

The Crisis of Control in James Joyce's  
*Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a  
Young Man*\*

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....for the purpose of playing,  
whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to  
hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue  
her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age  
and body of the time his form and pressure. (Shakespeare 3.2.20-4)

I seriously believe that you will retard the course of  
civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people  
from having one good look at themselves in my nicely  
polished looking-glass. (*Letters* 62)

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A major theme of James Joyce's writing is the paralysis of the Irish people caused by the monolithic influences of the Catholic Church and the British Empire. At the turn of the century, these two patriarchal institutions had cast a large net over the Irish people, and their insistence on absolute conformity, a demand which Joyce vehemently resisted, had a debilitating effect on the Irish. The Church and Crown exercised enormous control over almost every aspect of Irish society. From public life to private life, these two institutions of power worked in the background of Irish society to forge what Joyce called "the gratefully oppressed" (*D* 30). Joyce deeply resented the power exercised over the Irish by the Church and Crown but he felt that the Irish people were also partly responsible for their willing conformity to the expectations of the colonial powers which controlled them. One of the main purposes of Joyce's writing was to shock the Irish people into confronting their servitude and maybe even impelling them to resist their colonial oppressors. Joyce strove to create a "nicely polished looking-glass" (*D* vii) so that the Irish people could get a clear picture of their plight. It was Joyce's hope that if the Irish read *Dubliners*, the "scales would fall from their eyes, they would recognize their paralysis, that recognition would stimulate movement, 'a first step' towards freedom, towards 'civilization'" (*D* xii). His subsequent works, most notably, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*, also highlight the harmful effects that the Catholic Church and the British Empire have on the individuals they wish to subjugate. In this paper, I will employ a Foucauldian lens to show how the process of socialization causes children in Joyce's writing to suffer a crisis of control as they struggle against the conformity that is expected of them by the panoptic society in which they live.

## II

Over the past fifty years the word "paralysis" has emerged as a major theme in almost every critical analysis of *Dubliners*.<sup>1)</sup> Gerald Doherty states that in the

thematic readings of *Dubliners*, “paralysis” generally functions “as a metaphor for the plight of characters caught up in situations that they can neither completely comprehend nor control, and from which they cannot escape” (*Undercover* 36). While the focus of critical inquiry has largely been directed at the paralysis experienced by adolescent and adult characters in Joyce’s writing, the paralyzing influences of the patriarchal society that Joyce’s *Dubliners* inhabit actually begin to adversely affect the characters during the formative years of childhood when the patriarchal institutions are preparing children to enter society. It can reasonably be argued that the seeds of the paralysis seen in the adolescent and adult characters in Joyce’s writing were sown during their childhoods. The numerous examples in Joyce’s texts of children suffering at the hands of abusive adult authority figures has not been sufficiently linked to a cycle of paralysis that continues throughout the lives of the characters in Joyce’s writing.

In life, as in Joyce’s texts, the complex process of socializing children takes place primarily at home and in the classroom. Because children are confined to these places under adult supervision for such a long period of their lives (Min 46), it seems like a logical starting point to analyze the scenes in Joyce’s writing which take place at home and in the classroom for textual evidence of what Foucault calls

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- 1) The following critical essays all highlight the word “paralysis” as a key theme in critical readings of *Dubliners*: “Joyce’s Pattern of Paralysis in *Dubliners*” by Florence L. Walzl (1961), “‘The Sisters’ and the Critics” by Bernard Bernstock (1966), “Animadversions on Paralysis as a Symbol in ‘The Sisters’” by J. B. Lyons (1974), “‘Lying Still’: Another Look at ‘The Sisters’” by Eileen Kennedy (1975), “‘He Was Too Scrupulous Always’: A Re-examination of Joyce’s ‘The Sisters’” by Brian Breman (1984), “Undercover Stories: Hypodiegetic Narration in James Joyce’s *Dubliners*” by Gerald Doherty (1992), “Laughing in the Confession-Box: Vows of Silence in Joyce’s ‘The Sisters’” by James A. Wohlpart (1993), “The Art of Confessing: Silence and Secrecy in James Joyce’s ‘The Sisters’” by Gerald Doherty (1998), *Ulysses, Capitalization, and Colonialism: Reading Joyce After the Cold War* by M. Keith Booker (2000), and “Panopticism in *Dubliners* and *Portrait*” by Taeun Min (2004). This list, while not complete, shows the proliferation in scholarship over the past fifty years which examines the importance of “paralysis” as it relates to the lives and situations of the characters in Joyce’s short stories. See the full citations in the bibliography.

