James Joyce’s “A Little Cloud” and Chandler’s Tears of Remorse

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1 Joyce’s “A Little Cloud” has not generated significant critical debate, despite Warren Beck’s unorthodox interpretation of the denouement in 1969. Although speculation about the title has resulted in several theories—the most recent from Corinna del Greco Lobner—links to Byron and Dante and refines Stanislaus Joyce’s terse observation that the story reveals “a little cloud over married bliss” (“Background” 526), scholars have generally agreed that the ineffectual protagonist abuses his infant son and refuses to take responsibility for his own shortcomings. I suggest that Chandler’s relationship with the child—not with his wife Annie or journalist/friend Gallaher—is the crucial, epiphanal element of the story and that Joyce portrays a flawed father who is just beginning to “learn [...] what the heart is and what it feels” (James Joyce A Portrait 252), a man whose conscience is awakened, despite his flaws.

2 In the final scene, a thirty-two-year-old law clerk living in Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century dreams of being a poet although he has never written a poem and has just been belittled by Gallaher, an unmarried exfriend who is now a successful London journalist. The clerk, who appears to be trapped in a boring job, returns to his small apartment, his wife Annie, and their sleeping male infant. When Annie leaves to get the coffee he has forgotten, he tries to read an early poem of Byron’s but can’t because the baby starts to fuss. Little Tommy Chandler, the name which Joyce chose for the father, not for the infant, then begins to lose his temper. As the baby cries, Tommy doesn’t hit or even shake it, but he does yell “Stop!” in its face (Dubliners 84). The child becomes terrified and, in that cadence which all parents know, cries so violently that Chandler begins to count the seconds between screams. Joyce writes, “He tried to soothe it but it sobbed more convulsively. He looked at the contracted and quivering face of the child and began to be alarmed. He counted seven sobs without a break between them and caught the child to his breast in fright. If it died...” (84). Annie returns, glares at Chandler accusingly, and tries to calm the baby. The story ends with the following paragraph:
Little Chandler felt his cheeks suffused with shame and he stood back out of the lamplight. He listened while the paroxysm of the child’s sobbing grew less and less: and tears of remorse started to his eyes” (85, emphasis added).

3 Although I believe that Chandler is genuinely sorry for having frightened his son, most Joyceans insist that the protagonist cries out of self-pity, that his “epiphany,” if he does experience one, is egocentric—in short, that Chandler doesn’t change from the Bartleby-like scrivener who may dream and suffer but who will never “produce.”

4 Except for Beck, many veteran Joyce scholars affirm that “A Little Cloud” develops Joyce’s famous “paralysis” theme and that it complements, in tone and circumstance, the other pieces which precede the final story, “The Dead.” For example, Walzl believes that “The Dead’ seems to reverse the pattern of increasing insensibility that Dubliners otherwise traces” and that no one prior to Gabriel, the protagonist, “undergoes a comparable change or has such an enlightenment” (“Gabriel” 430). Similarly, Ghiselin suggests that “A Little Cloud” fits into the over-all schema of Dubliners by representing the sin of envy (323). Ruoff asserts that the story “describes a would-be artist’s pathetic failure to transcend a narrow existence of his own creation” (108), and Bernard Benstock’s interpretation mentions that Chandler “regresses to adolescent self-pity” (Narrative 137). Characteristically witty, Zack Bowen views the story’s denouement as a competition between father and son for baby of the year, and suggests that the race ends in a photo finish (“All Things” 140). Indeed, all of the annotations for “A Little Cloud” in the 1992 illustrated edition of Dubliners by Jackson and McGinley focus on Chandler’s “sloth, his cowardice, his self-delusion, and his final rage and humiliation.” They assert that he is “shamed, not ashamed,” and ignore Joyce’s use of “remorse” (75, 74).

5 Examining some of the reasons behind this critical response may soften the impact of a variant reading, for Joyce’s biography and details from the story itself allow readers to better appreciate Joyce’s word choice.

