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Rewriting the Mothers in Joyce's *Dubliners* for the 21st Century: Oona Frawley's "The Boarding House" and Elske Rahill's "A Mother"

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Abstract

Within the multifaceted portrayals of the people in James Joyce's seminal short story collection Dubliners *(1914), a complex and not particularly positive portrayal of motherhood emerges, as the mothers attempt to support their children in ways that may appear rather problematic. For example, in "The Boarding House," Mrs Mooney manoeuvres the well-off Mr Doran into an affair and, consequently, a wedding with her daughter, knowing he will be careful not to harm his reputation. Similarly, in "A Mother," Mrs Kearney attempts to use the Irish Revival to improve her family's social standing by arranging for her daughter Kathleen to be hired as an accompanist for four concerts, and then later insists on Kathleen being paid all the promised money regardless of the changing circumstances. In 2014, the collection* Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired by the Original *was published, with each story set in the early twenty-first century and adapted by a different contemporary Irish writer. This article thus aims to show how two women writers, Oona Frawley and Elske Rahill, rewrite and update Joyce's portrayal of Irish motherhood in their versions of "The Boarding House" and "A Mother."*

Keywords

James Joyce, Dubliners, contemporary Irish short story, rewriting

Introduction

In the twenty-first century James Joyce's seminal short story collection *Dubliners* (1914) continues to be widely read, studied, and taught. Despite the fact that *Dubliners* is a quintessential Irish book, the strong sense of place does not prevent readers from outside Ireland from connecting themselves to the characters, confirming Joyce's own statement in a letter to a friend that "in the particular is contained the universal."[1] Moreover, since its first publication, the stories from *Dubliners* have been included in numerous anthologies not only of Irish literature, but also Anglophone literatures and world literature.[2] While Joyce's extensive novel *Ulysses* (1922) may be considered his magnum opus, the short story collection has the advantage of being more easily accessible to a wide range of readers. Also, over the last decades, several writers as well as literary critics have characterized the short story as a typically Irish literary genre.[3]

Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that in 2014, on the centenary of the first publication of Joyce's *Dubliners*, a short story collection entitled *Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired*

1 Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 505.

2 Most recently, Joyce's "Eveline" has been included in *The Art of the Glimpse: 100 Irish Short Stories* edited by Sinéad Gleeson (2020), while both "Araby" and "The Dead" have been included in the tenth edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* edited by Stephen Greenblatt (2018).

3 Richard Ford, for example, asserts that by the time Frank O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (1962) was published, O'Connor was writing "from a country where the short story was *already* the national form." Richard Ford, "Introduction," in *The Granta Book of the American Short Story*, ed. by Richard Ford (London: Granta, 1998), vii.

by the Original was published by Tramp Press. Edited by the writer Thomas Morris, originally from South Wales but graduated from Trinity College Dublin, the collection includes stories by fifteen contemporary Irish writers, primarily written specifically for this project.[4] The authors of the stories are both male and female and represent a range of generations. All the stories feature the same titles as Joyce's originals, and even incorporate the opening sentence of the original story directly after the title. The short story genre may not only provide a particularly appealing material for reading and writing, but also for creative rewriting. While there has been only one notable example of a pastiche of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Chris McCabe's sequel to the novel entitled *Dedalus* (2018), some of the short stories from *Dubliners* had already been rewritten prior to this project.[5] Inspired by music, Morris describes the concept of rewriting a James Joyce's story in the introduction to *Dubliners 100* as "covering," as "Joyce's prose is, we're always told, so musical."[6] Morris also posits that "you don't have to be Irish to 'get' *Dubliners*."[7] While a first-hand familiarity with Dublin may add to the readers' appreciation of the stories, it is not a mandatory condition for grasping their universal themes.

