

“Who is the Cometty?”: A Mother’s Resistance to Paralysis

Hee-Whan Yun

The “public life” trilogy reduced Irish politics, culture and religion to a shambles and a farce, suggesting, in its composite picture, that “this is the Ireland that would emerge if the Irish were left to organize their own lives? (Williams 444). Set between “Ivy Day” and “Grace,” “A Mother” problematizes the reality of art and the artists’ circle in Dublin, the motivation and orientation of which were closely interrelated with the personal ambition and public zeal of the Irish Revival Movement. Joyce tries to criticize the devious convention and immoral scheming of those engaged in the management of the arts, either for economics or political causes, rather than in art itself. Most of the criticism of this story has therefore focused on the protagonist, Mrs Kearney. How can we judge her behavior? It is hard to find another example in *Dubliners* that has induced such a sharp division among the critics in their opinion of the main character. Beck and Hayman, two well-known critics of “A Mother,” stand firm in their unreserved blame of Mrs Kearney for her outrageous actions at the concert: the former posits his male-oriented argument of the assumption that Joyce is “disdainful of his chief character,” while the latter posits “a kind of penis-envy” on the part of Mrs Kearney, “a woman beyond her prime: who is “powerfully bent on social climbing.” (Beck 260, Hayman 124-30). They are more or less preoccupied with Mrs. Kearney’s outrageous behavior rather than

with her hidden psychological needs. Feminist critics like Henke and Miller provide an alternative reading, for they, placing Mrs Kearney's behavior in the frame of a power struggle between the sexes, try to judge objectively the protagonist harshly victimized by previous male critics. Both Henke and Miller, however, are far from being balanced in their judgements. For Henke still reads the whole story as a simple satire of Mrs Kearney's shrewish manner while Miller, in her efforts to construct a detailed study of Mrs. Kearney's hidden motivation, loses her critical equilibrium and intentionally overlooks the apparent coarseness of her behavior (Henke 40-41). I locate my argument between these two extremes by analyzing Mrs Kearney impartially from the inside as well as from the outside in an effort to determine whether her behavior is culpable and to what extent she is understandable.

Joyce provides us with a brief biographical sketch of Kearney and of how her desire has been repressed and in what way it seeks alternative outlets. A romanticist equipped with "high-class" education and endowed with polished "accomplishments," Miss Devlin's expectation of a "brilliant life" is repeatedly defeated when she receives no encouragement from others except "ordinary" candidates far below her standard. Here we can deduce the possible reasons for her frustration as a would-be-bride in the Dublin marriage market at the turn of the century. First, we note her "pale" complexion and the sexual charm and feminine subservience. Second, we can surmise her family could not afford to endow her with a large dowry, either. Her Cinderella complex betrays the lower socioeconomic background from which she came. The Dubliners compliment her cultural sophistication, but they inwardly ridicule her self-delusion, "loosening their tongues" about her marriage delayed. She retaliates against them by marrying a bootmaker "out of spite," repressing the desire which will ultimately determine her behavior afterwards.

A stubborn woman, Mrs Kearney revenges herself on the masculine discourse which had trampled down her maiden dream by exercising her power over domestic matters. One year is long enough for Mrs Kearney to come to terms with the disillusioning aspect of her "mismatched" marriage. Mr Kearney

is and unsuitable husband for her from the first. She therefore thinks of him as an "abstract value," as something "large, secure and fixed" — values of the "General Post Office" (*D* 139) — which means that she has been unconsciously assigning these masculine qualities to herself. (A dominant wife makes a subdued husband.) She succeeds in exercising a complete command at least in family matters, and she monopolizes and manipulates her daughter as an object for the psychological projection of her own desire.¹⁾ The coming concert therefore promises her to realize her vicarious desire for romance ("she never put down her own romantic ideas away" [*D* 134-35]) and allows her to exercise her "masculine" potential. In this sense, her interest in art, the Irish

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- 1) This is exactly the same process that happens to the Mooneys in "The Boarding House." Mrs Mooney, another dominant female in *Dubliners*, Married a man below her, eventually drives him out of her house and problematizes her Pyrrhic victory over Bob Doran and the ambiguous nature of her treatment of moral matters in "butchery" way.