1. The Critical Response

6 Probably the most important reason for assuming that Chandler is not enlightened by his experience involves several of Joyce’s own statements. “A Little Cloud” was written in the early months of 1906, when Joyce was 23 and the father of a six-month-old son, Giorgio (Scholes, “Further” 116). But in 1904, speaking about Dubliners, he had told a friend that he wanted “to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city” (Letters 55). Another frequently quoted letter asserts, “It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories” (Letters 63-64). The combination of “paralysis” and “odour,” then, while justified by many details in the works themselves, may have also clouded our perception of scattered, positive sensations which some of the pieces generate. As Gillespie argues, “The opinion that this [negative] attitude dominates the final form of the stories [...] oversimplifies Joyce’s emotional attitude toward his country and unjustly circumscribes the artistic potential of the work” (154). Similarly, Garrison observes that “Joyce’s explicit statements concerning his artistic intentions in Dubliners are not very useful as a basis for interpretation” (226). Although Joyce’s defense of his work provided us with an opportunity to clarify his intent, I don’t think that it was meant to narrowly limit or define our reactions as readers.

7 Scholars also tend to emphasize organizational patterns in Joyce’s work. As early as 1939, for example, Daiches wrote, “No English short-story writer has built up his design, has
related the parts to the preconceived whole, more carefully than Joyce has done in stories such as 'The Sisters,' 'Two Gallants,' or 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room'” (85). And after six decades of scholarship which escalated critical appreciation for the complexity and success of Joyce’s fictional constructs, Beja and Shari Benstock called him “a creator of systems” (xiv). But when Joyce wrote in 1906 that he envisioned Dubliners as containing four groups of three stories each to represent “childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life” (Letters II 134), he had completed only twelve stories. He would later write three more, “Two Gallants,” “A Little Cloud,” and “The Dead,” in that order (Scholes, “Further”). His decision to place “A Little Cloud” at the beginning of the maturity series (the exact center of the collection) has probably contributed to the belief that Chandler is as “little” at the end of the story as he was at the beginning. After all, the next three pieces in the collection involve a drunken father beating his praying son, teenaged girls ridiculing an aging spinster, and a neglected wife stumbling Karenina-like onto the tracks of an oncoming train. Viewing the denouement of “A Little Cloud” in a positive light might be regarded, then, as a challenge to the perfection of Joyce’s design.

But Dubliners evolved from a few stories into its present form over a period of three years, and “A Little Cloud” was penultimate in the order of composition. If Joyce at least partially intended the final story, “The Dead,” as a tribute to the more positive aspects of Dublin culture (Letters II 166), it is not unreasonable to discern a hint of this attitude in “A Little Cloud.” Joyce once told his sister, “The most important thing that can happen to a man is the birth of a child” (Ellmann 204), and since his only son and first-born child was about six months old when “A Little Cloud” was begun in the early months of 1906, life circumstances are relevant to this discussion. But such issues do not necessarily help us interpret the story, for Joyce might, after all, have been drawing a portrait of an unfit father. Reviewing the story’s link to A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man while examining information about the young writer should enrich our understanding of his state of mind, reveal key similarities and differences between Joyce and his protagonist, and test the validity of an alternate reading of this story.

2. Scene 1

“A Little Cloud” has three basic scenes: the first describes Chandler’s revery at work and then en route to a meeting with Gallaher; the second reveals their not-so-friendly drinking bout; and the final section portrays the frustrated and belittled law clerk at home. Thematically, the story examines interlocked aspects of Chandler’s identity—his job as a clerk in the King’s Inns and his role as husband and father. Opposed to these are his unfulfilled aspirations to be a poet (though he never writes) and his desire for a more exotic sexual life.

In general, Chandler’s disposition is melancholic, “but it [is] a melancholy tempered by recurrences of faith and resignation and simple joy” (73). He is fastidious about his appearance and, probably, careful about his work even though he finds it “tiresome” (71). Joyce also emphasizes Little Chandler’s shortcomings throughout the story. He lives in a “little house” (83), reads by a “little lamp” (82), drinks “small whiskies” (80), displays “childish white front teeth” (70), and is given “short answers” by his prim wife (82). In the first scene, Joyce invites us to imagine an ordinary man, still capable of a dream, but ruled by circumstances and his own, considerable inadequacies.
Still, Chandler experiences an occasional, artistic vision. Though he “gave no thought” to
the “horde of grimy children” he walked through on his way to meet Gallaher for a drink
after work (71), his ego expands as he thinks about his old friend’s invitation. After all,
Gallaher has been gone for eight years, and Tommy is the only member of the “old
crowd” whom he plans to meet at the pub. En route from his workplace to the uptown
inn, Tommy experiences a poetic moment as he gazes down from Grattan Bridge “at the
poor stunted houses” near the river (73). The sensation is prompted by a sense of his own
importance, but, as he admits, “For the first time in his life he felt himself superior to the
people he passed” (emphasis added), and the sensation results in a metaphor which
reveals empathy, not disdain: “[The houses] seemed to him a band of tramps, huddled
altogether along the river-banks, their old coats covered with dust and soot, stupefied by
the panorama of sunset and waiting for the first chill of night to bid them arise, shake
themselves and begone” (73). At this point, Chandler considers his own situation and
wonders, first, if he is capable of writing “something original” and, second, whether he
has “a poet’s soul” (73).