One of the strategies employed by a significant number of contributors to *Dubliners 100* is gender reversal of one or more characters in the story. In John Boyne's "Araby," for instance, the male narrator's love object is changed from his friend's sister to a slightly older boy living nearby, making the narrator gay. Boyne, who identifies as gay himself, thus provides not only an updated version of the story, but also one loosely inspired by his own experience. An exemplary case of a story in which the gender of two characters is reversed is Donal Ryan's "Eveline." While Joyce's narrative is titled after its female protagonist, a young woman from Dublin who contemplated departing Ireland with a sailor named Frank, Ryan's Evelyn is a male character named after Evelyn Waugh who assists a young woman named Hope in applying for asylum in Ireland. Whereas Joyce's story centres on Eveline's dilemma regarding whether to leave or remain in Dublin, Ryan's story mirrors the contemporary influx of immigrants to Ireland.

Joyce himself thematically divided the fifteen short stories in *Dubliners* into four categories – Childhood ("The Sisters," "An Encounter," "Araby"), Adolescence ("Eveline, "After the Race," "Two Gallants," "The Boarding House"), Maturity ("A Little Cloud," "Counterparts," "Clay," "A Painful Case"), and Public life ("A Mother," "Two Gallants, "Grace," "The Dead").[8] Joyce thus implicitly highlights a range of the themes, including coming of age, love and sexuality, to the characters' familial relationships, public image, as well as illness and death. However, alternative categorizations of stories may also be proposed. For instance, the recurrent character types that

4 The only story to have been published before is "A Painful Case" by Paul Murray. The work was not only retitled, however, but also revised for *Dubliners 100*. See Paul Murray, "Saint Silence," *Five Dials* 11 (2011): 8-14, <https://wp.penguin.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/fivedials_no11.pdf>.

5 An earlier Irish short story collection entitled *New Dubliners* (2005) petitioned eleven contemporary authors to rewrite Joyce's stories. In addition, Joyce's literary works have been reimagined by some major American authors such as John Updike, who rewrote "Araby" as his often-anthologized short story "A&P" (1961), thereby underscoring the universal appeal of *Dubliners*.

6 Thomas Morris, "Strange Traffic: An Introduction of Sorts," in *Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired by the Original*, ed. by Thomas Morris (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), viii.

7 Morris, "Strange Traffic," xi.

8 The classification is adopted from Richard Ellmann, *Letters of James Joyce. Volume II* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 134.

appear in stories from the afore-mentioned groups may be examined. To illustrate this approach, the present article investigates the complex fictional representations of the Irish mother character in Joyce's short stories "The Boarding House" and "A Mother" juxtaposed to their versions in *Dubliners 100* by Oona Frawley and Elske Rahill, respectively.[9] As will be explained in detail in this article, the character of the mother is significant not only in Joyce's *Dubliners*, but also in Irish literature and culture in general. The subsequent analysis endeavours to present a comparative close reading of Joyce's texts as well as those of Frawley and Rahill against the broader historical and social background of early twentieth and twenty-first century Ireland.

The Irish Mother in History and Literature

Since Frawley and Rahill do not change the gender of the characters in Joyce's stories, one might suggest they update the portrayal of the Irish mother, a significant figure in Irish history and imagination. As Ann Owens Weekes observes, at the beginning of the twentieth century "the theme of motherhood […] was ubiquitous in Irish culture, from sentimental popular songs to the Catholic Church's veneration of the Virgin Mary."[10] Furthermore, Owens Weekes emphasizes how the Irish Literary Revival often portrayed women "as emblematic figures, whether as maidens or mothers,"[11] idealizing their image in the interest of nationalism rather than realistically presenting their life experiences. Examples of these portrayals include Mother Ireland as a personification of the fertility of the Irish land[12] and Cathleen ni Houlihan, who represents an independent and separate Irish state. Writing about the traditional link between the family and the Church, which was strengthened and rigidified in nineteenth century Ireland, Tom Inglis asserts:

> The domination and control of women by the Church, and the necessity for women to ally themselves with that dominating power if they themselves were to have any power led to their high level of marital fertility which, in turn, created the need for postponed marriage, permanent celibacy and emigration among their children. These practices were encouraged by the mother in the home through a devotion to the Church, a rigorous sexual morality, and a physical and emotional distance from her children.[13]

Thus, Inglis provides a far less idealized description of Irish motherhood, untainted by nationalism.

