

## Dubliners 1914–Dubliners 100 (2014): Local Histories of Troubled Sexuality?

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### Abstract

*In twenty-first-century Dublin, it is difficult to see what caused all the fuss that delayed the publication of Joyce's Dubliners for so long, but part of the problem was his – actually rather subtle - treatment of sexuality.<sup>1</sup> In Dubliners, Joyce examined a colonial culture dominated, as Marilyn French argued, by popular Catholicism and ideas of propriety, both of which resulted in the repression of 'the sexual' along with 'the sensual and sensuous'. Dubliners 100 (2014) is a collection of rewritten versions of Joyce's Dubliners by contemporary Irish writers, using the same titles and showing several parallels with the original stories, but set in early twenty-first-century Dublin, many around the time of the financial crisis of 2008. Sexuality features in many of these stories too, but in ways that illustrate some of the changes in attitudes to sex and the social and cultural context of sexuality in Ireland since the late nineteenth century. Some of the contemporary stories also reveal a culture in which the expression of the sexual, the sensual and the sensuous is still dominated and constrained, if by different powers than in Joyce's day. This article will compare a selection of Joyce's stories ('Araby', 'Eveline', 'The Boarding House', and 'Clay') with the contemporary versions, specifically in terms of the treatment of sexuality.*

*Keywords: Joyce, James, 1882-1941; Dubliners 100; Dubliners; Araby, Joyce; Sexuality & culture*

### Introduction

Joyce's *Dubliners*, according to Marilyn French, is a 'full-scale examination' of what she calls 'the Dublin way of thinking', dominated 'by two sets of ideals: those of popular Catholicism and those of propriety', both of which tended to 'disparage' and lead to the repression of 'the sexual' along with 'the sensual and sensuous'.<sup>2</sup> The young Joyce's project, as French sees it,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Ellmann, one of the passages printers objected to was a line in 'Counterparts' referring to a 'woman's changing the position of her legs often and brushing against a man's chair'. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford, London...: Oxford University Press, 1982), 220.

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn French, 'Missing Pieces in Joyce's *Dubliners*', *Twentieth Century Literature* 20, no. 4 (Winter, 1978): 444-45. For a detailed discussion of the 'Dublin [and Irish] way of thinking' about sexuality in Joyce's time, see Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin, Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009).

was the ‘anatomization of a syndrome, a portrait of the consequences of repression and censorship (on every level, from the personal to the public)’ that constituted that ‘Dublin way of thinking’ in the Ireland of his youth around the end of the nineteenth century. ‘The city’s blindness to reality’—and infamous ‘paralysis’—is, she writes, shown to be ‘caused by its religious and proprietarial [sic] oughts’. Exposing this is supposedly what Joyce was getting at when he referred to his book of stories as the ‘first step towards the spiritual liberation in my country’.<sup>3</sup>

As Katherine Mullin points out, while it is true that ‘the regulation of sexuality in Joyce’s fiction is, time and again, the province of the Irish Catholic Church’, those ‘religious and proprietarial oughts’ affecting Dubliners were to no small degree also subject to the influence of a sexually repressive ‘Protestant evangelical social purity campaign’ being waged across the United Kingdom and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it was the latter which caused so many real difficulties for Joyce in getting *Dubliners* (as well as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*) printed and published in the English-speaking world at all. The ‘repression and censorship (on every level)’ that characterized what French called the ‘Dublin way of thinking’ was, as Joyce so directly experienced, not restricted to Dublin, nor to Catholicism. Mullin even suggests that ‘The Englishness of social purity in an Ireland Joyce so shrewdly designated “semicolonial” (FW 152:16) is a crucial aspect of his subversion.’<sup>5</sup> Perhaps what Joyce was subversively exposing in the ‘Dublin way of thinking’ then was really what one might call the ‘repressed sexuality of the semicolon’; the characters of *Dubliners* are situated ambiguously between the two masters Stephen Dedalus complained of: ‘the imperial British state [...] and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church’.<sup>6</sup>

One might wonder whether *Dubliners 100*, the 2014 collection of adaptations of Joyce’s stories by contemporary Irish writers, set in twenty-first century Dublin, will reveal a similar or rather changed ‘Dublin way of thinking’. One immediately suspects that the contemporary stories will show rather different attitudes to sexuality, to ‘social purity’, to ‘semicolonial’ identity and to the influence of religion; but it will be interesting to see *what* these writers have changed, how they have adapted Joyce’s stories to take account of contemporary culture and whether these adaptations by several different writers add up to a portrayal of a contemporary ‘Dublin way of thinking’ about sexuality, and how this is related to other contemporary issues. The *Dubliners 100* writers are clearly, as Gillian Moore puts it, ‘creatively reworking both Joycean source material and Joyce’s cultural legacy’.<sup>7</sup> The editor of *Dubliners 100*, Thomas Morris, describes the relationship between Joyce’s stories and the contemporary adaptations as a kind of ‘strange traffic’ and suggests that the new stories could ‘even be read as creative essays on Joyce’s stories’.<sup>8</sup> While offering readings of the original stories and ‘creatively reworking’ Joyce’s material, these writers are at the same time focused on contemporary Dublin. If a large part of the ‘paralysis’ Joyce describes in *Dubliners* had to do with the repression of sexuality, and, indeed, ‘the sensual and sensuous’ in the ‘semicolonial’ Dublin of

<sup>3</sup> Joyce’s letter to Grant Richards, 20 May 1906. Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 221.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Mullin, ‘Introduction: provoking the puritiesnoopers’ in *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head, 1960), 24.

<sup>7</sup> Gillian Moore, ‘[Un]covering Joyce: *Dubliners 100* and the Contemporary Irish Short Story as Intertextual Practice’, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 42 (2019): 114-137, 133.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Morris, ‘Strange Traffic: An Introduction of Sorts’, in *Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired by the Original* ed. Thomas Morris (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), xi.

his youth, what have these contemporary writers got to write about in an era of supposedly much greater sexual freedom?

To explore the differences and similarities between contemporary writers' treatments of sexuality and those of James Joyce—as well as ways in which the 'Dublin way of thinking' may have changed—this article will focus on a small selection of Joyce's collection and their contemporary adaptations, specifically: 'Araby', 'Eveline', 'The Boarding House' and 'Clay'.<sup>9</sup> Dealing respectively with the experience of a child just reaching adolescence ('Araby'), of young adults ('Eveline' and 'The Boarding House') and a more mature adult ('Clay'), these particular stories may be taken in some way as a representative sample of Joyce's declared mission of portraying characters at different stages of life in *Dubliners*.<sup>10</sup>

## 'Araby'

### 'The love that dare not speak its name', or, the impossible task of the translator

Joyce's 'Araby'<sup>11</sup> could perhaps be summed up as an extraordinarily evocative story about the awakening sexuality of a young boy, growing up in the depressingly dull environment of late nineteenth-century Dublin—but of course the word 'sexuality' is never used, nor is there any direct reference to 'sex'. Rather, the word 'Araby' itself, the 'magical name' (25), comes to stand for and evoke a whole, vaguely defined and emotional space (of 'desire') that is considerably less clinical and biological than the terms 'sex' and 'sexuality' suggest. The title evokes an imagined space (perhaps as 'measureless to man' as the caverns through which 'Alph, the sacred river ran' in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*<sup>12</sup>) that includes 'the sexual', but also the 'sensual and sensuous' mentioned by Marilyn French. Of course, the story situates the awakening (sexual, sensual, sensuous, emotional, physical, romantic...) desire of the boy in a particular cultural and linguistic context—the culture and language of late nineteenth century Dublin (specifically North Richmond Street) as well as that of late nineteenth-century Orientalism.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the story seems almost to suggest the 'feebly' lit and shadowy twilight space, 'the colour of everchanging violet' (21) found on North Richmond St. as a parallel for the mysterious and ill-defined space of the East evoked in Orientalist discourse—a discourse which (as Edward Said has demonstrated) tends to project the whole 'realm' of sex, sexuality, the sensual/sensuous and whatever was forbidden or repressed in the West, onto the East.<sup>14</sup>

Joyce gives his readers a story that isn't just about awakening sexual desire, but about desire and discourse, desire and language, desire *in* language, desire and/in translation, desire

<sup>9</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. M. Norris, Norton Critical Editions (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 2006); Thomas Morris, ed., *Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired by the Original*, (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014). Subsequent references to these volumes appear in parenthetical citations as noted below.

<sup>10</sup> For critique of Joyce's portrayal of the stages of life in *Dubliners*—'childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life'—see Earl G. Ingersoll, *Engendered Trope in Joyce's Dubliners* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 55. Ingersoll suggests problems with Joyce's classification system.

<sup>11</sup> References are to James Joyce, 'Araby', in *Dubliners: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. M. Norris, Norton Critical Editions (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 20-26.

<sup>12</sup> See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43991/kubla-khan>.

<sup>13</sup> Colin MacCabe's comments are relevant: 'Instead of constructing a meaning, Joyce's texts concern themselves with the position of the subject in language'. Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, New York: Penguin, 2003). See also Joseph Valente's comments on 'the furnishings of an Oriental fantasy' in *Dubliners*, suggesting that the East was 'something persistently associated in Joyce's Dublin with fervid, forbidden and "deviant" sexuality'. Valente, 'Joyce and Sexuality' in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce* ed. Derek Attridge (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 222-23.

and the search for *le mot juste* (for that ...desire...) and possibly a story about the inadequacy of any word—even ‘Araby’—to translate the kind of feelings the boy is beginning to experience. The text of ‘Araby’ not only consists of words, it is *about* words—and particularly the words one adopts to denote ‘affection’, ‘attraction’, ‘desire’—if even these words are not too clinical for such emotions. The period of the story’s composition, one should not forget, was just when nineteenth-century practitioners of what Foucault dubbed a ‘*scientia sexualis*’ were engaged in a full scale ‘transformation of sex into discourse’, establishing a ‘new regime of [scientific-sounding] discourse’. The new ‘scientists of sex’, as Foucault named them, acted like so many entomologists, inventing words and classifications (e.g. ‘homosexuality’) that would be employed in works like Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), translated into English only a few years before the 1895 court trials of Oscar Wilde.<sup>15</sup> By the early 1890s, Wilde already knew, like his character Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), that “from a label there is no escape.<sup>16</sup> Wilde’s ‘love that dare not speak its name’ was in the process of being unceremoniously given one by supposed scientific and legal experts— as was the ‘love that dare not speak its name’ in the very widest sense.<sup>17</sup> As Joseph Valente points out, Joyce’s ‘early life and career [...] unfolded during a turbulent period in the history of sexuality in the United Kingdom’, when the combination of new ‘cultural and scientific discourses’ and the scandals of the day (including the Wilde trials) led to a ‘fundamental if contradictory mutation in the enlightened sexual attitudes of the time,’ i.e. an ‘increased awareness of the irrepressible variety of sexual practices and preferences’ combined with a desire to ‘limit such variation’.<sup>18</sup> What was happening was not just a ‘mutation’ in attitudes, of course: the very language—henceforth increasingly *terminology*—of love was, to say the least, changing; it would probably be fair to say that it would never be the same.<sup>19</sup>

Once the boy in Joyce’s story has become ‘infatuated’ (if that is the *mot juste*) with the girl across the road, and before the boy transfers so much of his attention to the ‘magical name’ of ‘Araby’, he begins to translate his feelings in his own mind using the vocabularies of languages readily available to him—those of religion and romance. Readers have already been given a brief impression of the boy’s cultural background in the references to the old priest who had died in the house and the old books (named as ‘*The Abbot* by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*’ [20]) littering the waste room behind the kitchen. The boy is presented, like his predecessors in ‘The Sisters’ and ‘An Encounter’, as significantly ‘immersed in textuality’ from the start, as Ingersoll points out, and he is ‘immersed’ specifically in literature suggesting a ‘mélange of the proper and improper, mixing religious devotion with

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge* (vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*) trans. Robert Hurley (London, New York...: Penguin, 1998). See also Fuechtner, Haynes and Jones on late nineteenth-century sexual science as ‘an interdisciplinary field produced and maintained by specialists who codified and categorized sexual interactions in all their myriad expressions’, and the expansion of sexual science into a contemporary global phenomenon. Fuechtner, Haynes and Jones, *A Global History of Sexual Science: 1880–1960* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 4, 22. For the late nineteenth-century impact of ‘sexual science’ development, see: Richard Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment: Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance* (London: Collins, 1990); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1992); Michael Kane, *Modern Men: Mapping Masculinity in English and German Literature 1880–1930* (Cassell: London and New York, 1999); Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London, New York ...: Penguin Classics, 1985), 231.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London, New York: Penguin, 1987), 435.

