is revealed prior to his prompt rejection of Mrs. Sinico's advances, dispelling any notion of romance between the two. Yet, Mrs. Sinico does not have the same knowledge of Duffy's habits as the reader has and so falls victim to the expectation of reciprocated love.

Mr. Duffy's disregard for romantic interest results from a conditioned consequence of Mr. Duffy's isolated life philosophy. Deliberate disregard of Mrs. Sinico's romantic advances would necessarily mean Mr. Duffy was aware of them. The proposed growth, the "emotionalizing of his mental state" (93) was a facade and truly ironic. Emotional growth would require him to allow an external force the ability to transform his mental state. Notably, he never uses language that would indicate a metamorphosis. Instead, it reads as if their meetings intrigued him emotionally. He experienced their intimacy as a passive observer, one who truly lives at a distance from his body. The paragraph following Mrs. Sinico's physical confession clarifies that "Mr. Duffy was very much surprised. Her interpretation of his words disillusioned him" (93). Thus it seems, in a rare occasion by Joyce, we are committed to recognizing an absolute truth within this story: Mr. Duffy has not yet grown past his isolated mindset. He has yet to emotionalize his mental state and seems empathetically numb to the implied nature of

Mrs. Sinico's allowing the dark to fall upon them. While an awakening of emotions does not oblige him to a romantic relationship with Mrs. Sinico, mere recognition of her attraction would have constituted an emotional awakening. His lack of growth, thereby characterizing him as an incomplete person, parallels Plato's view of the soul. The complete (or harmonious) soul involves a balancing act of its three parts: rational, appetitive, and spirited. Each part is connected with a virtue: wisdom (thinking), temperance, and courage (emotions), respectively; justice is a fourth virtue that occurs when the other three virtues are in harmony. The harmonious interaction of these virtues should lead to a good life. Mr. Duffy practices wisdom, as we see from his bookshelf and notes at the beginning, and he embodies temperance through his avoidance of "dissipations". Nonetheless, by refusing to engage with his emotions he lacks courage and scorns the necessary amount of emotional engagement to ever be whole. By denying Mrs. Sinico's love, he denies himself an opportunity to express the harmonious soul. Further, the virtue of "justice" cannot appear in his present state, making him morally incomplete. By continuing his mental trajectory and distanced lifestyle, he remains a static, fractured character-- one that cannot hope to live a good life.

The article reporting Mrs. Sinico's passing-- titled "A Painful Case"-- revisits the notion of narrative instability. The story presents a perspective other than Duffy's for the first time, bringing a semblance of stability and objectivity to the narrative. The article does not describe her death as particularly gruesome or violent, so the pain is not necessarily a physical one. The phrase is derived from the coroner's statement identifying the situation as a painful one, though he says this in reference to Mrs. Sinico's husband and daughter. The reader, who has the context of their relationship, sees that the title serves a double meaning for Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico. Mrs. Sinico lived with the pain of loneliness the four years after their relationship ended, dulling

her pain with alcohol for the last two. Her self-medication is actually a form of self-destruction which makes the situation around her death most painful. Similarly, Mr. Duffy self-destructs by denying both Mrs. Sinico and himself the chance of happiness, leading to the short story taking on the same title. As such, the case is painful because it involves the decayed emotionalization of both parties. However, this is not obvious to the coroner nor the writer of the article. The title exudes irony through the reader's understanding of the facts surrounding the case. To the general public reading the paper, other words could capture the emotions of the case. The emphasis on pain strikes a chord with Mr. Duffy (and the reader) because of the personal connection he has to the victim. This understanding of the article implicitly implicates Mr. Duffy for Mrs. Sinico's death. The first perspective provided in the article is the Coroner's who states her death. While this perspective does not implicate Mr. Duffy, it draws his attention to the article. Secondly, the driver of the train gives his account which demonstrates that he was not at fault. Then the railway porter describes a woman crossing the tracks, him screaming for her to stop before she was hit. His attempt to stop her absolves the porter from guilt. The doctor provides his account, stating her injuries and concluding, "the injuries were not sufficient to have caused death in a normal person. Death, in his opinion, had been probably due to shock and sudden failure of the heart's action" (95). It seems her death had very little to do with the train itself. Instead, there must have been something else that put stress upon her heart. Captain Sinico reports a happy marriage until the two years preceding the accident, and her daughter notes that she was a chronic drinker. Finally, it is noted that the jury exonerated the train conductor. None of the accounts can find a person responsible for the death as the article ends, "No blame was attached to anybody" (96). However, the evidence against Mr. Duffy is damning: a 'sensible' woman, after having her heartbroken, takes to drinking and commits suicide. She does not take up drinking until two

years after the end of their meetings, so placing blame directly on Duffy may pose a challenge. Still, though he was possibly unaware at the time, Duffy had grown fond of her and she enjoyed his company. Their relationship provided both an outlet from emotional reciprocity that he denied. Returning to Plato's soul, we remember Mr. Duffy does not embody justice. Mr. Duffy's role in her death-- his lack of harmonious embodiment of the Spirit-- places a mark of guilt upon him. By denying her (and himself) affection, he realizes he has indirectly condemned her to death. Nobody is legally liable for her death, and there is no justice to be dealt. Despite this, Mr. Duffy is acutely aware of his role in her decline for which he can never receive absolution.