Throughout the twentieth century, modern and traditional views on the position of women in Irish society seemed to alternate. While the Irish Free State Constitution of 1922 granted the right to vote to all women (and men) over the age of twenty-one, the 1937 Constitution declared that "by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good

9 Frawley is a writer and academic who edited the book *A New and Complex Sensation: Essays on Joyce's Dubliners* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2004). Rahill is an actress as well as an author of drama and fiction.

10 Ann Owens Weekes, "Figuring the Mother in Contemporary Irish Fiction," in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, eds. Liam Harte and Michael Parker (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 100.

11 Owens Weekes, "Figuring the Mother," 104.

12 See Gerry Kearns, "Mother Ireland and the revolutionary sisters," *Cultural Geographies* 11, no. 4 (2004): 443.

13 Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, second edition (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 198–199.

cannot be achieved,"[14] confirming that women were expected to be child bearers and homemakers. Even the late twentieth century did not bring a significant change: while civil divorce was finally legalized in the 1990s, a constitutional referendum prohibiting abortion was passed by a majority of two to one in 1983. Just four years after the publication of *Dubliners 100*, the Health Act 2018 legalized abortion during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy as well as in cases in which the life or health of the pregnant woman is at risk or when there is a fatal foetal abnormality.[15]

Joyce's complex and not always positive portrayal of motherhood invites comparisons with Irish women writers of later decades. For instance, the mothers in Joyce's *Dubliners* are usually concerned with social propriety, while their husbands are often domineering and violent, as seen in "Eveline." The mothers in Joyce may impose a strong sense of obligation on their daughters. Eveline decides to stay in Dublin because she had promised her dying mother she would take care of the family.[16] Similarly, surveying the fiction of Edna O'Brien (1930-2024), Owens Weekes concludes that Irish mothers in her texts desire social recognition, adhere to rural Catholic mores, and are often married to alcoholic, abusive, or lazy husbands.[17] While Joyce as well as Frawley and Rahill set their stories in Dublin rather than in the countryside, O'Brien's body of work provides another point of comparison for the portrayal of Irish motherhood.

From "The Boarding House" to Property Porn

Joyce's "The Boarding House" focuses on the issue of what is considered proper and acceptable in respectable society. The short story is rather unusual in that it provides the perspective of three characters: Mrs Mooney, her tenant Mr Doran, and her daughter Polly. The opening passage summarizes Mrs Mooney's life experience. Separated from her violent drunkard husband, she is described by the narrator as a "determined" and "big imposing woman." As a "butcher's daughter," she is said to deal with moral problems "as a cleaver deals with meat,"[18] signifying her strong will. In Mrs Mooney's boarding house, an affair has recently developed between the nineteen-year-old Polly and Mr Doran, who is in his mid-thirties. In fact, Mrs Mooney – nicknamed the Madam by the young men who live there – has engineered the affair, practically soliciting Polly to her lodger. Polly is described in the text as sexually charged, with "light soft hair and a small full mouth" and "a habit of glancing upwards when she spoke with anyone, which made her look like a little perverse madonna."[19] As Fritz Senn notes

> a "perverse" madonna is one who is turned the wrong way. Etymologically, but not culturally, "madonna" is the same as "Madam." The Italian and the French variants both go back to a Latin *(mea) domina*,

14 As quoted in Mary Robinson, "Women and the Law in Ireland," *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 4 (1988): 351.

15 See Health Service, "When you can have an abortion," October 28, 2022, <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/abortion/how-to-get/>.

16 Interestingly, Donal Ryan's rewrite of "Eveline" in *Dubliners 100* does not feature an abusive widowed father, but a domineering widowed mother who Ryan's male Evelyn is obliged to look after.

17 See Owens Weekes, "Figuring the Mother," 108–109.

18 James Joyce, "The Boarding House" in *Dubliners* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1993), 74–75, 77.

