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## From Womb to Tomb: A Deconstructionist and Psychoanalytic Perspective of Death in James Joyce's Dubliners

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# From Womb to Tomb

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*A Deconstructionist and Psychoanalytic  
Perspective of Death in James Joyce's Dubliners*

Bailey Gunn

3/7/2013

## *Acknowledgements*

I thank my parents for making me.  
I thank my friends for making me smile.  
I thank caffeine for making me stay awake.  
I thank literature for making me curious.

The fifteen short stories that compose the text Dubliners by James Joyce survey the human condition by closely examining the issues inherent in the lives of the young and old. From poverty to love, Joyce is able to illustrate a broad expanse of humanity's specific foibles by engaging with the events that punctuate and test the maturation process, but also by depicting the common affairs that afflict men and women on a daily basis. Yet, it is through his specific treatment of the ideas of life and death that he creates the most compelling portraits of humanity. To sum up Joyce's ideas about these two counterparts, he once wrote of Giordano Bruno's philosophy in an epistle addressed to Harriet Shaw Weaver, "...every power in nature must evolve in opposite in order to realize itself and opposition brings reunion" (Black 293). Therefore, in commenting on these poignant cycles, Joyce asserts that "opposition brings reunion," and so paradoxically, in Joyce's view, the need for death is defined by the need for life, inextricably marrying the two concepts, for better or worse. Therefore, this sentiment becomes the crux of an interpretation of Joyce's understanding of humanity, and his works.

Thus, with the notion that contrary forces breed unity, the rendering of the concepts of life and death are further emphasized by the portrayal of the opposition of men and women, and their subsequent partnership. Biology places women at the start of existence, at birth, as they form the physical bodies. Yet, as women are situated at the start of life, the female is also culturally designated to perform the rituals of death. James Joyce is steeped in his Irish heritage, making it beneficial to examine this culture specifically, and mine it for its nuances. As John Wilson Foster notes of Joyce, "Joyce may have fled Ireland...but artistically he did not flee; rather he faced and analyzed the forces of Irish life through his literature" (145). Thus, it is critical to examine Irish funerary culture; the idea that women preside over the

bereavement of loss, and also the physical preparation of the body for the burial. Specifically, the “keening” tradition in Ireland is perceived as both an emotional expression of mourning, but also as a celebration. The “keener” was almost always a female, and was charged with the office of crying uncontrollably, and composing laments about the deceased that were sung after the funeral (Bourke 28). For example, if a husband died and left his wife in debt, she might croon that in her lament, and blame him for her troubles in her temporal life (O’Sullivan 132). Women in Irish culture are able to have the final say in their husband’s life through the process of “keening,” and so are able to assert their dominance in his mortal absence. The women are not dependent on men to practice “keening” in Ireland, and are even able to use this tradition as a way of subverting the system of mental dominance. In short, Cleary and Connolly state of the tradition of “keening,” “The caoineadh furnished formal and public acknowledgements of women’s responsibility for the ceremonies of death as well as for birth” (141). Echoed by Cleary and Connolly in this way, it becomes clear that women occupy the responsibilities that demonstrate both the oppositional concepts of mortality in the ideas of birth and death in Irish culture.

To further this consummate connection of women’s jurisdiction, the funeral displays that not only are they in charge of the emotions in death as portrayed by the “keening” ritual, but also in the the physical farewell to the body. Women complete the cycle of the corporeal creation of the body by preparing them for the grave. O’Sullivan speaks of County Cork in Ireland, “After a certain period of time has elapsed during which the corpse has been left undisturbed, it is washed and dressed and laid out by some local female who specialises in this work” (180). It can be interpreted from these quotes that not only are females charged with this responsibility, but that

they are educated in its specific details. A similar account is given of the County Galway that furthers these women's sense of expertise without the conventionalities of a formal education, "The oldest woman in the townland is properly the one to wash the corpse and wrap it in a white sheet..." (181). Again, there is a female presence at these orchestrations that is significant in ensuring that women are integral to death, and also the mourning process. Yet, this information is also pertinent in the fact that it is the "oldest" woman that carries out her death duties. This suggests that she bears a wisdom that cannot be taught, and must be gleaned from life itself. This testimony from Irish culture proves that women have complete authority over both the emotional and physical aspects of death, and are simultaneously able to express their grief through their participation in these traditions.