<sup>18</sup> Valente, ‘Joyce and Sexuality’, 213–33.

<sup>19</sup> For an interesting, recent review of the history of the ‘language of love’ and ‘sexuality’ from the perspective of lexicographers, see the Oxford English Dictionary blogpost ‘Release notes: the formal language of sexuality and gender identity’, <https://public.oed.com/blog/march-2018-update-release-notes-formal-language-sexuality-gender-identity/> (accessed 30 November 2018).

romance, detective work and “adventure”<sup>20</sup> Rather like the young Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the boy in ‘Araby’ seems to bear out Mikhail Bakhtin’s comment that ‘the ideological becoming of a human being’ involves ‘the process of selectively assimilating the words of others’.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore unsurprising to be informed that in ‘places the most hostile to romance’—going ‘marketing’ with his aunt through the ‘flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop boys [...]’—this young boy ‘imagined that [he] bore [his] chalice safely through a throng of foes’ (21-22). He continues: ‘Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand.’ Before he has even exchanged a word with the girl, he tells us: ‘I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: *O love! O love!* many times’ (22).

However much readers may be convinced by the genuineness of the boy’s awakening feelings for the girl across the road, they will probably be a little sceptical of the inflated romantic and religious language the boy uses to translate these ‘feelings’ for himself.<sup>22</sup> The words ‘*O love! O love!*’ seem particularly unconvincing—coming, as they do, precisely just before the girl speaks to him for the first time—but readers know that this is a very young boy, already ‘immersed’ in such vocabulary (and those readers may be coming up with their own words to describe this, e.g. ‘infatuation’, ‘crush’).

The girl’s very first words to the boy ask him whether he is going to ‘Araby’, and the question opens up a new vocabulary for the boy’s linguistic imagination/desire. The use of the word as the title of the story has already fired the *reader’s* linguistic imagination and left the reader requiring/desiring an answer as to its significance, but it is a word for which there is no straightforward translation. The ‘Araby’ mentioned by the girl was a large bazaar or fair with an oriental(ist) theme and one Saturday night in 1894 the young James Joyce attended a huge ‘Grand Oriental Fête’ with this very title in Dublin.<sup>23</sup> Both the actual event and the ‘Araby’ of Joyce’s story were clearly playing on the vague, evocative (and even suggestive) associations of the Orient in late nineteenth-century orientalist culture. As Heyward Ehrlich puts it:

dreams of the East had long flourished in western literature [...] inventing Araby as a place where ‘reality and dream become one,’ outside the ordinary boundaries of geographical, historical and political Europe. [...] In English and French writers of the nineteenth century, Araby became an exotic, sensual, or utopian alternative to the West, an epitome of difference.<sup>24</sup>

While Edward Said, of course, demonstrated the extent to which ‘orientalism’ in British and French culture functioned as an alibi of imperialism, Ehrlich points out that there was also a

<sup>20</sup> Ingersoll, *Engendered Trope in Joyce’s Dubliners*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, Michael Holquist (ed.), trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 341.

<sup>22</sup> The word “feelings” here is itself, of course, another “translation” – or mistranslation - of the boy’s words. Indeed “feeling” itself – the concept as well as the word – and the emotions have a complex history: Rob Boddice, the author of *A History of Feelings* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019) describes how his book “takes seriously the notion (borrowed from an increasingly culturally aware critical neuroscience) that the concepts available to a person are formative of experience, and that means trading carefully with contemporary conceptual categories.” <https://emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/2019/10/rob-boddice-a-history-of-feelings-qa/> One might well say that Joyce himself constantly shows how his characters are not just “immersed in textuality” (in Ingersoll’s phrase), but in concepts that are indeed formative of their experience. Antonio R. Damasio has (relatively recently) studied the perhaps surprising closeness of the relationship between rationality and the emotions in the human brain. Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2000). Joyce’s fiction, of course, demonstrates the closeness of the interrelationships between thinking, feeling *and* language to an extraordinary degree..

<sup>23</sup> Heyward Ehrlich, “‘Araby’ in Context: The “Splendid Bazaar,” Irish Orientalism and James Clarence Mangan’ in *Dubliners* ed. M. Norris, Norton Critical Editions (New York: Norton, 2006), 261–283, 264.

<sup>24</sup> Ehrlich, “‘Araby’ in Context’, 274.



tradition of ‘Irish Orientalism’ that differed significantly in terms of motivation and interest from its imperialist counterparts in that ‘Irish writers looked to the Orient to represent their rising cultural nationalism and their rejection of British influence’<sup>25</sup> Joyce’s evocations of the Orient in *Ulysses*—in the wanderings of Bloom’s mind and his sexual fantasies on the way to the butcher’s, for example—as well as in ‘Araby’ are to be read therefore in this slightly complicated, and indeed ‘semicolonial’ light, not as simply adopting British imperialist orientalism, but rather as looking to the East as a place of freedom from the Empire. In *Ulysses*, Bloom’s Jewish and Eastern European background enables him to represent an alternative to Stephen’s experience of life as a ‘servant of two masters’, ‘the imperial British State [...] and the Holy Roman catholic and apostolic church’.<sup>26</sup>

In Joyce’s short story ‘Araby’, it is striking (and possibly amusing) how quickly the boy’s interest in the girl is ‘translated’ into the word ‘Araby’ and the girl herself almost becomes ‘lost in translation’, as the boy describes how ‘the syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an eastern enchantment over me’ (23). Having promised to bring something back for the girl, going to the bazaar itself—and approaching this place of supposed ‘eastern enchantment’—becomes the focus of the boy’s desire. Delay caused by his uncle’s late return only heightens the boy’s determination and desire to get to ‘Araby’ and, of course, when, after a painfully slow train journey, he does finally get to the ‘large building which displayed the magical name’ (25), it is almost closing and the lights are going out. The actual ‘Araby’, it turns out, is simply a rather tawdry commercial fair where the boy sees men counting money, hears a young lady and two young gentlemen with English accents apparently flirting in superficial terms and finds nothing he would be interested in buying, only ‘porcelain vases and flowered teasetts’ (25).<sup>27</sup> His desire (‘crush’?) crashes against a disappointing reality, and he is left with his eyes burning ‘with anguish and anger’.

Ingersoll has described the first three stories in *Dubliners* as ‘epiphanies of failure’<sup>28</sup>, and he reads this story’s last line—referring to how the boy finally saw himself as a ‘creature driven and derided by vanity...’—as ‘a moment of transcendence through metaphoricity’.<sup>29</sup> While the boy does apparently have some ‘epiphany’ or insight into his situation at this point, he is still surely ‘translating’ in very literary terms, and even more ‘immersed in textuality’, if now more actively producing the text.

It seems by the end that that the boy’s desire has been cheated. He himself has allowed ‘it’ to be translated a number of times into words (‘chalice’, ‘prayers and praises’, ‘O love’, ‘Araby’) and finally it has been apparently hijacked by commerce.<sup>30</sup> In that final turn, ‘Araby’ could be said to be a very modern fable indeed: a story about the fate of ‘desire’, (or even ‘sexuality’) in a thoroughly commercialized and commodified world.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> The English accents of the young gentlemen may indeed indicate, as Ingersoll points out, that the boy’s trip to the East has ended with an encounter not with the imagined magical place, but what lies literally and geographically east of Dublin: ‘English hegemony and patriarchy’. *Engendered Trope*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> *Engendered Trope*, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>30</sup> According to Margot Norris, “‘Araby’”, the name of a longing for romance displaced onto a mythologized Oriental geography, suppresses the mediation of commerce. It thereby conceals the operations by which the fantasy of an exoticized and seductive East becomes a commercial fabrication produced by that realm the boy finds “most hostile to romance”—the marketplace. Commerce produces not only the trinkets and commodities the boy does not want, the vases and tea sets he spurns [...] Commerce also produces fantasy and magic through language’. *Suspicious Readings of Joyce’s Dubliners* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 47.

Joyce's story is also, however, about language, and about desire entangled with and 'immersed' in language: the interplay, one might say, of sexuality and textuality. Yes, the boy has allowed himself to be fooled and deceived: he has fooled and deceived himself in language (the languages of religion, romance, orientalism). However, two things are worth noting here. Firstly, Joyce could be said to be showing (among other things) how desire tends to be intricately interwoven with language and culture, with the currently prevailing 'regime of discourse', to use Foucault's phrase, a 'regime of discourse' that, for Joyce's late nineteenth-century Dublin boy, combines religious, romantic and orientalist vocabularies. Secondly, it may seem to readers that 'Araby' still stands for something: not the commercial fair the young boy arrived at and felt cheated by, but something vaguer, undefinable, evocative, poetic *and* utopian, indeed involving 'sexual desire', but for which the word 'sexual'—like the 'scientific' terms coined in the late nineteenth century to define the 'realm of Eros'—seems all too inadequate and over-clinical.

Indeed, when Joseph Valente portrays Joyce constantly reacting to contemporary discourse on sexuality and subverting it, he is not merely referring to Joyce's rejection of nineteenth-century prudery or Catholic repression of the sexual. According to Valente, 'Joyce's experiments in writing the psychosexual [...] intervened decisively in the discursive milieu that shaped them'; Joyce's work 'succeeded in reshaping the sexological accounts with which he began and from which he never entirely departed.'<sup>31</sup> He even sees Joyce as going 'a long way toward dismantling the foundation of sexual science in his time and our own, the notion of sexual identity, and clearly anticipat[ing] the counterdiscourse of queer theory'.<sup>32</sup> Sexuality in Joyce's work is presented rather more as a kind of undifferentiated 'polymorphous perversity'<sup>33</sup>; it is not neatly subdivided into the labelled categories and identities of sexology.<sup>34</sup> Valente's argument is not only based on *Finnegans Wake* and the polymorphous perversity of Bloom in the Circe episode of *Ulysses*; it also takes in the first story of *Dubliners*, 'The Sisters', where a young boy's attitude to an old priest is, he suggests, interestingly confused in ways that imply 'a critique of Freud's oedipal model', insofar as that supposedly serves to separate out gender identification and 'object choice'.<sup>35</sup> It is precisely in that first story of *Dubliners*, of course, in the midst of the boy's confusion—and half-remembered dream—that readers encounter the first reference to somewhere in the vague region of 'Araby': 'I felt that I had been very far away, in some land where the customs were strange, in Persia, I thought. .... But I could not remember the end of the dream' (7). If Persia in 'The Sisters' and Arabia in 'Araby' somehow evoke the whole sphere of 'desire', 'sexuality' and 'Eros', the sexual along with the 'sensual and sensuous', perhaps *these* words ('Persia', 'Araby') are all the more appropriate on account of their vagueness, their lack of clear geographical boundaries for the boy and their lack of definition. Perhaps, too, they are appropriate counterpoints to the rapidly-developing discourse and vocabulary of contemporary *scientia sexualis*.

