James Joyce Journal
Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter 2006) 141-160

A Family-Systems View of Father Flynn's Paralysis in "The Sisters"

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I

Father Flynn's physical immobility has long been treated as an important motif piecing together the entire stories of *Dubliners*. For most of Joycean critics, the priest's disease has immediately evoked the moral corruption. Burton A. Waisbren and Florence L. Walzl's 1974 medical article—"James Joyce's Symbolic Use of Syphilis in 'The Sisters'"—was on the threshold of a new enlightenment in the interpretations of *Dubliners* for the article offered a basis for eliciting the image of Irish moral degeneration from Joyce's own branding *Dubliners* as a chapter of the moral history (*Selected Letters* 83) and Dublin as "the centre of paralysis": "We propose that by the term *paralysis* in this story Joyce meant a specific disease, *general paralysis of the insane*, that is, paresis or central nervous system syphilis, and that the priest's symptoms in the final version of this story are consistent with this diagnosis" (Waisbren and Florence 758). Before the article's appearance, many critics had seen the paralysis as symbolic of Dubliners' highly limited degree of

latitude. In 1941, Harry Levin read *Dubliners* as "the annals of frustration" (30) pertaining to the "paralyzed subject" in which "The characters are arrested in mid-air; the author deliberately avoids anything like an event." John W. Corrington associated the paralysis with the harsh reality shaped within "the matrix of Dublin's dreary life" (25) in which "the venality" (15) prevails over the "spirituality." A year prior to the medical article, in the "Joyce's 'The Sisters': A Development" (1973), even Walzl phrased the purport of "paralysis" by the terms "psychological stasis" (388) and "total moral and spiritual insensitivity" hindering "the development of its people, making them progressively less sensitive and paralyzing their vitality and will" (386). Before the 1974 article by Waisbren and Florence, in sum, there were few of critics who had conceived Joycean "paralysis" as based upon the images of moral corruption.

After the 1974 article, putting emphasis on the Irish moral corruption in Joyce's days by regarding the nature of Father Flynn's paralysis as a sexual disease, many critics have accepted the notion of the priest's paralysis as resulting from syphilis. For example, Suzette A. Henke embraces the syphilitic priest to expose the "Irish decadence" (12) mirrored in a "'nicely polished looking-glass' of moral opprobrium": "[Father Flynn's] [d]eath comes as a climax to protracted paralysis—a condition that might, ironically, have been symptomatic of tertiary syphilis" (16). Margot Norris also takes the "unwholesome[1)] priest" (19) into her deconstructive reading of *Dubliners*: "The argument [by Waisbren and Walzl] is not unconvincing, particularly given Joyce's early admiration of Ibsen—the author who dared make syphilis and its concealment the subject of the drama *Ghosts*" (19).

My reading of "The Sisters" is to return to the paralysis theme as "the annals of frustration" or "psychological stasis" as suggested by Levin and Corrington prior to the medical article by Waisbren and Walzl. In doing so, I will read "The Sisters" as mimesis of the Irish familial relationships in a dysfunctional way of interactions by exposition of the way in which Father Flynn is adapted to his domestic environment. In the letter of 29 August 1904 to Nora Barnacle, Joyce's remark on her mother as a victim in his family system is the best example of understanding

a family member's difficulties in the context of the entire members' patterned interactions:

> My home was simply a middle-class affair ruined by spendthrift habits which I have inherited. My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father's ill-treatment, by years of trouble, and by my cynical frankness of conduct. When I looked on her face as she lay in her coffin—a face grey and wasted with cancer—I understood that I was looking on the face of a victim and I cursed the system which had made her a victim. (*Selected Letters* 25)

In the comment on his family, Joyce implies the negative transactions among family members by mutual feedback processes that make a member fall prey to family anxiety.

The family systems model differentiates itself from the Freudian psychoanalytical model. In the psychoanalytical model, the individual's mental stress stems from his or her problematic internalization of parental images (the residues of internalized objects) during the Oedipal period or after, i.e. intrapsychical aspects of mental experience—a focus is on the way in which irrational and anxiety-ridden fantasy is projected into the individual's psyche. By contrast, in the family systems model, the individual's mental stress is perceived in the context of the entire family, i.e. interpsychical aspects of the individual behavior. From the perspective of the family systems model, thus, I will direct attention at the dysfunctional interactions or communications transpiring between Father Flynn and his two sisters by taking into consideration Father Flynn's parents and his siblings' roles in giving rise to his emotional stress and later his paralysis as a psychosomatic symptom. In the family process, he has been pressured to live a successful life by parental expectations. His siblings also play a significant role in increasing his nervousness by their constant perceptions of him as the cause of family stress and frequent treatment of him as a psychotic.