Despite the behavioral pattern shared by the two militant women, and despite the enthusiasm they bring to whatever project for their mediocre daughters, whether marriage or musical promotion, it is not reasonable to categorize both of them by the same judgement. For in case of Mrs Mooney we cannot find any consideration of acceptable social norms in her treatment of moral matters. Mrs Kearney is also passionate in pursuing her objectives, but she at first tries to do so within the proper boundaries of social mores. Of course, Mrs Kearney should have behaved more decently instead of rejecting the program in the middle of the concert. Such a preposterous action is definitely to blame, but if we take into account her gradual exasperation at the irresponsible manner of the committee, she is not completely culpable (We should remember that she initially tried to control herself because "it would not be ladylike" to do otherwise [*D* 139].) If Mrs Kearney had helped to carry out the event successfully according to the program, it might have satisfied her romantic vanity, providing also a favorable opportunity for her daughter's career. In that case, however, the deplorable scheme of the committee would never have been exposed! Mrs Kearney's resistance to corruption is outrageous, but it is provocative because it challenges the deadening atmosphere of "cultural" clique in Dublin. Accordingly, we can say that her revolt against the ineptitude and deceitfulness of the Society is far more courageous than the subservient silence of the other *artistes* in the dressing-room.

Revival and even money are subsidiary to her will-to-power — to assert, to win and to manipulate.²⁾

Even before she starts the project of concert, Mrs Kearney is "political" enough to make friends with Nationalists as well as music *artistes*, multiplying her own and her daughter's "Irish connections." Self-conscious signs of Irishness include the Irish name of her daughter "Kathleen ni Houlihan," greetings in Irish after informal gatherings, an Irish piano teacher and Irish picture postcards.³⁾ Miss Kathleen Kearney has become so well-known as an aspiring musician as well as a firm believer in language movement that her mother takes it for granted that Mr Holohan will propose her for accompanist in the concert hosted by *Eire Abu* Society. Mrs Kearney's reasons for getting involved in the musical project is not clearly specified, but a close reading discloses a few plausible considerations on her side. First, she is interested in advancing Kathleen's career as a musician, which will make her daughter profitable on the marriage-market as well as on the job-market. For the evidence, we can suggest Kathleen's ongoing preparation for marriage (i.e the weekly payment of insurance for her dowry and her education in a "good" convent and at the Academy).⁴⁾ If we observe her buying dozen tickets for those "untrustworthy"

2) Hayman also points to Mrs Kearney's inverted ambition as an expression of her repressed frustration: "Unlike Molly Bloom In *Ulysses* but thoroughly Irish in this, she has sublimated her sex and turned her ivory manners and frustrations against those who she feels are her social inferiors. She is a mass of antagonisms. Superficial charm is a mask behind which the supremely competent and ambitious but frustrated woman conceals her *Wille zur Macht*. (Hart 124)

3) Mrs Kearney's determination to "take advantage of her daughter's name" originates from the title of *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, a drama written by Yeats, who actively participated in the Irish literary Renaissance.

Despite renewed interest in Ireland's original language, few people were able to speak it properly. Hence the parrot-talk in Gaelic. Miss Molly Ivors, a militant member of the Irish Movement in "The Dead," leaves Misses Morkans' party with a farewell in Irish — "*Beannacht libh*" (D 196).

4) We here recall Mr Doyle's enthusiasm for his son's education, which he thinks will bring him social satisfaction and guarantee Jimmy a successful future. His commercial

friends, monetary calculation seems likely the last thing to be considered. Second, Mrs Kearney as a romantic is interested in carrying out the concert itself, pouring her "heart and soul into the details of the enterprise" (D 136). She even snatches the initiative in organizing the concert from the hands of the "novice" Holohan, exercising power over him, and even cheering him up; "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid of it!" (D 136) Whatever her motivation may be, the enthusiasm, competence and practicality she brings to the project can hardly be dismissed as a trifle. The narrator underscores that the concert was actually organized by her: " ... in the end it was Mrs Kearney who arranged everything" (D 134)⁵.

Once at the Antient Concert Rooms, however, she finds everything disappointing at first glance: " ... she did not like the look of the things" (D 137). First, the quantity and quality of the audience turns out far below her expectation. The few that show up behave "indecorously as if the concert were an informal dress rehearsal" (D 138). Second, the opening of the entertainment is delayed by thirty minutes, making the *artistes* extremely nervous. She herself arrived at twenty minutes to eight. Third, the quality of the *artistes* proves unsatisfactory to her, and the audience diminishes as "mediocre items" follow one after another. At this point, she feels so self-complacent as not to suspect her own daughter's "mediocrity." Finally, she is exasperated by the ineptitude

calculation geared to social mobility, however, ends up spoiling his son by obliquely instigating his "international" corruption. Mrs Kearney's opportunistic propensity to make use of a cultural event in order to advance her social ends is quite similar to Mr Doyle's inverted value system.