Joyce employs important imagery at the end of the first section which firmly links this
story to central Joycean themes: “[T]he thought that a poetic moment had touched him
took life within him like an infant hope [...] and “[a] light began to tremble on the horizon
of his mind. He was not so old—thirty-two” (73, emphasis added). Linking “infant hope”
with “a light” so early in this story hints at Joyce’s lifelong interest in the
“consubstantiation” of father and son as well as procreation in the literary sense (Ulysses
32, 155). By the time Joyce wrote “A Little Cloud,” both physical and artistic generation
had become realities.

Of course, the reader soon realizes that Chandler won’t succeed, despite his “soul,” for he
is not original and hopes to capitalize on popular trends, although he realistically admits
that “he will never be popular” and hopes only to “appeal to a little circle of kindred
minds” (74). Recalling Joyce’s claim in 1904 that only “two or three unfortunate wretches
[...] may eventually read me” (Ellmann 163) offers an interesting echo.

The location of Chandler’s poetic “mood” (84) is also relevant, for it may be based on one
of Joyce’s own experiences. A similar incident occurs at a pivotal point in A Portrait of the
Artist as a Young Man. In Chapter 4, Joyce presents a rare interaction between the
protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, and his brothers and sisters during the family tea. Structurally, this scene occurs at an important juncture. Immediately preceding the
epiphany of "profane joy" which Stephen experiences on the beach while watching a girl
wading (Portrait 171), this episode also follows the interview with the religious director of
his school, after which Stephen decides not to become a priest. As he walks home to a
squalid, over-crowded house, interesting parallels to "A Little Cloud" occur. Like
Chandler, he crosses a bridge, symbolically connected to opposing attractions, but clearly,
like Chandler, moving toward a new possibility. Stephen notices a shrine to the Virgin
which is "in the middle of a hamshaped encampment of poor cottages" (162). Unlike
Chandler, however, Stephen does not romanticize the image, for he actually lives here,
and he laughs to think of the man "considering in turn the four points of the sky and then
regretfully plunging his spade in the earth" (162). Without even a hint of rain, the man
must begin work. The cloud image in this scene of Portrait is intentionally delayed.

Stephen then enters his home and finds his brothers and sisters seated at the table: "tea
was nearly over" (163). (Remember that Chandler returns too late for tea and babysits
while his wife goes out to buy some. Thus, if not for the missing "tea," there would have
been no father-son conflict.) Stephen, the university student, realizes the contrast between his privileged position as the eldest son and theirs:

The sad quiet greyblue of the dying day came through the window and the open door, covering over and allaying quietly a sudden instinct of remorse in Stephen's heart. All that had been denied them had been freely given to him, the eldest: but the quiet glow of evening showed him in their faces no sign of rancour (163, emphasis added)

After one of his sisters, who is as nameless as Chandler's son, tells him that the family has once again been evicted, her similarly unnamed little brother begins to sing. The others join in, and Stephen thinks, "They would sing so for hours [...] till the last pale light died down on the horizon, till the first dark nightclouds came forth and night fell" (163, emphasis added). Stephen joins the chorus, but only after listening to them for a while.

He heard the choir of voices in the kitchen echoed and multiplied through an endless reverberation of the choirs of endless generations of children: and heard in all the echoes an echo also of the recurring note of weariness and pain. All seemed weary of life even before entering upon it (164).