However, if 'Araby' is a word that evokes an alternative attitude to sexuality *as well as an alternative language* of sexuality (perhaps the '*ars erotica*', which Foucault opposed to the *scientia sexualis*<sup>36</sup>), it is nevertheless derived from the deeply problematic discourse of Orientalism, 'saturated with the imperialist attitudes of the West towards the East—and thus

<sup>31</sup> Valente, 'Joyce and Sexuality', 214.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>33</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey. 24 vols. London: Hogarth, 1953–74.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the parody of the language of sexology, spoken by 'Dr Malachi Mulligan, sex specialist' in the Circe episode. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 469.

<sup>35</sup> Valente, 'Joyce and Sexuality', 233.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *An Introduction* (vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*) trans. Robert Hurley, 57.

cannot be the *mot juste* at all. Yet perhaps, understood as an example of what Ehrlich refers to as ‘Irish Orientalism’, the orientalist vocabulary and frame of reference (‘orientation’) of the story may seem less objectionable, and to express a desire for escape from oppression (rather than to re-affirm the imperial master's self-image).<sup>37</sup> ‘Araby’ does not denote a precisely defined geographical place, but rather seems to connote a constellation of ‘feelings’ that are better left undefined, for which there is perhaps no better *mot juste*—at least for a young boy ‘immersed’ in the ‘semicolonial’ textuality of late nineteenth-century, Irish Catholic, anti-imperialist orientalist as well as British orientalist culture.

According to Valente, Joyce’s ‘major novels’ propose ‘that sexuality cannot find satisfaction precisely because it does not exist “in-itself” but only “other-in-itself”’, a proposition that ‘in-itself’ is at variance with the defining terminology and language of sexology.<sup>38</sup> This could be seen to be relevant to ‘Araby’ too, and not just in the sense that the boy clearly cannot find ‘satisfaction’ even when he gets to ‘Araby’. The boy’s awakening desire leads him on to the pursuit of this imaginary place that does not exist ‘in-itself’, and his pursuit becomes a matter of (unsatisfactory) translations. His ‘sexuality’ is entangled with language, which also does not exist ‘in-itself’: words refer beyond themselves and demand translation; meaning, as Derrida reminds us, is constantly deferred as well as differed, and thus a matter of ‘*différance*’.<sup>39</sup> Like few other writers, Joyce depicts sexuality as intricately interwoven with textuality. Joycean sexuality, one might say, is ‘structured like language’—and vice versa: both are presented as not existing ‘in-themselves’, but as boundless and endless.<sup>40</sup> One might perhaps compare the Araby of ‘Araby’ to the ‘infinity’ towards which Molly Bloom’s almost endless and boundless words and desires trail off in *Ulysses*,<sup>41</sup> as well as the endless end of *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>42</sup>

### ‘Crush’ meets ‘Crash’?

In John Boyne’s twenty-first century adaptation of Joyce’s ‘Araby’ for *Dubliners 100*,<sup>43</sup> one comes to realize that the title doesn’t make sense in relation to the ensuing narrative, but only in relation to the Joyce story. There is no fair called ‘Araby’ for the boy in Boyne’s story to attend, and the writer could hardly have introduced one, for that word and title belong to a particular historical version of orientalist language and culture that simply cannot be transposed or translated to the early twenty-first century. The other thing one notices very quickly, of course, is that Boyne’s story deals very subtly with the awakening ‘sexuality’/‘feelings’/‘desires’ of a young boy who becomes ‘interested’ not in the girl across

<sup>37</sup> Ingersoll, however, reads ‘the East’ in *Dubliners* not as some vague space of freedom from oppression, but both the place of power in the British empire—London lies east of Dublin—and an imaginary source of religious power and mastery. In ‘The Dead’, Gabriel Conroy’s final recognition that the ‘time had come for him to set out on his journey westward’ is an epiphanic realization that other things (than power) matter. While Ingersoll’s interpretation of geographical orientation fits ‘The Dead’, it is not apparent that the boy in ‘Araby’ seeks ‘power’, or identification with British power: commercial power is what he finds, not what he was looking for.

<sup>38</sup> Valente, ‘Joyce and Sexuality’, 216.

<sup>39</sup> Such ‘*différance*’ is, of course, a feature of the text itself in Derrida’s lecture ‘Ulysses Gramophone: Hear say yes in Joyce’. Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 253-309.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Desire depends entirely on difference [...]. The experience of language as signifier is the condition of existence of desire.’ MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 723-68.

<sup>42</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939).

<sup>43</sup> References are to John Boyne, ‘Araby’, in *Dubliners 100: Fifteen Stories Inspired by the Original*, ed. Thomas Morris (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), 31-37.



the road, but in another boy: an older boy at school. As in Joyce's story, the word 'sexuality' is never used. Nor, in this case, is the word 'homosexuality'.

The very fact that the boy's awakening feelings for another boy are treated in Boyne's twenty-first century story without such labels or any kind of "drama", at once subtly and matter-of-factly, is itself a sign of a surely progressive shift in what Foucault termed a "regime of discourse" around (words such as) "sexuality", and particularly "homosexuality" in Ireland in more recent times. The boy only very briefly wonders: 'Were boys not supposed to think of girls, had I not read that somewhere?' (33); otherwise no issue is made of the boy's 'orientation', though it will, no doubt, strike the reader as an interesting twist in the adaptation. The contemporary reader might, however, wonder whether Boyne's portrayal of the boy's reaction to a dawning awareness of his own desire is convincing. Despite all the apparent progress in the 'regime of discourse' around 'sexuality' and 'sexual orientation' in early twenty-first-century Irish society, is it really plausible that a boy would not give *some* thought to the possibility of becoming the target of homophobic violence, school bullying, mockery, belittlement, gossip, discrimination or more or less subtle exclusion from particular career paths, from society in general—and panic, just a little?<sup>44</sup> Boyne himself claims he 'thought it would be interesting to make the boy gay so that he would also have to explore these unexpected, confusing and frightening feelings that were building inside himself'.<sup>45</sup> While, as Gillian Moore puts it, 'modifying the source material of "Araby" in this way granted him an opportunity to correctively depict an adolescent experience he feels is both underrepresented and misrepresented in contemporary fiction', the boy does not actually appear to need to 'explore these unexpected, confusing and frightening feelings' very much, insofar as they relate to another boy. At one point, Boyne's boy does recall: 'I [...] felt as alone as I have ever felt in my life, the isolation of a boy who feels that an unfairness has been thrust upon him that he will never be able to share for who would ever understand such a thing or tell him that he is not a monster?' (34). However, this sense of isolation is never spelled out as a result of his awareness of the implications of *same-sex* desire, and it may be read as simply expressing the emotional turmoil of adolescence. Boyne explains how he reads Joyce's 'Araby' as 'an absolutely heartfelt memory of being young and confused by first love' and asks 'Who hasn't experienced that emotion?'<sup>46</sup> His boy's emotions are treated with sensitivity and subtlety, as perfectly 'normal', and any sense of 'fright' specifically relating to the stigma of homosexuality in a homophobic culture is downplayed, to the benefit of the sense of the 'normality' of the boy's anguished desire. This may be an indication of great progress in Irish attitudes to sexual

<sup>44</sup> According to Peter McGuire of the *Irish Times*: 'A recent survey of more than 2,000 members of the LGBT community in Ireland found that, despite the marriage referendum, only eight per cent of respondents feel schools are safe places and fully inclusive of gay or transgender students'. 'Are schools standing up against homophobic bullying?', *The Irish Times*, 14 November 2016, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/are-schools-standing-up-against-homophobic-bullying-1.2856766> (accessed 30 November 2018). Research by the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre (ABC) at Dublin City University in 2014 indicated that 'One in two primary school principals in Ireland have dealt with homophobic bullying'. [https://www.dcu.ie/human\\_development/news/2016/Nov/New-research-shows-homophobic-bullying-present-primary-schools](https://www.dcu.ie/human_development/news/2016/Nov/New-research-shows-homophobic-bullying-present-primary-schools) See Gerard Farrelly, James O'Higgins Norman & Michael O'Leary, 'Custodians of silences? School principal perspectives on the incidence and nature of homophobic bullying in primary schools in Ireland', *Irish Educational Studies* 36, no. 2 (2017): 151-167, DOI: [10.1080/03323315.2016.1246258](https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2016.1246258). For late twentieth-century fiction on growing up gay in northern France, cf. Édouard Louis, *En finir avec Eddy Bellegueule* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> John Boyne interviewed by Gillian Moore, May 2014, in Moore, '[Un]covering Joyce: *Dubliners 100* and the Contemporary Irish Short Story as Intertextual Practice', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 42 (2019): 114-137, 129.

<sup>46</sup> Boyne cited by Moore, '[Un]covering Joyce', 129.

orientation—or indeed, Boyne's active contribution to that progress<sup>47</sup>—or it could be seen as insufficiently realistic. However, it may be said that the story is more effective as a result of its lack of ‘drama’.

Instead, Boyne's story focuses on the boy's emotional state—his ‘desire’. ‘Araby’, however archaic and loaded with nineteenth-century orientalist assumptions, is perhaps still a good (non-clinical, non-scientific or pseudo-scientific) word to evoke the boy's vague sense of longing, thanks to its very evocative vagueness. The sense that it does not quite ‘fit’ the twenty-first-century story may make it all the more appropriate to evoke feelings, emotions and dreams that are not quite reachable or graspable: feelings which the boy does not quite understand himself.<sup>48</sup>

As in Joyce's story, Boyne's boy's longings are shown arising in a domestic situation in which the boy lacks a sense of belonging. In Joyce's story, it is never explained why the boy is living with his aunt and uncle rather than with his parents; in Boyne's adaptation, it is made clear that the boy's parents have left Dublin for Canada, *and* intimated that this has something to do with the boy's father's attempt to evade legal proceedings in Ireland in the aftermath of the financial crisis. People said, the boy tells us, that his father ‘had destroyed lives and that families would not recover for generations’ (31). In Joyce's story, one might say, the ‘crash’ comes at the end, when the lights go out and the boy's hopes are dashed. In Boyne's adaptation, the ‘crash’ has already happened before the opening. Like many of the *Dubliners 100* stories published in 2014, ‘Araby’ reminds us of the recent financial crisis - and shows how it continues to make its effects felt in the (emotional and ‘sexual’) life of a central character. The boy deeply misses his father, whose absence is evidently associated with his actions during the boom and the bust of the Irish economy in the early twenty-first century.

