

**READING BETWEEN THE LINES: NOTES ON FEMALE****CHARACTERIZATION IN *DUBLINERS***

Gabriela Semensato Ferreira

*Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*

**ABSTRACT:** In this article, I propose to analyze female characterization in *Dubliners* (1914), by James Joyce, by “reading between the lines” of this literary work and considering not only character description and the direct discourse, but especially some characters’ silences and more interior way of expressing themselves, perceived through the narration. One of the traits of James Joyce’s style is the description of these characters using only a few lines. While this trait can limit the formation of a clear picture of them, on the other hand – and maybe for this reason – it may make a more open interpretation possible. This might happen either because of the consequent ambivalence of the literary language or because of the tension that is formed when comparing our present reading of the text and the pre-conceived meanings we attribute to some of the expressions used, such as what characterizes a “lady” or a “spinster”. It is not by chance, then, that what is not said, or the blank spaces left by the text, can be so meaningful after some research about the political and sociocultural context of publication of this work. Thus, I approximate previous critics’ readings of Joyce’s writings concerning this thematic to a panoramic view of this context. Finally, I chose, as focuses of this paper, the situation of late XIX and early XX century Irish women, as well as the role of mothers taken by two female characters in *Clay* and *A Mother*, their characterization and point of view.

**KEYWORDS:** *Dubliners*, female characters, mother, Irish women, characterization.

**RESUMO:** Neste trabalho, proponho pensar a caracterização das personagens femininas em *Dublinenses* (1914), de James Joyce, a partir de uma leitura “entrelinhas”, considerando não apenas sua descrição e discurso direto no texto literário, mas em especial seus silêncios e seu modo de expressão mais interior, a partir de narração. Uma das marcas do estilo de James Joyce é a descrição dessas personagens em poucas linhas. Essa característica pode ao mesmo tempo limitar a formação de uma imagem mais “completa” dessas mulheres assim como, por outro lado – e talvez por essa razão – possibilitar maior abertura interpretativa. Isso pode ocorrer pela conseqüente ambivalência da linguagem literária ou pela tensão formada entre nossa leitura atual do texto e os sentidos pré-concebidos atribuídos a algumas das expressões utilizadas, como o que caracteriza uma “dama” ou uma “solteirona”. Não é à toa, portanto, que os “não-ditos”, ou os espaços em branco deixados pelo texto, possam ser tão significativos, após certa pesquisa relativa ao contexto político e sociocultural da época de publicação dessa obra. Por isso, alio às leituras prévias de críticos da obra de Joyce sobre essa temática uma visão panorâmica desse contexto. Como foco e divisão do trabalho escolhi a situação das mulheres irlandesas do final do século XIX e início do XX, o papel de mãe das personagens principais dos contos *Argila (Clay)* e *Uma Mãe (A Mother)*, sua caracterização e a construção de seu ponto de vista.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Dublinenses, personagens femininas, mãe, mulheres irlandesas, caracterização.

When reading *Dubliners*, first published in 1904, by James Joyce, one notices a feeling of paralysis in the arcs of many – if not all – the characters. This has been

particularly observed by critics and it seems to come from a sense that life itself in Dublin at the turn of the century suffered from a similar situation. People's existences were as if "paralyzed" because of the socio-political issues affecting them, such as the death of Charles Stewart Parnell (leader of the Irish Home Rule movement) in 1891, or their living conditions, resulting, for instance, in the emergent movement for the defense of women's rights.

Paralysis affects various characters and can be perceived through their actions and their speech in these narratives. However, it seems that what is not clearly stated textually can sometimes also have a strong effect in their attitudes. In other words, it is possible to sense, when reading, that there is something there, "between the lines" of the text, that calls our attention and must be observed and taken into account when interpreting *Dubliners*.