“subtle coercion” (*Discipline* 137).

While Foucault makes it clear that “power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual’s consolidated and homogeneous domination over others” (*Power* 98), as it relates to children, it can be argued that some individuals are more capable than others of exercising the power they have at their disposal. Central to Foucault’s theory of power is the belief that power is not something that an all-powerful individual possess and wields over a submissive and powerless individual or group of individuals.

He explains in *Power* that “[p]ower must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (98). With this in mind, we remember that one of Joyce’s motivations for writing *Dubliners* was a hope that by reading his collection of short stories, “the Irish would come to a moment of anagnorisis or self-recognition, a recognition which would be ‘the first step’ out of the state of ‘hemiplegia’ or unilateral paralysis in which they currently existed” (*D* xi).

Joyce seems to suggest that the Irish people are as culpable for their subjugation as the British patriarchal system and the Catholic Church are for subjugating the Irish people. In “After the Race,” Joyce refers to the “clumps” of Irish bystanders as “the gratefully oppressed” (*D* 30). The children in Joyce’s texts are able to engage in exercises of power with other children on the playground, but when faced with an adult authority figure that is determined to exert his influence over them, those same children do not dare to exercise the little power they possess for fear of the physical abuse that will likely follow their overt challenge of authority. The adult male authority figure that looms over the children with a

pandybat or a stick in Joyce's stories plays an important role in the disciplinary society in which they live.<sup>2)</sup> The ceremony of punishment which the adult male authority figure presides over helps to forge "the meticulously subordinate cogs of a machine" (*Discipline* 169) who willingly conform to the expectations of the panoptic society.

Another technology of power used by the panoptic society to aide in controlling children is the covert, omnipresent surveillance system. In fact, Stanislaus Joyce wrote in *My Brother's Keeper* that the classes at Belvedere "were smaller and surveillance closer" (52). Central to Foucault's theory of power is that in a panoptic society:

...power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert.... (*Discipline* 214)

The punishing adult male authority figure cannot be everywhere. As a result, in the disciplinary society described by Foucault, and in the Dublin described in Joyce's stories, the omnipresence of surveillance is one way to scare children into complying with societal expectations even when an adult authority figure is not physically present. In imposing this intricate system of surveillance, the panoptic society aims to create a climate wherein the people actually police themselves. In *Starting With Foucault: An Introduction to Genealogy*, C.G. Prado writes that "[c]entral to the foregoing devices is the idea that 'being able always to be seen' keeps the disciplined individual subjugated.' Initially, subjugating surveillance is thought of as observation by authorized agents. But once it is appreciated that the

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2) For more information about physical punishment in Joyce's writing, see Francis L Restuccia, *Joyce and the Law of the Father* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989). Restuccia says of Joyce's works that "Dublin emerges as a redoubtable punishing environment, as one father-figure after another seems to delight in the potentially castrating activity of whipping" (3).

ever-present possibility of observation works as well as actual surveillance, it is a small step to realize that the subjects of surveillance can be made complicitous in their own subjugation. If what the subjects are made to believe works as well as actually watching them, instilling certain additional beliefs can make control complete. In other words, subjects might be made to watch *themselves*” (63-64).

Physical punishment and surveillance emerge as the primary technologies of power employed by the panoptic society to control children and train them to function “normally” in society. The children in Joyce’s writing who experience the physical pain of punishment (or even the psychological trauma of the threat of physical punishment) and who strive to avoid being detected by the all-seeing, omnipresent surveillance system suffer as a result. Longing to be free from the authority figures that control them, the children in Joyce’s writing struggle against the calculated constraints of society. While Joyce’s texts offer numerous examples of children who are consciously aware that they are being watched and who cower in fear of being physically punished, I will limit my critical examination of the crisis of control to the boy narrators in “The Sisters” and “An Encounter,” and to the scenes from Stephen Dedalus’ childhood in *Portrait*.