However, while in both Joyce's story and Boyne's adaptation the boys are displaced, not living at home, and there are several other parallels between the stories (including the depiction of the urban environment of Dublin as rather grimy, dirty and rough), Boyne's boy does not begin to “translate” his thoughts about his feelings into some other (inflated) language in the same way the boy in Joyce's “Araby” does. He does echo the phrase ‘confused adoration’ (33) from Joyce's narrative, but he does not imagine himself carrying a ‘chalice through a throng of foes’; he does not think of the other boy in terms of ‘prayers and praises’; nor does he join his hands together muttering ‘*O love, O love!* many times’. This boy is not presented from the beginning as ‘immersed in textuality’, in Ingersoll's phrase, and no ‘other languages’ with religious, romantic or orientalist vocabularies—no paths of linguistic / romantic self-deception—seem either immediately available, or required of him. The apparent equivalent or counterpart of ‘Araby’, the ‘splendid bazaar’, is a rugby match in which the older boy will be playing. Instead of asking whether he was going to Araby, the older boy's question to the narrator is ‘Do you play rugby at all?’ (34). The boy in Boyne's story does not find that ‘the syllables of the word [rugby] were called to [him] through the silence in which [his] soul luxuriated and cast an eastern enchantment over [him]’. However much one may be interested in rugby—or rugby players—and enjoy the game, one could hardly say it has a ‘magical name’.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. According to Moore, Boyne was conscious of a need to counter ‘the deep harm done by fiction norms that dismiss gay experience,’ such as novels where, in Boyne's words, “‘gay” is something intended to make the reader laugh’. Not dramatizing the ‘issue’, not making an ‘issue’ of it, is perhaps an effective way of countering the ways in which homosexual desire is typically ‘dramatized’.

<sup>48</sup> One might also consider the title appropriate as referring readers back to Joyce's manner of presenting the ‘sexual’ along with the ‘sensual’ and the ‘sensuous’ as a mysterious place with no clear boundaries and, in his approach, as Joseph Valente suggests, going a “long way toward dismantling the foundation of sexual science in his time and our own, the notion of sexual identity, and clearly anticipat[ing] the counterdiscourse of queer theory”. Valente, ‘Joyce and Sexuality’, 224.

There is in fact no ‘magical name’ in Boyne’s adaptation—apart from in the title itself. This is perhaps the greatest difference between the adaptation and Joyce’s story, which, after all, turned so much around the ‘magic’ of language. The boy here is ‘enchanted’ not by a word, but by the body of the older boy, who ‘came home most afternoons in rugby shorts, his face mud-stripped and wild, the hairs on his legs clay-caked to his skin’ (32). One could *perhaps* argue that the absence of any ‘magical vocabularies’ in Boyne’s story has something to do with the non-availability of conventional romantic language to same-sex desire, along the lines that the boy cannot conceive of himself in conventional romantic roles or terms. The absence of any ‘magical name’, however, is probably rather more indicative of a difference between the contexts surrounding awakening ‘sexual’ feelings in late nineteenth- and early twenty-first-century Dublin: in the latter, ‘souls’—even adolescent ones—are perhaps less likely to ‘luxuriate’ in language.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, there is no British (or Irish) orientalist, romantic discourse proffering a half-mythical, poetically evocative place and vocabulary towards (or by) which desire or longing may be (falsely) ‘oriented’; rather, one is left with a sense of displacement, disorientation and unease as Boyne’s character finally realizes: ‘That part of me that would be driven by desire and loneliness had awoken and was planning cruelties and anguish that I could not yet imagine’ (37).

## ‘Eveline’

### Will s/he stay or will s/he go?

Joyce’s ‘Eveline’<sup>50</sup> follows the thoughts of a young woman as she sits at the window trying to decide whether to leave Dublin with a young sailor called Frank ‘by the night boat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Ayres’ (29), or stay and look after her elderly, bad-tempered and betimes violent widowed father. The drama of this very short, apparently simple story about a supposedly simple young woman resides in the fact that she does not know what she should do—or what she really wants to do. This, of course, rather complicates matters. What further complicates matters for the reader is the use of free indirect discourse in the narrative, which may make the reader all the more unsure about what Eveline wants, particularly at the crucial moment at the end.

While one might be inclined to oversimplify the story as dramatizing (in free indirect discourse) a straightforward conflict between ‘sexual’ desire and filial duty, Eveline’s whole dilemma arises out of her apparent awareness of the complications of both, and the impossibility of being really sure about either. Apart from being faced with the question of what duties she really owes her elderly, abusive, difficult, sometimes violent but sometimes ‘very nice’ (30) father, she has to deal with the question of how committed she really is to this ‘Frank’. How much does she ‘love’—or even know—Frank? Is Frank really the ‘object’ of her ‘sexual’ ‘desire’? What is ‘sexual desire’? The reader learns little of Frank’s physical appearance, but Eveline remembers the first time she saw him with ‘his peaked cap pushed back on his head and his hair tumbled forward on a face of bronze’ (29). Was that it? ‘He was

<sup>49</sup> According to Gillian Moore, John Boyne disagrees with critics who ‘read the [Joyce’s] story’s sentimental language ironically, as leading towards a disavowal of the boy’s romanticism and naiveté’ (129). She quotes Boyne saying that Joyce’s ‘Araby’ is ‘absolutely not a send-up of the narrator’s youth; it’s an absolutely heartfelt memory of being young and confused by first love’. Pointing out that Joyce depicts the boy’s language as exaggeratedly romantic does not necessarily imply that the story is a complete ‘send-up’, of course, but it does rather highlight Joyce’s inordinate attention to words—and the provenance of words—in his characters’ consciousness. The narrative does invite readers to identify and sympathize with the boy, but there is surely some ironic distance as well.

<sup>50</sup> References are to James Joyce, ‘Eveline’, in *Dubliners: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. M. Norris, Norton Critical Editions (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 26-32.

awfully fond of music and sang a little', she recalls (29). Is that the 'object of desire'? Do Eveline's fragmentary thoughts and memories of Frank add up to 'love', 'sexual desire', a 'relationship', possibly 'marriage'? Could anybody be sure of these things? What do all these things really mean? What does Eveline 'desire'? The reader might well begin to wonder whether Eveline is attracted to Frank only because he signifies escape from her father. Although Eveline never spells out these questions for herself, the use of free indirect discourse encourages the reader to see that they are implied.

Marilyn French points out that part of Eveline's dilemma is her uncertainty about the desirability of marriage itself. On the one hand, the society of Eveline's day encouraged her to look upon marriage as the public institution that would resolve her questions about desire and sexuality; on the other hand, Eveline's memories of her own mother's experience of marriage to her violent and abusive father are bound to colour her ideas about marriage—and about men, too. While Eveline does not articulate her concerns about marriage straightforwardly, French points out a little contradiction in the character's thought process that makes them evident. Just after considering how she is treated with so little respect in the 'stores' where she works, Eveline's thoughts turn to the prospect of escaping all that by going to Argentina with Frank:

But in her new home, in a distant unknown country, it would not be like that. Then she would be married—she, Eveline. People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been. Even now, though she was over nineteen, she sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence. (28)

As Marilyn French writes: 'Unless we wish to infer that Eveline's mother was not married to her father, we are confronting an ellipsis beneath which much is concealed.'<sup>51</sup> The mention of her father's violence in the sentence immediately after the mention of her mother suggests that the mother had lived 'in danger of her father's violence' before her and this was how her mother had been 'treated' in marriage, i.e. *not* with very much 'respect'. Does marriage mean 'respect' as well as respectability for a young woman, or is it possible that it could mean the opposite? French comments:

The social and economic realities of her world are unthinkable. Marriage is the great end, the state she has been taught throughout her life to expect. To admit to herself that it is not necessarily desirable, that it was not a great end for her mother, would be to let herself know fully how constricted she is: and that would be intolerable.<sup>52</sup>

Eveline's mother's notoriously incomprehensible final words 'Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!' (31) could perhaps be read as encapsulating the impossible, incomprehensible and intolerable message her mother's life, "a life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness" (31), has left her - in terms of her role as a woman.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, Eveline's situation *is* intolerable. She is faced with not just one, but several dilemmas. At the story's end, she appears not so much to have made a decision as to have become paralysed at the North Wall, unable to go off to sea with Frank and unable to go anywhere.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> French, 'Missing Pieces in Joyce's *Dubliners*', 453.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Katherine Mullin suggests another possible role for Eveline hovers between the lines of Joyce's story: a 'white slave', to be seduced and then sold into prostitution in Buenos Aires. "Don't cry for me, Argentina": "Eveline", white slavery and the seductions of propaganda', in *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56-82, 80-81.

<sup>54</sup> For Eveline as an 'imprisoned and finally immobilized woman', and the 'diametric opposite' of the 'liberation' achieved by the boy at the end of 'Araby', and the 'ultimate "feminized" subject', see Ingersoll, *Engendered Trope*, 56-62. For 'Eveline' in context of its first publication, *The Irish Homestead* (which was full

## Hope—or No Hope?

In his adaptation of ‘Eveline’<sup>55</sup> Donal Ryan gives readers the first-person narration of Evelyn, a young man with an elderly, domineering, widowed mother who drinks too much brandy and ‘leaks’ on the ‘cream stair carpet’ (44). Ryan not only changes the sex of the characters in the story; he turns a tale that hovers around the prospect of emigration and escape from Ireland in the late nineteenth century into a story that deals with twenty-first-century immigration into Ireland by those in search of refuge.<sup>56</sup> At a so-called ‘Welcome Night’ for people in ‘reception centres’ organized by his mother, Evelyn befriends a young woman named Hope who has paid thousands of pounds to traffickers to get to Ireland in the summer of 2008, and managed to kick her way free of them. While the narrator comes to entertain certain hopes for his developing friendship with the young woman, which are put in specifically sexual and physical terms, the whole story could be said to revolve around difficulties and awkwardnesses in relationships between the Irish characters and recent immigrants.<sup>57</sup>

As in Joyce’s story, where the ‘relationship’ between Eveline and Frank comes to nothing, here the budding ‘liaison’ between Evelyn and Hope falls apart, but while feelings of guilt at the prospect of abandoning filial duties do crop up in Ryan’s adaptation, the main problem appears to be that Evelyn knows Hope finds it difficult to trust him—which is understandable, given her recent experiences with both traffickers and ‘Welcome Nights’. Having found a cottage/refuge in Galway where Hope can stay while she applies for asylum, Evelyn’s hopes are somewhat dashed when it comes to communication:

Do you think I will let you touch me, because you have brought me here, hidden me away? Do you think I’m your slave? No, no, I whispered. I just love you. You don’t have to do anything. I cooked a stir-fry and she sat silently across from me, looking past me through the window at the darkening sky. My throat constricted, my stomach clenched. My cutlery rattled against my plate. I’m sorry, I whispered. For what, she whispered back. I didn’t know. (44-45)

It seems that the difficulties these characters face in communicating and relating with each other echo the issues raised earlier in the story, in the account of the so-called ‘Welcome Nights’. The first of these, organized by Evelyn’s mother’s friend, Reeney, turned out to be a total disaster attended by ‘not *one* foreigner’, to the great delight and ‘shrill glee’ of Evelyn’s

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of ‘anti-emigration stories’), see Garry Leonard, ‘Dubliners’, in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, 2nd ed., ed. Derek Attridge (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 87-102, 94.

<sup>55</sup> References are to Donal Ryan, ‘Eveline’, in *Dubliners 100*, 41-45.

<sup>56</sup> Both immigration *and* hostility towards immigrants also feature in Joyce’s story, when a piece of music coming from the street outside reminds Eveline of the night her mother died and her father’s annoyance at a street organ player, complaining of the ‘Damned Italians! Coming over here!’. Joyce, *Dubliners* ed. Norris, 17.