Through the examination of these cultural traditions alone, the male appears to be woefully displaced within the matters of death and mourning. Yet, in regards to James Joyce's perspective on the male's roles, Harry Levin relates, "When we view life collectively, Joyce would suggest, we see how men are related to things. Nothing is irrelevant. Everything moves in its appointed orbit" (120). This provides that men, if this sentiment is taken literally, also have designated positions in all matters. Thus, if women are biologically, and culturally responsible for birth and death, men must also have a presence in these two areas. A rudimentary sexual education class would detail the fact that males play their own part in procreation. However, in this symbolic sense, males are not charged with the physical task of creating the form, but only in initiating conception. As a result of this removed role in the formation of life, it is a logical leap to their estranged role in death.

It is thus important to then examine the cultural funerary traditions of the Irish, specifically the “wake,” to glean male’s estranged and counter-intuitive role in death. This then provides insight into the Irish male’s expression of grief, but also Joyce’s view of this matter. To this end, the Irish wake resembled a party, and often lifted the veil of sobriety by becoming a celebration of the life that had passed (Delaney 175). The men smoke cigars, drink alcohol, and generally reminisce about the life of the deceased (Delaney 175). In fact, the male’s frivolity and drinking occasionally deteriorated into heated discussions (Delaney 175). According to Mary M. Delaney, “The wake, in fact, offers the Irishman an excellent opportunity for indulging his passion for debate” (175). Importantly, the men do not engage in traditional mourning behaviors, such as crying, but the exact opposite. Even despite the women’s somber engagements in death, the males are decidedly removed from their emotional and physical practices. Therefore, the female’s sober presence is in direct contrast with the male’s cultural role in death. Thus, rife with formalities, but devoid of somberness for the males, the Irish wake is indicative of the very life and death of the native people that live there.

It is this contradiction between men and women in the Irish funerary culture that colors James Joyce’s work Dubliners. Specifically, the stories “The Sisters” and the “The Dead” present the dysfunctional male grieving process as it is thwarted by the female presence. To examine this concept, a deconstructionist lens can elucidate the inherent anxiety, and confusion that surrounds death for males through its emphasis on oppositions and contradictions in the text. A psychoanalytic examination of the males’ inability to understand death reveals a complex, and stunted relationship with traditional mourning rituals. Both of the males in the works manifest the death drive and as a result experience “hemiplegia,” a term Joyce utilizes himself that

denotes the “paralysis” of one “hemisphere,” or the physical half of the body (Fagnoli, Gillespie 46) The opening story, “The Sisters” expands upon this notion in that the young boy narrator does not experience the death of his mentor, Father Flynn, through the physical preparation of the body. Instead, he attempts to reconcile his passing by reverting to an emotionally fertile time, namely before the priest’s death, in order to feel important, and continue in his emotional development. This behavior is largely indicative of the death drive, as he tries to bring himself to terms with mortality. It is then a similar, but inverted experience for Gabriel in the closing text, as he is confronted with the emotional grieving that his wife expresses, and so attempts to revert back to a time when he felt useful physically, and significant to her in order to progress their relationship. In this way, Gabriel invokes the death drive by repeatedly addressing his absent role in death through asserting his sexuality. The young boy is incapacitated and is paralyzed mentally, whereas Gabriel’s immobilization is physical, and sexual. Split between these two heads, the enactment of the death drive is symbolic of the males’ inability to engage in the grieving process as they are frustrated by the female presence in death.