19 Joyce, "The Boarding House," 76.

> which perfectly suits Mrs. Mooney who rules on high and knows how to put a religious front on a meretricious calculation, combining both roles with ease.[20]

After some time, Mrs Mooney decides to confront Mr Doran, explaining to him he has no other option than to marry Polly. Before this meeting of Mrs Mooney with Mr Doran takes place, the reader has access to her plans:

> She was sure she would win. […] She had all the weight of social opinion on her side: she was an outraged mother. She had allowed him to live beneath her roof, assuming that he was a man of honour, and he had simply abused her hospitality. He was thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, so that youth could not be pleaded as his excuse; nor could ignorance be his excuse since he was a man who had seen something of the world. He had simply taken advantage of Polly's youth and inexperience: that was evident. The question was: What reparation would he make?[21]

Mrs Mooney's thoughts reveal her scheme to force Mr Doran to marry her daughter. Relying on his desire to protect his reputation, the possibility that the confrontation might have a different outcome is to her out of the question. She also assumes that Polly's wedding will be financially profitable, as "she suspected he had a bit of stuff put by."[22] Michael Kane even suggests that the name of Mooney carries a symbolic meaning which "seems to indicate what is really on her mind: money."[23] The text thus portrays Mrs Mooney as intelligent, manipulative and calculating in contrast to her young and immature daughter and the soon-to-be victimized Mr Doran.

As Mr Doran prepares for his meeting with Mrs Mooney, the text is written from his perspective. At one point, he reflects on his confession of the night before:

> The priest […] had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation. The harm was done. What could he do now but marry her or run away? He could not brazen it out. The affair would be sure to be talked of and his employer would be certain to hear of it. Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else's business.[24]

Mr Doran's thoughts show that Mrs Mooney is right; he will not risk losing his job as a Catholic wine merchant, which he has had for thirteen years. While Mr Doran tries to convince himself that marrying Polly is morally right, he worries that Mrs Mooney's daughter will not meet the expectations of his social circles: "But the family would look down on her. […] He could imagine his friends talking of the affair and laughing. She *was* a little vulgar; sometimes she said 'I seen' and 'If I had've known.' He could not make up his mind whether to like her or despise her."[25] Despite being physically attracted to Polly, Mr. Doran admits to her lack of sophistication and is determined to avoid a scandal.

20 Fritz Senn, "'The Boarding House' Seen as a Tale of Misdirection," *James Joyce Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1986): 409.

21 Joyce, "The Boarding House," 78.

22 Joyce, "The Boarding House," 79.

23 Michael Kane, "*Dubliners* 1914–*Dubliners 100* (2014): Local Histories of Troubled Sexuality?" *Studies in Arts and Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2019): 15.

24 Joyce, "The Boarding House," 80.

25 Joyce, "The Boarding House," 80–81.

The thoughts of Polly herself are given the smallest amount of space in the text. The girl's view of their prospects is more hopeful than Mr Doran's: "She waited on patiently, almost cheerfully, without alarm, her memories gradually giving place to hopes and visions of the future."[26] While Polly's naivety and idealism make her the most optimistic character at the end of the story, the text as a whole emphasizes how Mr Doran has agreed to marry Polly out of social propriety rather than love or affection. Thus, Mrs Mooney has reached her goal thanks to her knowledge of the social world.

In Frawley's version of the story, the quotation of Joyce's opening sentence, "Mrs Mooney was a butcher's daughter,"[27] serves only as a reminder of the text in *Dubliners*. The female character corresponding to Joyce's Mrs Mooney is more likely to be referred to by her first name, Marie, by all the other characters. Even the title "The Boarding House" is metaphorical as the spatial setting in Frawley's story is Marie's house, where her daughter Therese and son-in-law Ger are staying since they lost their house in the financial crisis of 2008. As Marie's house offers little personal space, it is Ger that "felt like he was in a *boarding house* now."[28] While Frawley leaves Marie's personal history the same as Joyce's, briefly mentioning her violent ex-husband, she alters the power dynamics in the relationship between Therese and Ger by making them much closer in age. Both Therese and Ger are in their thirties, they already have one son, and Therese is expecting their second child, a daughter. While various parts of Frawley's text provide the perspectives of all the three characters, Frawley assigns more space to Therese than Joyce did to Polly.