In some stories, there is a recurrence of "silences", omissions and expressions that provide examples of significant ambivalence, which is perceived as a trait present in literary texts with multiple possible meanings, according to theoreticians such as Paul Ricoeur (1976). These occurrences contribute vastly to the interpretation of the work and can even alter first impressions that the reader might have of some characters. I have chosen to investigate some of these cases, focusing especially on two female characters: Maria, from *Clay*, and Mrs. Kearney, from *A Mother*.

I have decided to analyze these women according to three characteristics: as mothers, as Irish women and as points of view in their own stories. By comparing *Clay* and *A Mother*, it is possible to see that these women are, if not opposites, two individuals in very different points in a spectrum of personalities. They are both mothers (or surrogate mother, in the case of Maria), they both seem to care about their

children, or the family they take care of, but they behave in very distinct ways in order to demonstrate their feelings. While Mrs. Kearney is more outspoken and open about her opinions (although I will question that), Maria seems to be more shy and modest, keeping her feelings to herself (but is she honest about them?).

These female characters also strongly relate to the conditions imposed on women in the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in Ireland. By looking more attentively at their speech and attitudes, and investigating their silences, gestures, and “mistakes”, I intend to offer alternative interpretations of their behaviors, considering previous critical readings, and to approximate them, in spite of their seeming so different.

## 1 CHARACTERIZATION

*Clay* and *A Mother* present a third person narrator. This anonymous voice describes Maria and Mrs. Kearney (prior Miss Devlin) in few sentences.

Maria was a very, very small person indeed but she had a very long nose and a very long chin. She talked a little through her nose, always soothingly: “Yes, my dear,” and “No, my dear.” She was always sent for when the women quarreled over their tubs and always succeeded in making peace. (JOYCE, 1991, p. 64)

[Mrs. Kearney] had been educated in a high-class convent, where she had learned French and music. As she was naturally pale and unbending in manner she made few friends at school. When she came to the age of marriage she was sent out to many houses, where her playing and ivory manners were much admired. (JOYCE, 1991, p. 91)

Right from the start, their physical appearance and manners are summarized in a paragraph. Although few words are used, it seems that their description is very precise and gives us a clear notion of what they look like and how they behave. This perception, however, can be deceiving. It is precisely because they are described in few words, using some adjectives to define their features – like “very small”, “long chin”, “pale”, “unbending” – that those attributes might be considered open to interpretation.

Perhaps we are led, as readers, to understand that Maria, for instance, was not pretty, but this is never actually said anywhere in the text. It is our preconceived notions of her characteristics that make us reach this conclusion. Also, this description of her is paralleled with the way she talks, very politely saying “no, my dear” and “yes, my dear”, being considered by others a “peacemaker”.

When Mrs. Kearney is said to be “unbending” and to have learned French and music, we also assume that she is talented, but maybe a kind of difficult person to live with. She also chose her husband to “silence” her friends who “began to loosen their tongues about her” (JOYCE, 1991, p. 91). This means that, while we get a quick notion, in a few lines, of what they were like, an attribute of Joyce’s writing style, we are also cleverly led to make assumptions based on our interpretation of what these characteristics mean to us. Some might simply accept them, but they might also question these descriptions when confronted with actions that follow these passages.

In *A Mother*, expressions to indicate the direct speech – like “she thought”, “she said”, “she asked” – are very frequent (the narration focuses a lot on what she said), whereas in *Clay* Maria does not say a lot (in direct speech) though it has been argued that the third person narrator actually expresses how she would speak of herself or how she wished others would view her.

The titles too can reveal other aspects of their personalities. “Clay” has been associated, as Margot Norris (1987) points out, with the symbolic sense of death, and Maria’s name with the Virgin Mary, because of her docile manner and virginity. *A Mother* has been suggested to symbolize “any” mother in Dublin, or any mother in general, and, because of her attitudes, Mrs. Kearney could be considered a fervent advocate for her daughter. Other interpretations, though, can coexist. These women, in any case, are associated to the Irish women of the time, who were confronted with the option of getting married when there was still time, as seems to be the case with Mrs. Kearney, or being seen as “spinsters”, like Maria.