<sup>57</sup> See Gerardine Meaney for the ‘impact of the dramatic shift from emigration to immigration in the last decade, which has been a cultural liberation but also produced a xenophobic backlash in politics and policy’, specifically the results of the 2004 referendum in which ‘over 80 percent of the Irish electorate voted to revoke the automatic right of citizenship to all children born on the island of Ireland and to restrict citizenship on the basis of kinship and ethnicity.’ Gerardine Meaney, *Gender, Ireland and Cultural Change: Race, Sex and Nation* (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), xv. For a good news story on the welcome extended to some Syrian refugees see Sorcha Pollak, ‘From Syria to Wicklow: A desperate family, an Irish Welcome’, *The Irish Times* (23 June 2018). <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/from-syria-to-wicklow-a-desperate-family-an-irish-welcome-1.3537684> (accessed 23 November 2018). More recently, there have been protests about planned ‘Direct Provision Centres’ to house asylum seekers in various Irish towns, though it seems some were protesting against the system of ‘Direct Provision’—where asylum seekers often end up living for years in institutionalized, ‘temporary’ accommodation—rather than the presence of asylum seekers themselves. Some, however, were worrying about the safety of ‘scantily’ clad Irish girls. See ‘Hundreds of Wicklow residents protest housing of asylum seekers in hotel’, *The Irish Examiner* (21 November 2018), <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/hundreds-of-wicklow-residents-protest-housing-of-asylum-seekers-in-hotel-886808.html> (accessed 23 November 2018).

mother (42). The second is the personal ‘victory’ of Evelyn’s mother, of course, who ‘counted and catalogued and licked her lips, almost curtsying to the more regal Africans’ (42). As part of her ‘welcome’ of ‘foreigners’, she goes around asking ‘whether they were Christian ... or otherwise.’ The narrator (Evelyn) continues: ‘What is otherwise? a man asked. Oh, you know, *Islamic* or some such, Mother replied. What is sumsuch? the man asked’ (42). Evelyn’s mother’s ‘welcome’ and her entire manner of relating to ‘her’ gleefully ‘counted and catalogued’ foreigners is clearly all to do with her power play, and it is outrageously condescending, as Evelyn notes that ‘the man’ seems to realize.

The miscommunication and awkwardness involved in relating to people from other cultures is shown somewhat comically at the start of Ryan’s story, and seems to foreshadow the difficulties Evelyn and Hope experience in trying to build a relationship at the end, a relationship that was almost ‘sexual’, but which is finally hampered by too much intercultural baggage—particularly in the aftermath of Hope’s experiences with traffickers, ‘reception centres’ and ‘Welcome Nights’. Ryan’s adaptation of ‘Eveline’ brings a new and, of course, topical dimension to the story: how do human beings with different cultural backgrounds, different skin colours and very different experiences—natives and immigrants, the settled and the newly arrived, the ‘Old Irish’ and the ‘New Irish’—interact, communicate, trust and relate to each other, socially as much as sexually? To what extent is there Hope?

## ‘The Boarding House’

### From propriety to property?

Joyce’s story ‘The Boarding House’<sup>58</sup> shows how sex and marriage could be brought together in turn-of-the-century Dublin, not so much like a horse and carriage, but rather like a butcher’s cleaver and a piece of meat. Mrs Mooney, one quickly learns, is seeking to get her daughter ‘off her hands’ (i.e. to ‘marry her off’), but the first thing one is told about the woman—in the very first sentence—is that ‘Mrs Mooney was a butcher’s daughter’ (49).<sup>59</sup> Having successfully prodded her daughter and an eligible young man into each other’s company, and having monitored the developing ‘affair’ until ‘she judged it to be the right moment’ (i.e. the young people have had sexual contact) she ‘intervened’: ‘She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat: and in this case she had made up her mind’ (51). She has made up her mind that this man is to marry her daughter—and ‘get her off her hands’. It may be a mere coincidence that the word ‘daughter’ rhymes with ‘slaughter’.

Mrs Mooney’s motive for arranging her daughter’s marriage / butchery is very clearly financial. Her very name seems to indicate what is really on her mind: money. The story is as much about money, sex and marriage as it is about the Mooneys: the mother’s own marriage brought her to the edge of financial disaster as her butcher husband drank, ‘ran headlong into debt’, ‘ruined the business’ of their butcher’s shop and ‘one night [...] went for his wife with the cleaver’ (49). After separating from her husband, Mrs Mooney took ‘what remained of her money out of the butcher business and set up a boarding house in Hardwicke Street’ (50).<sup>60</sup> It

<sup>58</sup> References are to Joyce, ‘The Boarding House’ in *Dubliners* ed. Norris, 49-56.

<sup>59</sup> Just before her crucial meeting with Mr Doran, we are told that Mrs Mooney ‘thought of some mothers she knew who could not get their daughters off their hands’. Joyce, ‘The Boarding House’ in *Dubliners* ed. Norris, 53.

<sup>60</sup> See Julieann Veronica Ulin for statistics on residents of ‘boarding houses’ and other temporary forms of accommodation in Joyce’s Dublin. ‘Fluid Boarders and Naughty Girls: Music, Domesticity and Nation in Joyce’s Boarding Houses’, *James Joyce Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2007), reproduced in 50, no. 1-2 (Fall 2012 – Winter 2013), 385-411. Diarmaid Ferriter writes that, according to the census of 1911, ‘26,000 families lived in inner city tenements, 20,000 of them in just one room.’ One cannot help considering that, if that last phrase were true, the Mooneys and their boarders could count themselves lucky. Cf. Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, 76.



is in this boarding house that she gives her daughter, Polly, ‘the run of the young men’; here where she disappointedly finds that despite early signs of flirtation, none of the men ‘meant business’ and here that she finally ‘noticed that something was going on between Polly and one of the young men’ (51). It is also here, of course, that she finally wields her ‘cleaver’.

The one man who appears to ‘mean business’ (i.e. serious sexual interest)—and also to mean ‘business’ (i.e. ‘money’) as Mrs Mooney understands it—is Mr Doran, one of the lodgers in her boarding house, who is all the more eligible because Mrs Mooney knows he has a good job in a ‘great catholic winemerchant’s office’, and she suspects that he has ‘a bit of stuff [i.e. money] put by’ (53).

Joyce’s use of free indirect discourse gives the reader some irony-tinged insight into Mrs Mooney’s mind as she plans her confrontation with Mr Doran and, one might say, sharpens her ‘cleaver’ in the paragraph beginning:

Mrs Mooney glanced instinctively at the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece as soon as she had become aware through her reverie that the bells of George’s church had stopped ringing. It was seventeen minutes past eleven: she would have lots of time to have the matter out with Mr Doran and then catch short twelve at Marlborough Street. She was sure she would win. (52)

It is no small irony that Mrs Mooney intends to ‘catch short twelve at Marlborough Street’—i.e., go to mass in the pro-cathedral—immediately after her meeting with Mr Doran, nor that she calculates the time required for the meeting (and the mass) so precisely. She is shown to be a very calculating woman in terms of ‘business’ and ‘winning’, even as she plans to bring all the ‘weight of social opinion’—heavily influenced by religious teaching, particularly in sexual matters and notions of propriety—down on the head of Mr Doran (52). The twin ideals Marilyn French identifies as the ‘Dublin way of thinking’—‘those of popular Catholicism and those of propriety’—literally come to a head here, with the force of a cleaver. Mrs Mooney’s calculations are based on her knowledge that Mr Doran will know—after, as he puts it to himself, ‘*it* [my italics] ha[s] happened’ (54)—that (in French’s words) ‘the major area of experience [...] disparaged by both religion and propriety is the sexual’. According to French, ‘The Boarding House’ is one of the ‘grimmest indictments’ of ‘the Dublin way of thinking’:

The culture as a whole is responsible for the character of the institution of marriage. The church, state, social and business worlds all participate in transforming erotic and affectionate feeling leading to sexual union into an economic and political arrangement that stifles the very feelings it is intended to channel and control.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed.

Joyce’s story highlights the hypocrisy of the middle class ‘fetish for respectability’, and demonstrates very clearly how, in this sad case at least, it all comes down to mo(o)ney.<sup>62</sup>

### Property porn?

Oona Frawley’s version of ‘The Boarding House’<sup>63</sup> also shows that much comes down to money, but hers is a story that revolves less around ‘propriety’ than *property*—and *pornography*. It also revolves around the perspectives of three characters, presented in free indirect discourse just as in Joyce’s story. In this adaptation, Ger and his pregnant wife, Therese, are living in the house of Mrs Mooney, the mother of Therese, after they have lost

<sup>61</sup> French, ‘Missing Pieces in Joyce’s *Dubliners*’, 457.

<sup>62</sup> The phrase ‘A fetish for respectability’ is a section heading in the first chapter of Diarmaid Ferriter’s *Occasions of Sin*.

<sup>63</sup> References are to Oona Frawley, ‘The Boarding House’, in Thomas Morris (ed.), *Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired by the Original* (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), 71-82.

their large, luxury house as a result of the property crash in Ireland around and after 2008. Adding to the tension in the house is Mrs Mooney's discovery that her son-in-law has been viewing pornography on her iPad, and in the story she is about to confront him about this. This is clearly an equivalent to Joyce's Mrs Mooney confronting Mr Doran about his sexual relations with her daughter. While Oona Frawley's plot hinges on actual pornography, one might say that the real issue in the adaptation is what David McWilliams, among others, has referred to as the Irish addiction to 'property porn' and its widespread, devastating social consequences in the years after 2008.

In his 2005 book *The Pope's Children*, published as the 'Celtic Tiger' was still roaring and the property bubble was happily bubbling, David McWilliams included a whole chapter with the title 'Property Porn'. McWilliams—surely rightly—suggested that something really fundamental had changed in the Irish psyche around the beginning of the twenty-first century, writing: 'The property boom—the soaring price of houses, the associated lending, building, commuting and working—has not just changed the economy, it has changed us—the Irish people—profoundly.'<sup>64</sup> It had, he continues, 'changed the psychology of the nation and the way we see ourselves and others':

The part of the Irish imagination which used to be taken up with dreaming of escape, writing a book or playing for Arsenal, now dreams of slate wet-rooms, gravel driveways and Belfast sinks. All kitchens are advertised with glasses of Chablis and smiling pretty girls with whopping orthodontic bills and suggestive fleshy lower lips, busily chopping coriander.<sup>65</sup>

'Araby', one might say, has been successfully transformed into a highly commercial 'splendid bazaar' in early twenty-first-century Dublin, involving very big money (as well as fashionable herbs). McWilliams's point about the fundamental change in the 'psychology of the nation' and the 'Irish imagination' is similar to that made by Declan Kiberd, in somewhat less graphic terms, as he charts 'some very extreme cultural shifts occurring beneath the mask of prosperity' in an essay entitled 'Ireland 2012: Excavating the Present'.<sup>66</sup> The extreme cultural shifts noticed by both have echoes of Herbert Marcuse's description of the arrival of 'one-dimensional' society and 'one-dimensional man' in the 1960s. Marcuse wondered whether the very notion of 'alienation' had become 'questionable' in a society where 'the people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment.'<sup>67</sup> Marcuse also related this feature of contemporary capitalist society to a re-moulding or re-shaping of sexuality—or better, *Eros*—that he termed 'repressive desublimation'. An ostensibly sexually permissive society might no longer force people to 'repress' and 'sublimate' their desires, but could be just as, or *more* repressive in the way it manipulated people's (sexual) desires to make them conform to the demands of the capitalist system. The energies of *Eros* are channelled into the 'splendid bazaar'; 'sex' is made to 'sell'.