Similarly to Joyce's text, Frawley's story focuses on what is considered proper and acceptable. The divorced Marie does not consider herself prudish, as she has had some "gentlemen friends"[29] over the years. She observes that sexual mores have recently become looser as the influence of the Church has decreased: "Along with the priests, manners had fallen into the ditch."[30] Yet, Marie is shocked when she accidentally clicks on the browsing history on the iPad that Ger had given her as a present and finds out he watched pornography on it:

> It looked painful and – *unnatural*, yes; there was nothing at all *natural* about the people (because sweet Jerusalem there were never only two) and what they were doing. And the fact that they had no hair where God intended was ab-so-lutely frightening: bald as doorknobs, children, like."[31]

Despite her allegedly modern views, Marie seems rather hypocritical in her disapproval of pornography being watched in her house. Ger has likely resorted to watching porn regularly because he had not been intimate with Therese due to her pregnancy as well as the limited privacy at Marie's place. Nevertheless, Ger is surprised when his brother confesses to him that he hardly ever watches porn, only "once a month, once every few months."[32] In Joyce's story, the priest to

26 Joyce, "The Boarding House," 84.

27 Oona Frawley, "The Boarding House," in *Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired by the Original*, ed. Thomas Morris (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), 72.

28 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 76.

29 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 76.

30 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 73.

31 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 75.

32 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 78.

whom Mr Doran confesses is substituted for Ger's brother. There is no character representing the clergy in Frawley's version, perhaps confirming the gradually decreasing influence of the Catholic Church on the everyday lives of the people in Ireland.

Like Joyce's Mrs Mooney, Marie also interferes in her daughter's relationship. First, Marie reveals her discovery to Therese, then she wants to confront Ger with it. Being asked if she and Ger have been intimate makes Therese rather uncomfortable. After admitting that "things had been difficult and that the 'intimacy' had been limited,"[33] Therese uneasily ponders the future of their marriage. In Joyce's version, the main issue is a socially unacceptable affair between Mr Doran and a rather young single girl, which can only be made proper by his marrying her. In Frawley's version, Therese as a married woman is expected to have a sex life, and yet, in her mother's house "she had to revert to the faintly Madonna-like chastity of her teenage years."[34] Although the central issue in Frawley's story is lack of intimacy in marriage, the spatial setting contributes to the overall atmosphere and makes the problem more pressing for Therese:

> The truth was she wondered if she'd be so angry – you must be devastated, her mother had said – if they'd been in their own house where she wouldn't have to merely mime her rage rather than release it. Was it being here? Was this what provoked the fury? The terrible displacement, the shame of being past thirty, in the sensible decade, and losing your home?[35]

In her thoughts, Therese thus refers to the loss of her and Ger's large house, which they both bitterly regret. As he waits for Marie to talk to him at the end of the story, Ger believes she is "looking forward to the fact that he would have to face her,"[36] a feeling he shares with Mr Doran in Joyce's story. Nevertheless, Marie's sense of power and control of the situation is not what bothers Ger the most, as she cannot significantly affect his life. Rather, he recalls the financial crisis and "all of the years of hard graft gone in what seemed like an instant."[37] Although neither Ger nor Therese fully admit it, Michael Kane suggests they had been seduced by the promising Celtic Tiger era in Ireland and especially by property porn, a term used in David McWilliams's book *The Pope's Children* (2005) in reference to the enticing presentation of luxurious houses in the media in the boom years before the economic bubble burst.[38] Ger's thoughts reveal a discrepancy between Marie's negligible disapproval of his finance management and her tendency to boast about his wealth: "He knew that Marie thought he had [been rash], thought that the investment in Bulgaria in particular had been hilarious, but hadn't she been first to yap away to her friends about it?"[39] While there are many shared themes between Joyce's and Frawley's stories, such as prostitution and the mother's hypocrisy, Marie is not as influential as Mrs Mooney in Joyce's text. Overall, Frawley's

33 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 75.

34 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 81. In this way, Frawley's reference to the Madonna as a traditional symbol of chastity reworks Joyce's reference mentioned earlier to a misguided or corrupted Madonna.

35 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 80.

36 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 77.

37 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 77.

38 See Kane, "*Dubliners* 1914–*Dubliners 100* (2014)," 17–18.

39 Frawley, "The Boarding House," 77.

story emphasizes the direct influence of money or the lack thereof on the characters' relationships even more than Joyce's does.