With these more general attitudes towards the notions of life and death explained through the presentation of Irish culture reasoning, it is then necessary to examine the specific cases for these ideas in terms of James Joyce’s works. The beginning story, “The Sisters” harbors many connections to the final story “The Dead” and thus is able to sustain a dialectic that creates a complete cycle due to the age range of the main characters. As Gerhard Friedrich elaborates, “This...suggests that the first and last stories overlap significantly, and that the *Dubliners* sequence moves as a spiral, widening inward and outward, toward awareness and purgation”



(426). This established connection between the stories provides an intimate dialogue between these two examples.

Yet, despite the similarities of the stories, it is the contradictions within them that offer the greatest insight. For instance, in “The Sisters” the first opposition that is established through the presence of women is their physical preparation of the priest’s body. The women are the harbingers of death as they prepare the body of Father Flynn, the priest, for the wake. As the narrator’s aunt provides, ““There’s poor Nannie...she’s wore out. All the work we had, she and me, getting in the woman to wash him and then laying him out and then the coffin and then arranging about the Mass in the chapel” (Joyce 7). Inherent in this is the burden that the women openly take up in the Irish culture; to be charged with the dead and to be the wardens to the body’s after-life. The women thus fulfill the physical role of mourning by addressing the priest’s final needs. In a way, they are at peace themselves as Nannie “wore out” and resting, their duties completed.

However, the young narrator does not occupy a cultural position in death that allows for this type of conventional mourning. Instead, he is assigned to frivolity at the mention of his mentor’s passing. As the character Old Cotter explains to the boy, “My idea is: let a young lad run about and play with young lads of his own age...” (Joyce 2). This sentiment becomes contradictory with his encounter with his aunts later in the story. He has been told that it would have been better if he had played with his friends, and yet he is confronted with their adult conversation over his mentor’s death. As Joyce composes, ““He looks quite resigned,”” said my aunt. “That’s what the woman we had in to wash him said. She said he just looked as if was

asleep, he looked that peaceful and resigned” (6). This secondhand account of the priest’s appearance in death is conveyed entirely through the women’s perspective. For the young boy, he is utterly estranged from any physical observation of the priest’s state, so he must rely on the women’s authoritative discussion. Thus, he is conflicted about how he should mourn for the priest from such a physical distance; this translates into an equally distant emotional observation of death. His confusion is evident through the contradictory language of his narration. Observed by the young boy, in “The Sisters” of the priest’s corpse in which he narrates, “...and I knew that the old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him, solemn and truculent in death, an idle chalice on his breast” (Joyce 9). Confronted in such a way by his aunts’ treatment of death, the child is confounded. He expresses his confusion by commenting that the corpse is both “solemn” and “truculent.” A cursory search in the Oxford English dictionary will reveal “solemn” to mean “Of a serious, grave, or earnest character” (“Solemn” def. 6a). Yet, “truculent” is defined as, “Characterized by or exhibiting ferocity or cruelty; fierce, cruel, savage, barbarous” (“Truculent” def. 1a). At the basest level, this reveals an inconsistency in the text.

However, it is more than an inconsistency; it is a gap in meaning in the text. Moreover, it is an indication of the narrator’s frustrated mourning process. Thus, it is critical to expose this contradiction through the deconstructionist lens to further illustrate the young boy’s dysfunctional expression of grief. Steven Lynn in *Texts and Contexts* remarks of the deconstructionist lens, “...the text’s oppositions and hierarchy can be called into question because texts contain contradictions, gaps, spaces, and absences that defeat closure and determinate meaning” (112). “Solemn” through its dictionary definition emulates a sense of “seriousness,” and impassivity, whereas “truculent” denotes a “ferocity” that undermines the lifeless state of the

dead body that is being described. The narrator thus experiences an abject upheaval of conflicting emotions in regards to the priest's death.