Mr. Duffy recoils into his continual distanced analysis of his life, drawing him away from an epiphany similar to Michael Kramer's. Upon reading of her death, Mr. Duffy seems uninterested in the consistency of his mannerisms. The stout hazel that he characteristically carries enters the action again, rhythmically striking the ground until he gets near his home. Once near his home, the stout hazel, which has thus far represented his stern resolve, begins to strike the ground "less emphatically" (94). Her death has so shaken him that even the pounding of his stout hazel becomes inconsistent and cannot conceal his anxiety. He reads the article again in the privacy of his apartment not aloud, but "moving his lips as a priest does when he reads the prayer *In Secretis*" (95). By doing so, his reading parallels that of a secret confessional. He *is* aware of his role in her life, and while he may not want to take responsibility for her death, the allusion to prayer may indicate an attempt to absolve himself, as no one else can do so. However, this would mean he accepted his guilt. Instead, the reader finds Mr. Duffy conflicted between revulsion and despair. He states a regret that he "had ever spoken to her of what he held sacred" (97). He is attempting to remove her impact on his life by denying the comfort she provided by listening to him. He appreciated that she provided a space where he could discuss the things he held sacred,

even if he now professes to regret doing so. He further attempts to dissociate himself from her by condemning her efforts to self-medicate. He criticizes her alcoholism, surprised that she was "an easy prey to habits" (97) even claiming she was unfit to live! She becomes the object of his abhorrence because her death produces mental disorder within him, and in doing so "she had degraded him" (97). Even though he avoided her love, her eventual death still lowered his self-image-- the very thing he had hoped to avoid. His belief that he can control his own image fully through stifling emotions leads him to place the blame upon Mrs. Sinico. He vilifies Mrs. Sinico for her human fallibility as if he could never fall victim to those same follies. In doing so, he denies his own humanity in an attempt to retain dignity by framing her death as a misfortune upon himself.

Once Duffy separates himself from his pride, he reaches his epiphany. While in his house he feels her phantasmic hand touch his. Until now his apartment has been a beacon of independence for him, a representation of a successful life away from the riff-raff of Dublin. Her death has unsettled him so much that he no longer feels mentally resolute in his apartment, a place where he has repeatedly found comfort. He visits a public house, a neutral spot where he can "evoke alternately the two images in which he now conceived her," (98) either as a stain upon his image or as a lost love. Without the overwhelming presence of his apartment, he is able to imagine the feelings she felt. He first views her in a negative light, degrading her memory to dull the pain and save himself. He cannot, however, forget the true image he had of her: the caring companion. He comes to the realization of "how lonely her life must have been, sitting night after night alone in that room" (98) which directly parallels his own situation. Conforming to his tendency of self-reflection, he frames her pain in the most relatable way to his own

situation. He begins to take on her pain as his own as he exhibits the patterns of grief. He has thus experienced denial by refusing to confront the impact of her death upon him. He transitioned to anger, expressing frustration that he shared himself with her. Here, his reevaluation pushes him towards depression by analyzing his own life. During a walk, he recognizes the guilt lies with him asking, “Why had he withheld life from her? Why had he sentenced her to death?” (98). Despite feeling her presence on a walk, he knows that she is not really there. The real presence of people impresses upon him that he is not wanted anywhere. Mr. Duffy perceives the rhythm of passing train cars to be reiterating her name. Once they are gone, and her name is no longer echoing to him, and the reality sets in. He moves into acceptance. Mrs. Sinico is not there; she is dead. Desperate for some connection again: “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” (99). The final lines lead Mr. Duffy to the epiphany that he was, is, and will continue to be alone because of the choices he made. He has finally undergone an emotional transformation at the expense of Mrs. Sinico. It took a great loss, but he has accepted his fault and relinquished emotional control to experience the impact of her death upon him. He has attained “justice” of the soul, according to Plato, but there is still an emptiness. Though he has had an awakening to the flaws of his lifestyle, no meaningful change can really occur. He perceives that she was the only one who loved him, who showed him kindness, and she is gone. While an epiphany of the soul would leave a person feeling complete, Mr. Duffy can never realize happiness even with the harmony of virtues. As such, his reevaluation uncovers the truth of himself, but cannot lead to a meaningful change.

The original image the narrator paints of Mr. Duffy presents a man prideful in his life of solitude. His attitude towards others is sneering and even loathsome, though not without a flicker

of unrealized hope: he “gave the impression of a man ever alert to greet a redeeming instinct in others” (90). He spends his nights at his landlord’s house or at concerts. Mr. Duffy takes Mrs. Sinico’s comment at the opera house as an invitation to talk, but he does eagerly pursue the conversation. The narrative voice works tirelessly to convince the reader that Mr. Duffy has truly mastered his mind, but his humanity eventually breaks through; Mrs. Sinico’s death has awakened a realization within him. The last line--"He felt that he was alone"-- reveals that he is now acutely aware of that loneliness, and cannot return to the facade of restrained passion. However, there is nothing he can do, as he has lost his “soul's companion” (98) already. He is doomed to a continued life of loneliness, now acutely aware of its invasive nature. Earlier, Mr. Duffy analyzed his feelings towards his companionship with Mrs. Sinico: “He heard the strange impersonal voice, which he recognized as his own, insisting on the soul’s incurable loneliness” (93). However, recognition does not equal internalization. At this point, his voice remains impersonal; he feels compelled to live apart from himself. Until the end of the story, the reader may have forgotten their task of inferring meaning from his thoughts, as they became too pervasive to distinguish from the initial narrator. Mr. Duffy lived at a deliberate distance from others, calculating how much of himself to give to others. The barrage of emotions at the end stuns the reader with a sense of emotion Duffy has never expressed. He called her his soul’s companion ironically as he mentally berated her memory, but the end of the story proves that it was a genuine feeling. He recognizes that “his life would be lonely too until he, too died, ceased to exist, became a memory-- if anyone remembers him” (98). Solidifying that there is an epiphany, but meaningful change is no longer possible. The final lines-- “He felt he was alone”-- stuns the reader due to the emotional weight carried by such a simple sentence, expressed by a man who only recently has begun to carry that weight.

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