If Joyce had ended the passage here, one would be quick to note the similarity to Little Chandler's comment about the children in the park: "He watched the scene and thought of life; and (as always happened when he thought of life) he became sad" (71). But Joyce does not end Stephen's musings on a negative note, just as I believe he does not end "A Little Cloud" with a protagonist who pities himself more than his screaming son. Stephen remembers

that Newman had heard this note also [...] giving utterance, like the voice of Nature herself, to that pain and weariness yet hope of better things which has been the experience of her children in every time. (164, emphasis added).

Despite their circumstances, the children sing. Faced with the guilt of primacy, the oldest son is forgiven by his brothers and sisters. Again, Stephen's vision is superior to Chandler's. He will retain the mood of this experience, be more receptive to future encounters, and sustain an ethos which will allow him to reject home and family to pursue an artist's life, perhaps with a family of his own making. Stephen is an artist; Chandler only longs to be one.

And I don't minimize that difference. In Stephen Hero, written between 1904 and 1906, Joyce viewed the "artist [...] standing in the position of mediator between the world of his experience and the world of his dreams–a mediator, consequently gifted with twin faculties, a selective faculty and a reproductive faculty" (77-78). Chandler certainly dreams, but his production is entirely physical. He is a parent, not an artist. At the same time, in a collection of stories which includes a series of married men who beat children (Mr. Hill in “Eveline,” Old Jack of “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” and Farrington of “Counterparts”), Chandler faces the truth about himself after merely shouting at his son. His experience prepares us for Gabriel’s, just as the family tea prepares us for the strongest epiphany of Portrait.

To return to the story itself, since Joyce often built major characters in Dubliners “on more than one real person–usually himself and one other” (Atherton 46), when “A Little Cloud” was composed, Joyce was twenty-four (Chandler was twenty-four when Gallaher left Ireland) and had already contemplated several careers. He had abandoned medical school twice, both in Dublin and in Paris; he had hoped to sing professionally and briefly pursued that option; and he had also tried teaching, an endeavor which would keep the family afloat for many years. Although he possessed a strong sense of his vocation as an
artist, continued to write, and probably never seriously doubted his talent, Joyce realized that some mundane job was needed to pay the bills, despite the funds he could wrangle from others. Surely he, like Chandler, often felt trapped in “tiresome” tasks. And, although Joyce would work as a clerk in Rome a few months after mailing “A Little Cloud” off to the publisher and felt superior to his fellow employees who “were forever having something wrong with their testicles... or their anuses” (Ellmann 226), Chandler, unlike them, is fastidious about his manners and appearance and at least longs for an artist’s life. The first portion of “A Little Cloud” also reminds us of Joyce’s sentimental, poetic temperament while living in Paris as a medical student from December 1902 until April 1903, when he was called home because of his mother’s illness. Stanislaus reports,

He told me that often when he had no money and had had nothing to eat he used to walk about reciting to himself for consolation, like ‘Little Chandler’ in Dubliners, his own poems or others he knew by heart or things he happened to be writing then (My Brother’s 231-21).

Another habit which the two shared involved night excursions. The timid Chandler usually hurried home after dark:

Sometimes, however, he courted the causes of his fear. He chose the darkest and narrowest streets and, as he walked boldly forward, the silence that was spread about his footsteps troubled him, the wandering silent figures troubled him; and at times a sound of low fugitive laughter made him tremble like a leaf (72).

Approximately two years before writing these lines, Joyce had composed the short prose meditation, “A Portrait of the Artist,” in which he spoke of the impulse which had led him forth in the dark season to silent and lonely places where the mists hung streamerwise among the trees; and as he had passed there amid the subduing night, in the secret fall of leaves, the fragrant rain, the mesh of vapours moon-transpierced, he had imagined an admonition of the frailty of all things (45).

Although the settings are different and Chandler chooses to “court” his fears of forbidden sexual encounters whereas the young Joyce, having already experienced them, reports a more Romantic venue, both accounts hint at an openness to life and desire as well as a resigned acceptance of the futility of “struggling against fortune” (Dubliners 71).

In fact, two paragraphs after the passage from “A Portrait” mentioned above, another intriguing link between the two works occurs: “The cloud of difficulties allowed only peeps of light; even his rhetoric proclaimed transition” (47). It is also significant that in 1906 Joyce chose prose over poetry, asserting, for example, that “A page of ‘A Little Cloud’ gives me more pleasure than all my verses” (Letters II 182). Dubliners also reveals a tighter style than Stephen Hero, the precursor of the novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, which Joyce stopped working on six months prior to the composition of “A Little Cloud” (Walzl, Dubliners 161). Unlike Chandler, Joyce had matured as an artist, but he probably regarded those early actions, sentiments, and poetic explorations with fondness, especially in light of his domestic situation in Trieste.

