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From Gnomon to Parallelogram: A Geometry of Interpretation in *Dubliners**

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I

James Joyce's *Dubliners* is a collection of 15 short stories. The three italicized words on the first paragraph of the first story, "The Sisters," have been intriguing critics since its publication in 1914.

> There was no hope for him this time: it was the third stroke. Night after night I had passed the house (it was vacation time) and studied the lighted square of window: and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew that two candles must be set at the head of a corpse. He had often said to me: "I am not long for this world," and I had thought his words idle. Now I knew they were true. Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word *paralysis*. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word *gnomon* in the Euclid and the

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> word *simony* in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of some maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work. (*D* 1)

'Paralysis' and 'simony' have been interpreted as thematic keys to the meaning of the work as a whole. Such a reading was properly supported by Joyce's own comment as a writer. In the *Dubliners* stories, he intends "to write a chapter in the moral history of [his] country, because Dublin seemed to [him] to be the centre of paralysis" (*Selected Letters* 88). Through the collection, Joyce wanted the Irish people under British colonial rule to have "one good look at themselves in [his] nicely polished looking-glass" (*Selected Letters* 90). Most of the characters in the stories are inactive, involuntary and even unwilling. They don't clearly recognize, much less they wish to change the situation they are trapped in. Take Father Flynn, Eveline Hill and Bob Doran. The narratives that delineate their frustration are just static, making no action or progress whatever. Simony, an ecclesiastical sin, suggests another kind of thematic clue: a debasement of spirituality. *Dubliners* abounds in the varied characters' endless disappointments and their total disillusionments in the end. "Araby" and "Two Gallants" are the cases that graphically portray a narrative movement from the spiritual to the material, from an ideal romance to a banal deception.

While paralysis and simony, amassing a great deal of criticism, have proven to be extremely resourceful motifs penetrating each stories, gnomon has received comparatively less attention thus far. Gnomon, according to *OED*, is "the part of a parallelogram which remains after a similar parallelogram has been taken away from one of its corners." Gnomon, therefore, is an incomplete parallelogram, a figure that would be whole were it not missing one of its corners. (See the following the Fig. 1.)

Fig. 1

If Joyce placed gnomon along with paralysis and simony on the first page of *Dubliners*, we should value it as much as the two other signifiers. However, since gnomon is a simple geometrical figure, early critics such as Hugh Kenner and William York Tindall (14) questioned whether gnomon is connected to Joyce's aesthetic design and provides a hermeneutical key for readers. If so, readers should pay due heed to the narrative strategy Joyce employed in writing *Dubliners*.

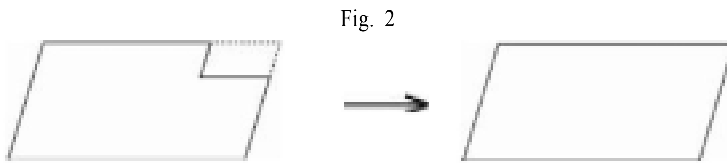
In 1957, Gerhardt Friedrich takes the geometric figure as a useful trope for the "gnomonic existence" of the *Dubliners*, for "incomplete areas of human relationships" (422). He notices in the gnomonic quality, for the first time ever, something absent or incomplete. It was Phillip Herring who fueled the ensuing debates about gnomon. Joyce's texts, he argued, are gnomonic because the meaning generated by the language is often incomplete or fragmentary, "designed to create mystery" (x). Such a gnomonic feature of Joyce's language naturally leads to textual uncertainty in *Dubliners*. Sonja Bašić follows Herring's approach, and remarks *Dubliners* "undermines categorization and sense-making" (351). Joyce's narrative, she underlines, is problematic because he breaks the illusion of "nice fitting" correspondence between the world and language. She advises readers to study patiently the "imperceptible uncertainties of the fiction" (351).

David Weir, pays attention to gnomon as an incomplete geometric figure and focuses on omitted passages in *Dubliners*. Terming them as 'gnomonic omissions,' he shows how such 'gnomonic passages' can be functional in the operation of the larger narratives in which they occur (344). He pays a particular attention to such narrative suspension that omits Eveline's actual movement to the harbor as well as Farrington's apology after his smart retort to his boss, Alleyne. He calls such an

gnomonic ellipsis as a 'gnomonic moment' in the narrative (346). Weir goes one step further by pointing out another feature of gnomon as a geometric figure which has been ignored so far. For the first time, he introduces Giordano Bruno's use of the gnomon as the paradoxical proof of the coincidence of contraries. His analysis of "Counterparts" is particularly worth noting in that vein. Weir's gnomonic explication reaches its apex when he mentions 'gnomonic reduction' in "The Dead." In conclusion, he suggests that Joyce has employed Bruno's conception of the gnomon as the "structural paradigm" (351).