“The Sisters” recounts the boy narrator’s coming to terms with the death of his Catholic religious mentor, Father Flynn. The time that the boy spent with Father Flynn learning to pronounce Latin properly (*D* 5), uncovering “the meaning of the different ceremonies of the Mass and of the different vestments worn by the priest” (*D* 6), answering questions related to whether certain sins were “mortal or venial or only imperfections” (*D* 6), and the boy’s facility for learning the priests abstruse teachings caused the priest to have “a great wish” (*D* 6) for the boy. The boy’s indoctrination into the mysteries of the Catholic Church, however, is cut short by Father Flynn’s death and ironically his death causes the acolyte to feel “annoyed” (*D* 5), not because his mentor died, but because the priest’s death caused him to discover in himself “a sensation of freedom as if [he] had been freed from something by [the priest’s] death” (*D* 5). While there is not any textual evidence to suggest that the boy’s religious education was compulsory, it is noteworthy that

he experienced a “sensation of freedom” when he learned of the priest’s death. In Joyce’s stories of childhood experiences in *Dubliners*, the feeling of liberation that the children exhibit when they are “set free” (*D* 19) from school suggests that boys are imprisoned by the educational institutions that they are forced to attend.

“The Sisters” begins with the boy surveying Father Flynn’s house, gazing up at the window for “the reflection of candles on the darkened blind” (*D* 3) that would indicate that two candles had been placed “at the head of a corpse” (*D* 3). We see from the outset that the boy is already being conditioned to be a keen observer of his surroundings. In the panoptic society that he lives in, surveillance is a technology that the boy is learning to utilize for his own benefits. It is also something that he is learning to evade.

While Old Cotter pontificates about Father Flynn at the dinner table, the boy sits quietly and suffers Old Cotter’s disparaging remarks about the deceased priest. After his uncle informs him of Father Flynn’s death, the boy says, “I knew that I was under observation so I continued eating as if the news had not interested me” (*D* 3). Aware that his reaction was being studied, the boy feigns ignorance of the priest’s death and alters his behavior in an attempt to mislead the adults into thinking that the news does not interest him. Even at a young age, children in Joyce’s writing are aware that they are being carefully monitored by adults and they are already in the process of learning how to conceal their true feelings from those in power by giving a false outward appearance to the authority figures that are surveying them. The boy narrator says, “Old Cotter looked at me for a while. I felt that his little beady black eyes were examining me but I would not satisfy him by looking up from my plate” (*D* 4). Old Cotter seems to be purposely trying to get a reaction out of the boy and when the boy does not satisfy him with one, Old Cotter “finally spat rudely into the grate” (*D* 4). Old Cotter’s frustration suggests that even children are capable of exerting power over adults and of defying the authority figures that seek to accurately observe them. The boy, though not visibly upset by the opinions of the “[t]iresome old red-nosed imbecile,” has to cram his mouth with stirabout “for fear [he] might give utterance to [his] anger” (*D* 4). The

boy clearly resents having to suppress his true feelings from the observant patriarchy and he is distressed that a person like Mr. Cotter has the power to silence him simply because Mr. Cotter is older.

The ensuing conversation between Uncle Jack and Old Cotter exemplifies what the patriarchy considers “normal” behavior for young boys to engage in. Old Cotter clearly objects to the boy’s relationship with Father Flynn. He believes that such a relationship is “bad for children” (*D* 4). Old Cotter states: “let a lad run about and play with young lads of his own age and not be.... Am I right, Jack?” (*D* 4). Old Cotter seems to be implying that the boy is abnormal for preferring to engage in lengthy theological conversations with an aging priest rather than playing childhood games with children his own age. Uncle Jack quickly agrees. The boy narrator states:

That’s my principle too, said my uncle. Let him learn to box his corner. That’s what I’m always saying to that Rosicrucian there: take exercise. Why, when I was a nipper every morning of my life I had a cold bath, winter and summer. And that’s what stands to me now. Education is all very fine and large.... (*D* 4)

Old Cotter and Uncle Jack are subtly trying to impose their ideological beliefs on the boy while at the same time making him feel abnormal for enjoying his experience under the tutelage of Father Flynn. The men want the boy to play with kids his own age, be more physically fit, and not over-concern himself with education. This exercise in socializing the boy narrator to believe in the dominant patriarchal view of “proper” behavior for boys is an example of what Foucault calls “subtle coercion” (*Discipline* 136-7). In an indirect way, they are teaching the boy to conform to societal expectations and not engage in behavior that is “abnormal.”

In “The Sisters” Joyce frequently employs aposiopesis during conversations. While the unfinished sentences have the effect of making the conversations seem more realistic, they also suggest that the adults are shielding the boy narrator from the full import of their statements. As in the aforementioned quotes, the boy must



use his imagination to complete the meaning of the unfinished statements. The implication is that the boy is not old enough to be trusted with the truth and the adults censor their conversations as a result. In the panoptic society that the boy lives in, information is privileged and children are not yet able to handle the truth.