The puzzlement over his role is as a result of his removal from death. Yet, the text asserts a superior in this binary through the boy's perspective. The inherent impression that can be gleaned from the boy's perspective is that Father Flynn is dead, for his corpse is lifeless. Thus, the "solemnity" of the body can be fully asserted, as a dead man does not bear the qualities of life that the word "truculent" might afford. Displayed in this way, the young boy affirms that the priest is dead even to himself as he explains, "The reading of the card persuaded me that he was dead and I was disturbed to find myself at check" (Joyce 3). There is a certainty in his tone, as he is "persuaded" of the priest's death by the card's text. Finally, at the close of the story, the boy is able to internalize this fact, as the piece concludes, "...and I knew that the old priest was lying still in his coffin as we had seen him..." (Joyce 9). To this point, the young narrator "knows" the priest is dead. This acknowledgement becomes an important final affirmation about Father Flynn's state that ensures that he is dead from the boy's perspective. His description of the corpse as quiet and "grave" as the term "solemn" permits signals finality. However, this is merely indicative of the argument that the young boy continues to have with himself. He grapples with the knowledge of the priest's death, and tries to determine his role in the his passing, but also in the grieving process, as he proceeds. Although the end result manifests in his acceptance of his death that is reinforced by the state of Father Flynn's body, his internal struggle still manifests in his inability to mourn, as he must continually convince himself that the priest is dead. Therefore, the text appears to assert undoubtedly through the young boy's

understanding that Father Flynn is dead despite the vacillating language, and the denial that seeps through the narration.

It then becomes a matter of whether Father Flynn is truly “dead” for as the boy notes that the body is “solemn,” he explicitly suggests that he is also “truculent.” For example, the boy often entertains the notion that Father Flynn is possibly still alive, and with counter fantasies, he envisions this possibility. Joyce writes, “Had he not been dead I would have gone into the little dark room behind the shop to find him sitting in his arm-chair by the fire, nearly smothered in his great-coat” (3). Whether this manifests as a rejection of death, the young boy still entertains the notion that he is alive, and this presents the opportunity for him to rely on his memories. Further to this point, Joyce writes of the encounter between the corpse and the narrator, “The fancy came to me that the old priest was smiling as he lay there in his coffin” (5). Thus, upon the first look, it appeared that the corpse had living characteristics. Moreover, the boy refers to him as “truculent” a second time after his initial viewing of the body. The young boy again comments of Father Flynn’s body, “His face was very truculent, grey and massive, with black cavernous nostrils and circled by a scanty white fur” (Joyce 6). His instinctual reaction in seeing the body is that it is still alive, which thus undermines the “solemnity” that has been portrayed before. It is inherent in the idea that the boy both accepts the priest as living and dead through his perception that succinctly portrays his removed role with death.

Thus, this contradiction in the text that provides these numerous interpretations through the deconstructionist lens can be focused on how males mourn. In “The Sisters,” the young boy’s confusion over the death of his mentor is presented through the examination of the text’s

oppositions is indicative of the struggle between the life drive and the death drive. Thus, this opening story offers the perspective of a young, male narrator that establishes the development of this internal battle from an early age. In managing his grief, it becomes apparent that the young boy exercises the life instinct as Sigmund Freud has portrayed, "...the Eros, the all-sustaining, and of deriving the narcissistic libido of the ego from the sum of the libido quantities that bring about the mutual adherence of the somatic cells" ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle" VI). In this way, Freud centers Eros, the life instinct that is based in sex and the propagation of life, as an expression of the ego. Operating under the more colloquial definition of the ego, the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as, "Self-esteem, egotism, self-importance" ("Ego" def. 3). Therefore, the young boy displays his ego, and thus, Eros in the way that he processes the death of Father Flynn. He narrates, "I found it strange that neither I nor the day seemed in a mourning mood and I felt even annoyed at discovering myself a sensation of freedom as I had been freed from something by his death" (4). He places his own sense of freedom above the traditional norms of mourning as expressed by the women. He quite literally enacts the pleasure principle in "avoiding pain to produce pleasure," as the male has been taught through the idea of the Irish wake, as he asserts frivolity over sobriety ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle" I).