Property, McWilliams declared provocatively, 'is the new sex [...]' (70). This was a time when there were 'routinely more pages in the property sections of the newspapers than in the papers themselves' and McWilliams referred to these bulging 'property sections' as so many 'property porn mags':

Every house in the pages of this property porn mag is a bricks-and-mortar version of a playboy bunny with perfect 34D breasts—waiting just for you. All you have to do is call now. The property narrative is a virtual chat-line and property speak has its own soft, suggestive

<sup>64</sup> David McWilliams, *The Pope's Children: Ireland's New Elite* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2006), 68.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>66</sup> Declan Kiberd, 'Ireland 2012: Excavating the Present', *Irish Review* 46 (2013): 52–59, 52.

<sup>67</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 11.

vocabulary, designed for maximum financial arousal. Each ‘for sale’ sign beckons you evocatively with the thrill of capital gain and the lure of immediate social gratification.<sup>68</sup>

The situation described in Oona Frawley’s version of ‘The Boarding House’ is, one could argue, more to do with *this* kind of pornography than the kind viewed by Ger on his mother-in-law’s iPad. In free indirect discourse this Mrs Mooney remembers how she and her friends, ‘the ladies who did the aqua-aerobics the few mornings’, laughed ‘so hard that their tummy muscles ached’ (74) when they heard of the wildly extravagant spending of her son-in-law and daughter who got married during the boom:

This one with his fine job and his pressed shirts and the fancy wedding cost fifty thou if it cost a penny. The house with the *sunroom* and the *kitchen island* and the *solar panels*. In Ireland, for chrissake, *solar panels*! [...] All that, but then—they solar panels weren’t the last straw, either, but a whole load of everything followed. The apartment had been in *Bulgaria*! (74)

Ger and Therese were clearly seduced by the property porn and overstretched themselves. Now, after the crash, they have lost everything, especially their big house—their home—and are living in the house of the mother-in-law, which Ger has been heard to refer to as like a ‘boarding house’ (76), a phrase at which this Mrs Mooney particularly takes offence. The situation of this young couple now is in fact rather similar to that of the many adults and adult couples living in the houses of parents in contemporary Ireland as they are unable to afford places of their own—depicted for example in the contemporary RTÉ ‘Lifestyle’ TV series *This Crowded House*, and rather less lightly a topic of discussion across the country.<sup>69</sup>

The thoughts of both Ger and Therese are shown to turn—very naturally—to the trauma of having lost their house. Ger, one reads,

regretted the loss of the house above everything. Now they were stuck back in uniform suburbia with its tangle of cables and narrow parking spaces, when what they had once had was the summer grass and the full sky. He wasn’t sure he’d be able to get it back: not that one in particular—with the gorgeous walls of stone plucked from knobbly, sullen green fields, the view of green fields replied to by the blue of distant sea that he had coveted since childhood—but any house like it. (77)

It wasn’t just property pornography that seduced the couple, it seems, when one hears Ger’s thoughts: there was some poetry, too, in dreams of open space, sky and sea. Was that perhaps a version of the imagined ‘Araby’, come crashing down into commerce? Therese thinks of ‘the terrible displacement, the shame of being past thirty, in the sensible decade, and losing your home’ (80) and dreams of how, if only they still had the money they spent on the wedding, they ‘could even buy a house in Laois or somewhere else in the middle of the country now, a wreck of a place, surely, but a place of their own’ (80). She dreams of a ‘stone cottage with a massive fire and a wild garden half-full of vivid green reeds and buttercups and coiled fiddleheads, the intricacies of cobwebs visible on those heavy, misty days, when the moisture caught like jewels on the threads’ (80). Again this sounds rather more poetic than the property-porn-inspired fantasies featuring the ‘*sunroom*’, the ‘*kitchen island*’ and ‘the *solar panels*’—

<sup>68</sup> McWilliams, *The Pope's Children*, 72.

<sup>69</sup> The website of the Central Statistics Office indicates that 460,000, or 1 in 4, Irish adults over 18 were living at home with parents. See <https://www.rte.ie/lifestyle/living/2017/1031/916470-this-crowded-house/> (accessed 16 November 2018). The CSO figures for families living in Ireland are available under <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp4hf/cp4hf/fmls/> (accessed 16 November 18).

Cf. Julieann Veronica Ulin on the numbers of residents of ‘boarding houses’ ca. 1900 and the boarding house as a ‘fitting image of the Ireland of Joyce’s time’, Ulin, ‘Fluid Boarders and Naughty Girls: Music, Domesticity and Nation in Joyce’s Boarding Houses’, *James Joyce Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2007), reproduced in 50, no. 1-2 (Fall 2012 – Winter 2013): 385-411, 404. Ulin sees the image of the boarding house as relevant to debates (in *Ulysses* and Ireland itself) about what constituted a nation.

and more modest. One might say it reflects the kind of shift one saw, for a few years after the crash at least, in the ‘regime of discourse’ relating to property in the Irish media. Less brashly ‘pornographic’, in McWilliams’s terms, some media coverage of the subject of property perhaps became a little more down-to-earth, attempting to relate to more modest expectations. Unfortunately, however modest Therese’s dreams are now, she is aware that they are completely out of their reach. She is about to give birth to another child while they are all living involuntarily in the tense environment of her mother’s crowded ‘boarding house’.

## ‘Clay’

### More tricks than treats

Despite all her self-conscious performance of brightness, shy cheerfulness and saintliness—or indeed because of it—it seems that Maria, the central character of Joyce’s story,<sup>70</sup> is all too aware that clay is all she has to look forward to. Literally an ‘old’ ‘maid’—a former domestic servant now working in the ‘Dublin by Lamplight’ laundry—as well as a mature, unmarried woman, Maria is well used to Lizzie Fleming’s annual joke that she ‘was sure to get the ring’ in the Halloween barmbrack, and she is ready with her answer that ‘she didn’t want any ring or any man either’, laughing as her ‘greygreen eyes sparkled with disappointed shyness and the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin’ (84). The latter, often repeated phrase (‘the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin’) appears to describe Maria’s own Halloween trick—one might even say a ‘Halloween mask’ that she wears all year round—a comic performance to distract others from all the disappointment in that shyness.

The question of who will get the ring—and who will not—crops up not just once, not just twice, but three or more times in the course of this short story of seven pages. On her journey across the city by tram, from the laundry where she works to the Halloween party in the house of one of the young men she had helped to bring up, Maria stops to buy some cake to bring to the party, but she hesitates so long over which cake to choose that the ‘stylish young lady behind the counter’ asks her ‘was it weddingcake she wanted to buy’, causing Maria to blush (85). At the party itself, of course, Maria joins in with the children playing a Halloween game, where one of the blindfolded children touches a ring, with all that that implies.<sup>71</sup> There is no ring for the blindfolded Maria, however, as she is led ‘up to the table amid laughing and joking’ and her fingers come down on a ‘soft wet substance’ (88). It seems that some of the children have played a nasty trick, and left something all too ominous for Maria to choose.

The fact that the word ‘clay’ is not mentioned apart from in the title itself adds to the ominous significance of the ‘soft wet substance’. Indeed, the facts that the substance is quickly thrown out at the behest of Mrs Donnelly after some hushed ‘scuffling and whispering’ (88), and that the blindfolded Maria never learns and never asks what it was she touched first, and neither she nor the others speak the word ‘clay’, as well as the fact that she is blindfolded all the time all add to the significance of the ‘substance’, while indicating that something is not or should not be said or seen, that something is indeed repressed here. But this is probably the impression the reader will have had all along, as the character of Maria is presented from the first in (exaggeratedly simplistic and naïve) free indirect discourse,<sup>72</sup> deliberately putting a brave face on things despite her intense ‘disappointed shyness’. She deliberately blindfolds herself, one might say, so she will not see—or at least she will *pretend* not to see—her own

<sup>70</sup> References are to James Joyce, ‘Clay’ in *Dubliners* ed. M. Norris, Norton Critical Editions (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006) 82-89.

<sup>71</sup> For Ingersoll, the Halloween game is a ‘fortune-telling device’ that ‘inscribes the power of patriarchy’ and ‘foreground[s] the limited choices for Irish women’. *Engendered Trope*, 78.

<sup>72</sup> Garry Leonard refers to this as a style of ‘compassionate irony’. ‘Dubliners’ in *Cambridge Companion*, 96.

desperation and loneliness as a result of not ‘getting the ring’. This is where the Halloween game of life has left her, but she cannot admit it to herself. The ‘major theme of “Clay”’, according to Marilyn French, is ‘blindness, Maria’s self-deception’, her deliberate adoption of a ‘way of thinking’ that ‘blots out or sugars over reality’.<sup>73</sup> The reality that Maria attempts to ‘blot out or sugar over’ is the reality—about which she is supremely conscious and concerned—that she herself is *not married*. Just as she is of course *pretending* not to ‘want any ring or man either’, she is—surely—*pretending* not to know what the ‘soft wet substance’ is, nor what it signifies.<sup>74</sup> The fact that Maria gets ‘the prayerbook’ (88) when she is asked to choose again (after the whispers and scuffles) indicates the only other fate available to her: a fate that is, the story suggests, if not worse than ‘clay’, at least comparable to it. Somebody else will always ‘get the ring’.

### Metro-sexuality?

Michèle Forbes’s contemporary version of ‘Clay’<sup>75</sup> is also set on Halloween, but the central character in this case is a young man who is taking a Luas tram out of the city to the suburbs around the Cherrywood stop. Unlike Maria, who was described as ‘a very, very small person indeed’<sup>76</sup> and who tended to *make* herself as small as possible, Conor is very, very large: he usually wears XXXL-sized T-shirts, and is introduced, presumably in his own words in free indirect discourse, as doing a ‘fat person’s thing’ of ‘tugging his T-shirt down so that it covered his protruding belly’ (119). Just like Maria, however, he is both very conscious of his body and inclined to use it as a kind of Halloween costume to be worn all year round—to conceal (and distract others from noticing) the troubled soul within. Like Maria, Conor does not have a partner and is unloved in that sense; also rather like Maria, he consoles himself with the thought that ‘the people at work liked Conor, they all said they were very fond of him’ (121)—and thus tries to convince himself that he is loved by everybody, in *that* sense. While he does entertain some vague romantic notions about ‘Marika from accounts’ with whom he had a laugh at work, he has no ‘serious relationship’ in his life—and he cannot admit to himself that he is deeply lonely. So, Conor consoles himself—rather as Maria had done—with the thought of buying ‘something really nice’ (the same phrase is used in both stories) in the shop on the way home from the Luas stop, and the ‘something really nice’ for both Conor and Maria has to be something really sweet. Maria bought plumcake; Conor picks up ‘two two-litre bottles of Diet Coke and two bags of fun-sized Mars bars’ as well as two packs of ‘chocolate Swiss rolls’ (124-25). Both characters, it seems, are very literally attempting to ‘sugar over reality’: the reality, in both cases, of their loneliness.

Neither barmbrack nor ring is mentioned in Forbes’s story, but there are indications of the presence of thoughts concerning romantic love and sexuality in Conor’s mind, as well as of the absence of anything of that nature in the reality of his experience. One gathers that he does not really have a chance with ‘Marika from accounts’ when one reads how, after they had had their usual brief laugh together about the tea he had brought instead of coffee yet again, he had ‘chuckled and his big frame had wobbled, and he’d tugged at his T-shirt, and wondered if Marika thought she might like to spend a bit more time with him because she always seemed

<sup>73</sup> Marilyn French, ‘Missing Pieces in Joyce’s *Dubliners*’, 459-60.