Father Flynn's family is a highly enmeshed and overinvolved family whose members are overly interdependent on each other as they mutually infringe on their

autonomy and independence. In *Psychosomatic Families*, Salvador Minuchin *et al*. find that children's anorexia nervosa is connected to family organization and functioning. They demonstrate, in the case study of Deborah Kaplan whose anorexia nervosa is extreme, that all of her family members contribute to her physiological symptoms by constant repetitions of ineffectual parental authority and escalating filial resistance:

> These three members of the Kaplan family [threesome of father, mother, and child] are all seriously troubled individuals. But when one watches the family together, it is the futility of the triad's interactions that impresses the most. The family repeats stereotyped transactions, no matter how many times they prove ineffective. There is no resolution or closure, and no escape. The Kaplans are trapped in a Sisyphean pattern. (8)

Father Flynn's physical immobility as a psychosomatic symptom stems from a poorly differentiated family members whose excessive togetherness intrudes on each other's thoughts and feelings. Eliza and Nannie's perception of Father Flynn as mentally abnormal and the priest's nervousness about their treatment of him as such give birth to his physical symptom. Father Flynn's paralysis is psychogenic in nature as an example of the body's response to familial stress.

II

What is highly controversial in the debate on *Dubliners*'s thematic matters is whether the paralysis theme works as a book-length theme binding together the entire fifteen stories of *Dubliners* if Dubliners' moral degeneration is instantly evoked by the priest's syphilitic paralysis. Waisbren and Walzl's theoretical basis in their argument for Father Flynn's paralysis as caused by an STD is the fact that Joyce inserted enigmatic words such as paralysis, simony, and gnomon into the later (and final) version of "The Sisters." Waisbren and Walzl argue, citing

Stanislaus Joyce, that, unlike the first version that referred to the priest's "sign of a simple schizophrenia" (760), in the final version Joyce used the term paralysis to mean the "central nervous system syphilis" for "an ambitious scheme for a whole book on this theme" by embodying "Father Flynn as a 'symbol of Irish life'":

> 13 August 1904 Jim [James Joyce] . . . boasts of his power to live, and says, in his pseudo-medical phraseology, that it comes from his highly specialized central nervous system. He [James Joyce] talks much of the syphilitic contagion in Europe, is at present writing a series of studies in it in Dublin, tracing practically everything to it. [...] [22]. (760)[2)]

Waisbren and Walzl maintain that "[t]his entry confirms a syphilitic etiology for the pathological condition of paralysis developed in *Dubliners*" (760).

Once the reader accepts the paralysis as the motif of immorality, he or she encounters an interpretive conundrum in taking the paralysis as a book-ranging theme. To what extent is, for example, the boy's disillusionment with his naiveté in the love affair with Mangan's sister morally unacceptable? Is Mangan's sister's inadvertent manipulation of the boy's infatuation with her morally wrong? Is there any moral implication in Mr. Duffy's rejection of Emily Sinico in "A Painful Case"? Is Mrs. Kearney's overprotective motherhood a moral insensitivity or a spiritual debasement? To what extent is Miss Ivors's Irish nationalism in "The Dead" based upon the moral sense of right and wrong? Most characters in the fifteen stories of *Dubliners* do not fall into what is morally wrong in light of our commonsensical understanding of what is moral and immoral.

In "Missing Pieces in Joyce's *Dubliners*," Marilyn French insightfully perused the nature of what Joyce meant by "a chapter of the moral history of Ireland," discussing the way in which the Irish self is related to the others. She objects to an allegorical reading of *Dubliners* by dividing the characters into symbolic types in which each of them represents a particular moral value:

> Because of Joyce's Jesuit education, and his claim to be writing moral history, the volume [*Dubliners*] has been interpreted as a latter-day *Piers Plowman*, offering a procession of the seven deadly sins and incarnations of saints and sinners. [...] He [Joyce] claimed he wished to nourish people *spiritually*: but what does *spiritual* mean? For many people, it implies transcendence of the world, body, and ego, and it is the qualities associated with such transcendence they bring to bear as standards in Joyce's work. But if one has read Joyce's work carefully and his letters even desultorily, there is no question that Joyce was opposed to such an approach to experience. For him, transcendence of body, desire, and ego was impossible, and the effort to achieve it destructive. (443-44)