Therefore, the young boy places his individual needs above all else, and asserts his ego and his life drive. He experiences a sense of emotional liberation from the death that allows him to move forward. He emphasizes this self-importance by thinking about his mentor's influence on him. The boy provides, "His questions showed me how complex and mysterious were certain institutions of the Church which I had always regarded as the simplest acts" (Joyce 4). As a result, he does not primarily focus on the priest's absence, but how his teachings have given his

own thoughts agency. In this way, the young narrator is investing in his right to renew his life by focusing on the cultivation of his emotional development by the priest in the present. Yet, this is a flawed conception of progress, for the boy only praises the knowledge that the priest imbued into him. The narrator thus becomes a victim of not only the women's authority over death, but the notion of transcendence that Nouri Gana establishes in his article "The Vicissitudes of Melancholia in Freud and Joyce," "Transcendence is a mode of coming to terms with the temporal presence of a loved object flawed by mortality, that is, by the absence building in the horizon of its immediate presence" (98). As applied to the young narrator, this concept portrays his inability to acknowledge the priest's death, for he refuses to acknowledge his mentor's mortality. By becoming a living example of Father Flynn's own life, the boy cannot transcend his appreciation for the priest and accept his death. He instead attempts to immortalize the priest by asserting his own ego, as largely created by his intimate relationship with Father Flynn.

However, when it comes time to actually mourn this loss, the boy cannot continue to assert his own ego, while simultaneously championing the priest's teachings. As the psychoanalytical definition of ego is then applied, it "...mediates between the id and the demands of the social and physical environment" ("Ego" def. 4) Thus, confronted with an environment dominated by the women who engage in the physical preparation of Father Flynn's body, the young boy cannot keep the pretense of his own needs; the female presence intercedes. He comments upon the experience, "There was a heavy odour in the room-the flowers" (Joyce 6). In reality, it is the flowers that truly create the environment, a cloying scent, and suffocation; all because of the women who have tried to make his passing peaceful. The young narrator cannot reconcile his presence in the arrangement because the women have taken care of even the

smallest details. To this end, there is a literal sense that the narrator is not supposed to be involved in this tangible expression of funerary tradition.

Unable to join them, for his cultural role in death is designated to be removed from the physical traditions that these women complete, he attempts to express his grief through emotion. Therefore, he reverts back to an emotionally fertile time, in which he was useful, and invokes the death drive. As the boy suggests, “Had he not been dead I would have gone into the dark little room behind the shop to find him sitting in his arm-chair by the fire, nearly smothered in his great-coat” (3). The young narrator is cognizant that the priest is dead, yet he still feels the need to return to the past to grieve properly. He asserts in reverting back to a time when he was an integral part to the priest’s life then he is able to mourn him presently. However, by slipping into the past to rediscover his own importance in regards to the priest is an activation of the death drive. As Robert Kastenbaum states in his text, *The Psychology of Death*, about the core principles of the drive, “The compulsion to repeat or restore an earlier condition can take precedence over the usual forms of gratification” (165). The women in the story occupy the cultural role of death, and eliminate the possibility of confronting Father Flynn’s death through addressing the body. As the young boy admits of his potential engagement with death, “I wished to go in and look at him but I had not the courage to knock” (4). Instead of mustering his courage, the boy initiates the death drive, and “repeats or restores” his memories, which further removes himself emotionally. This brings him closer to the priest, but does not allow him to advance emotionally, thus rendering him inert. As Thomas E. Connolly, composes “...the boy reacts violently in the early part of the story; later, he becomes a calm, objective narrator of events” (190). The death drive signals that the boy is thus stunted emotionally, and is therefore

“objective” towards the end of the story. This is as a result of his reversion to the past and his emotional removal from the present to reach the priest.