- 5) Mrs Kearney's organizing skill makes a sharp contrast with Holohan's inability as an assistant secretary whose lack of consistency and competence is vividly shown in the first passage of the narrative where he is seen walking up and down downtown Dublin. He does not have a clear idea of what is happening on the consecutive evenings of entertainment, either. He seems rather like Corely and Lenehan in "Two Gallants," whose meandering walk reflects their frustrating situation as jobless and homeless vagrants in Dublin. True, *Dubliners* abounds in its gallery of such distracted characters as are eternally trapped in the circuit of environmental force and personal inadequacy.

and insincerity of the Society. They cannot give her clear answer concerning the abrupt cancellation of Friday performance or their reservation of talents for Saturday night. What is ironic is that the members do not know what is going on and refer everything to the Committee. A woman of quick sense, Mrs Kearney deftly reads the clumsiness of the whole affair from the vacant smile, careless manner and flat accent of Mr Fitzpatrick, secretary of the Society, as well as the limping, hurried and futile explanations offered by Mr Holohan, the assistant secretary. A woman of tact, she "said nothing and waited to see how it would end" (*D* 138).

Surrounded by such frustrating gestures as disapproval, distrust and unconcern, Mrs Kearney starts to feel alarmed and keeps her own counsel: "She thought her plans over" (*D* 139). She truly is thorough in the execution of her retaliation, for which we cannot blame her. For that matter, she seems to make the most of her potential as a subject, much more so than the other male agents in the Society who marginalize their own desires and alienate themselves from their proper needs. Miller therefore reads in the active practicality of Mrs Kearney an attempt to avoid paralysis, which she argues is threatened by the paralyzing complacency of masculine dominance in Dublin. Mrs Kearney begins her fight against the Society by asking Holohan when her daughter will be paid. Her insistence on immediate payment seems more a desperate expression of her outrage than a genuine momentary concern, because the arbitrariness and avariciousness of the Society has totally destroyed her expectation of the concert. Her anxiety is not unrelated to her desire to promote her daughter's career. She may be angry at herself for making a mistake by spending too much for the concert, because circumstantial evidence reveals that her expenses are by no means "justifiable."⁶ Seen from this perspective, Mrs

6) Out of vanity, she spends quite a lot of money on the preparations for the event: a charmeuse for Kathleen's dress, a dozen of two-shilling tickets (*D* 136) and Kathleen's new shoes (*D* 144). The bad turnout, she recognizes on the first evening, is so stunning that she starts to regret squandering so much on the concert. This is the beginning of the painful self-recognition that continues throughout course of the

Kearney's fastidious demand that one omission from the concert should not affect the full payment — eight guineas for four concerts reflects the intensity of her exasperation. When her moral shock at the deceptive manner of the committee reaches its height, all she can do is to assert to her legal rights: "I have my contract and I intend to see it is carried out" (*D* 142).⁷⁾ We wonder, however, whether the committee has any serious intention to promote the Irish culture and whether they intend to make a full payment to Mrs Kearney.

Mrs Kearney's lonely fight against the Society parallels the ongoing process of her disenchantment with the committee and the dubious character of its Irish commitment. (Epiphanies in the narrative continually arrest and expose the agonizing moments of Mrs Kearney's embarrassment, disenchantment and frustration. They also illuminate, through her adamant resistance to corruption, the devastating mechanism of the Society.) Mrs Kearney's behavior, though culpable, not only spoils the musical *soirée* but, in the deepest sense, exposes the suspicious intention of the occasion. The failure of the concert betrays the limited perspective of *Eire abu* as well as its inefficient management of the event. Going further, we suspect the corrupt morality of the Society, which denegrates the pure essence of their cultural doctrine for monetary profit. This is another form of simony. (The theme of simony, one of the recurrent themes in *Dubliners*, becomes quite dominant in the stories of "public life" as we witness political simony in "Ivy Day," cultural simony in "A Mother" and religious simony in "Grace.") Mrs Kearney's increasing vehemence in her argument against the committee reveals, ironically, her naïve vulnerability and the sophisticated manners of the members.⁸⁾ From the first, it is a battle that is

narrative.