Approximately ten months after leaving Ireland with Joyce, Nora Barnacle, a beautiful and independent twenty-one-year-old woman from Galway, gave birth to a son on July 26, 1905 (Maddox 63)4. Since the two weren’t married, the child forced his father to consider the practical results of illegitimacy as well as the novel realities of life and work in a two-room apartment. In fact, although Joyce had tentatively chosen the names George and Lucy several months before the baby was born, the infant was still nameless at two months old (Letters II 95, 107). (Recall that neither Chandler nor Annie refers to the child...
by name.) Although Joyce was the eldest of ten children and was used to writing in the
midst of noisy chaos (Ellmann 144, 224), he probably became frustrated by the brevity of
his flight from responsibility. According to Nora’s biographer, Brenda Maddox, even
before the baby was born, Joyce had already begun to drink heavily, and Nora was
miserable (62-64). She cried so much that Joyce worriedly wrote to Stanislaus, “I do not
know what strange morose creature she will bring forth after all her tears” (Letters II 95).

Accounts of their life during this period reveal the typical struggles of young parents, but
the Irish couple surely faced extraordinary difficulties. Both had left fairly devout
Catholic families; they were unmarried parents, and compared to her twenty-three-year-
old husband, Nora was uneducated and probably unconvinced of James’s genius. Not five
months after Giorgio’s birth, despite Joyce’s occasional delight in singing arias to him
(Maddox 64), the young father hinted of serious problems in a letter to his aunt: “[T]he
present relations between Nora and myself are about to suffer some alteration”; however,
he didn’t “wish to rival the atrocities of the average husband” (Letters II 128).

In retrospect we can judge this difficult period as just that, for James and Nora stayed
together until his death in 1941, and her importance in his life remains undisputed.
Beyond this, however, Joyce’s concern for his son, Giorgio, and for Lucia, born two years
later, permeated his life. And the infant son certainly charmed his father. Writing to
Stanislaus on January 10, 1907, when Giorgio was eighteen months old, Joyce called the
child “the most successful thing connected with me” (Letters II 206), and Stanislaus
reports, “In spite of his struggle with poverty, [Joyce] believed in fatherhood and
considered it a form of cowardice, ‘too great a fear of fate’, not to have children” (My
Brother’s 152).

Joyce’s attitude about family life and his own vocation as artist must have been quite
complex as he conceived and composed “A Little Cloud” between February and July of
1906, but such information doesn’t weigh the scales of interpretation in one direction or
another. Fortunately, the second scene of the story does. Through the encounter with
Gallaher, Chandler appears provincial, timid, and curious about “immoral” sexual
practices, but he definitely emerges as the better human being.

3. Scene ii

Asserting a direct correlation between Little Tommy Chandler and the young Joyce as
husband and father is unfounded. Just as extreme, though, is assuming that Joyce wanted
his readers to feel no sympathy at all towards his protagonist. However negative one’s
opinion of Chandler might be after reading the first section of the story, Joyce’s
juxtaposition of the two friends in the second scene inches us toward sympathy.

Physically, the two are almost stereotypically opposite. Chandler, though average in
height, seems small; he has a “fragile” frame and is well-groomed. He uses “perfume
discreetly on his handkerchief,” has “fair silken hair and moustache,” and blushes easily
(70). Gallaher, on the other hand, is boisterous and balding, has a “large” head and a
“heavy, pale and clean-shaven” face; he wears an orange tie to a Dublin pub and affects
Britishisms, calling Chandler “old chap” and using “blooming” as an adjective (79, 81).
Ellmann reports that Gallaher is based on a combination of Fred Gallaher, an Irish
journalist whom Joyce includes in his “galaxy of stocky insensitives,” and Oliver St. John
Gogarty, an ex-friend and rival with whom Joyce had once lived in Martell Tower (220,
46). In early 1906, however, they were estranged and, like Chandler, Joyce resented Gogarty’s success and considered himself superior to his old friend “in birth and education” (80).