In this way, the death drive does not signal progression, but the inability to move on. This indicates that the young boy is essentially emotionally frustrated in the mourning process by the presence of women. He becomes paralyzed specifically as James Joyce himself describes it in this way, “I have written one. I call the series Dubliners to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city” (Friedrich 421). Thus, it is important that the prefix of this paralysis is “hemi” that denotes the word hemispheres. This would suggest that the characters are split into halves horizontally. In terms of “The Sisters” story it can be maintained that the young narrator is functional only in the top half of his body, specifically that he is paralyzed mentally after the invocation of the death drive. Thus, the boy is debilitated in both his attempts to physically and emotionally mourn as the death drive does not indicate progress, but an end to “individual development” (“Beyond the Pleasure Principle” VI). To this end, Joyce writes, “Nannie gave the lead and we three knelt down at the foot of the bed. I pretended to pray but I could not gather my thoughts because the old woman’s mutterings distracted me” (5). Within this scene, the young boy is out of his element because “Nannie gave the lead” and so directed his actions, and is physically in charge of him. Additionally, the paralysis is inherent for he was “distracted” and so did not complete the task assigned to him. As Florence Walzl elucidates about paralysis, “This motif is exemplified in repeated pictures of people living dull rounds of existence that eventually turn into figures of death in life” (47). Thus, Walzl captures the cyclical nature of the life and death drive as it renders the young boy incapacitated within his role in death, doomed to repeat this through any attempt to mourn emotionally or physically.



To this end, a similar experience with death can be found in the text "The Dead," the closing piece of the Dubliners. The main character, Gabriel Conroy, encounters a difficult situation when his wife, Gretta, ignores his sexual advances because she is fixated on the memory of her dead lover, Michael Furey. In relation to her impassivity, Gabriel comments, "He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her" (Joyce 186). In this dichotomy of "crying" and "crushing" there is another inconsistency. This could largely be attributed to the emotional upheaval, and desperation that Gabriel exhibits in regards to his wife's mood, but since Gretta is grief-stricken from memories, it is important to define Gabriel's reactions in this context, and in relation to the mourning she completes. For this point, the word "cry" is defined by the Oxford English dictionary as "To entreat, beg, beseech, implore, in a loud and emoved or excited voice" ("Cry" def. 1a). There is a sense of dependence that is reinforced by the notions of "entreating" or "beseeching." Moreover, to "cry" is a vocal, and that is made even more significant because it is from Gabriel's "soul," and therefore there is the simultaneous notion of a release in the word "cry." However, there is a far more contradictory understanding in the word "crush" for it is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, "To compress with violence, so as to break, bruise, destroy, squeeze out of natural shape or condition: said of the effect of pressure whether acting with momentum or otherwise" ("Crush" def. 2a). This "compression" coupled with the "breaking" or "destruction" that the definition offers suggests a dominating influence that contrasts starkly with the "begging" that is inferred with the word "cry." The "violent" introduction of "crush" is representative of an individualistic need to eliminate, and dominate. It is also indicative of Gabriel's emphasis on his physical relations with his wife.

In addition, the presentation of this sentiment for Gabriel will largely define how he treats Gretta's grief, as she recalls memories of the dead; whether through supplication or through brute force. He manifests, and so the text supports, the former in the way that he cautiously handles Gretta's fragile state. He consoles her, as Joyce writes, "Her hand was warm and moist: it did not respond to his touch, but he continued to caress it..." (189). In this way, he offers himself to her, despite her lack of acknowledgement. This is presented as a selfless act that renders him as understanding of her engagement with the past, and as a result, respectful to the dead that she recalls. To this end, he is able to quell his own physical needs in order to not distract Gretta from embarking on the mourning process. Joyce writes to display this, "He could have flung his arms about her hips and held her still, for his arms were trembling with desire to seize her and only the stress of his nails against the palms of his hands held the wild impulse of his body in check" (185). In reacting to Gretta's grieving process in this way, the superior term in the binary is that of "cry" for Gabriel is able to placate Gretta's needs in mourning. This indicates that he too can recognize the need for her entertainment of a memory of a past lover, and thus creating functional connection to the dead from the present.