7) Gifford raises a reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the contract which does not seem, according to him, to be a legally binding document but rather a promise of payment of certain amount of money because the concert is more or less an occasion in which a nameless artist — for example, Miss Kearney — seeks to get recognition. (99)

8) When confronted by the bad turnout of the first night, Mr Fitzpatrick, a secretary of the Society, handles the situation with marvelous equanimity as if he expected that

doomed to end up with Mrs Kearney's failure, which she recognize all too late.

If most of the narrative space is allotted to Mrs Kearney's encounter with the "cultural" brokers in Dublin and her subsequent disillusionment, her personal experience is intimately connected to public affairs and subverts in turn the false consciousness of *Eire Abu* which professes as its doctrine the promotion of the Irish Revival. Mrs Kearney's vehement debate with the committee repeatedly provides a powerful counteraction that exposes the committee's ineffectualness and irresponsibility. The most frustrating thing for Mrs Kearney in her fight with the Society is that she cannot find the actual authority who makes final decisions and takes responsibility. Hence her outburst of anger: "I haven't seen any Committee" (*D* 147). Her personal exasperation, however, unconsciously raises a serious doubt about the formation of power and its execution. In this sense, Mrs Kearney becomes another female figure in the collection who, like Mrs Mooney, militantly resists the paralysing supremacy of masculine discourse and threatens the power structure maintained by the male-dominant society. The first thing of which Mrs Kearney accuses the committee is the lack of responsibility. Her continual problematization of the clumsy procedure of the concert — for instance, the arbitrary change of schedule, the abrupt change of performer and the careless recruitment of singers — gets no clear answer but a routine shifting of responsibility to other members: Mr Holohan refers her to Mr Fitzpatrick as an authority, and Mr Fitzpatrick refers her to "unidentifiable" committee: "It's not my business" (*D* 147). Mrs. Kearney also exposes the fictitious authority of the committee. Surprisingly, no one but Mrs Kearney in the narrative suspects the dubious function of the Committee as an ultimate authority of the current event. In this sense, her acute retort becomes a powerful epiphany that demystifies the deceptive nature of the committee.

much or as if it were the routine occurrence. He not only bears the disappointments "lightly" but even smiles "vacantly" at the nervous musicians in the dressing room. (*D* 137).

—And who is the Cometty, pray? (*D* 139)⁹

In a single question full of anger and sarcasm, the illuminating power of epiphany is eloquently conveyed, because Mrs Kearney's battle against the committee turns out to be a process of deconstructing the dubious identity of the "Cometty" as she calls it. For her, the most baffling thing is that she cannot find anyone against whom to fight, because most of her opponents in the Society conveniently shift their responsibility to the impersonal organization. The more elusive an identity the institution assumes, the more effective becomes its deceptive function. This explains why Mrs Kearney takes such pains in searching the committee while they easily communicate with one another "by instinct" (*D* 143).¹⁰ In this sense, the architectural complexity of the building becomes a powerful metaphor of the committee, an institution full of closed-circuits and labyrinths, accessible by none but its own members.¹¹

9) Remarkably, we notice that her strong suspicion becomes all the more powerful, for she restrains herself from uttering her exasperation, controlling the upsurging flutter in her cheek. She at least knows that this sort of behavior is beneath the dignity of a lady. Joyce ridicules the dominant fiction of male discourse through Mrs Kearney's will-controlled anger this time, which proves highly ironic when we consider that the phonetic representation of Hiberno-Irish is not hers but her imitation of Mr Fitzpatrick's "flat" accent. She unconsciously gives double twist to her angry criticism on the futility of the Committee. See Richard Wall, *An Anglo-Irish Dialect Glossary for Joyce's Works* (Gerrards Cross: Collin Smythe, 1986, 32.)

10) Miller suggests that the institution of the "Committee is the collective representative of" male control, male solidarity, and male superiority. (418)

11) Surprisingly, most of the members of the *Eire Abu* Society know how to get to the "secret" room Mrs Kearney tries in vain to find. The forbidden place is accessible through "tortuous passages and up a dark staircase" (*D* 143). What we find there at last is a drinking party thrown for a few gentlemen. One of the gentlemen is Mr O'Madden Burke who finds out the place "by instinct." The other is Mr Hendricks who, coming as he does from the *Freeman's Journal*, implies the complicity between the Society and the paper. He also degenerates the Irish Revival Movement by his amorous involvement with Miss Healy, who makes a "political" advance toward him. (As for Miss Healy, she tries through the politics of her body to improve her career

While the committee members self-indulgently exploit the *artistes* through the delusive mechanism of the “Cometty,” they don’t realize that they are also manipulated by the larger power structure — for instance, Ireland’s British rulers. This is repeatedly shown by their lack of objectives, their limited perspective on the Irish Revival, and their inability to carry out the concert.