As French pointed out, not surprisingly, critics of *Dubliners* often tend to divide its characters into transcendental cultural types by pseudo-moral values such as masculine evil and feminine good. For example, Garry M. Leonard's Lacanian analysis—*Reading* Dubliners *Again*—attacks the cultural hegemony of masculinity by "an examination of the masculine gender because one cannot fully understand the desperate origin of the coercive patriarchal forces that insist women must masquerade as worshippers of the Phallic symbol (i.e. masquerade as feminine) [...]" (13).

For Leonard, thus, Farrington in "Counterparts" represents masculine subjectivity that desperately adheres to "the power of Phallic Order," constantly striving to exercise his virility through arm wrestling and through manly ogling of the anonymous dancer in the Dublin Pub, but eventually disclosing how weak he is in abusing his son. Mrs. Mooney in "The Boarding House," Mrs. Kearney in "A Mother," and Molly Ivors in "The Dead" stand for feminine subjectivity that refuses to "sacrifice [themselves] in the service of maintaining a masculine illusion" (Leonard 15). According to her, too, the characters of less feminine subjectivity such as Eveline are destined to "slavishly support the validity of the Phallic Order" (14).

As an alternative to those readings of *Dubliners* grounded in abstract moral values, French's reading seems to be closer to what Joyce meant by the "moral history" in that she discerns the stoic ethos constraining Dubliners' thoughts and

feelings: "[t]he spiritual nourishment Joyce offers in *Dubliners* is not greater awareness of sin nor greater impetus toward transcendence, but anatomization of a syndrome, a portrait of the consequences of repression and censorship (on every level, from the personal to the public" (445). At the crux of French's reading of the Irish stoicism in *Dubliners* is her affirmation of the paralysis as a symbol evocative of stereotyped interactions generated by "both religion and propriety" (445): "Inability to act is paralysis" (445). In "He Was Too Scrupulous Always," Brian A. Bremen notes "the paralyzing effects of [Father Flynn's] scrupulosity" (55). Redirecting a focus from the priest's physical condition in the etiology of his paralysis to his mental condition, Bremen sheds light on the religious scrupulosity of Father Flynn as "a very real, potentially paralyzing, mental disease" (63). His point is that the priest's nervousness is linked to his religious scrupulosity that, eventually, leads to his physical immobility: "it is his scrupulosity that provides the link between his nervousness and his paralysis [...]" (63). In short, Bremen's psychosomatic view of paralysis is that mental stresses generate physical symptoms. It is, for Bremen, Father Flynn's obsessions with the broken chalice that develop his paralysis: "we finally discover that 'it was that chalice [Father Flynn] broke. . . . That was the beginning of it' [...], we realize that the priest had sinned, and that his sin was the simony of attributing more spiritual significance to the chalice than it should have had" (62).

Bremen's view of the priest's psychosomatic symptoms remains psychoanalytical, though. As a Freudian psychoanalyst does, he draws attention to the *intrapsychical* phenomenon whose focus is on the individual's inner struggles: "Modern explanations of scrupulosity focus on the ego's being torn apart by the excessive demands of the superego and the id, leaving the conscious ego unable to form judgments" (63). By contrast, my view of Father Flynn's paralysis is drawn to the systems thinking whose focus is not on the individual but on the individual in context, i.e. the *interpsychical* phenomenon that is observed in interpersonal transactions.

Textual evidence reveals that Father Flynn has displayed extreme nervousness from his childhood. The initial version of "The Sisters" offers a few glimpses of

James Flynn's (i.e. Father Flynn's) introversive nature during childhood, which made him highly vulnerable to retention of anxiety and inordinately sensitive to the changing environments:

> Not that he was anyway mad, as you know yourself: but he was always a little queer. Even when we were all growing up together he was queer. One time he didn't speak hardly for a month. You know, he was that kind always—. (250)[3)]

Eliza restrains more revelation of her brother's boyhood, but it is clear that Father Flynn suffered from chronic anxiety even before he entered the priesthood. Another remark by Eliza on her brother confirms that Father Flynn's anxiety was a lifelong one: "[H]is life was, you might say, crossed" (17), the remark that appears in all versions of "The Sisters."

