

Spring 2015

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Recommended Citation

Wonderling, Meghan (2015) "*Dubliners* Class Discussion on Male-Female Relationships," *ESSAI*: Vol. 13, Article 39.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol13/iss1/39>

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Dubliners Class Discussion on Male-Female Relationships

by Meghan Wonderling

(English 1130)

CHARACTERS: TAYLOR, MIKA, WILLIAM, and JOSEF, all college-aged students who have fully embraced James Joyce's *Dubliners*. PROFESSOR, late thirties/early forties, well dressed.

SETTING: The stage is set to look like a small classroom, with the four main characters sitting in desks in a semi-circle downstage center, a teacher's desk upstage right, and two or three groups of extra students in desks arranged in squares, spread randomly about the stage, but not blocking view of the teacher's desk or too close to the semi-circle of main characters.

The lights go up on the classroom, students are milling around, PROFESSOR sits at his desk, writing, glances up at the clock, stands and claps his hands together to signal a start to the class. Students take their seats.

PROFESSOR: Now that we've completed *Dubliners* by James Joyce, it is time for us to discuss the entire collection of short stories as a whole instead of individually. Each group will be assigned a theme to look at that deals with male-female relationships. (*Walks to the semi-circle group downstage*) Group one, you will have marriage and independence.

PROFESSOR continues walking around to groups while the main characters begin discussion. PROFESSOR then sits back down at his desk.

MIKA: So where should we start? Quite a few of the characters are married and those who aren't want to be.

WILLIAM: That's not true though. Plenty of characters didn't want to get married or wish that they hadn't.

TAYLOR: Like Eveline? Although she is complicated in the sense that she did want to get married to Frank, but ended up not going with him.

MIKA: I think that's because she didn't have a good home life. Her father was mean and abusive to her, her siblings, and her mom. However, she still looked at marriage as being a good thing. She says so right on page 21, "People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been." She's still hopeful that marriage can be something positive.

JOSEF: But she doesn't end up getting married. She chooses to not get onto the boat.

MIKA: I think all the independence was just too much for her. I mean, think about it. She had been burdened with taking care of her younger siblings and she had an abusive father that took all of her wages from her. She was practically a prisoner.

TAYLOR: "Eveline" has some of the most interesting male-female relationships, I think. Eveline's father is abusive towards her and was towards her mother, but on the complete opposite end of the spectrum, Frank is "very kind, manly, and open-hearted" (21). She fantasizes about him protecting her by "[taking] her in his arms" and saving her (23). I think that she looks at marriage as giving her independence that she didn't have at home and that her mother didn't have while she was alive. Even though she ended up not leaving on the boat with Frank, I think it can be argued that Eveline still believes marriage can offer a great deal of independence.

WILLIAM: However, on the opposite side of marriage offering independence it can also take it away. Remember in "A Little Cloud" how Chandler loses it and screams in his infant's face because he can't stand being tied down as a married man?

TAYLOR: I don't think he actually wanted to be married though. He doesn't describe his wife the way Eveline described Frank. He describes her as having "cold" eyes and he talks about how she couldn't even accept a gift from her husband nicely, saying that once "she heard the price she threw the blouse on the table" and said it was a "regular swindle" to spend "ten and eleven pence" on it (53).

MIKA: They definitely have an odd relationship. It's like he feels trapped by the marriage and wants to get out and have an independent life of his own without her, and yet he also tries to please her. He brings her gifts and he feels such remorse when he upsets their son and she becomes incredibly angry (54). It sounds like she gets angry at him a lot though. She was angry that he spent so much on the blouse, she was angry that he forgot to bring home tea and she was angry that he made their son cry. What if she's like this every day?

JOSEF: It would be next to the same kind of story as "Eveline" then. Except this time the wife would be mean and the husband would be the one looking to escape and escape would be through travelling and not marrying rather than marrying. It would be the same type of male-female relationship, but with the roles flip-flopped.

WILLIAM: Can we talk about Gallaher in "A Little Cloud" too? He had a playboy's male-female relationship mentality.

TAYLOR: Well he certainly savored the independence of being single. He even says that he most likely won't ever get married. And if he did it would be only because she has a "good fat account at the bank" (52).

JOSEF: Also, you can't forget that he thinks marriage "must get a bit stale" (52).

WILLIAM: Plus how he describes how immoral Paris is. It's like you can see him sitting at the bar with this secretive grin on his face. He talks about how "There's no woman like the Parisienne—for style, for go" and how the women in Paris were "ready to eat" him (48-49).

MIKA: Would you say then that his male-female relationships could be summed up as being him using women for pleasure and then leaving them?

WILLIAM: I suppose so. I mean, that is pretty much what a playboy lifestyle is and that's definitely what Gallaher is living.

MIKA: How do you think that his lifestyle then plays into his views on marriage and on his independence?

WILLIAM: I think that Gallaher likes being independent and that he genuinely enjoys his lifestyle. Maybe when he's older he'll want to be more dependent on someone rather than out there on his own all the time, but right now I think he enjoys the male-female relationship style that he has going. I think he enjoys not being married. I'd go so far to say that while Chandler pines for Gallaher's life in "A Little Cloud," I honestly don't think that Gallaher pines for Chandler's in any way.

PROFESSOR: There is five minutes left of class. I'd like for you all to make a conclusion about what you've talked about this class period to share with the other groups next time, then you may go.

TAYLOR: So in both "Eveline" and "A Little Cloud" the male-female relationships are the same, though flip-flopped. Eveline is abused by her father and wants to escape via marriage, and Chandler is abused by his wife and wants to escape by leaving the marriage. Then because of this Chandler only sees what marriage is taking away from him and Eveline only sees what marriage can give to her.

WILLIAM: And Gallaher wants nothing to do with marriage. He just wants to stay completely independent and keep his playboy lifestyle. His male-female relationship is able to be categorized not by abuse but by lust and sexual desire.

MIKA: (*writing quickly*) Sounds good to me. I'll hold onto the conclusion and see you guys next time.

MIKA, WILLIAM, JOSEF, and TAYLOR pick up their backpacks, say their goodbyes, and leave stage left. Background students should start leaving before WILLIAM's last line. PROFESSOR is the last

to leave and is seen hitting the light switch, making the stage go dark.

Works Cited

Joyce, James. "Eveline." *Dubliners*. New York: Dover Publications, 1991. 20-23. Print.
---, "A Little Cloud." *Dubliners*. New York: Dover Publications, 1991. 44-54. Print.