In any case, analyzing the language used in the stories can help understand these women and the way they are portrayed. Both narratives seem to present their points of view, although differing noticeably in the way they develop. While the focus on Maria’s perceptions of events indicates internal focalization, such as described by Mieke Bal in *Narratology* (1997), Mrs. Kearney’s feelings are mostly observed through her interactions with other characters. She engages in arguments, whereas Maria has a quieter demeanor. Hence, while in both cases it is possible to judge these female characters from the perspectives of others, in Maria’s case these views are described by the third-person narrator. In *A Mother* they are often perceived through the characters’ direct discourses. However, since the narrator seems to know – or reveal – only as much as these point-of-view characters, what is said about them can often go unexplained and left for the reader to interpret. This might happen because of Joyce’s writing style, which is concise but achieves great effects, and can therefore be associated to poetry and modernist art.

Katherine Mansfield and James Joyce, like their 'Modernist' contemporaries, deliberately raised the stakes, according to David Trotter (1992), because they made things difficult for the reader at a time when writers were encouraged to facilitate, to elaborate writings that were easier to read. Trotter argues that they could do so because changes in the publishing and marketing of fiction had established a greater diversity of readerships.

Because there is so much investment in the prose language in Joyce's writings it seems relevant to understand the way females are characterized in *Dubliners*, that is, how they are portrayed by the narrator, but also how their own voices can be heard, through their language, description, roles.

Trotter defends that using Relevance Theory would allow the listener/reader to construct a context as he or she processes the utterance, interpreting the new information in the context provided by the old. He argues that modernist writers sometimes disguise or displace the focus of a sentence, "thus forcibly extending the range of inferences necessary to understand what they are talking about" (TROTTER, 1992, p. 14), which seems to be the case with the short stories in *Dubliners*. One example would be the guessing game played by Maria and the Donnellys in *Clay*, when Mrs. Donnelly ends up telling someone to "throw it out at once", while Maria thinks that "it was wrong that time" (meaning that she didn't get it right, she didn't guess what she touched). The narration does not center in the wet substance she touched or the mysterious thing that had to be thrown out. Instead, it leaves these parts open to interpretation, quickly concluding with the prayer-book that Maria got the second time and deviating the attention to the possible explanation to the "wet substance" as "garden dirt", since someone mentioned it while Maria had her eyes covered during the game.

## 2 MOTHERS

As Linda Rohrer Paige points out in *James Joyce's Darkly Colored Portraits of 'Mother' in Dubliners* (1995), there is something wrong with the mothers in *Dubliners*. They are ambiguous, paradoxical, enigmatic. Their “goodness” is tainted, “their positive feelings for their children become suspect when tempered by their harshness or selfishness” (PAIGE, 1995, p. 329). Because these women are usually paralyzed, either physically, socially, or spiritually, their offspring also suffers.

The mothers, in this work, are portraits of ambiguity. Mrs. Kearney demands the institution of a contract for her daughter Kathleen, who is a pianist. This agreement is associated primarily with “duty” or “rights”. When Mrs. Kearney realizes (or infers) that the concerts are not attracting as much attention or that her daughter might not be paid accordingly, she maintains that the terms of the contract stand inviolate even after being warned that her daughter’s contract would be broken if she did not play for the second part of the concert. Immobile for an instant, irritated with the man’s response, the mother becomes as if paralyzed. She is inflexible. Hence, Linda Paige suggests the contract serves to metaphorically retain other kinds of holds on her daughter, binding her both physically and emotionally.

As has been pointed out, the title *A Mother*, with the indefinite pronoun “a”, may suggest it represents any mother, all mothers of Dublin. Although Mrs. Kearney might be seen as a type of *artiste* herself in her attempt to ensure her daughter’s payment, the consequences of her actions are disastrous. She appears to want to help her daughter, but ends up making her situation worse. The mother’s behavior is contradictory. Once,

when supposedly defending Kathleen's interests, she lets something slip: "I'm asking for my rights", she says, making it clearer that she is fighting for herself too.