Further proof of the derogatory link between Gogarty and Gallaher can be found in Joyce’s prolonged refusal to renew their friendship, despite Gogarty’s overtures (Ellmann 236) and in his reaction to Gogarty’s marriage to a woman of means. Having received an Irish newspaper by post in Trieste, Nora met Joyce at lunch to announce Gogarty’s changed status. We might well imagine his reaction to Nora’s news: Gogarty had married; Joyce, already a father, had not. Whether Joyce regarded her action as a protest we cannot know; however, he did write acerbically to Stanislaus a few weeks after mailing “A Little Cloud” to his publisher, “[T]o be charitable, I suppose we had better wish Mr and Mrs Ignatius Gallaher health and long life” (Letters II 148). We can safely assume, then, that, whatever Chandler’s weaknesses, Joyce had an even lower opinion of Gallaher.

Florence Walzl’s important essay, “Dubliners: Women in Irish Society,” also reveals significant information about Irish demographics at this time and supports a more positive view of the Chandler household. The Irish middle class was experiencing tremendous economic hardships and either postponed marriage or abandoned it altogether: the translation for a Catholic country meant a diminished population (33-34), a fact which Joyce surely noticed. A closer look at Chandler’s “sit” (75) reveals that he is, indeed, more successful, economically and biologically speaking, than many of his generation. Not only does he have a job, but he can also provide for a wife and child, a situation which Walzl reports was also rare since the typical Irishman delayed marriage until the age of thirty-five or forty-five (Dubliners 34). Unlike O’Hara, for example, a character in the story who fails because of “boose” and “other things” (76), Chandler is abstemious, employed, married, and a parent.

In the second scene, conversation dominates the prose, allowing us to experience, along with Chandler, his friend’s inflated ego and patronizing attitude toward “dear dirty Dublin” and Tommy Chandler, despite Gallaher’s claims of being “a sincere friend” (75, 79). Unlike the first scene, we are not as often informed of Chandler’s thoughts. Joyce relies, instead, on our imagination and ability to identify with the inhibited, limited law clerk. The final sentence of this encounter, for example, consists of Gallaher’s derogatory remark about Chandler’s being married and having sex with the same woman year after year: “Must get a bit stale, I should think, he said” (82). Although Joyce does not provide Chandler’s reaction, he is careful in structuring this conversation, offering an early example of the belief that “For [artists] a portrait is not an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion” (“A Portrait” 41). We can safely assume that Chandler felt insulted.

The meeting at Corless’s, despite Tommy’s dream of launching into a writing career with Gallaher’s help, offers a series of moments in which Chandler assumes a muted, almost subservient role while he reassesses Ignatius Gallaher and finally asserts the inevitability (and perhaps primacy) of married life. The “stale” insult serves as a powerful ending to an exchange which illustrates the validity of Joyce’s claim to have written the Dubliners stories in “a style of scrupulous meanness” (Letters II 134). Prior to this final blow, however, Chandler had asserted himself by saying that Gallaher, too, would marry someday “if [he could] find the girl” (81), perhaps hinting that convincing a woman to do so might be a problem. His balding friend’s responses reflect the sting of this comment as he eventually resorts to hyperbole, claiming that there were “hundreds […] thousands of
rich Germans and Jews, rotten with money, that’d only be too glad” to marry him “tomorrow” if he asked them to (81). Incapable of the kind of wit which might successfully redeem his position, Chandler is ultimately defeated; however, our sympathies lie not with the victor but with the young clerk and father. Gallaher may have had the ability to “fly by [the] nets [...] of nationality, language, religion,” an aim to which the protagonist of Joyce’s next major work aspires (A Portrait 203), but he is little more than a bragging, rude scribbler in the worst Swiftian sense.

The first two scenes of the story, then, reveal that Chandler, however remote from being either a poet or the “old hero” which Gallaher initially calls him (74), remains physically and morally the more appealing character. Still, Chandler himself probably feels anything but heroic, and during the gap between scenes, we imagine him returning, deflated, to his family. Bernard Benstock writes, “Like the dog viewing his reflection in the pond, Chandler drops his bone in envy of Gallaher’s, preferring the exotic narrative not of his own experience” (“Narrative” 558). His mood at the beginning of the final scene in the story is reflective, self-pitying, and, ultimately, enraged. However, the intensity of his son’s suffering and the coldness of his wife’s accusation eventually result in unselfish shame and genuine contrition.