From Irish Revival to the Gaelscoil: "A Mother"

Elske Rahill's version of "A Mother" presents even more substantial rewriting of Joyce's short story. The opening sentence of Joyce's text, "Mr Holohan, assistant secretary of the Eire Abu Society, had been walking up and down Dublin for nearly a month, with his hands and pockets full of dirty pieces of paper, arranging about the series of concerts,"[40] serves here merely as a reminder of the original story. In Joyce's *Dubliners*, Mrs Kearney arranges for her daughter Kathleen to be hired as an accompanist at four concerts and insists on her being paid the full sum in the contract although the third concert is cancelled. Like Joyce's Mrs Mooney, Mrs Kearney focuses on financial gain.

The beginning of Joyce's story summarizes Mrs Kearney's personal history. After completing her education at a convent, she reached marriageable age and waited a rather long time for what she considered an eligible suitor:

> The young men whom she met were ordinary and she gave them no encouragement, trying to console her romantic desires by eating a great deal of Turkish Delight in secret. However, when she drew near the limit and her friends began to loosen their tongues about her, she silenced them by marrying Mr. Kearney, who was a bootmaker on Ormond Quay.[41]

Mrs Kearney thus lowered her aspirations somewhat by marrying a working-class man who was also considerably older than she was.[42] They lived a respectable well-off life and had two daughters, the older of whom is Kathleen. Being rather ambitious, "when the Irish Revival began to be appreciable Mrs. Kearney determined to take advantage of her daughter's name and brought an Irish teacher to the house."[43] The pretentious Mrs. Kearney thus uses the association of the name Kathleen with the Irish revival to improve the family's social position. As Mr Holohan was not very decisive or active, she easily convinced him to hire Kathleen.

However, things do not go exactly according to Mrs Kearney's plan. The first two concerts were poorly attended, and the few who did come did not behave properly. The third performance was cancelled, and the final one was advertised in an attempt to attract a larger audience. Nevertheless, Mrs Kearney insisted on Kathleen being paid all the money promised regardless of the changing circumstances. When Kathleen received only half of the money before the final concert, the raging Mrs Kearney made a scene in the interval; she was not satisfied with the answer that Kathleen will be paid the rest of the money in three days, and marches off with Kathleen and her husband, both of whom have remained rather passive throughout the text. One might argue Mrs Kearney sought to protect her daughter's interests by asserting her rights within the patriarchal order, embodied

40 Elske Rahill, "A Mother," in *Dubliners 100: Fifteen New Stories Inspired by the Original*, ed. Thomas Morris (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), 166.

41 James Joyce, "A Mother," in *Dubliners* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1993), 171–172.

42 Owens Weekes notes that adult daughters in Edna O'Brien's fiction also "enter into unequal marriages with older men." Owens Weekes, "Figuring the Mother," 115.

43 Joyce, "A Mother," 172–173.

by Mr Holohan and the other members of the all-male organizing committee. This reading is supported by her indignant thought: "they wouldn't have dared to have her treated like that if she had been a man."[44] Sherril Grace criticizes what she sees as a rather simplistic portrayal of women in the original story collection, arguing that "Joyce's female Dubliners are repeatedly depicted as powerless, passive and silent or, if they do act, as monstrous."[45] Throughout Joyce's short story, Mrs Kearney is portrayed as pretentious and greedy. Towards the end, the narration mentions that "Mrs Kearney's conduct was condemned on all hands: everyone approved of what the committee had done."[46] While Mrs Kearney's character might seem rather contentious, as Linda Rohrer Paige highlights, "the title of the story, 'A Mother,' ironically implies that she may represent any mother of Dublin, all mothers."[47]