What remains elliptical is the cause of the priest's chronic anxiety during his childhood. As Don Gifford remarks, "The fact that Father Flynn was educated at the Irish College [in Rome] implies that he was regarded as an outstanding candidate for the priesthood, the more remarkable since he was born in the lower-class neighborhood of Irishtown" (31). The young James Flynn must have been motivated by his mother or father to enter the priesthood as a way to move up to the upper class and overcome poverty, as Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was inadvertently advised to enter the priesthood by his mother.[4)]

In *New* Dubliners, Alexander J. Humphreys depicted the socioeconomic conditions of Irish personalities with a study of how the Irish from traditional rural communities were urbanized in the capital city of Ireland from the turn of the century through the 1960s. The book's focus is on the impact of urbanization on the Irish with traditional rural values, but the Irish family life sketched by Humphreys alludes to family relationship patterns that might structure Father Flynn's family and cause his anxiety. Humphreys features the Irish rural families at the turn of the century with families of emotionally charged relationships:

> The uniquely advanced age at which parents marry and accede to control of the farm, and in turn relinquish it to their succession, has profound and singular effects upon the obligations of filial piety. It makes for a pronounced glorification and veneration of the aged, especially of the authority of the father and the affection and devotion of the mother. And this, in the total situation we have described, leads to the sanctioned expectation of prolonged celibacy, subordination to parental control and, in special circumstances, of the sacrifices of individual achievement through occupation and through marriage in the interests of family welfare. This has resulted in the creation of a process of socialization of the children which instills in them a deep sense of inferiority, of submissiveness and many other notable juvenile traits. (23)

It is not coincidental that Joyce published "The Sisters," which was later to become the first story of *Dubliners*, in *The Irish Homestead* magazine at the request of George Russell for writing a short story of something "simple, rural?, livemaking?, pathos?" (*Letters II* 43). In that sense, *Dubliners* may be seen as the mimesis of the urbanized Irish life of rural tradition. In the same sense, I will read Joycean aphorisms such as the "special odour of corruption," "hemiplegia," or "paralysis" as evocations of dysfunctionally stereotyped interactions among family members, which ultimately refer to the Irish phenomenon of the unusually intensive parent-offspring relationship, the resultant inhibited young generation, and the family system itself as the matrix of intense mental pressures preventing youngsters' healthy growth.

Conceptualization of family from a systems perspective[5] has sprouted up since the late 1950s, as stimulated by the general systems theory. Seeing family as a part of social system, i.e. a fundamental social system, in the 1950s Gregory Bateson and his colleagues hypothesized about particular communicational patterns giving rise to schizophrenia in relational interactions between family members, the "double-bind situation" in which a child ultimately leading up to schizophrenia develops acute anxiety when he is exposed to a paradoxical situation by the "contradictory messages" (254)[6] that are verbalized, or gesticulated, by their family members.

Since the family is the matrix of personality, we could infer from an understanding of the Irish rural tradition that Father Flynn's introversion may have been driven by the Irish family system, as Humphreys observed. In this family system, a child grows up in an extremely enmeshed system; the child is raised carefully protected by parents. Parental care is expressed in expectations of the child. The child is extremely conscious of himself as one who does or does not fulfill the expectations of his parents. Gradually, he attains the conditions of hesitation to initiate action and an increased dependency on parental assent. He is socialized to act as the family expects and forced to feel tremendous responsibility for not embarrassing the family in the eyes of community. He begins lacking confidence in the self and develops an obsessive concern for perfection. He turns into a person dependent on parental assessment and highly loyal to family values, making him more and more timid.

This hypothesis by the family systems view is valid in that Father Flynn's excessive worries about perfection cause extremely conscience-stricken behaviors. Concerning his vocation as a priest, "[h]e was too scrupulous always" (17). During excessive fulfillments of the "duties of the priesthood," in his later life, he faces an incident intolerable to him as a perfectionist: the broken chalice. That the chalice was broken during his mass intensifies his anxiety to the extent that he is unable to bear it. The very stressful situation of the incident activates his physical immobility—paralysis:

> It was that chalice he broke. . . . That was the beginning of it [paralysis]. Of course, they say it was all right, that it contained nothing, I mean. But still. . . . They say it was the boy's fault. But poor James was so nervous, God be merciful to him! (17)

The unacceptable level of the growing nervousness drives him into psychosomatic reactions: "That [the broken chalice] affected his mind, she said. After that he began to mope by himself, talking to no one and wandering about by himself" (17). The extreme avoidance of the others, the withdrawal from reality, and the

indulgence in self-contained inner world are indications of mental stresses accompanying bodily symptoms.