4. Scene iii

The end of this story, though straightforward in terms of action and narration—we know precisely what Chandler does and thinks, for example, until the final paragraph—also reveals a key thematic concern in Joyce’s later work, the relationship between sexual and artistic generation. The precise nature of the final epiphany hinges on this theme, and the denouement is rich with dramatic pauses and religious allusions which link Chandler’s “remorse” with Stephen’s “agenbite of inwit” in Ulysses (14).

When Chandler reaches home at 8:45 p.m., his wife, Annie, is “[o]f course [...] in a bad humour” (82). She’s been caring for the infant all day and now must buy the makings for tea. Chandler looks at her photograph and concludes that Annie is, by nature cold and too “lady-like” (83). The reader suspects that Chandler would never have married a bold woman, but once again Chandler envies Gallaher’s life among “rich Jewesses [...] full [...] of passion, of voluptuous longing” and resents his present condition. True to his nature, Tommy concentrates on his own inadequacies rather than Gallaher’s. (The differences are not wasted on the reader, however, as we wonder which two of the “thousands” of rich Jewesses would actually compete for Gallaher’s bed.)

Carefully holding the baby, Chandler thinks again of writing poetry and begins to read one of Byron’s early pieces which reminds Tommy of “his sensation of a few hours before on Grattan Bridge” (84). In a few moments, a triple dissatisfaction—whith his mate, his life in Dublin, and his career—creates a rising flood of self-pity which results in a selfish and ineffectual response to his son’s crying. Yet, unlike Father Boyle, who calls Chandler’s yelling at the infant “an irrational and even brutal [...] attack” which “no normal man” would consider (84), others might regard Little Tommy’s response as understandable. Unlike Annie, who has obviously had far more practice calming the baby, Chandler is inept. When it continues to fuss, Tommy “began to rock it to and fro [...] faster,” adding sound to rapid movement by yelling in its face, not an uncommon practice for inexperienced babysitters. Chandler is also uncharacteristically drunk and probably
wondering why a man of superior “birth and education” (80) should have so little control over an infant.

Joyce then invites the reader to imagine Annie on her way home, hearing her son's screams, rushing in, “glaring into [Tommy's] face” and charging, “What have you done to him?” (85). The narration focuses on Tommy’s reaction, revealing that “his heart closed together as he met the hatred” in Annie’s eyes, those eyes which he had so recently judged as too composed and lady-like (83). Indeed, Joyce’s use of metonymy, writing “Why had he married the eyes in the photograph?” (83) is a psychological masterpiece, distancing both character and readers from this "young woman... panting" (84). But we would be nearly as naive as Chandler if we assumed that Joyce had no sympathy for Annie. Once again, biography becomes relevant.

The narrator doesn’t divulge the child’s exact age but does offer a few clues. Little Tommy has told Gallaher that he “was married last May twelve months” (79). Since it is now “late autumn” (71), the story takes place in October or November; Chandler has been married, then, for approximately eighteen months. Unless Annie was pregnant before the marriage, the infant would now be no more than nine months old and could be even younger. Recall that Giorgio Joyce was approximately six months old when “A Little Cloud” was begun in early 1906 and that Nora took in other people’s laundry to help support the family only three weeks after giving birth to him (Maddox 65). Even while teaching during the day and trying to write in stolen moments in the small apartment in Trieste, Joyce surely realized the hardships which Nora faced, regardless of his own.

Joyce’s memories of his own mother, Mary (May) Joyce, were also fresh. Notified on Good Friday, 1903, that she was dying, Joyce left his medical studies in Paris. En route to Dublin, he must have considered the rigors of her life–mortally ill at forty-four, pregnant thirteen times, and married to John Joyce, a handsome man of wit and charm, but an alcoholic spendthrift who continually failed his family in all but the procreative sense. In a letter to Nora in late August, 1904, Joyce wrote,

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 made her a victim (Letters II 48).7

Once again, however, this information could support both positive and negative interpretations of Chandler’s reaction at the end of the story. We can’t assume that Joyce’s experience with either his mother or his wife informs Chandler’s psyche. After all, Chandler, perhaps unfairly, judges Annie’s eyes as “cold,” and Annie does calm the child—Joyce himself calmed his nine-year-old sister after his own mother’s death (Stanislaus Joyce My Brother’s 236-37). Any sympathies which the author may have felt for Annie could support the claim that Chandler suffers by comparison. At this point in the drama, Chandler surely realizes that Annie could succeed where he had failed. Ultimately, however, Joyce’s focus is not on the mother but on the father’s link to his own child. Joyce provides an important dramatic shift by revealing Chandler’s final thought before Annie’s arrival: “If it died!” (84).