Most recently, Margot Norris has also tried to read "The Sisters" in a gnomonic way. *Dubliners*' textual uncertainty caused by gaps, ellipses, absences, and silences in the narrative surface, she argues, naturally leads to the indecidability of the Joycean text (16). Interestingly, she proposes to read "The Sisters" as a gnomon to the whole collection. Serving as an introduction to the volume as a whole, she suggests, "The Sisters" introduces a theory of reading, interpretation, and textuality (17). Taking "The Sisters," Norris starts to show an example of a gnomonic reading of the text. Paying close attention to the discrepancy in between the young and adult narrators, she suspects the Flynn sisters, gnomonic as they are, knew all about the unspeakable concerning Father Flynn's gradual decline, both mental and physical. Norris's reading reaches its climax when she suspects Father Flynn and the boy-narrator can be deemed "the sisters," a gay couple, so to speak. Regardless of interpretative authenticity, such a gnomonic reading lets us note what was considered absent or missing in the narrative, and provides an alternative perspective unknown hitherto. What is unsaid, half-said, and repressed in each *Dubliners* story is its gnomonic function, and it is reader's job to restore that shortfall to make it a meaningful whole. Such a reading process can be compared to completing the parallelogram which will otherwise remain a gnomon with one of its corners left out. (See the following the Fig. 2.)

Fig. 2



In the above, I surveyed the gnomonic interpretations made by diverse Joyce scholars of *Dubliners* so far. Those approaches are unique and valuable but no one has read through each *Dubliners* story with gnomonic hermeneutics in mind. This research will be a reading of all *Dubliners* with a gnomonic imagination. I'll also try to determine the 'missing' or 'unwritten' parts of each narrative in a way as yet not noticed or provided thus far. Hopefully my approach will widen the horizon of gnomonic understanding of *Dubliners* and push one step further those various, willy nilly gnomonic readings undertaken hitherto. The validity and creativity of my paper is demonstrated in the lengthy analyses of "Eveline," "Clay" and "Grace," and shorter references to other short stories in the collection.

II

A gnomonic reading of Joyce is a challenge to clarify textual uncertainty or indeterminacy, completing a hermeneutic circle. Such a reading process is both creative and rewarding: creative because it tries to put together missing or unsaid narrative pieces and make it the whole parallelogram; rewarding because it brings pleasure to 'informed' readers who, equipped with their own hermeneutic skills, venture to grasp for hidden meaning or alternative interpretations. The reading samples of three different stories follows, which I hope will provide a glimpse into the analyses I will strive for in my gnomonic research.

First, I would like to point out how telling Eveline's body can become when her language fails. Potentially "Eveline" is the most positive narrative in Dubliners because the heroine finds an opportunity for a new life abroad. The mood, however,

turns out to be gloomier than any other in the collection because the whole narrative concerns Eveline's inaction rather than her dynamism. Instead of grasping the chance Frank has proffered her, i.e. leaving Ireland and marrying him in Buenos Aires, Eveline exhausts not only herself but readers through endless indecisiveness. She continually changes her mind, envisioning and revising her plan to elope with Frank, which leads nowhere.

What frustrates readers is not that she continually changes her mind, revising, but that she doesn't even know what she wants. She wavers between temporary determination and recurrent indecision. Worth mentioning is Joyce's method of narration. The third-person narrator increases the indecidability of the text. What we hear as a final version of the narrative filters through her limited perception and vocabulary, and the past tense. Such different levels of narration make "Eveline" a seemingly transparent but actually disturbing narrative. What impedes her decision? Her inherent indecisiveness or the nature of her relationship with Frank. The former possibility leads us to look at her family life during her formative years. The latter calls for an explanation as to how her affair with Frank alters her relationships with her family. Eveline's concept of 'home' has become warped. Apparently, the life of the Hills meets the qualifications of a 'dysfunctional family.' Eveline's continual traumatization by Mr. Hill causes her 'palpitations,' an incipient sign of breakdown. Cleary Mr. Hill desires Eveline as a wife-substitute. Such devastating 'rape' of Eveline's subjectivity leaves her passive and hopeless. Continual victimization by her father leaves Eveline a totally dependent person lacking free will and clear thinking. Finally, she abandons the will-to-escape and chooses instead a stagnant life of vegetation because it is not the 'wholly undesirable' (*D* 31).