At the viewing of Father Flynn's body, the boy again reveals that he is aware of the omnipresence of the technology of surveillance in his society. After kneeling before the coffined corpse, the boy states, "I pretended to pray but could not gather my thoughts because the old woman's mutterings distracted me" (*D* 7). Conscious of being watched and knowing what behavior is expected of him, the boy pretends to pray so as not to offend or upset the other mourners.

Joyce's first portrayal of childhood in *Dubliners* highlights the boy narrator's awareness of surveillance and reveals the boy's tactics for evading the authority figures who seek to discover his true feelings. As the boy stuffs his mouth with food to prevent himself from lashing out at Old Cotter, we can infer that he deeply resents the attempt at control by the patriarchal figures presiding over the conversation. While in some respects the boy conforms to societal expectations, in the end he proves himself to be more adept at giving a false impression of conformity.

As in "The Sisters," the boy narrator in "An Encounter" also evades the omnipresent surveillance of the panoptic society he inhabits and struggles to be free from the compulsory religious education imposed on him. In "An Encounter," Joyce introduces another technology of power wielded by adults that is not mentioned in "The Sisters": the threat of physical violence for transgressing what is considered socially acceptable behavior.

Central to the boy's story is the longing to escape from the repressiveness of the society in which he lives. Because actual escape is not possible at such a young age, the boy engages in mock Indian battles with his friends every evening after school and reenacts the stories of the Wild West introduced to him by Joe Dillon. Even though the stories were "remote from [the boy narrator's] nature" (*D* 11), "they opened doors of escape" (*D* 11) which at least temporarily freed the boy's

imagination.

The Wild West stories “were circulated secretly at school” (*D* 11) and the fear experienced by the students when Father Butler catches Leo Dillon with a copy of *The Half Penny Marvel*<sup>3)</sup> causes everyone’s heart to palpitate (*D* 11). The priest’s blatant disapproval of Leo’s preference for “rubbish” written by “some wretched scribbler that writes these things for a drink” (*D* 12) and his surprise at how educated boys could read such “stuff” (*D* 12) succeeds in diminishing the appeal of reading these stories for the boy narrator. The boy narrator states, “this rebuke during the sober hours of school paled much of the glory of the Wild West for me...” (12). The priest’s rebuke only succeeds in altering the boy’s choice of reading materials; the boy’s thirst for adventure remains undiminished.

To “break out of the weariness of school-life” (*D* 12), the boy narrator, Leo Dillon, and Mahony planned “a day’s minching” (*D* 12). In *My Brother’s Keeper*, Stanislaus gives this anecdote: “In ‘An Encounter,’ my brother describes a day’s minching which he and I planned and carried out while we were living in North Richmond Street, and our encounter with an elderly pederast” (62). Leo Dillon “was afraid [they] might meet Father Butler” (*D* 12) and does not show up at the bridge to meet the other boys. The fear of being seen by Father Butler outside of school, even though highly unlikely, causes Leo Dillon to submit to the patriarchal authority which demands his attendance at school. Leo Dillon’s refusal to break the rules and skip school with his friends shows how successful the technology of surveillance is in causing individuals in a panoptic society to police themselves.

Away from the “restraining influence” (*D* 12) of school and home, the boy

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3) Don Gifford explains that this type of literature was “advertised as reform magazines that would replace sensational trash with good, clean, instructive stories of adventures for boys, what *The Union Jack* called ‘pure healthy tales.’ They featured stories of American Indians, explorers, prospectors, sailors, and travelers” (*Joyce Annotated* 35-6). Coincidentally, these stories are a perfect example of something the Church and Crown would fight to censure because the heroes are men or boys who fight against the evil forces, kill the bad guys, experience freedom, go against what society is telling them, and live independently.

narrator, for the first time, expresses his happiness (*D* 13). As soon as the narrator and Mahony are out of public view, Mahony feels comfortable pretending to be an Indian and revels in playing the part. The farther away from school and home the boys get, the less influence these two patriarchal institutions have on them (*D* 14). Even though the boys have a taste of freedom, they are never completely free from the rules imposed on them by society. Their ultimate plan, visiting the Pigeon House, cannot be carried out. They have to be home before four o'clock "lest [their] adventure should be discovered" (*D* 14-5). While they do have the power to temporarily break the rules, the boys realize that they will eventually have to return to the confining social system from which they have briefly managed to escape.