Additionally, the concert scene is colored with sexual ambiguity: it seems to be about an angry mother demanding payment for her daughter's musical performance, but it can also be associated with a different kind of performance. Mrs. Kearney, outraged, attempts to force customers to pay up for her "girl" to provide money for services rendered. Mr. Holohan and other male characters, Paige (1995) explains, appear limping, as if it were a sign of their sexual impotence. The author also observes Joyce's word choices when describing the audience's complaints when the concert does not start: they are clapping, stamping, whistling, panting, bursting. And when it does start, men's contentment is mentioned. In this way, Kathleen seems like a marketable commodity. This can be perceived as an unflattering portrait of a mother obsessed with obtaining a "contract" for her child. The "rigidity" of this personality, in a mother, resonates that of "The Madam" in *The Boarding House*. However, it does attest a recurrent and common problem of the time: finding a way to survive gender oppression, finding out what to do for a living, either by certifying a marriage or a job.

Maria of *Clay* represents another example of a struggling and sometimes ineffective and powerless mother, or surrogate-mother. She appears to have helped take care of the Donnelly family, and now visits them with some frequency. She still has ties with them, but it is not clear to what extent her care for them is reciprocated, for example, by the children, or how much hers is a good influence, if the brothers keep fighting and if she almost instills a fight between the married couple (not to mention the "wet substance" prank she suffers when they play).

Warren Beck, who studied this story in depth, theorizes that Maria's "little life" (BECK, 1969, p. 202) fueled no fire for those who came in contact with her, regardless of her fondly recalling Joe's saying that "Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother" (JOYCE, 1991, p. 65). Although parallels between Maria and the Virgin Mary have also been noted, for both hold reputations of "peacemakers", it has been argued that at home Maria fails to instill harmony within the family. Unlike Mary, Maria's physical attributes are somewhat negatively emphasized in the text – her nose being referred to at least three times –, which results in her appearance being imagined by some readers as "grotesque" (PAIGE, 1995). Also, she appears alone and powerless, the "clay" she touches does not come to life, and the family she fosters remains fragmented. They remain clay.

Another "mother" figure in *Dubliners* appears in *Eveline*. Eveline's task is to take care of her family and to prevent them from falling apart. She promised her dying mother, another victim of violence, to keep the home together for as long as she can. However, according to Paige (1995), mothers of *Dubliners* remain either aggressive – thus continuing the cycle of oppression – and ineffectual or meek and ineffectual, whether they be actual mothers or symbolic representations of mothers. Their intentions, despite being apparently positive, can have harsh results, at times making their children's situations actually worse. Also, these intentions might be more centered in their own interests than in others'. In the case of Mrs. Kearney, money seems to bother her much more than Kathleen, who is always submissive. Maria, on the other hand, appears to be more in the need of attention, care, love, than the children or the couple she visits.

When considering these characters in light of the socio-political context at the time this work was published, however, it is hard to think of these female characters as merely inefficient and meek mothers.

### 3 IRISH WOMEN

Michael Wainwright, in *Female Suffrage in Ireland: James Joyce's Realization of Unrealized Potential* (2010), relates that Britain in the 1860's witnessed the emergence of a female demand for self-development.

First voiced from within the bourgeoisie by the Girl of the Period, this opposition to male strictures not only resisted the clichés of femininity, but also challenged marriages arranged for social or economic standing (WAINWRIGHT, 2010, p. 651).