Two gnomonic characters, the missing priest and Mrs. Hill, cause Eveline's indecision. She does not recognize in the 'yellowing' print the name of the priest who had left for Melbourne. The priest had abandoned his flock by moving out of Dublin yet still manipulates as an absent authority the vulnerable minds of his sheep. The promises Eveline made to the obsolete print, therefore, comports with

those made at her mother's death-bed that destroyed her future. Eveline senses that staying with her father will make her another victim of Mr. Hill. Yet, the death-bed promise grips her will and emotions. In this sense, Mrs. Hill, another gnomonic character, exploits Eveline. Eveline hallucinates her dead mother and hears insane cries.

Yet Eveline's relationship with Frank suggests a promising alternative to her home life. Eveline is so fascinated by his tough masculinity that her instinct as a virgin is touched: "they had come to know each other" (*D* 31). Outings with Frank lead her into new emotional territories hitherto forbidden. The "unaccustomed part" of the theatre, then, means an expensive seat unavailable to Eveline's class or a dark corner where people normally do not sit. More profoundly, the words maybe a metonymic displacement for a part of her body, suggesting obliquely what Frank attempts in the dark. In this context, her confession that "she always felt pleasantly confused" (*D* 32) implies her sexual arousal. Certainly, her body is being awakened. Her blooming physical maturity suggests her burgeoning heterosexuality and womanhood. They leave her 'confused' by her own development. Her body transforms to tell. Eveline's obscure prospect of marriage, however, perversely clouds her future. She is so preoccupied with escapist ideas that she recognizes neither the unreality of the project nor the unreliability of Frank. Hence the faulty blueprint of her marriage, something 'distant and unknown.' Even if she craves respect through marriage, the process from being an indefinite 'she' to becoming the independent 'Eveline' cannot come from outside herself. But Eveline is passive and self-abandoned.

Between the darkening room and the harbor scene, a gap suspends the narrative. David Weir terms this a gnomon, because it is 'omitted' from the story (344). This missing time effectively substitutes for Eveline's actual movement. She remains static. She may never even actually have shown up for her rendezvous with Frank, which accounts for the narrative's consistently inert style and tone. Even loud cries such as "Come! Come!", "Eveline! Evvy!" (*D* 34) sound muffled and nightmarish rather than determined and lusty. If she took not one step out of her

room in the final scene, we assume a predestined scenario. That's why Weir calls it a "narrative break" or "gnomonic moment" (345).

Probing deeper, I would suggest Eveline's awakening body as a potent gnomon. So far, no one has paid attention to her body as an alternative medium for her subjectivity. How does her body function? At the North Wall station, we find Eveline at the verge of psychic frenzy, dumb-struck. Her extreme anguish is expressed by her body which becomes "pale and cold" (*D* 33). Pressed, her internal organs revolt against the distressful confusion. Unable to cope with the situation and decipher Frank's discourse, Eveline reaches the extreme panic and her body explodes. Nausea ensues. Her body senses disaster: "A bell clanged upon her heart" (*D* 34). In extreme tension, her mind cannot work properly, while her body expresses her agony. This naturally results because her physical sensation has been keenly aroused by the tryst with Frank. Her body reflects her mental state. The 'nausea in her body' (*D* 34) is highly gnomonic, confirming her subjectivity. Eveline's pain is captured starkly by the image of a caged animal behind bars. The whole narrative has been calibrated to culminate in the lasting image of Eveline as helpless creature, and readers are unsurprised. Her vegetation, her quiet deterioration has been looming from the first. At last Eveline enters her visions, not through her mind but through her body. Such a state of trance, however, can hardly substitute for her escape, nor can it be her epiphany. Ironically, Eveline's ultimate behaviour, either conscious or unconscious, resists Frank. Her gnomonic body determines this. That is my argument. Superficially, "Eveline" can seem a boring, frustrating story. To focus, however, on her bodily message, the story challenges. Eveline cannot perceive her trapped condition and wavers between her plan and her constraints. But her body tells. Where her mind fails, I would argue, her body expresses, conveying mounting mental and emotional frenzy, diving Eveline in the end. My research demonstrates how her body reacts to Frank's amorous initiatives, and unexpectedly reveals her agony and terror when language fails.