The most dramatic scene in the story takes place when the boys encounter the "queer old josser" (*D* 16) in the field. This strange man with "bottle-green eyes" represents a different type of patriarchal authority from that of Father Butler: he is someone who enjoys the ceremony of punishment and uses a stick as a means of correcting children who deviate from societal expectations. While the man's preference of education over games seems to contradict the preference of games over education expressed by Old Cotter and Uncle Jack, the queer old josser is a very deceptive individual and what he says is not necessarily what he believes.

Morris Beja's "The Wooden Sword: Threatener and Threatened in the Fiction of James Joyce" is helpful in bringing attention to various aspects of the adult male characters in Joyce who beat children with sticks. Citing numerous examples from *Stephen Hero*, *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*, Beja notes that "all Joyce's fictional heros (*sic*) are keenly receptive to the impressions created by the men of this world who carry wooden swords, the men who flourish them literally as well as figuratively and symbolically" (33). Related to the theme of surveillance, Beja also states that in the confrontation between threatener and threatened, "someone's eyes are almost always stressed—usually those of the threatener, from the stranger in 'An Encounter' with his 'bottle-green eyes' (31) to the 'green-eyed mister' of *Finnegans*

*Wake* (88). Occasionally, the focus is on the eyes of the pray, or on *both* his and his attacker's" (34). The man shows his affinity for canonical writers (i.e. Thomas Moore, Sir Walter Scott, and Lord Lytton) and seems to disapprove of Mahony who the man infers "goes in for games" (*D* 16).

The conversation moves from books to girls and the queer old josser begins to set a trap for the boys which he hopes to spring at a moment of his choosing. At first he seems to favor the idea of a boy having sweethearts, which "struck [the boy narrator] as strangely liberal in a man of his age" (*D* 16). As the man questions the boys about their experiences with girls, the boy, using techniques of surveillance, notices the man shivering and "disliked the words in [the man's] mouth" (*D* 16). The old josser becomes so excited speaking about girls that he is forced to excuse himself to masturbate.

When he returns, he reveals his pleasure in chastising boys. He says that boys like Mahony "ought to be whipped and well whipped" (*D* 17). He says that when "a boy was rough and unruly there was nothing would do him any good but a good sound whipping. A slap on the hand or a box on the ears was no good: what he wanted was to get a nice warm whipping" (*D* 17). Having "forgotten his recent liberalism" (*D* 17), the man says:

...if ever he found a boy talking to girls or having a girl for a sweetheart he would whip him and whip him; and that would teach him not to be talking to girls. And if a boy had a girl for a sweetheart and told lies about it then he would give him such a whipping as no boy ever got in this world. He said that there was nothing in this world he would like so well as that. He described to me how he would whip such a boy as if he were unfolding some elaborate mystery. He would love that, he said, better than anything in this world.... (*D* 17)

The old josser's sadistic monologue frightens the boy and he quickly gets up and makes his exit. Extricating himself from the encounter with the man, the boy exhibits behavior similar to the boy in "The Sisters." Just as the boy in "The Sisters" gives a false outward appearance at the dinner table and when viewing the

body of Father Flynn so as to confuse the patriarchal technology of surveillance, the boy in "An Encounter" gives the queer old jossler the false impression that he was calm when in reality his "heart was beating quickly with fear" (*D* 18).

While several examples of children suffering from the controlling influences of society can be seen in *Dubliners*,<sup>4)</sup> Joyce's most developed example of the crisis of control can be seen in the childhood experiences of Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait*. In *Portrait* we see how the patriarchal institutions of family and school cause young Stephen to suffer confusion and mental anguish as he desperately struggles to make sense of the world in which he lives. In *Joyce and the Law of the Father*, Francis Restuccia writes that in *Dubliners*, "Joyce exposes the repressive patriarchal atmosphere of his childhood" (9) and that in *Portrait*, "the repressiveness intensifies; the idea of punishment dominates the first three chapters" (9). Joyce's portrayal of Stephen's childhood experience shows just how embedded the various technologies of power used by the disciplinary society in Ireland were at the turn of the nineteenth century. A more complete picture of the panoptic society described by Foucault emerges in *Portrait* as the various technologies of power Stephen is forced to obey are highlighted by Joyce and their effects are described in more visceral terms.