As Donald T. Torchiana remarks, the Flynns are all victims of their life obsessed with moving up to a more prestigious position in society:

> [...] the title ["The Sisters"] alone suggesting the ruin that has fallen not only on Father Flynn but also on his sisters as well. Apparently, a promising boy from a poor family in Irishtown, especially if he went to the Irish College in Rome, might expect two of his sisters to earn money and help put him through his training. After serving as his housekeepers when he went up the ecclesiastical ladder, his sisters might expect their rewards: a decent chance at good marriages. (22)

Father Flynn must have strived to live up to the expectations imposed by his family on him. Given that kind of interactive patterns in the Flynn family, his unmarried siblings as well as his parents, too, must have regarded their brother's outstanding education as their own achievement. Their unchanging admiration for Father Flynn brings them to care for the disabled brother at their great sacrifice during his paralysis:

> He used to sit in that stuffy room for the greater part of the day from early morning while Nannie (who was almost stone deaf) read out the newspaper to him. His other sister, Eliza, used to mind the shop. These two old women used to look after him, feed him and clothe him. (246)[7)]

The two spinsters of the Flynn family are perhaps the priest's siblings whose commitment to their brother might be correlated to their mother's favoritism towards the eldest son. In addition, Eliza's intellectual deficiencies, which are found in her malapropism—"the *Freeman's General*" (16), and Nannie's autistic wordlessness bear out their long-lasting struggles with the intolerable and frightening psychotic brother on their part. Nannie and Eliza's frequent ellipses in recounting their brother's "crossed" life demonstrate their constricted personalities coming from their long maladjustments in the dysfunctional family.

Viewing Father Flynn's development of the intensified nervousness as a process in the feedbacks of family anxiety enables us to make a family-system-oriented interpretation of the puzzling story title, "The Sisters," by examining the roles Father Flynn's siblings play in his later life in development of an inhibited personality and of a psychogenic paralysis; the sisters' roles in their brother's retention of symptomatic anxiety are perhaps what Joyce aimed at when the first story was entitled "The Sisters." A dominant explanation for the rationale behind why the story was entitled "The Sisters" is that the sisters are representative of Irish sterile life. Walzl maintains, for example, that Joyce kept the title "The Sisters" in order to make a typology of Irish people trapped in hopelessly routine life:

> The conclusion of "The Sisters" has many suggestions of vacancy, hollowness, and idleness, and this scene specifically associates emptiness with the sisters. [...] The hearth is a most ancient traditional symbol of the home, family, and domestic love, and by this very tableau Joyce indicates the emptiness of family life and of bourgeois society in Ireland. It is an epiphany also of the barrenness of the lives of the sisters as individuals and types. ("Joyce's 'The Sisters'" 407)

> The reason why Joyce retained the title "The Sisters" is apparent. Throughout Joyce, the part represents the whole. *Dubliners*, as a book and as a title, pictured Ireland in the image of a city. "The Sisters" is synecdoche too. As characters, the sisters represent the Irish people in type in typical situations. Despite the title, it is Father Flynn who most engages the imagination. (408)

The exposition by Walzl of Joyce's preservation of "The Sisters" as a story title is problematic in three ways: first, she fails to discuss a connection between Father Flynn's paralysis as a book theme and the sisters—they are, too, a story title; second, she treats the priest's paralysis as symbolism by showing that all of *Dubliners*'s characters like the sisters are symbolically paralytic; third, she tends to reduce the sisters to abstract ideas by seeing them as particular types representing particular ideas.