Then comes my analysis of "Clay" in which I try to show how Maria's playing surrogate mother bring about disturbance in Joe's family. Like so many Modernist

texts, Joyce's works often resist interpretation. They subvert: a statement in his text tends to connote or imply far beyond what it literally means. Numerous narrative gaps, ellipses, absences, omissions, silences interrupt. Thus, reading "Clay" is challenging, despite its apparent transparency and simple structure. An "informed" reader, therefore, keeps returning to the text, and exerts his imagination to delve into what is "unsaid" in the text, the "unwritten" narrative. Ironically, such a textual indeterminacy stimulates the reader's imagination, and his real interpretive task is recovering the "unwritten" text. If he finds gnomonic, missing parts from the text, his reading process will prove creative and geometrically complete.

Countless interpretations of "Clay" exist. For this latest to be creative, or even aesthetically pleasing, it must reach beyond the hitherto accumulated readings. To find fresh meaning, this research takes narrative indeterminacy as a starting point and seeks to fill narrative gaps, and connect the written and unwritten parts. Both a creative and an informed imagination is called for: creative, because uncovering the "unwritten" text needs imagination; informed, because this imaginative act must be controlled by literary convention and the written text. This highlights the reader's, rather than the author's, role as text interpreter or the ultimate determiner of meaning. The narrative surface of "Clay" is transparent and the narrator, comprehensible. The perceptive reader, however, questions the narrator's reliability and senses the discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. The creative reader discerns the limited, rather than omniscient, perspective of reporting Maria. Her narration is disoriented, even misleading at times. The narrator's unreliability escalates when he introduces Maria in a language befitting her vocabulary and speech. The narrator "uses Maria's own presumed language to emphasize her willful evasion of reality" (Williams 449). With such a narrative situation, the reader should be wary of his interpretation, deciding what to believe and what to suspect.

Maria feels life around her goes swimmingly because she is simple-minded and unable to penetrate her illusions. In Maria's limited view, everything is problem-free on Halloween if she believes all troubles will be made right. Such an

attitude can be an “ideological veiling of reality” (Williams 451). A sensitive reader, however, repeatedly detects the characters’ emotional balance breaking and recovering throughout the evening. Despite Maria’s good intentions, she turns out to be the very agent who spoils the festivity of the Halloween Eve. How does that happen? All the turbulent emotional undercurrents of the evening, I argue, is subtly interrelated with ‘the unspeakable’ part of the Donnelly’s. Inadvertently but repeatedly Maria refers to such a gnomonic part of the narrative. Maria’s pitiful self-deception continually disturbs the Donnelly family. She knows not who she is, nor can she objectively recognize her woeful, social as well as economic, situation. We hear, she used to work as a baby-sitter for Joe and Alphy. After the brothers’ breakup, Maria, with no place to go, gains a position in a correctional laundry or ‘laundered whorehouse’ (Norris 209) run by Protestants. Working with ex-prostitutes, Maria’s social status is among the lowest in Dublin. She also has no family to live with. Maria is a lonely, old, impoverished, laborer. However, she never betrays such sentiments. The Donnellys may have nice personalities but she never suspects that they might find her an outsider, a nuisance. That is the ‘unwritten’ narrative. Events that Maria neither expects nor understands continue that evening. Despite Maria’s compliment about Joe’s ‘nice’ personality, he becomes temperamental and abruptly takes offence by mid-evening, and bursts into tears in the end. Maria fails to see through Joe’s double personality. When Joe explains and laughs away what happened in his office, Maria neither comprehends nor laughs. When no one finds a nutcracker, Joe, “nearly getting cross over it” (*D* 100), abruptly cries out for Maria’s sake. Maria, again, feels upset. She wants no nuts. She wants solitude. But Joe insists she have a stout instead. Superficially, his behaviour looks kindly toward his childhood baby-sitter. Maria, however, feels uncomfortable with his excessive generosity. Worse, she can’t understand why she should be the object of annoyance and concern. The reader wonders if Maria really is the welcomed guest she naïvely imagines. When everybody welcomes her, with “*O, here’s Maria!*” (*D* 99), ironic exaggeration seems to hide their true feelings.