The threat of punishment is seen from the very outset of the story when Stephen's mother promises Dante that Stephen will apologize for saying that he wanted to marry his Protestant neighbor Eileen Vance (*P* 4). This innocent

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4) Frances L. Restuccia writes in *Joyce and the Law of the Father* that "[i]t is not just a few punishing fathers whom Joyce imagined as emasculating: they seem to infiltrate every Dublin household" (5). She notes that "[a]lthough Chandler does not literally whip his son, he gives him a verbal whipping with the lash of one angry, loud 'stop!' to terminate the child's wailing" (4). Restuccia writes that in 'Eveline,' "Eveline's father used to hunt the children 'in out of the field with his blackthorn stick' [and in 'Counterparts,'] "Farrington's repressed violence, the result of Mr. Alleyne's treatment of him as well as of attendant humiliations during the course of the dreary day, must erupt, as it does, on his poor son" (5-6). The numerous examples of male authority figures physically abusing children in Joyce's writing suggest that Dublin in Joyce's time was a punishing environment for children.

proclamation, rather than being treated like the harmless wish of a very little boy, is turned into an opportunity by the maternal authority figures to force Stephen to apologize for his error in judgment. Cowering under the table, Stephen hears Dante say that if he refuses to apologize, “the eagles will come and pull out his eyes” (*P* 4). Reciting a few stanzas from Isaac Watts’ *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* wherein children are admonished to apologize or suffer having their eyes pulled out (*P* 278), Dante instills fear in the boy in an effort to teach him that Catholics do not marry Protestants. Our first glimpse of Stephen is one in which he is being given the false illusion of choice: either conform to societal expectations of “proper” behavior for Catholic boys or suffer an excruciatingly painful physical punishment for his non-conformity.

The story jumps from Stephen hiding under the table at home to Stephen hiding again, this time at Clongowes, the same Jesuit boarding school attended by Joyce. He is just six and a half years old and learning to evade the watchful eyes of the prefect of studies as he pretends to play football with the other boys. Compared to the other boys, Stephen is “small and weak” and as a result he is the victim of bullying. Stephen does not fit in with the boys at Clongowes and he prefers to sit alone in the corner pretending to watch others than to be a part of any of the groups at school (*P* 9-10). This is Stephen’s first experience away from his parents and he is desperately homesick. When a boy named Fleming notices Stephen looking sickly, he inquires about Stephen’s health. Stephen admits that he is sick, but not in the way Fleming imagines. Stephen “thought he was sick in his heart” and “[h]e wanted to cry” (*P* 10). Feeling isolated and longing for home, Stephen, like a prisoner doing time, counts the days until Christmas vacation (*P* 12).

Just as the students at Clongowes are compelled to engage in mock battles on the football field, a similar mock battle takes place in the classroom as the students are divided into two rival English armies: the Yorks and the Lancastrians. According to Foucault, this simulated warfare is a common practice in disciplinary institutions. He writes:

In Jesuit colleges, one still found an organization that was at once binary and unified; the classes, which might comprise up to two or three hundred pupils, were subdivided into groups of ten; each of these groups, with its 'decurion', was placed in a camp, Roman or Carthaginian; each 'decury' had its counterpart in the opposing camp. The general form was that of war and rivalry; work, apprenticeship and classification were carried out in the form of the joust, through the confrontation of two armies; the contribution of each pupil was inscribed in this general duel; it contributed to the victory or defeat of a whole camp.... (*Discipline* 146)

As Stephen faces off against his rival Jack Lawton, "the white silk badge that was pinned on the breast of his jacket began to flutter" (*P* 8) as he struggles to solve the difficult sum put on the board by Father Arnall. Stephen not only felt pressure to win this math battle for the Yorkist army he represented, he also knew that several students were betting on who would get first place in elements; Stephen or Jack Lawton. As he struggled to work out the sums put to them by Father Arnall, Stephen "felt his own face red" (*P* 9) and the silk badge on his chest "fluttered and fluttered" (*P* 9) due to the pounding of his fast beating heart. This type of competitive spirit, which frequently made students experience a similar anxiety felt by Stephen, was commonly practiced by the Jesuits and was "in accord with the examination system inaugurated in 1878" (*P* 281).