The inefficiency of the committee is first betrayed by their recruitment of the performers. Most of the *artistes* turn out to be part-time entertainers with little or no talent. Even if the first part of the concert has induced a “stirring patriotic recitation” (D 145), Madam Glynn actually spoils the event with her “bodiless gasping voice” and old-fashioned mannerisms. Her failure as a performer exposes the inefficacy of the Irish Revival as a movement pursued by the “Cometty”.¹²⁾ A discovery of Mr Holohan, a “dug-up” from London, Madam Glynn turns out to be a mere “unknown woman” (D 141) among the Dublin *artistes*. Second, the committee’s lack of efficiency as the managing body of the concert is confirmed by their hot debate regarding how to handle Mrs Kearney. They are so shocked at the “scandalous exhibition” and her

as a musician. Such an act of “simony” is substantiated by her accompaniment on behalf of Kathleen, which is an act of betrayal even if it helps the concert to finish smoothly.)

- 12) Moreover, her failure has already been foreshadowed by the circumstance prior to the performance: “The shadow took her faded dress into shelter but *fell revengefully* into the little cup behind her collar bone” (D 141-42, italics mine). As is often the case in *Dubliners* — even impersonal objects through their extended personality establish some sort of complicity with human beings and deconstruct the dubious reality of the Society. Another example for ominous foreshadowing is the weather of the Saturday evening which turns out rainy “[b]y ill luck” (D 139). The rain helps to expose the ambiguous attitude of Miss Beirne, a financial secretary in the Society, which is betrayed by her change of expression. For she proves untrustworthy and passionless when she rejects paying the promised money to Mrs Kearney at the end of the narrative, asserting that they did their best. A little woman with *twisted* features, another case of physical deformity common in other members, “[s]he looked out at the train until the melancholy of the wet street effaced all the trustfulness and enthusiasm from her *twisted* features” (D 140, italics mine).

outrageous demand that they are at a loss for solutions. (*D* 145) Hence the disorienting debate about whether or not to pay Mrs Kearney.¹³⁾ Third, we are stunned to find that a drinking party is being held in a "secluded" room, while the dressing room is heated with "swift struggle of tongues" concerning the impending disaster when it appears that Kathleen may not perform during the second half of the concert. This is a hilarious satire on the contradictory reality of an organization which is more concerned with taking advantage of "ambitious" *artistes* than with the promotion of Irish culture. Fourth, we can eventually identify who the ultimate authority of the committee is: Mr O'Madden Burke. We also immediately discern the precarious nature of his power, its dubious reality and its fragile foundation:

He was a suave elderly man who balanced his imposing body, when at rest, upon a large silk umbrella. His magniloquent western name was the moral umbrella upon which he balanced the fine problems of his finances. He was widely respected. (*D* 143)

Critics differ in their opinions about the function of Mr O'Madden Burke as a moral character. So far, those who suggest his positive role in the final judgement of Mrs Kearney's behavior form the majority. They grant him the role of bringer of epiphanic illumination from the outside, just like Villona, a Hungarian, at the end of "After the Race." But recent critics note Joyce's ironic tone in his attitude toward Mr O'Madden Burke and read him as "the object of sharpist satire." (Miller 410) At first glance, he looks like a plausible visualization of the elusive Committee, an agent with concentrated power in the Society, but a closer examination discloses the fictitiousness of his fame. His suavity comes from his age, and he resolves his financial problems through his

13) Opinions among the musicians also vary. When asked for an opinion, the baritone will not say anything that might break his "peaceful" relationship with the committee because he "had been paid his money. The second tenor says that Mrs Kearney "had not been well treated" (*D* 146). Miss Healy would like to side with the Committee, but she does not because Miss Kearney is a friend of hers.

imposing name. If he resorts to his high-sounding name as a "moral umbrella," what is the difference between his nominal fiction and the "cleaver" with which Mrs Mooney solves her "moral problems" (D 58). We therefore seriously suspect the "respect" he is reported to enjoy, which eventually weakens the authenticity of his harsh verdict against Mrs Kearney and Kathleen and gives an ironic twist to what he says: "Miss Kathleen Kearney's musical career was ended in Dublin ... Pay her nothing" (D 146).¹⁴ He condemns Kathleen to moral death as a musician in Dublin, a *coup de grâce* to her mother as well as to herself, but his sentence is actually far less fatal than it sounds.