Although Rahill's text features neither a character named Mr Holohan nor a series of concerts, Rahill's Mrs Kearney is rather like Joyce's, despite living a century later. She is referred to as Kathleen in the text, which in Joyce's version is the daughter's name. By providing their main characters' first names, Frawley and Rahill portray Marie and Kathleen as more fully-rounded individuals than Joyce does. As Earl Ingersoll emphasizes, in "A Mother," Joyce transforms Miss Devlin to Mrs Kearney, without ever mentioning her given or Christian name,[48] referring to the character first as her father's daughter, then as her husband's wife. In contrast, the beginning of Rahill's story summarizes Kathleen's life thus far, representing a transposition of Joyce's Mrs Kearney to the early twenty-first century. Kathleen was educated at a convent boarding school and took an events management course at a private college, but she failed to find a future husband there: "The few boys enrolled on the course were scrawny and unambitious, and she graduated at the age of twenty-two with only a handful of disappointing cinema dates behind her."[49] Like Joyce's Mrs Kearney, Kathleen ends up marrying a significantly older man, an accountant at her father's firm named Graham who "had been dedicated to a woman who suddenly married someone else."[50] Although she dreamed of marrying a solicitor, Kathleen takes solace in the fact that Graham is a decent man, and they live a respectable well-off life with their two daughters, Roisín and Cliona. Yet, Kathleen "had never quite given up her romantic notion,"[51] occasionally reading romances set in Victorian times. Like Joyce's Mrs Kearney, Kathleen ate Turkish Delight in bed.

In the twenty-first century setting, an allusion to the Irish Revival would be dated, so Rahill replaces it with a reference to the Irish language schools, or Gaelscoileanna. As a member of the parents' committee of the school, Kathleen is even more active than the chairperson named Ger, similarly to Joyce's Mrs Kearney usurping Mr Holohan's responsibilities. In addition, Kathleen's

44 Joyce, "A Mother," 187.

45 Sherrill Grace, "Rediscovering Mrs. Kearney: An Other Reading of 'A Mother,'" *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988): 38.

46 Joyce, "A Mother," 188.

47 Linda Rohrer Paige, "James Joyce's Darkly Colored Portraits of 'Mother' in *Dubliners*," *Studies in Short Fiction* 32, no. 3 (1995): 332.

48 See Earl Ingersoll, "Gender and Trope in James Joyce's 'A Mother,'" *Études irlandaises* 20, no. 2 (1995): 37.

49 Rahill, "A Mother," 168.

50 Rahill, "A Mother," 169.

51 Rahill, "A Mother," 171.

alleged interest in Irish language schooling is reminiscent of Joyce's Mrs Kearney's pragmatic association with the Irish revival. Kathleen appreciates that "there were no non-nationals at the Gaelscoil. At least there was that. It wasn't a question of racism. Kathleen simply didn't want her child held back because Bubba Mac Zuzu at the Educate Together couldn't understand a word of English."[52] Nevertheless, the other members of the parents' committee do not agree with her. As Maurice Fitzpatrick observes, Kathleen "sees in such schools an opportunity to shield her princess from the worst assaults that exposure to a multi-ethnic society may bring; she is deftly wrong-footed in the story when she is forced to cope with other mothers who refuse to follow her lead."[53]

The event Kathleen organizes for her nine female friends from the parents' committee is a girls' night in her house, a get-together in their wedding dresses, the justification being "they deserved to feel excited and pretty again. They deserved to feel, every day, the way they did on their wedding days – like the most beautiful woman in the world."[54] All the friends agree to bring food and be driven to her house in a pink limousine one by one, as they will hire a driver for the night and share the cost. On the day, however, some of the women must wait a long time for the ride, so they decide to use a taxi to reach Kathleen's house more quickly. When Kathleen wants them all to pay for the limousine as they had agreed on, some of them claim they have forgotten to bring the money, but Kathleen remains uncompromising, much like Joyce's Mrs Kearney. However, as Kathleen is arguing with her female friends rather than with men in positions of authority, the theme of a woman's struggle with patriarchy is not manifested in this scene. In the end, Graham returns from a business trip earlier than expected and pays the driver the whole sum by credit card. Graham is thus portrayed as more self-confident and active than Mrs Kearney's husband in Joyce, resolving the situation on his own.