Yet, the text also opposes this notion, and asserts it over the implications of the word "cry." Instead, the "crushing" force of Gabriel's jealousy for Gretta's deceased lover causes him to eradicate it from his life, and to estrange himself from death. To this end, Joyce writes, "A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer, as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world" (189). Encompassed in the signal verb of "triumph" exists Gabriel's need to dominate over his wife, and over death, for its definition implies that he would "prevail" against

the forces that occupy her attention (“Triumph” def. 2a). However, it is in the very fact that the opposition that Gabriel faces is “vague” that suggests he cannot reconcile the presence of death, and cannot physically affect it. Yet, he can act on his wife, for while experiencing the grief that connects her to death, she is still present in Gabriel’s world. To this end, Joyce asserts of Gabriel, “Gabriel was silent. He did not wish her to think that he was interested in this delicate boy” (188). In this way, Gabriel does not foster the conversation, as he gains control of the situation by not responding, and by “crushing” the possibility for further discourse on the topic. Moreover, in the idea that he calls Michael Furey “delicate” suggests that he believes himself to be the opposite, and so asserts his strength over the situation and the memory of her lover in this way. As a result, the dichotomy that is presented in the wake of Gretta’s mourning through Gabriel’s perspective suggests that there is a primary inconsistency of how he views the grieving process. In turn, the multiplicities of meanings in this exchange are manifested to illustrate his dysfunctional encounter with death.

Gabriel’s inability to deal with death as it is portrayed through his interactions with Gretta suggests that he similarly struggles with the life and death instinct that result in a final hemiplegia. Gabriel first asserts the life drive in a similar fashion to the young boy. Yet, Gabriel’s mourning process can be examined through the issuance of a more literal definition of the ego’s sexual components. As Freud introduces the life drive, “We have fixed our attention not on the living matter, but on the forces active in it, and have been led to distinguish two kinds of instincts: those the purpose of which is to guide life towards death, and the others, the sexual instincts, which perpetually strive for and bring about, the renewal of life” (“Beyond the Pleasure Principle” VI). Thus, Gabriel’s life instinct, as a result of his age, is namely libidinous in nature.

Therefore, the life drive is presented in a literal sense, as it suggests that Gabriel will physically conceive, and propagate future generations. Joyce reinforces this by writing of Gabriel's attraction to Gretta, "...the first touch of her body, musical and strange, and perfumed, and sent through him a keen pang of lust" (184). To this end, Gabriel's ego and Eros is largely connected to Gretta, and the physical aspect of their relationship is often emphasized.

Yet, as the young narrator experienced "transcendence" as established by Nouri Gana, so too does Gabriel. In the idea that his life drive, and thus his ego, is entangled in Gretta's existence, it is then able to be subverted by the death drive. To establish this, Joyce writes of Gabriel, "He had felt proud and happy then, happy that she was his, proud of her grace and wifely carriage" (184). He asserts that as a result of the degree of her physical beauty, his ego is bolstered by her presence. However, when Gretta confronts him with her emotional mourning, he cannot separate his ego from her physical form. Therefore, he is unable to aid Gretta mourn for he focuses his efforts in redressing her physical needs. As a result, when she does not return the physical extension of his ego through his sexuality, this invalidates his ability to grieve with her.

It is thus when Gabriel's sexual life drive engages with Gretta's mourning that he is thwarted physically, and arrested emotionally. Joyce writes of the incident of Gretta's grieving the loss of Michael Furey, "She stopped, choking with sobs, and overcome by emotion, flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt" (190). This display of mourning is directly reminiscent of "keening," and so echoes Gretta's cultural role in death. Unable to join her emotionally, Gabriel settles on comforting her physically, though this too is a frustrated attempt. Joyce relates, "Gabriel held her hand for a moment longer, irresolutely, and then shy of