The narrative in *Dubliners* indicates that these arranged marriages, considering some kind of interest, are very close to Mrs. Kearney's and Mrs. Mooney's situations in *A Mother* and *The Boarding House*. Quite unexpectedly, though, Wainwright explains, an influential but seldom studied counterpart to this socioeconomic desire evolved among the Protestant women of Ireland. Despite their colonial statutes, Irish Protestants had enjoyed increasing power, or Ascendancy, since the Flight of the Earls from Ulster at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Wainwright (2010) states that the numerical inequality between the sexes in Ireland at the time made the subject of labor for women pertinent. Single women, often deemed valueless spinsters, experienced social exclusion. This was especially the case among the working class, according to Wainwright and it is indicated in the case of

Maria, for instance, who refers to the joy of having her own money due to her work in *Clay*.

This atmosphere in Ireland might have helped to transform the associated female cause into the Revolt of the Protestant Daughters. In the 1880's, then, there was significant political and social agitation in Ireland. However, the claims of Irish women to a positive legal status "were still largely unheeded" (WAINWRIGHT, 2010, p. 654).

The author points out that while Bram Stoker could have testified to his mother's outspokenness, a similar maternal provenance cannot be cited for James Joyce (1882-1941). His mother, Mary Jane "May" Murray (1859-1903), was of the same generation as the Parnell girls, but the Murrays entertained no Revolt of the Daughters. May was schooled in the Catholic faith and in activities concomitant with her middle-class background. His mother had lessons in piano and voice, as well as dancing and even politeness at the Misses Flynn School. She was described as shy, modest, and pious (much like Maria) and she married John Stanislaus Joyce (1849-1931) in 1879. While women such as Charlotte Stoker and Delia Parnell endured their marriage and parenting duties and became activists for female emancipation, May Joyce collapsed under the demands of matrimony and motherhood, according to Wainwright. Thus, the young Joyce's formative impression of Irish womanhood, the author suggests, must have been particularly divided: the silence of his mother, a woman only rarely driven to assertiveness, in contrast to the demonstrative outspokenness of his governess, a woman who is said to have expressed her views.

In *Eveline*, the shortest tale in *Dubliners*, Joyce portrays the desperate anxiety provoked by the opportunity of migrating and hints at the melancholic future that follows its denial. Migration at the time was very common. Eveline, however, chooses

to remain in Dublin – and her future, consequently, looks bleak. Molly Ivors, the “frank-mannered talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes” (JOYCE, 1991, p. 127) from the closing story, *The Dead*, may have brighter prospects, “yet, education can be a hegemonizing practice that offers the prospect of liberty while conterminously co-opting the knowledge bearer into standard social practices” (WAINWRIGHT, 2010, p. 660), as Joyce’s writings from this period show.

Very few women in Ireland at that time could hope for such educational advantages, anyway, a fact which is illustrated in the *Dubliners* stories, by the situation of these female characters. It is the silence of most of these characters, after all, and not their outspokenness, one of the clearer connections to the sense of paralysis often associated with Joyce’s works. And even when they do speak, like *A mother*, what they say is interpreted as “unladylike”. What they hear in reply, as she did, refers to their lack of “decency” (JOYCE, 1991, p. 99).

#### **4 POINTS OF VIEW**

*Clay* might seem like a “simple” story, but if the text is analyzed closely this impression can be quite easily discarded. In *Narration under a Blindfold: Reading Joyce's 'Clay'* (1987), Margot Norris suggests some points of this narrative where assertions attempt to mislead the read, but fail. On the other hand, it is some of the “blank spaces” and silences of this story that can shed some light on its interpretation.

The protagonist Maria has been seen by critics as the figure of the “old maid”, who seems to lack in everything and therefore embodies desire,

a desire for the recognition and prestige that would let a poor old woman without family, wealth, or social standing to maintain her human status in paralytic Dublin and that would let her story be credited by those who hear it (NORRIS, 1987, p. 206).