Stephen is overcome with anxiety again as he prepares himself for bed. As his nimble fingers tremble from fear and cold while undressing himself, Stephen goes over his bedtime ritual. He "had to undress and then kneel and say his own prayers and be in bed before the gas was lowered so that he might not go to hell when he died" (*P* 15-6). Someone, a boy at school, a priest, or Dante, has convinced Stephen that he will suffer eternal damnation if he fails to complete his devotions before the gas is lowered. Quivering on bended knees he quickly prays and is relieved when he finishes his prayers before the lights are dimmed. As the lights are lowered, however, his mind wanders to another fearful thought. He wonders, "[w]as it true about the black dog that walked there at night with eyes as big as carriagelamps? They said it was the ghost of a murderer. A long shiver of fear

flowed over his body” (*P* 16). This terrifying rumor, as farfetched as it may seem, is successful in keeping Stephen, and probably many other boys, confined to their rooms at night. By instilling fear in the boys, the panoptic authority succeeds in compelling the children to police themselves when the authority figures cannot be present. In such a repressive environment, it is no wonder that Stephen is so anxious to return home for Christmas vacation.

When Stephen finally returns home for vacation, he experiences his first Christmas dinner with the adults in his family. The Christmas dinner scene in *Portrait* shows how intertwined religion and politics were in Ireland at the turn of the century. It also highlights how differing religious and political opinions were capable of creating serious divisions among family members. The argument that takes place is between Mr. Casey and Simon Dedalus, who believe that priests should not use their positions to influence their congregations on political matters, and Dante, who believes that it is a priest’s duty to direct his flock (*P* 29-30). Despite Uncle Charles’ and Mrs. Dedalus’ earnest pleas to refrain from arguing about politics in front of Stephen, once started, the adults cannot stop (*P* 31, 33). As the argument between Mr. Casey, Simon Dedalus, and Dante escalates, Stephen becomes more and more confused. Unfamiliar with the intricacies of politics, he wonders who is right; his father and Mr. Casey or Dante (*P* 35). After Dante’s dramatic exit, Stephen, “raising his terrorstricken face, saw that his father’s eyes were full of tears” (*P* 39). What was supposed to be a pleasant evening with family in honor of Christ’s birthday, the Christmas dinner celebration quickly digresses into a bitter religious and political debate that leaves Stephen emotionally “terrorstricken” and confused (*P* 39).

When Stephen returns to Clongowes he learns that a group of boys were caught engaging in homosexual acts by Mr. Gleeson and the minister. As a result, all the boys at Clongowes are to be punished. They are to be silent in the refectory for three days and sent up to Father Barrett to be pandied (*P* 44). Outraged that they will be punished for the actions of others, the boys threaten not to come back to Clongowes (*P* 44). When Fleming suggests getting up “a rebellion” (*P* 44), “[a]ll the fellows were silent” (*P* 44). None of the boys are willing to overtly challenge



the disciplinary society they find themselves in. Stephen meditates on the violence of being flogged with a pandybat as the boys discuss the punishment likely to be administered on Simon Moonan and Tusker for their “smuggling” (P 42). The pandybat, “made of whalebone and leather with lead inside” (P 45) delivered “different kinds of pains” (P 45) depending on the sound it made. Despite feeling “shivery” (P 45) thinking about it, Stephen wondered what the pain of being hit with a pandybat felt like. Unfortunately for him, he would soon find out.

During Father Arnall's class the boys are paid a visit by the prefect of studies. Father Dolan, carrying his pandybat, inquires if there are any “lazy idle loafers that want flogging in this class” (P 49). Upon Father Dolan's entering the classroom, “[t]here was an instant of dead silence and then the loud crack of a pandybat on the desk. Stephen's heart leapt up in fear” (P 49). The fear felt in the hearts of the children is an intended reaction. The ceremony of corporal punishment administered by the prefect of studies is, after all, an exercise of ‘terror.’ According to Foucault, the aim of public physical punishment “was to make an example, not only by making people aware that the slightest offense was likely to be punished, but by arousing feelings of terror by the spectacle of power letting its anger fall upon the guilty person” (*Discipline* 58). By forcing the children to witness the punishment, the authority figures believed it would serve as a deterrent for others who wanted to behave in a similar manner.