Finally, Mrs Kearney opens her fiery attack on the committee, pointing out that it is the Committee that is "scandalous" in its unfair treatment of someone who has "spared neither trouble nor expense" (D 146) for the concert. Despite the ever-increasing sound from the hall, despite Mr Holohan's "earnest" request, and despite Fitzpatrick's banknotes ("This is four shillings short" [D 145]), Mrs Kearney's decision is firm: "She won't go on without her money" (D 144). Regaining her self-complacency, Mrs Kearney intimidates, in turn, the men in the Society who has been bullying her so far. Her argument follows:

They thought they had only a girl to deal with and that, therefore, they could ride roughshod over her. But she would show them their mistake. They wouldn't have dared to treat her like that *if she had been a man*. But she would see that her daughter got her rights: she wouldn't be fooled. If they didn't pay her to the last farthing she would make Dublin ring. Of course she was sorry for the sake of the *artistes*. But what else could she do? (D 146, italics mine)

That her concern is not exclusively a monetary interest is again confirmed when she asserts that she will no longer be ridiculed by men. Her indictment is directed toward their gender discrimination, their victimization of the weaker

14) If such a figure as Mr O'Madden Burke is widely respected in Dublin, it is a sure sign of the general paralysis of Dubliners which traps them in the state of confused thinking and illogical judgement.

sex rather than their clumsy running of the event. She is more interested in exposing their "mistake" than in getting the money promised. Her accusation is in the subjunctive mood — "if she had been a man" — and it gains textual support when we hear that the baritone had already possibly been paid in full. We are suspicious when Mr Fitzpatrick postpones paying the other four guineas until "after the Committee meeting on the following Tuesday" (*D* 146-47). They again pull in the fictitious committee to silence Mrs Kearney.

Given that Mrs Kearney's moral defence sounds convincing, her undaunted demand for payment then and there seems far beneath her dignity, and for this she does deserve the harshest criticism of all. Even if we understand her desperate situation, she indeed goes too far by making the whole event into a farce without considering the other *artistes*. It remains unclear, however, why the committee would not pay the rest of the money, when they are threatened with impending failure. Is this their way of retaliating against Mrs Kearney for her impudence? Or do they have no intention of paying her at all? It is hard to tell. Still worse, they warn her of no-payment, which proves that their decision is no better than hers. The main argument of the Society is that Mrs Kearney has broken the code of behaviour conventionally expected of a woman in Dublin: "I never thought you would treat us this way" (*D* 147). Not knowing exactly what is the genuine cause for her anger, not recognizing still how they have done wrong, they simply impute her behavior to impropriety: "I thought you were a lady" (*D* 147). In this manner, they emphasize social decorum, which they have already broken. At this point, we can say that Mrs Kearney makes a wrong judgement as to the genuine motivation of the committee in projecting a concert. Hence the moral shock she suffers throughout the evening. Despite continual frustration and disenchantment, Mrs Kearney sticks to her naïveté to the end. When we see her still waiting outside, hoping that "the secretaries would approach her" (*D* 147), we cannot help feeling compassion for her vulnerability. To add insult to injury, her sense of defeat comes not from outside (i.e. the Society), but from inside (i.e. Miss Healy, who betrays the Kearneys by "kindly" accompanying on behalf of