Norris offers a different way of reading *Clay*. She questions the critics' need to capitalize on Maria, to transform her negative attributes into positive symbols – from poor old woman into Poor Old Woman, from witchlike into Witch, from virginal into Blessed Virgin – a transformation which betrays how little esteem this lady can muster. She argues that Joyce does not promote her to metaphoric status as much as he explores her need, and her strategies, for promoting herself. Although I might disagree with what she says about the use of metaphors, her view of Maria's self-image seems to be very coherent. The use of rhetoric in this narrative is very strategic, as *Clay* can be seen as Maria's defense against her own interiorization of all the derision and contempt that she has endured in her life.

Hence, the narrator in *Clay* seems to have a peculiar “social” function and phantasmal narrative voice. If human desire is born out of an imaginary lack, the things Maria lacks are only symbolic (marriage, wealth, status, beauty) in the significance they have for her (which is itself grounded in their desirability to others). It is in the way sexual attributes become socially codified and significant that Maria is made to suffer. In her social world, “being an unmarried, childless and virginal woman endows her with a negative prestige whose consequences are encoded even in something as trivial as a card game that treats the Old Maid as the nightmare image of undesirability” (NORRIS, 1987, p. 207).

Although *Clay* is narrated in the third person, the speaker is really Maria, according to Norris. Narrative speech in ‘Clay’, she argues, is mostly uttered in the

language of Maria's desire. It is her desire speaking, and so she is described as she would like to catch someone speaking about her to someone else. The narration's true beneficiary, then, is Maria herself, "whose prestige is certified by being 'recognized' by objective and anonymous 'others' (NORRIS, 1987, p. 207). Her stratagem, though, not the narrator, betrays Maria's plight.

Maria seems to want recognition. The narrative works all the time towards restoring to her everything that she "lacks". Thus, it also offers compensations to what might be considered her "negative" aspects (very small, but long chin, she is also noticed by a gentleman on the tram, e.g.). Restored, these things remain as imaginary as when they were "lacks", but they allow Maria to feel as if she possessed them, as if she enjoyed the security of wealth ("How much better it was to be independent and to have your own money in your pocket") and the affection of a family ("He had wanted her to go and live with them", "but Maria is my proper mother"). These restorations create a version of Maria's condition "that she presumably would like to believe but that the narration does not ultimately succeed in making tenable" (NORRIS, 1987, p. 208). The author suggests that this version is contradicted by a second version that is not verbalized in the narration but can be read through the silences, ruptures and evasions that lie between the lines, or in the margins of the text, "and that constitute the smudged and effaced portions of the 'Clay' palimpsest" (NORRIS, 1987, p. 208).

According to this unconscious version that Maria "knows" but doesn't "recognize", as pointed out by Norris, Maria works long hours for meager pay as a scullion in a laundry for reformed prostitutes who, in turn, make fun of her. She is ignored or patronized by everyone, including the Donnelly's from whom she seems to get equal shares of care and pity. This is indicated subtly by the text, but never clearly

by Maria. The positive version abolishes the negative one, as if repressed. Maria's fears can utter the negative version of her life only in silent semiologies, as observed by Norris: a wince, a blush, a lost object, a moment of forgetfulness, a mistake.

The reader also has multiple roles as a fictional construct in these stories. They might believe Maria's life is simple but good and admirable, and thus embody the ideology of a docile consumer of nineteenth century narrative conventions, such as in the Victorian fiction, with *Jane Eyre*, for example. However, as the discrepancies continue between what is said and what is seen, this simple interpretation might crumble. Now the critical reader might see old prostitutes amuse themselves at Maria's expense, if they have the knowledge that *Dublin by Lamplight*, for instance, was a charitable institution for reformed prostitutes (BECK 1969, p. 204).

If the narrative expresses Maria's desires, though, as well as how she views herself, the sentiments she does not repress, and what she wishes others to see, why, then, can't she truly narrate the story (in the first person)? Because, as Norris suggests, her flattering version of herself might seem as empty boasting, wishful thinking. Such as it is, in the third person, her own account, her thoughts as told by someone else are credible up to a point, but then questioned, although they don't seem outright wishful and boasting.