intruding on her grief, let it fall gently and walked quietly to the window” (190). Her “keen,” so to speak, is an entirely emotional expression that is foreign to Gabriel, and when he cannot relate to her, even on a physical level, he removes himself by leaving her side. With this inability to reach Gretta emotionally, he reacts in a physical manner. To this end, Joyce writes, “Generous tears filled Gabriel’s eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love” (191). It is in the fact that Gabriel cries, and that his response is physical that marks his inability to mourn for her. Yet, it is in the idea that he “had never felt like that” that estranges him permanently from Gretta. As she embodies the emotional aspect of mourning, he cannot engage with his grief, or comfort her. Instead, he is forced into producing a physical reaction without knowing why he weeps with her. This baseless behavior is thus symbolic of the male’s presence in death, for his role is culturally estranged, and devoid of responsibility.

Thus, Gabriel embodies the death instinct in that when he cannot reach Gretta emotionally, he attempts to return to a previous state of importance physically. This is all carried forth by his sexual needs; the driving force of the ego, and his only capable expression in the face of death. As Benjamin Boysen in his article, “The Self and the Other in James Joyce,” “Gabriel is caught between an arrogant cultural feeling of superiority and latent feelings of inadequacy, and he projects his inner drama out into the social world...” (401). These stirrings of “inadequacy” are felt most prominently in his sexual relationship with Gretta as he repeatedly attempts to “restore” a physical moment between them, but also as he initiates the death drive (Kastenbaum 165). To this end, Joyce writes, “Like distant music these words that he had years before were borne towards him from the past. He longed to be alone with her” (183). In this way,

he desires to recreate the events of their history. Gabriel then explicitly relates this, “He longs to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy” (183). He aches to present himself as significant to Gretta’s existence in the presence of her mourning, yet he can only do this by highlighting their past. He only desires to revert to a time that he was physically, and sexually present in her life, not to remedy her emotionally volatile condition. Unfortunately, as a result of his manifestation of the death drive in this way, he cannot progress, and is rendered incapacitated through his inability to mourn the love she once knew, and the love he never had with her.

Thus, as paralysis is imminent with the introduction of the death drive, Gabriel experiences the similar notion of hemiplegia. Instead of the young boy’s debilitation of his upper torso and his mental capacities, Gabriel is immobilized from the waist down. His physical and sexual relationship with Gretta is frustrated when he is confronted with her emotional grief. Joyce relates, “While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him” (188). To this end, it is important he is “full of memories” while she is “comparing him in her mind.” This further separates their mourning processes in death into physical and emotional, respectively and permanently. Then, as he is assailed by his own consciousness he is barraged on all sides by his own consciousness, thus completing his paralysis.

In this larger analysis of Dubliners, the most important question that is to be asked of psychoanalysis that deconstructionism has broken open for its discussion is the query of male’s

role in mourning, if women have been largely positioned at the ends of existence. As it has been displayed through Irish funerary traditions previously, the male finds himself largely uninvolved in the preparation of the body, and its eventual burial. Even in the Irish wake, the male carries on in merry making to celebrate the life of the deceased, but avoids any conventional notions of mourning such as crying; this is left to the women in the aforementioned “keening” ritual. Thus, the convolution and ambiguity of the deconstructionist lens can be answered through the Freudian perspective of psychoanalysis to further delve into the mourning ritual of men, and to effectively attribute meaning to their existence after their initial, and important role in conception. Inevitably, there is much in this subject of study that can be further explored. For instance, if women preside over birth and death, it becomes pertinent to ask who is in charge of the afterlife, as can be signaled by the appearance of the ghosts of the deceased in the stories. Moreover, the inherent sexual component of the ego could be further expanded to examine the sexual maturation processes of the males in the text. In many ways, the women’s dominance of these their sexual maturation slip thwart the male’s sexual epiphany, as the young boy and the priest never acknowledge their sexual drive, while Gabriel and Michael Furey are both frustrated in the pursuit of theirs. Thus, while the concepts of birth and death, and women and men loom large in human consciousness, James Joyce’s ability to effectively portray the experiences and contradictions of his characters from womb to tomb renders Dubliners recognizable, and relatable to all readers.