<sup>74</sup> Margot Norris suggests that the children in the story have actually been subjecting Maria ‘to a much more primitive, conventional, universal trick’ that ‘depends on making the victim mistake a neutral and benign substance (spaghetti, mushroom soup [...]) for a repulsive, usually excretory material (worms, vomit, feces etc.) [...] what Maria fears is not the touch of excrement on her fingers, but the recognition that her own “family” – like the rest of the world – treats her “like shit”’. *Suspicious Readings of Joyce’s Dubliners* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 152-53.

<sup>75</sup> References are to Michèle Forbes, ‘Clay’, in *Dubliners 100*, 117-128.

<sup>76</sup> Joyce, ‘Clay’, 82.

to be laughing when he was around' (121). Readers will probably see this as purely wishful thinking on Conor's part. If Marika's name sounds rather close to Maria, Conor betrays his own closeness to Joyce's character in the way he realizes with annoyance that he has lost his most recent work on a short film (his real passion) because

he had been distracted the night before by a photo which came up in the small Facebook window with a message that simply said 'Hey you! Long time. What's up?' A girl he had known at college, Alexis Auger, and how sexy she'd looked in the photo and how surprised he was that she'd sent it to him or had someone else, pretending to be her, sent it instead. [sic] (126)

In Joyce's story, Maria loses the plumcake on the tram because she is chatting with a 'colonel-looking gentleman' with a 'greyish moustache' who had 'confused' her as she 'favoured him with demure nods and hems', evidently thinking of it as a slightly romantic encounter, despite her realization that he had 'a drop taken'.<sup>77</sup> Readers will see that the 'encounters' are pretty insubstantial in both cases, but, one might say, the very faintest whiff of a romantic encounter / sexual opportunity is enough to throw these two lonely and vulnerable individuals off their balance. The episode in Conor's story is indicative of all-too-common contemporary modes of 'communication' that relate to prospective romantic / sexual encounters via social media. The flirtation seems abruptly abbreviated to the point of absurdity, promising instant intimacy with the sexy Alexis, who has no time to lose. It is at the same time so casual and out-of-the-blue that Conor wonders whether the message is genuinely from the girl, whether it was intended for him, and what to think of it all. He does not respond to this message, just as he does not respond to the several brief messages he finds on his phone, such as the ones from Gerry Donovan inviting him to 'like his page'. Conor does not seem to regard this as real communication at all, probably for good reason.

In fact, the message and photo from Alexis Auger, and the messages from Gerry Donovan for that matter, seem about as real as (or less real than) the instructions that came—in a woman's voice—from the self-service checkout in the shop where Conor buys chocolate Swiss rolls. The following passage of deadpan, free indirect discourse will perhaps be read as containing something more than simply a description of someone paying for goods in a shop:

Conor put the basket on the stainless steel surface of the self-service checkout and immediately a voice came from the machine. It sounded like the same woman who did the Argos dial-up service over the phone. She had a nice voice, Conor thought, English, but not too English, but she had pronounced Dun Laoghaire 'Doon Laharr', although someone must have complained because the next time he rang Argos she said it right. The woman asked him to place his items in the bagging area, then asked Conor to scan his items, then said—ten euro ninety-four. The screen gave him the option of buying a bag. He checked how much money he had—not enough to buy one—and pressed 'own bag'. The woman thanked him for his custom and the machine proffered a receipt. (125)

As well as capturing a common contemporary experience of shopping in the kind of depersonalized environment or 'non-places' Marc Augé saw proliferating in the age of 'supermodernity', the passage invites the reader both to laugh and to cry at the way Conor comments on the attractiveness of the machine-woman's voice.<sup>78</sup> One might wonder whether she is perhaps an early version of *Alexa* (and indeed whether the name of the sexy girl in the photo, Alexis Auger, is a reference to both *Alexa* and Augé)! In any case, this is about as close as Conor gets to interaction with 'someone of the opposite sex' during the story, at least until the end. The scene can be read as depicting a quasi-romantic/sexual encounter—with a self-service checkout machine.

<sup>77</sup> Joyce, 'Clay', 86.

<sup>78</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1995).



## Is this ‘sexuality’ in twenty-first-century Dublin?

Less ‘romantic’ than this—and perhaps more disturbing—is the scene with which the story closes. Conor is finally home and looking forward to an evening in, alone with his computer. The reader is even told that ‘he felt a satisfied click in his head when he turned on his computer’ (125). The pleasure of this satisfying interaction is interrupted, however, by the doorbell. ‘Standing on the doorstep’, he finds the following scene:

a group of five girls, aged around fourteen or fifteen, dressed in next to nothing. They were squirming from the freezing night air or, he could imagine his mother saying, from shameless impudence and they all wore heavy make-up. One girl had a pair of devil’s shiny red horns on her head. The girls rubbed their shoulders up against each other as they laughed. ‘Trick or Treat’, the tallest girl let loose [...]. The other girls cackled and screamed and arched their backs and then pouted their huge, red lips and looked very seriously at Conor. (126-27)

Not only do these children, ‘dressed in next to nothing’, flirt with Conor with ‘affected coyness’ (127), but when Conor asks them to sing something in return for a Halloween treat, the song he hears is no children’s nursery rhyme. At the close of Joyce’s story, in a ‘tiny quavering voice’ Maria had sung ‘I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls’ (88), timidly expressing, one gathers, her much frustrated desire—for a different life, for love.<sup>79</sup> In Michèle Forbes’s version the smallest girl ‘who wore the least amount of clothes’ sings lyrics that would surely have caused Maria to faint:

C’mon baby make my dreams come true  
 Work me, big boy, do that thing you do  
 Give me hell, smack me up real good  
 You know I want it bad, I know you want it too. (127)

While Conor is not in the least shocked and in fact joins in with the song, knowing the words ‘from a link on Facebook’ (128), the reader will probably be a little taken aback by such words coming from the mouth of a child ‘dressed in next to nothing’, on Halloween night, ‘with a serious rock-pop shimmy to her voice’ (128) and, no doubt, with an attempted imitation of an American accent. There is something uncannily disturbing about the juxtaposition of childish innocence and brutalized and brutalizing versions of sexuality in this scene and—as Freud suggested about the ‘uncanny’ generally—there is something uncannily familiar about it too. The exposure of increasingly young children to a culture saturated with the vocabulary of casual brutality, casually brutal sexism and mechanical sexuality, not to mention to actual hardcore pornography itself, seems nowadays an everyday phenomenon. How very young children are being introduced to the whole area of sexuality, with how little sensitivity and subtlety they are being socialized and sexualized, being given ready-made words, lyrics, scripts to repeat by a throwaway, thoroughly commercialized culture with no time for thought, emotion or real (non-commercial) dreams (or what little girls and boys might really want) is a matter of much concern for many in contemporary society.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Maria in Joyce’s story repeats the same verse of the song twice by mistake, omitting a verse “depicting courtship and a marriage proposal” as Norris points out: ‘Joyce uses the specifically romantic content of Maria’s repression (suitors, husband, love) to carefully focus the sexual etiology of her inferiority complex.’ Margot Norris, *Suspicious Readings of Joyce’s Dubliners*, 154. Joyce makes it clear that ‘no one tried to show her her mistake’, as no one really cares about Maria at all, however much she likes to pretend to herself that they do.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Debbie Ging on ‘the news that Primark/Penneys were urged to remove padded bras for seven to 10 year-old girls from their shelves’, which had ‘reignited the “sexualisation-of-children debate”’. Debbie Ging, ‘Padded bras will never empower young girls’, *The Irish Times*, (21 April 2010). For a critique of this debate, calling for new ‘analyses of inequality (e.g. asking why the “moral panic” discourses are inevitably about girls), LGBT teenagers, the sexual inequity and (hetero)sexist “pornification” of the wider (adult) society and subjective

Having launched into the song with such apparent gusto, singing these words she presumably does not really understand, the young girl suddenly stops, as if she realizes with embarrassment that something is not quite right here. Conor had joined in with her for the lines:

Work me hard, bad boy, play your dirty game

You the best, big boy, with all your money and your fame. (128)

That seems to position Conor in the same role as that adopted by the little girl, masochistically begging to be ‘smack[ed] up’ and ‘work[ed] hard’ by the ‘big boy’. He then, however, continues the song alone, ‘gallantly’ slipping himself apparently into the role of the ‘big boy’, promising in American slang and no doubt with a fake American accent, ‘I’ll smack you up real good’, before handing out ‘some apples and some fun-sized Mars bars’ (128).

One could perhaps relate this scene, set on a Halloween night in the early twenty-first century somewhere near Cherrywood Luas stop, to Judith Butler’s point about how gender is constructed generally—through imitation, *impersonation* and performance, and how gender may thus be thought of as rather similar to a drag performance. ‘In imitating gender,’ Butler writes, ‘drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself [...] The various acts of gender create the idea of gender,’ she continues, and ‘the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*,’ a ‘stylized repetition of acts’.<sup>81</sup> In Forbes’s story, it is Halloween, and the scene is indeed theatrical: the young girls are ‘dressed up’—even if that means wearing ‘next to nothing’ but heavy make-up, with one in a pair of mock ‘shiny devil’s red horns’ on her head. When the tallest girl ‘lets loose’ the phrase ‘Trick or Treat’ (127), she makes it clear, consciously or not, that they are playing—imitating—*American* Halloween rather than the Irish version. The song the smallest girl sings, at Conor’s invitation, involves imitating the phrasing of American slang—as well as adopting the role of somebody much older, who presumably has rather more experience of sadomasochist sexual encounters. It is, disturbingly, a ‘song of experience’ sung by an evidently rather innocent singer. Similarly, Conor’s performance, when he takes over the singing and the role, is just that: a performance. There is something akin to ‘drag’ in these performances—for they are evidently ‘performances’, pointing to themselves as performances—but it is not amusing at all, if one considers that this is how the genders of these young performers are being constructed, singing along with some big boy’s ‘dirty game’ of money, fame and violence.

The disturbing atmosphere of this Halloween night, with its mixture of childish innocence and the ‘performative act’ of borrowed, gung-ho, sadistic aggression is not completely defused, however, as the girls draw attention to the brown, sticky substance that stains Conor’s white shoes. When Conor explains that the substance is clay, the girl with the devil’s horns repeatedly tells him that ‘It looks like shit’ (128) as they move away shrieking and laughing among themselves.

The clay, in this version of Joyce’s ‘Clay’, is what sticks to Conor’s shoes when he takes a shortcut over ‘wet, mucky, uneven ground’ through a ‘wasteland’ on his way home

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accounts from children and young people themselves about how they use and understand media products, images and discourses’, see Kiely, Ging, Kitching, and Leane, *The sexualisation and commercialisation of children in Ireland: an exploratory study* (Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015), 60 (available at: [www.dcyia.ie](http://www.dcyia.ie)). See also a recent article on ‘flashpoint’ events of 2013 that ‘put teen and child sexualisation in Ireland back on the public radar’. Ging, Kiely, Kitching and Leane, ‘#Slane Girl, beauty pageants and padded bras: Flashpoints in the sexualisation of children debate in Irish media and political discourse’, *Feminist Media Studies* (2018), DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2018.1467943, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1467943>.