Furthermore, the testimonials about her can be seen as self-canceling because each attribute appears to depend on pushing aside an unpleasant reality in Maria's life. One of the laundry women inflates Maria's diplomatic skill: "(...) what she wouldn't do to the dummy who had charge of the irons if it wasn't for Maria", "the cook said you could see yourself in the big copper boilers", "one day the matron had said to her: - Maria, you are a veritable peace-maker!" (JOYCE, 1991, p. 64). In addition, later

narrative events dispute these claims for the success of Maria's interventions by showing the opposite. Her intervention into the Donnelly brothers' quarrel almost results in a marital fight, her presence instills a prank, her bag of cakes is not immediately welcomed, since she lost the plum cake, but the utterance of "thanks" has to be asked of the children. Her peacemaking does not show itself so much as it is talked about in the beginning.

Maria is also offended by a religious text on the walls. The reason for her reaction, though, should be questioned. It could be upsetting because of religious differences between Protestants and Catholics or because it is a reminder for Maria of the place she lives, thus generating her discomfort. The narrator only mentions the writing on the wall, but we as readers do not see it, do not know what kind of place this is, what the writing says, only hear of her discomfort.

Further on, Maria is said to have decided what to do on the tram, but then has doubts about what to buy for the family she is going to visit. She seems to like her conversation with the gentleman, although recognizing he was slightly drunk and only later, when she realizes she forgot the plum cake, mentions her confusion while talking to him. She also thinks of the "joke" about a wedding cake that is directed to her in the shop, but apparently does not get upset by it, at that instant. On the other hand, she avoids the subject of marriage and "forgets" a verse of the song she sings, from the opera *The Bohemian Girl*, by Michael Balfe and Alfred Bunn (1843). The absent excerpt unsurprisingly makes references to romance, marriage and acceptance:

I dreamt that suitors besought my hand,  
 The knights upon bended knee,  
 And with vows no maiden heart could withstand,  
 That they pledged their faith to me.

And I dreamt that one of this noble host  
 Came forth my hand to claim;  
 Yet I also dreamt, which charmed me most,  
 That you loved me still the same.

It is uncertain if these things are hidden from the reader or from Maria herself. Norris believes the narration suppresses the causal link between the lost plum cake and the sabotaged game, a link in which the maligned children's reprisal takes the form of a trick that is itself an eruption of the "truth" of the children's true feelings. What was the wet substance Maria touched? She chooses to "ignore" it and is, once again, the victim of someone else's joke.

Thus, another connection between *Clay* and *A Mother* is the presence of these silences, the possible meaning of what is not said about the characters or what they don't say, but only react to, their intentions, motives, fears, desires. These various ambiguous scenes, such as Mrs. Kearney's intention with her daughter's presentation (is it to satisfy herself?), Kathleen's (sexual?) performance, her reasons for marrying (out of interest, to silence her friends about something?) are open to interpretation.

Both characters suffered from the conditions that most women in Ireland at the time were subjected to. They had to marry or suffer the consequences of being considered a spinster. Working became an option, but it did not completely beneficiate them. They were not as well paid as the men, nor as well respected. They had to serve as mothers (or surrogate mothers). Some of them chose to migrate, but most stayed home, as Evelin, paralyzed by what bleak future awaited them.

Joyce succeeds not only in portraying this, but in creating characters whose "silences" speak volumes, their inner selves often more eloquent than their actual statements. As such, interpreting the appearances, manners and choices of the female

characters presented in *Dubliners* only according preconceived notions of the roles females are expected to have can be misleading, once more. It is necessary to consider the subtle hints left by the text that these roles are being reevaluated by the women in these stories.

Finally, Joyce also succeeds in always ending his stories with no certain future established for his characters. The ambiguities remain, no explanations are given. We as readers must read, reread, investigate, pay attention to detail, and decide for ourselves what to believe and what to understand.

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