This interpretation fits. Soon afterwards, Joe curses his blood brother he broke

up with long before. Inadvertently, with good intentions, Maria refers to Alphy. This inflames Joe who pours oaths on him: “God might strike him stone dead if ever he spoke a word to his brother again” (*D* 100). Whether Joe’s anger stems from his deep-rooted brotherly feud or the simple fact that it is mentioned on All Saints’ Eve is hard to tell. Furthermore, does the fact that it was brought up by none other than Maria irritate him? If so, his quick temper that evening is understandable. Maria is arguably related somehow to the enmity between the brothers. This is also ‘unwritten’ text, the gnomonic part, so to speak. The reader’s imaginative interpretation to fill the gnomon, however, must be controlled by the ‘written’ text. Otherwise, the reading process, as Iser warns, may be inconsistent and subjective (276).

Joe may feel emotional *catharsis* in pouring out vengeful feelings toward Alphy whom he disowns as his brother. But Maria is again trapped in a contingent situation, and knows not what else to do but apologize for mentioning the matter. Maria’s mention of ‘the unspeakable’ in the family and Joe’s lost temper are highly contingent. That Maria mentions Alphy in the middle of the night shows she thought about the uncomfortable issue all evening because the ‘break-up’ is still painful in her memory (Ingersoll 74). We do not know what has caused the Donnelly brothers’ break-up. We just know the brothers landed her a work-and-board position *after* their falling out. Arguably, they could stay no longer with Maria. Hearing Joe say “Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother” (*D* 96), we surmise she is more than a baby-sitter. At this point, Maria is connected to Joe and Alphy’s blood mother, a gnomonic character absent in the narrative. Strangely enough, Joe and Alphy’s mother goes unmentioned. She *is* a gnomon in the story while Maria plays the role of ‘maternal surrogate.’ Granting Joe’s confession is no more than a causal utterance to please Maria, Joe’s sentimental attachment to his former nanny irritates Mrs. Donnelly (Ingersoll 81). Maria cares so much for the Donnelly brothers we suspect if she may still play their mother unconsciously. Unconsciously she is trying to fill up the position of a missing mother for the Donnelly’s. She never suspects that “she has become *something like*

a family member, without actually being one" (Ingersoll 73), which somehow relates to the still unresolved break-up. The surrogate-mother, however, brings emotional trouble to Joe. Unawares she "rub[s] him the wrong way" (*D* 100). Advancing our gnomonic argument, we hazard to wonder if Maria is the very agent of their break-up. Leonard also casts doubts by supposing "the breakup of the home was caused by [Joe's] rivalry with Alphy for Maria's recognition" (Leonard 198). But we should leave it there at the most extreme scenario imaginable. One more step, and our interpretation goes out of the control, the range, of the 'written' text. Then our interpretation risks becoming solipsistic or relative, as Fish warns (531).

Beneath the smooth narrative surface, deep currents of anger, failure, anxiety and bewilderment flow among the characters. Out of the blue, Joe is pushed into emotional turbulence, from outbursts of anger, pacifying tears caused by Maria's heedless reference to Alphy and then her acquiescent singing. He cannot stay sober: he imbibes stout and wine all evening. When Maria finishes singing, "Joe was very much moved" (*D* 102), the narrator reports, bursting into tears. What sort of tears? Does Joe really appreciate Maria's song? Hardly. Joe's tears may be self-pitying 'idle tears' for 'the long ago' (*D* 102). Or Joe, feeling compassion for Maria's vulnerability, feels apologetic toward her. Whatever the reason, the reader feels deeply touched by Joe's breakdown. Joe's son is called Alphy, named after his own brother he so hates. How sadly ironic must be the relationship between the brothers?