<sup>81</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999) 175, 178-79.

from the Luas stop in Cherrywood: “‘Namaland’ his mother had called it’ (124). The stop was—and is still, in early 2020—surrounded by land that was to be developed, but then the financial crash occurred and everything came to a standstill.<sup>82</sup> ‘Namaland’ is of course a reference to the ‘National Assets Management Agency’, the institution set up in the aftermath of the crash to take over land and properties of developers unable to pay off their loans. The ‘Clay’ of Forbes’s title thus refers—as do many of the stories in the *Dubliners 100* collection—to the aftermath of the financial crash in 2008, a literal wasteland of ‘wet, mucky’ clay in Conor’s story. Forbes herself has commented that the clay in her version is ‘not part of a parlour room prank’; rather, she writes, ‘now it’s everywhere, now it’s part of the very ground Conor walks on. The wet clay of his city is stuck to his shoe and he carries it home.’ ‘Clay’, in Forbes’s hands, seems to refer to a whole cultural landscape:

Now the paralysis of Joyce’s city has settled into its groove and become accepted. Now there is a further retreat of the soul, characterised by individual inertia. Conor is a passive recipient of globalised ideas and organised invasive technologies and his sense of himself is governed more by an individual pursuit of the sensory kick than any need to connect on a collective level.<sup>83</sup>

She explains that ‘reimagining “Clay” in the context of a contemporary Dublin’ she ‘wanted to describe a life just as circumscribed, in gender, in physicality and in circumstances; a life, like Maria’s, un-lived; a life even further in retreat.’<sup>84</sup> Gone to ground?

## Conclusion

In the stories of *Dubliners*, Joyce portrays late nineteenth-century Dublin, a city, as Joyce put it himself, ‘supposed to be the second city of the British empire’,<sup>85</sup> as a place that exudes an air of neglect and genteel poverty—the ‘air, musty from having been long enclosed’ in the boy’s house in North Richmond Street in ‘Araby’ (13), or the ‘odour of dusty cretonne’ in Eveline’s nostrils (36). The very air itself seems to infect the inhabitants of the city with ‘paralysis’, holding them back, stifling their dreams, indeed in terms of ‘sexuality’, as well as dreams and desires in the widest sense. Joyce not only indicates how particular aspects of a historicalcultural environment—such as poverty, neglect, the frustrations of the older generation leading to a recourse to alcohol or aggression, what French calls ‘popular Catholicism’ and notions of ‘propriety’ and so on—impose constraints on individuals, but he also shows how his characters’ own dreams and desires (and ‘sexuality’) are shaped, framed and expressed in the vocabulary and language of that culture. (Think of the effect of the ‘magical [orientalist] name’ on the boy in ‘Araby’, for example!)

And a hundred years later?

<sup>82</sup> A summary of the Cherrywood story was given in *The Irish Times*: ‘Cherrywood, the largest and most valuable site in south Dublin, located at the interchange of the M50 motorway and N11 and served by the Luas, belonged to builder Liam Carroll before his businesses collapsed in the property crash. The National Asset Management Agency and a group of banks appointed receivers Stephen Tennant and Paul McCann of Grant Thornton to it in 2014.’ Joe Brennan, ‘US investment firms poised to sell Cherrywood land to builders’, *The Irish Times* (22 September 2018), <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/construction/us-investment-firms-poised-to-sell-cherrywood-land-to-builders-1.3637463> (Accessed 12 November 2018). In early 2020, however, it seems the land is being built on.

<sup>83</sup> Michèle Forbes, ‘Michèle Forbes on her version of James Joyce’s CLAY’, <http://www.micheleforbesauthor.com/home/books/dubliners-100/> (accessed 11 June 2018).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Bruno Latour’s characterization of the current *global* crisis as also having to do with clay, as it involves a sense that ‘the very notion of soil is changing’, and that ‘each of us is beginning to feel the ground slip away beneath our feet’. Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Polity, 2018), 4-5.

<sup>85</sup> Joyce to Grant Richards, 15 October 1905. Cited by Norris in ‘Preface’ to James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. M. Norris, Norton Critical Editions (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), ix.

At the outset of this article, one wondered whether the contemporary adaptations of Joyce's stories would reveal changes in what Marilyn French termed the 'Dublin way of thinking', specifically in relation to sexuality. A number of things could be said in summing up here. Firstly: the characters of these four *Dubliners 100* stories are clearly not subject to the sway of either 'popular Catholicism' or late nineteenth century 'sexual purity' campaigns or notions of 'propriety'. References to priests and Catholicism—so much part of the air that Joyce's characters breathed—are conspicuously absent from the contemporary adaptations, and there is evidently much greater frankness about sexuality and the body in twenty-first-century Dublin. Same-sex desire is treated both frankly and delicately by John Boyne in his 'Araby', and part of this desire is clearly for the body of the older boy in rugby shorts. Donal Ryan's Evelyn tells us how he 'sat rigid, priapic', thinking of the girl's 'firm breasts' (43). The pornography discovered by Oona Frawley's Mrs Mooney after her son-in-law's viewing on her iPad is described quite graphically by Mrs Mooney herself. The song sung by the teenage girls 'dressed in next to nothing' (126) on Halloween in Michèle Forbes's 'Clay' is rather less restrained than Maria's rendition of 'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls' in Joyce's story. The contemporary authors (and their characters) refer to sexuality and the body in much more explicit language than what is used in *Dubliners*, and there appears to be little need for these characters to 'translate' thoughts about sex and the body into another language. Perhaps this is shown most clearly in the difference between John Boyne's version of 'Araby' and Joyce's story.

The fact that sexual desire can be expressed rather more explicitly without the restraints of religion or 'propriety' does not mean that sexuality has become a simple matter, however. This is made clear in the troubles these characters experience in establishing or maintaining their relationships with others. John Boyne's young boy and Donal Ryan's Evelyn remain frustrated in their desires: in the case of the former, this frustration is perhaps shown to be the nature of desire itself; in the latter story, difficulties in relationships between the 'old Irish' and 'new Irish' are brought to the fore. In the contemporary version of 'The Boarding House', Oona Frawley's Mrs Mooney does not use notions of propriety to arrange a marriage for her daughter, as Joyce's Mrs Mooney had; instead, the story turns around tensions in relationships in the overcrowded house, and the frustrated desires of a young couple for a home of their own after the loss of their previous house in the property crash. It is suggested above that Frawley's story deals with the effects of what McWilliams referred to as the 'property porn' of the Celtic Tiger years—when something close to sexual desire was channelled towards overpriced bricks-and-mortar and consumer goods, similarly to how sexuality, according to Marcuse, was re-shaped in late capitalist consumer society in the process he labelled 'repressive desublimation'. The idea that the most explicit expressions of the twenty-first century's apparently-greater sexual freedom could coexist with both repression and depression—what Michèle Forbes referred to as a 'further retreat of the soul'—and even with Joycean 'paralysis', within a society of 'globalised ideas and organised invasive technologies', convulsed by the booms and busts of the property market and of global capitalism, is shown most forcefully and depressingly in Forbes's contemporary version of 'Clay'.<sup>86</sup> Here, the abrupt directness and mechanical formulaic language of the briefest flirtation via social media together with the sexual explicitness of the young girls' performance at the end appear as further evidence of the affinity between the degradation of the cultural environment and the muckiness of the physical landscape. There is not much liberation—sexual or otherwise—evident in the life and environment of this twenty-first-century story's central character.

<sup>86</sup> Michèle Forbes, 'Michèle Forbes on her version of James Joyce's CLAY', <http://www.micheleforbesauthor.com/home/books/dubliners-100/> (accessed 6 November 2018).

*Dubliners 100* depicts the historical and cultural situation of Dublin around the time of the financial crisis and property crash, which succeeded the hubris of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years when Ireland had seemed to many finally to have escaped from the shadows of its colonial past. There are still shadows in these stories, shadows cast by those more recent historical events. That historical situation may indeed be characterized in the phrase ‘The Empire’s New Clothes’, the title of an article by Luke Gibbons.<sup>87</sup> The empire, Gibbons writes, has ‘donned a new set of clothes’, and Irish sovereignty has again gone ‘out of fashion’: ‘Having acted as a success story for rapid globalization, the debt crisis plunged Ireland into the abject condition, complete with begging bowl, of a postcolonial periphery’.<sup>88</sup> Gibbons relates a ‘dystopian turn in representations of late- or post-Celtic Tiger Ireland’, the so-called ‘Tiger Gothic’ of contemporary Irish writers such as Barry, McCabe and O’Rowe, to a line he quotes from Yanis Varoufakis on the Irish and Greek crises in the Eurozone: ‘To all intents and purposes, an economic crisis in the Eurozone ends up creating a form of neo-neo-colonialism within the world’s most advanced “democracy”—within the EU [...]’.<sup>89</sup>

This is the historical and cultural context of the contemporary stories in *Dubliners 100*. As Joyce’s stories showed the paralysis of nineteenth-century Dublin within the British empire, these stories show Dubliners still as ‘semicolonials’, although living under a different empire, or maybe just a later manifestation of imperialism, as Gibbons’ title suggests. The supposed ‘new clothes’ may be in line with the latest fashion in a world of ‘lifestyles’, ‘consumer profiles’ and the trends of ‘globalization’ or ‘multinational capitalism’, but it is empire, just the same. The kind of empire that Gibbons appears to be referring to is an empire that knows no bounds; it is not as geographically-defined as the nineteenth-century empires that depicted themselves with lines drawn on the surface of the globe. There are, one could argue, shadows of this new global empire and the crises within it—the Irish financial crisis, the global financial crisis, political and economic crises causing refugees to flee their own countries—in many of the stories in *Dubliners 100*. In John Boyne’s ‘Araby’ the boy misses his father, whose absence has something to do with avoiding prosecution for financial misdeeds from which ‘families would not recover for generations’. Evelyn, in Donal Ryan’s ‘Eveline’ befriends and ‘develops feelings for’ a young woman named Hope, who paid thousands of pounds to traffickers to travel from France through Britain to Ireland in 2008. Oona Frawley’s ‘The Boarding House’ exposes the tensions in the crowded house Mrs Mooney shares with her married daughter and son-in-law who have lost their own big house in the midst of the Irish and global financial crash. The clay of Michèle Forbes’s story is the clay of ‘Namaland’, and the author describes her central character Conor as ‘a passive recipient of globalised ideas and organised invasive technologies’. If one were to give *Dubliners 100* the subtitle ‘The Empire’s New Clothes’, the implication would be obvious. These are stories that reveal what everyone knows, but no-one dares—or bothers—to say: that this empire is wearing no clothes at all, that the empire is stark naked.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that the stories in *Dubliners 100* often show that it is in the presence of the stark realities of *this* nakedness that twenty-first sexuality must unfold.

<sup>87</sup> Luke Gibbons, ‘The Empire’s New Clothes: Irish Studies, Postcolonialism and the Crisis’, *Irish Review* 46 (2013), 14-22. Gibbons opens the article referring to a *Metro Herald* headline that appeared ‘during Queen Elizabeth’s visit to Ireland in May 2011 [and] proclaimed: “Forget History, We’re here for the Fashion”’, and to a widespread feeling that had arisen during the Celtic Tiger, and with the visit of Queen Elizabeth II, that ‘Ireland’s colonial past no longer matter[ed]’.

<sup>88</sup> Gibbons, ‘The Empire’s New Clothes’, 14.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>90</sup> Compare Alain Badiou’s recent comments on the contemporary relevance of Genet’s play *The Balcony*. Set in a brothel, the play, Badiou notes, points to ‘the formidable capitalist machine, the real of naked power’. Alain Badiou, *The Pornographic Age*, translated and edited by A.J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 18.

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