Unlike the Walzlian interpretation that focuses on individuals by abstract

categorization of them, a family-systemic view offers an understanding of the environmental context of a particular character. In "The Sisters," that is to say, development of the priest into an extremely nervous person is rooted in the intensive relationships of action-reaction basis between the sisters and the priest. The sisters' anxiety about their brother's unusual personality increases his dysfunction in a familial environment. In short, the "family projection process" intensifies Father Flynn's anxiety. The term "family projection process,"[8] taken from family-systems theory, refers to the mechanisms in which a family member with a symptom attunes his perceptions to what the other family members, who function as "his blamers," feel and think about him. The sisters unduly care for their brother's unusual personality and treat him as a patient, as evidenced in Eliza's statements about her brother: "[H]e was always a little queer" (250) and "He was too scrupulous always" (17). The sisters have unwittingly diagnosed their brother's small behavioral inadequacies and, by degree, treated him as if he is really ill. As Father Flynn accepts the family projection in which his siblings look upon him as a mentally ill person, he has become functionally more inadequate, having held intensified anxiety. The family projection attains its maximum when the incident of the broken chalice occurs since it embroils all the family members in anxiety.

The sisters become increasingly worried about their brother's potential nervous breakdown because they always believed their brother is mentally ill. They unnecessarily pay attention to his unusual mental condition, treating him as if he is a patient, with a placatory tone, saying "it [the broken chalice] was all right, that it contained nothing. [...] it was the boy's fault" (17), but it causes more anxiety on the side of Father Flynn, driving him into an unbearable condition and making him hate them: "He had an egoistic contempt for all women-folk and suffered all their services to him in polite silence" (247). The high level of anxiety of Father Flynn, intensified by the broken chalice, acts out psychosomatic symptoms:

> So then they got the keys and opened the chapel and the clerk and Father O'Rourke and another priest that was there brought in a light for to look for

> him. . . . And what do you think but there he was, sitting up by himself in the dark in his confession-box, wide-awake and laughing-like softly to himself? (18)

Father Flynn's psychosomatic symptom is a psychological tactic in which he attempts to escape from his unbearable condition.

III

From the perspective of family systems, Father Flynn's paralysis is a psychosomatic symptom, which is construed as a mode of physical response to mental stress. "The Sisters" foregrounds "family anxiety" in which any family member's stress puts all the other family members in a vortex of collective anxiety, occasionally making a vicious cycle of attack and counterattack on each other in either an implicit or explicit way. As Augustus Y. Napier and Carl Whitaker say, in *The Family Crucible*, "[t]he family function[s] as an entity, as a 'whole,' with its own structure, rules, and goals." What stands out in the Flynn family's structural patterns of mutual interactions is an emotionally close bond between them, making them live up to mutual expectations for each other: Father Flynn fears his potential failure to meet his siblings' wishes for him to be a prestigious man; Eliza and Nannie fear their failure to meet the family wishes for them, which demanded to serve the eldest son of the Flynn family at the expense of their marriages. Napier and Whitaker remark:

> Instead of a family of [...] separate persons, there is a conglomerate person, *the* family. And instead of the members controlling the family, they are rigidly controlled by their roles in *the* family system. The family rules them all with a steel hand. This symbiotic togetherness, which is probably basically a response to stress, produces a stress of its own because of the fact that *it threatens the individuality and autonomy of the family members*. (emphasis original: 88)

The more dysfuntional family members are, i.e., the closer the emotional bond

between them is, the more the independence in their own feelings and thoughts is encroached on. The Flynn family is extremely dysfuntional in that, as they routinely calibrate themselves to others' expectations, they smother their true feelings at the cost of their individuality. In the Flynn family, we observe the family anxiety's circular effects: the influence of family on a particular family member and the influence of the family member on family.

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Notes

1) Norris means two things by the term "unwholesome," both the priest's moral corruption and the "state of un-wholeness" (18) pointing to "the narrative mysteries" in "the story's ["The Sisters"'s] disjointed narration," which makes a consistent reading impossible.
2) The quotation by Waisbren and Walzl appears in *The Complete Dublin Diary of Stanislaus Joyce*, p. 22.
3) All the citations from the initial version are taken from the 1967 edition of *Dubliners: Text, Criticism, and Notes* by Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (pp. 243-52).
4) Richard Ellmann observes that Father Flynn was modeled on an "old, paralyzed, and demented priest to whom he [Joyce] was related on his mother's side" (*James Joyce* 163). It is inferred from Ellmann's notes that the triangular relationships between Uncle Jack, his wife, and the boy in "The Sisters" mirror the familial relationships in Joyce's real life, the triad of John Joyce (his father), Murray Joyce (his mother), and James Joyce himself.
5) The patterns of the dysfunctional interactions taking place within the Irish families would never stand out without discerning the way in which they are mutually related beyond simple character analysis of individuals. The systems view is synonymous with a holistic world view or an ecological world view: an integrative understanding of the world that is an intellectual movement to perceive not the parts but the whole, not the individual but the way in which individuals are mutually related. The general systems theory emerged in the multiple areas of biology, cybernetics, engineering systems, and many others after the 1940s. In particular, the concept of the feedback loop introduced by cybernetics has had impact on other areas: element *A* affects element *B,* which then affects element *C,* which then affects element *D,* and then the element *D* affects the element *A* again, making a circular causality. In the feedback loop, element A affects other elements and, at the same time, element A is affected by the other elements. A common example of the feedback