We can also make a gnomonic analysis about Mrs. Donnelly. She, with reserved manner, succeeds in hiding her genuine feelings all through the evening. But her polished improvisational behaviour does not guarantee the authenticity of her feelings. Mrs. Donnelly may not be as she appears. She may be a generous lady or one hiding her gut feelings through polished speech and manners. If Maria, contrary to her expectation, is an unwanted guest, Mrs. Donnelly's sophistication is suspect. Kenner, and I as well, doubts Mrs. Donnelly's emotional honesty in saying she "has eased [Maria] into the laundry and one may suspect will soon ease her into a convent" (57). Mrs. Donnelly skilfully cloaks her knowledge of Maria's

pitiable situation with mock-kindness (Chaudhry-Fryer 322). Did Maria ever appreciate Mrs. Donnelly's kindness? No, not at all. She never refers to Joe's wife by any name but 'Mrs. Donnelly' (Ingersoll 74). Such an 'unwritten' narrative, ironically, tells a lot about her. Yes, the plot of "Clay" is simple, and its narrative surface transparent. That doesn't mean "Clay" is a simple, thin-layered story. To prove the rich, complex potential of "Clay" as a narrative, this gnomonic reading tried to restore the 'unwrittten' part of the narrative. That "Clay" has such great gaps, unspoken parts and missing items shows its complicated depth as a narrative, and readers are positively invited to various interpretations.

Now I'm going to make a detailed gnomonic approach to "Grace". What exactly is divine grace? In Christian theology, grace is God's gift to sinners for their salvation. People, then, cannot conjure their own grace. Rather, it must be granted from without. It then may lead to transformation. In "Grace" Mr. Kernan's friends trick him into going to a retreat with them to prepare him for grace. Supposing Mr. Kernan a "fallen man," literally and financially, they lead him toward spiritual regeneration; "we're going to make [Kernan] a good holy pious and God-fearing Roman Catholic" (168). Are they serious? Absolutely not. What, then, is the story all about? The theme, Sonja Bašić suggests, is the very lack of what is mentioned in the title (359). Grace is absent in the whole narrative. Neither Kernan nor his friends are interested in God's grace. Scoundrels as they are, they are particularly in need of grace to purify themselves. Yet they don't earnestly bring themselves to such a spiritual cleansing, which, together with Father Purdon's sermon, leaves the story inconclusive and ambiguous. That's why Bašić pays close attention to the ending which she supposes is too abrupt.

Yet I start my argument by proposing that grace does exist not overtly but hidden in the form of host. Jesus, the distributer of grace, exists as a gnomonic character in the narrative and continues to illuminate the darkness of Dublin. Before mentioning a small red light that shines in the Sanctuary, consider Father Purdon's sermon. The sermon proves highly compromising and even badly disorienting. First, he points out the Christian mission to live unworldly lives in a secular world. The

participants are flattered when Father Purdon calls them 'the children of the light' (*D* 171). Are they so different from 'the children of this world?' I doubt it. Most prove worse than the latter: pawnbrokers, money-lenders, cheats, police-informers, and business failures. Instead of comforting, Father Purdon should have challenged their self-complacency, and preached that they cease worshipping Mammon. Second, Father Purdon's message is delivered through mercantile metaphor. Calling himself their 'spiritual accountant,' he talks 'as a man of the world speaking to his fellow-men' (*D* 172). Father Purdon's easy-going view of the Gospel suits Kernans' friends. Thus, they help circulate the commercialized Gospel among Dubliners. Third, Father Purdon's sermon is mainly nonsense, presenting Jesus Christ 'as a very understanding master, asking little, forgiving much' (Burgess 42). Jesus is compassionate only with those who humbly repent their failings, not with those who exhibit 'manly' rectitude. Are spiritual matters open to manly frankness? Far from it. Father Purdon's retreat stealthily displaces spiritual values with commercial logic. His commercialized salvation is based on business ethics (Schneider 411). If the retreat brings no 'spiritual renewal,' it becomes 'moral simony.' He thus proves himself a religious populist and the participants a 'nice collection of scoundrels' (*D* 160). Both Father and laymen are, I suspect, unfit for divine grace. Thus, the whole narrative abruptly ends in mid-sermon. We never know if Kernan and his friends are affected.

From the start, I have suspected the retreat's authenticity. I wondered if any spiritual renewal occurred among participants. Nowhere in the narrative, however, can I find any earnest spiritual cleansing or rejuvenation. Kernans' friends suppose attendance in a religious affair guarantees forgiveness, just as they want. And Father Purdon satisfies their self-complacency with his 'friendly' talk in a 'manly' tone. He is 'selling the promise of grace' in a 'friendly' manner (Ingersol 113). The retreat, then, is not spiritual but rather businesslike. The Father has become a spokesman of the institutionalized Church, delivering a 'commercial' message while Dublin businessmen mouth confessions, never seriously considering their iniquities.