Kathleen tries to enjoy the evening, but she cannot stop thinking about the future of her marriage. She recently saw in person the woman she recognized from a photo as the one Graham was supposed to marry, and "from her smile Kathleen knew that this was the sort of unbeautiful woman a man could fall in love with."[55] Suddenly, Kathleen realizes that wanting to look as young and beautiful as she did on her wedding day is foolish. In her extensive review of *Dubliners 100*, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne argues that contemporary women writers "would have difficulty agreeing with Joyce that it is OK not to pay a woman artist according to her contract." She accuses Rahill of being "seduced by the power of Joyce's storytelling [so that] an opportunity to reassess the gender politics of the master has been lost."[56] However, as this article has shown, Rahill chose to loosely reimagine Joyce, as she moves the place of confrontation from the concert hall to Kathleen's home and describes a gathering of the protagonist's friends. Rahill foregrounds the issue of women's appearance and its relation to satisfaction in marriage. Thus, the main conflict in Rahill's story concerns Kathleen's interaction with her friends and husband rather than a woman's struggle with a male-dominated institution.

52 Rahill, "A Mother," 172.

53 Maurice Fitzpatrick, "A Writer for Our Time," review of *Dubliners 100*, edited by Thomas Morris, *Celtic Life International*, June 2014, <https://celticlifeintl.com/a-writer-for-our-time/>.

54 Rahill, "A Mother," 175.

55 Rahill, "A Mother," 178.

56 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, review of *Dubliners 100*, edited by Thomas Morris, *Estudios Irlandeses* 10 (2015): 148.

Conclusions

This comparative analysis of Joyce's and Frawley's "The Boarding House" has revealed that the figure of the Irish mother plays a more significant role in Joyce's story. In this text, Mrs Mooney's preoccupation with money, which she presents rather as a necessary concern with social expectations and a moral code derived from Christianity, serves as the driving force. The narrative concludes with the manipulative mother achieving her objective, having successfully coerced Mr Doran into marrying her daughter. Mr Doran's decision to marry Polly was driven by social propriety rather than personal sentiments, and the story ends with Polly achieving financial stability.

A thematic and structural analysis of Frawley's narrative reveals significant parallels with Joyce's, particularly in the transposition of concerns from an extramarital relationship between Mrs Mooney's daughter and tenant to Marie's dismay upon discovering her son-in-law Ger had viewed pornography on her iPad. As Marie grapples with concerns regarding her daughter Therese's lack of intimacy and disapproves of Ger's engagement with pornography, she confronts both with the discovery. However, her influence over the couple is less pronounced than that of Mrs Mooney, as their residence was lost due to the 2008 property crash, necessitating their stay in her home. Rather than the importance of religious beliefs or social expectations, the narrative places greater emphasis on the impact of financial constraints on the characters' relationship.

Rahill's version of Joyce's "A Mother" presents a considerable departure from the original text. The protagonists only exhibit a few personality traits in common. An overly sympathetic reading may suggest that both mothers prioritize their daughters' interests. For instance, Joyce's Mrs Kearney insists on her daughter being paid all the money she had been promised, and Rahill's Kathleen tries to protect her young daughter from what she sees as potentially bad influences. Both mothers, however, exhibit tendencies toward pretentiousness. Mrs Kearney uses the Irish Revival to improve her family's social standing, while Kathleen enrols her daughter in an Irish language school to shield her from interactions with classmates belonging to ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, a critical distinction emerges between Rahill's narrative and Joyce's in their predominant themes. Rahill's account pivots from the mother's orchestration of her daughter's employment as an accompanist to the mother's facilitation of a gathering for her female acquaintances from the school parents' committee. Additionally, Rahill relocates the primary setting from the concert hall to Kathleen's home, foregrounding the issue of women's appearance and its correlation with marital satisfaction.

In essence, both Frawley and Rahill transpose the thematic elements of Joyce's narratives to the context of early twenty-first century Ireland. Their texts offer intricate fictional portrayals of Irish motherhood against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving world, contemplating the recent economic recession and contemporary multiethnic society. However, while Catholicism no longer exerts a significant influence on the characters of Frawley and Rahill, as it does on those of Joyce and Edna O'Brien, Frawley's and Rahill's texts adhere to a prevailing tradition of depicting Irish mothers as middle-class women seeking social acknowledgement.

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