system is a thermostat. The self-regulatory system of the thermostat controls indoor temperature by modulating into changes of outdoor temperature. If indoor temperature reaches a certain preset point, it turns on or off either heater or air conditioner. In the self-regulative system, input (temperature) affects output (thermostat) and output (thermostat) conversely affects input (temperature).

6) See "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia" by Bateson, Jackson, Haley, and Weakland. They rationalize a finding that schizophrenia "is essentially a result of family interaction" (253). They observe a typical phenomenon that schizophrenics' mothers, in particular, mask their anxiety about their children, pretending that they are loving mothers, which unbearably confuses the children. They hypothesize about a double-bind situation as follows: "In the Eastern religion, Zen Buddhism, the goal is to achieve Enlightenment. The Zen Master attempts to bring about enlightenment in his pupil in various ways. One of the things he does is to hold a stick over the pupil's head and say fiercely, 'If you say this stick is real, I will strike you with it. If you say this stick is not real, I will strike you with it. If you don't say anything, I will strike you with it.' We feel that the schizophrenic finds himself continually in the same situation as the pupil, but he achieves something like disorientation rather than enlightenment" (254).
7) The quotation is taken from the initial version of "The Sisters."
8) Grounded in the observations of the intensive family relationships in which a family member's emotional or mental stress reverberates around the entire family, Murray Bowen's theory of "family projection process" pays attention to "the symbiotic attachment between mothers and patients [children]" (214), in particular, "the cyclical nature of the symbiotic relationship in which each [family member] could at times be so close that they [are] 'emotional Siamese twins' or, at other times, so distant and hostile they repelled each other" (214) by putting the entire family in stressful situations through the process of mutual blaming and self-blaming.

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Abstract

A Family-Systems View of Father Flynn's Paralysis in "The Sisters"

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"The Sisters" has long been conceived of as an introductory story to *Dubliners*, which carries the paralysis leitmotif to incorporate the entire fifteen stories of the book. Joycean critics tend to readily connect Father Flynn's paralysis as a polymorphous concept to Joycean notion of "the moral history" by associations of a sexual disease and consequent readings of "The Sisters" as well as *Dubliners* as Joyce's moral opprobrium.

Departing from instant evocations of syphilis by the priest's paralysis, which have dominated Joycean criticism during the last decades, my reading of "The Sisters" shifts a focus from a moral judgment on the priest's paralysis to the Dublin mindset, which is based upon the Irish ethos of familial relationship coercing extremely emotional togetherness that causes him to be extremely nervous. Father Flynn's paralysis is psychogenic, i.e. a sort of psychosomatic disease—the body's response to mental stress.

His mental stress comes from the Flynn family's dysfunctional interactions. In short, the pathogenesis of Father Flynn's paralysis is a series of negative feedbacks taking place in his family. The priest's severe nervousness engendering his religious scrupulosity is both caused and causative: his anxiety is precipitated by his siblings' frequent treatment of him as mentally abnormal and, at the same time, their brother's unusual behavior causes them to be more anxious about their brother's hypersensitive personality, which in turn makes him more intolerable to their perceptions as such.

The family systems view of Father Flynn's psychosomatic disease is a divergence from a psychoanalytical view of his psychogenic symptom. The

Freudian psychoanalysis focuses on the individual by analyzing his inner psychic struggles, whereas the family systems model postulates that enmeshed family structure contributes to the development and maintenance of psychosomatic symptoms. In "The Sisters," the priest's physical immobility is attributed to family anxiety involving all the family members in a stressful situation.

■ Key words: family systems therapy, psychoanalysis, family anxiety, paralysis, psychosomatic disease, syphilis