Spiritual Dublin looks dark and hopeless. Is there no beacon? A ray of hope

indeed twinkles in the dark. Kernans' friends, seated in the Church, notice a light.

> They sat well back and gazed formally at the distant speck of red light which was suspended before the high altar. (*D* 170)

A Sanctuary Lamp signals the tabernacle, which keeps the Blessed Sacrament. Catholic faith holds that the Sacramental wafers are the transubstantiated Body of Christ when blessed by a priest. They believe Jesus resides in the tabernacle as the Blessed host, "which bestows grace upon all of them" (Leonard 286). If so, Christ the origin of grace is present, not overtly but hidden in the form of the host. Christ the Saviour resides in Dublin as a gnomonic character. That is my argument. No one has ever paid attention to this, thus far. Kernans' friends, however, look upon it *formally* without reverence, implying they are not interested in His presence or grace. Like his businessmen friends, Kernan has no wish to be transformed.

Once again, the narrator returns to the 'red light.' Father Purdon looks at it this time.

> Father Purdon knelt down, turned towards the red speck of light and, covering his face with hands, prayed. After an interval he uncovered his face and rose. (*D* 171)

Unlike the congregation who merely see the Sanctuary Lamp, Father Purdon kneels toward it and makes a short prayer. He concedes God's presence in the tabernacle and his prayer is truly devoted. But his choice of verses, sermon contents, and interpretation of the Gospel are so eclectic, even unorthodox, that we question his commitment as a priest. Rather, he seems to peddle a secularized Gospel and a 'commercial' Christianity for businessmen. This means the Irish Church has degenerated into a social organization or businessmen's club. Authentic spirituality has vanished. Institutionalized ideology has displaced God's Communion, and darkness pervades. Father Purdon, red-faced, shares his name with that of a street formerly synonymous with Dublin's red-light district. Ironically enough, he has

been elected as a guiding priest, a 'red light,' who has become 'at best ineffectual, at worst actively malevolent' (Werner 38). The metaphor of prostitution poignantly exposes Father Purdon's commercialized Gospel. The divine, gnomonic, 'red light' before the altar yet illuminates the spiritual darkness of Dublin, but that darkness fails to comprehend its presence. A gnomonic reading sheds light on the original giver of grace, hidden to sinners.

Finally I would like to try brief gnomonic readings of the other stories in the collection. "The Sisters," where the trope 'gnomon' first shows up has rich possibilities of gnomonic approach. Regarding Father Flynn's gradual breakdown as well as his final death, textual data try to hide rather than expose. Readers struggle to find out real causes of Flynn's ambiguous behaviours at his end but they are supplied with elusive information at best: i.e. the boy-narrator's highly disorienting dream-narrative, Old Cotter's euphemistic references, the Flynn sisters' misunderstanding excuses, etc. The narrative surface is very opaque and all the information given is extremely gnomonic in "The Sisters." However, the reader's role is to try to make a meaningful whole out of those gnomons. In "An Encounter," the boy-narrator feels terrorized by encountering a "queer old josser." He is a gnomic character, coming out of nowhere, who helps in a shocking way complete the boy's initiation. Jimmy Doyle and his friends' overnight drinking and gambling, in "After the Race," come to an end when an Hungarian, another gnomon in the narrative, calls out "Daybreak!" (*D* 40) to inebriate youngsters in Dublin. At the end of "The Boarding House," we find another narrative gap. Bob Doran's interview with Mrs. Mooney, we assume, is supposed to be the most embarrassing as well as intimidating one. But the passage is gnomonically omitted. Little Chandler feels frustrated about his diminished life after meeting Ignatius Gallaher, a Continental success, in "A Little Cloud." Returning home, he compares his wife's passionless picture with a rich Jewesess with "dark oriental eyes" (*D* 72) mentioned by Gallaher. The lady, however, is a gnomon because she, I suspect, is fictitious, considering Gallaher's exaggerations. But she intensifies Little Chandler's sense of being "a prisoner for life" (*D* 73). Farrington's abuse of his son at the end

of "Counterparts" can be read, as Weir points out (348), as gnomonic because it duplicates the abuse that he himself has been subjected to from Alleyne, his boss. The futility of election canvassers' debate on Irish politics is betrayed by Hynes's poem which features the patriotism of Parnell, the gnomonic character. In "A Mother," the disturbance caused by Mrs. Kearney in the middle of the concert is resolved by Mr. O'Madden Burke, a gnomonic character. He appears in the scene all of a sudden and out of nowhere. Readers have no idea who he is but he is called a 'moral arbiter.' In "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy's ego alternately deflated and inflated, as he moves back and forth from paralysis to revelation all through the night. We can read the whole process of his expansion of ego in the narrative as a geometrical movement from gnomon to parallelogram.