Kathleen). Her burning shame reaches its climax when she “had to stand aside to allow the baritone and his accompanist to pass up to the platform” (*D* 147). We can’t miss Joyce’s sympathetic irony when we encounter Mrs Kearney’s “angry stone image” (*D* 147) when she leaves the hall bitterly, hearing the first notes of a song. Her stony image recalls to us the last scene of “Eveline,” in which Eveline turns into a blank animal, giving no sign of emotion or recognition, at the agonizing moment of departure. This is the humiliating moment of epiphany for Mrs Kearney, because she is forced to admit her failure in public. It also provides an illuminating moment for the reader, because he or she recognizes the savage decision of the committee. Mrs Kearney’s matriarchal vehemence is, as it turns out, ineffective to fight against corrupt institutions in Dublin. We should prize her fight, however, because she was for the first time challenged the hypocritical complacency of male power in Dublin by problematizing the ineptitude, avarice and arrogance of the Society. Her brave action turns out, then, to be a significant act of resistance to paralysis. Her final retort to Holohan, therefore, shows the undaunted prowess of a mother rather than the spite of a wronged woman: “I’m not done with you yet, she said” (*D* 148). In contrast to her militant determination, Holohan’s hilarious cynicism sounds cowardly as he protects himself under the convenient umbrella of masculinity: “O, she’s a nice lady!” (*D* 148). Ironically, It is the “supposed” winner who has to cool himself down “for he felt his skin on fire,” and who also needs the comforting words from Mr O’Madden Burke: “You did the proper thing, Holohan” (*D* 148).

If we question the authenticity of O’Madden Burke as a “moral arbiter,” and if we continue criticizing the doublefaced tactics of the cultural organization, his praise of Holohan seems to be the exercise of an empty authority whose intrusive judgement is far from being a “moral balance” in the narrative. Therefore it is well worth quoting the following passage as a conclusion. Miller suggests that the committee is much more to blame for its shamefaced combination of culture and politics than Mrs Kearney is for the vulgar behavior, which actually spoils the concert.¹⁵⁾ Of course, Mrs Kearney’s

behavior should be criticized no matter what the cause, but she unconsciously exposes the irresponsibility, inefficiency and immorality of the committee. Joyce illuminates the cultural paralysis of the *Eire Abu* Society through Mrs Kearney's outrageous behavior, and this proves to be the most effective way imaginable:

Much has been made of the presence of the Irish Revival movement in "A Mother." The story is usually seen as a satire on the movement itself, exposing it as superficial, regressive, or merely a front for social advancement. The low level of artists in the concert is certainly a comment upon the awkward efforts of the movement to combine culture and politics. But what critics have failed to notice is that Mrs Kearney's interest in the Irish Revival is unabashedly pragmatic — she "believes" in it no more than Joyce did himself. It is the *Eire Abu* Society that is disorganized and unscrupulous, not Mrs Kearney; and it is Mr. Holohan, Mr. Fitzpatrick, and Miss Beime, who, as foremost representatives of the Irish Revival in the story, bear the weight of Joyce's ridicule.

(Kangnam University)

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15) See Miller, 410.

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Abstract

키어니 부인의 마비와의 저항

윤 희 환

지금까지 「어머니」(A Mother)에 대한 비평은 키어니 부인(Mrs. Kearney)의 행동을 어떻게 판단할 것인가에 따라 양분되어 왔다. 콘서트를 망친 키어니 부인의 행동은 비난받아 마땅하다고 주장하는 벡(Beck)와 헤이만(Hayman)은 그녀의 심리적인 억압과 숨은 동기보다는 겉으로 드러난 행동의 분석에 초점을 맞춘 반면, 페미니스트적인 접근을 시도하는 헨케(Henke)와 밀러(Miller)는 그녀의 행동양식을 남녀양성의 대결구도 속에서 파악하면서 이전의 남성위주의 비평이 간과한 부분을 짚어내지만 그녀의 거친 행동에 대해서는 애써 무시하려는 태도를 짓는다. 키어니 부인에 대한 이러한 이분법적인 평가를 넘어서려는 시도로 씌어지는 이 논문은, “A Mother”의 등장인물 중에서 가장 마비된 사람은 키어니 부인이 아닌 콘서트 주최측인 Eire Abu Society의 멤버들이라는 전제에서 출발하며, 콘서트를 둘러싼 키어니 부인의 일련의 행동은 주최측 멤버들의 탐욕, 위선, 도덕적 타락을 가장 직립하게 폭로하는 기제로 기능한다는 점을 제시하려는 의도로 씌어진다. 또한 연주회 프로그램의 취소에 따른 보상을 요구하는 키어니 부인의 거친 행동들이 사실은 무기력과 무능력으로 특징지어지는 남성위주의 아일랜드 사회에 대한 여성으로서의 저항의 몸짓임과 동시에, 그녀와 주최측 사이의 대결구도가 Eire Abu Society라는 특정한 파워구조의 폐쇄회로성과 자기파괴성에 대한 메타포로 읽혀질 수 있음도 제시하려는 시도로 이 논문은 씌어진다.