The description of the punishment shows just how brutal and painful it is to be flogged with a pandybat. Father Dolan demands that Fleming hold out his hands. Fleming obeys and “the pandybat came down on it with a loud smacking sound: one, two, three, four, five, six” (P 50). The same punishment is administered to his other hand. Stephen's “heart was beating and fluttering” (P 50) as he noticed Fleming's face “contorted with pain” (P 50). When Father Dolan discovers Stephen not writing, he zeros in on Stephen, causing Stephen's heart to suddenly jump (P 50). Stephen is so afraid that he cannot even speak when Father Dolan asks him for his name (P 50). After explaining that he was exempted from writing because his glasses were broken, Father Dolan accuses him of being a “[l]azy little

schemer” (P 51). The visceral description of the pain experienced by Stephen is reflective of just how brutal this form of punishment is. As Stephen stands before Father Dolan and his peers with outstretched and trembling hands, he cannot even imagine the pain that is about to be inflicted on him. The omniscient narrator describes the scene as such:

A hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scalding tears were driven into his eyes. His whole body was shaking with fright, his arm was shaking and his crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air. A cry sprang to his lips, a prayer to be let off. But though the tears scalded his eyes and limbs quivered with pain and fright he held back the hot tears and the cry that scalded his throat.

—Other hand! Shouted the prefect of studies.

Stephen drew back his maimed and quivering right arm and held out his left hand. The soutane sleeve swished again as the pandybat was lifted and a loud crashing sound and a fierce maddening tingling burning pain made his hand shrink together with the palms and fingers in a livid quivering mass. The scalding water burst forth from his eyes and, burning with shame and agony and fear, he drew back his shaking arm in terror and burst out into a whine of pain. His body shook with a palsy of fright and in shame and rage he felt the scalding cry come from his throat and the scalding tears falling out of his eyes and down his flaming cheeks. (51-2)

The description of Stephen’s punishment highlights how traumatic it is to be physically punished. Aside from being physically painful, the experience of being flogged in front of his classmates causes Stephen to suffer a feeling of humiliation. Sean P. Murphy writes in *James Joyce and Victims: Reading the Logic of Exclusion* that “Father Dolan’s violent use of the pandybat on the innocent Stephen serves as a reminder of authority to schoolchildren, and it underscores the necessity of submission, regardless of logic, sense, or justice...” (93). Witnessing the punishment of Fleming and Stephen, coupled with Father Dolan’s ominous warning that he will

be back “[t]omorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” (*D* 50) serves to instill fear in the minds of all the students in the classroom. The intended result is to coerce the children to comply with what is expected of them.

### III

Joyce's stories of childhood experiences in *Dubliners* and his portrait of Stephen Dedalus's early years highlight how pervasive the technology of surveillance was in Dublin at the turn of the century. The panoptic gaze that carefully monitors children for signs of abnormality seems to cause children in Joyce's writing to suffer a crisis of control. Joyce's children are painfully conscious of being watched by authority figures in these stories and they long to escape the confining environments of school and home. By reading Joyce's stories of childhood experiences through a Foucauldian lens, we see how psychologically affected these children are as a result of their perpetual struggle to evade the authority figures who insist on their compliance with a system of oppression which the children intuitively know will restrict their freedom. Although some children in Joyce's stories prove adept at challenging the colonial patriarchal system trying to mold them into “proper” subjects, it is implied in the stories of adolescence that a large majority of children eventually submit to authority and choose to conform to societal expectations. It seems that in the end, the dual mechanisms of power (i.e. surveillance and physical punishment) succeed in forging the docile bodies that Foucault describes as products of a disciplinary society. A small percentage of children in Joyce's writing, however, are not so willing to conform. These children, like Stephen Dedalus, find themselves increasingly isolated by society and face a new crisis during adolescence, a crisis of identity. The crisis of identity involves a conscious decision on the nonconformists' part: they can either embrace their status as social outcast and be free or do what is expected of them by society and be a slave.

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**Abstract**

The Crisis of Control in James Joyce's  
*Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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This paper focuses on how British colonial institutions adversely affected the male characters in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. When pressured to conform to societal expectations, characters face a particular crisis related to the stage of life they are experiencing. In childhood, the patriarchal institutions of education and family demand that young boys submit to their authority and they use physical violence and surveillance to assure compliance. As a result of this struggle, young boys in Joyce's writing experience a crisis of control. The short stories "The Sisters" and "An Encounter" from *Dubliners* and the beginning of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* highlight this crisis. Joyce employs these masculine crises to expose the British colonial system for its oppression of Ireland, and his writing aimed to awaken the Irish people to the reasons for their own subjugation.

■ **Key words** : *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, masculinity, Foucault, punishment, colonialism, crisis, children

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