III

Readers of *Dubliners* feel frustrated because they encounter so many gaps, ellipses, omissions, absences, silences in the textual surface of each story. Each narrative resists readers' interpretation because it hides rather than reveals data and information. Such a tough situation Joycean readers are faced with, however, turns out to be challenging if they positively look out for keys and clues, and try to make a meaningful whole out of the elusive text. As an effective reading strategy, I suggest readers to pay keen attention to the interpretative function "gnomon" might arguably imply. While "paralysis" and "simony" carry thematic implication of the whole collection, "gnomon" might suggest ways of interpretation of the highly elusive Joycean text. I would postulate that the given narrative, with parts or data left out of the textual surface, could be called a "gnomon" and the reader's interpretation can be a process of filling up the missing parts to make it a complete "parallelogram." Such a gnomonic reading has proven very productive in analysing "Eveline," "Clay" and "Grace," to take three examples. Eveline's body and her newly awakened sexuality turn out to be a strong medium to resist Frank's doubtful

discourse. Her body, a "gnomon," starts to tell at the end of the narrative when language fails. In "Clay," Maria's surrogate mothering of Joe and Alphy can possibly be the cause of uncomfortable emotional undercurrent for the Donnellys. Ironically, however, Maria is the only one who couldn't sense she is rubbing in the wrong direction. Joe and Alphy's biological mother, absent in the narrative, is highly gnomonic but obliquely directs an alternative reading. In "Grace," the Blessed Host placed in the tabernacle, illuminates the spiritual darkness of Dublin but no one, Father Purdon as well as Kernan and his commercial friends, recognize this. Such a gnomonic reading of the Sacrament is quite a new interpretation. Yes, Joycean readers fill the narrative gaps with creative imagination, and construct new versions of stories on their own. But how far can their interpretations be extended? To avoid idiosyncrasy and misreading, however, a reader must balance what is said and what is unsaid in the text, because "the reader's activity of filling gaps is 'programmed' by the text itself" (Suleiman & Crosman 25). A gnomonic reading is to find out the "programmed" parts of the text and make it a complete whole. To fill the textual space left unsaid, the reader should try to pay attention not only to what's happening but to the subtle mood, ironic perspective, unconscious repression, etc. in narrative. True, the concept of "gnomon," as well as its potential as an interpretative strategy, still remain controversial. However, one thing is clear: its application to Joycean texts provides highly illuminating alternatives of reading, thus expanding the textual possibilities hitherto undiscovered.

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Abstract

From Gnomon to Parallelogram:
A Geometry of Interpretation in *Dubliners*

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This paper tries to clarify the concept of gnomon and examine its possibility as an interpretative strategy in reading *Dubliners*. Gnomon is the part of a parallelogram which remains after a similar parallelogram has been taken away from one of its corners. Gnomon, therefore, is an incomplete parallelogram, a figure that would be whole were it not missing one of its corners. The gaps, ellipses, omissions, absences and silences in Joycean text frequently obstruct reader's interpretation. Such a textual "uncertainty" can make readers feel frustrated in their deciphering process. A gnomonic reading is an effort to fill in those missing, unwritten parts of the text, trying to discover subtly programmed as well as deftly hidden keys and clues for interpretation. Such a reading, geometrically speaking, can be likened to making complete an incomplete parallelogram, that is, a gnomon. Gnomonic approach can be highly creative, bringing about new, radical, alternative interpretations. It requires on the reader's part, however, to strike a balance between what is said and what is unsaid in the text. Otherwise a gnomonic reading can simply lead to idiosyncratic and irresponsible misreading. Understanding of gnomon as a narrative concept, as well as its applicability to reading, still remain controversial. But its practicality as a reading strategy is very challenging as well as promising because it could open up different textual interpretations hitherto unknown, as my gnomonic reading of *Dubliners* would hopefully show.

■ Key words : gnomon, parallelogram, text, uncertainty, interpretation
(그노몬, 평행사변형, 텍스트, 불확실성, 해석)

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