Most of us realize that infants can cry for hours without any discernable damage; most of us have also experienced the irrational fear that an infant will, indeed, fail to inhale at the last moment. The three words “If it died!” depict genuine emotion. We would have to ignore Joyce’s repeated references to Chandler’s bone-deep, insurmountable timidity, to
his frequent blushes and delicate temperament, in order to believe that he was not genuinely upset by his son’s “paroxysm of sobbing” (85). Chandler is a hard-working, fastidious individual whose dreams complement, not dominate, his daily world. Byron’s poem about the death of a young girl may have evoked a mood, but the infant’s condition sparked a much deeper emotion. And when Chandler “caught the child to his breast in fright” (84), he was finally reacting as a parent should. Surely Joyce structured these thoughts and gestures to indicate a growing awareness on Chandler’s part.

Rather than end the story at this point, however, Joyce brings Annie back, for human families are, after all, a trinity (or they were in the biotechnology-free world of 1906). Before examining the rich (if abbreviated) interaction between the parents, however, I’d like to turn once again to biographical evidence: Joyce was fully aware of the pain which a child’s death could cause.

He knew that his mother had given birth to three male infants who died and that one of her greatest sorrows was the death of fourteen-year-old Georgie in 1902, her favorite, after continued religious clashes with James. Stanislaus Joyce describes George as handsome, intelligent, and musical: “After Jim he was the most promising member of the family” (My Brother’s 131, 133). Contracting typhoid and then peritonitis, Georgie lingered in Joyce’s mind, prompting several written epiphanies (Epiphanies 4, 17; Stephen Hero 167, 169; Ellmann 94; Stanislaus Joyce My Brother’s 136, 235). At the time of Georgie’s death, James was “toying with the idea of a medical career” and had unsuccessfully tried to revive his dead brother (Ellmann 78, 94). Never a good student in chemistry or biology, Joyce may have regretted his inadequacies when his brother’s life was in danger. Later choosing the name Giorgio for his own son, a more suitable form in a European milieu than “George” (although Nora always called him “Georgie” [Maddox 64]), Joyce, a writer obsessed with onomastics, honored his younger brother. Even before becoming a father, Joyce had known the pain of watching a child die.

In depicting Chandler and Annie’s encounter, Joyce handles the difficult task of representing overlapping, almost simultaneous conversation in a linear format by employing ellipses. Beginning with Chandler, Joyce once again encourages us to imagine what he thinks during the pauses. When Annie enters, Chandler says, "It's nothing... He began to cry... I couldn't... I didn't do anything... What?" (85). The reader is then given a sample of Annie's babble, which, interestingly, doesn't include the child's name, but is rather a litany composed of cooing phrases—"My little mannie! Was 'ou frightened, love?...There now, love! There now!"—and the more intriguing "Lambabaun! Mamma's little lamb of the world!" (85). Since these words immediately precede the final paragraph wherein Chandler backs out of the light and since his asking, "What?" implies that Annie’s comments were interspersed with his own, we should imagine their effect on him as well as references which may resonate in "kindred minds."

Aware of the Celtic literary movement, Chandler may have realized that the Gaelic words lampa beag meant both "a little lamp" and "a little cloud" or that "leanbhan, which is often pronounced 'lannabawn,' [meant] something like 'babykins!’” (Jackson and McGinley 72, 74), but I suspect that Joyce was more likely than Chandler to have been intrigued by these connections. The not-so-young father had more immediate concerns, but the words "little lamb of the world" probably did catch his attention and may explain why he asked, "What?" The phrase conjures the English translation of the "Agnus Dei" portion of the Catholic Mass which refers to Christ: "Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, have mercy on us [...] grant us peace." Although Joyce offers no direct proof,
Chandler was probably Catholic; in any event, we know that Joyce was raised in that faith and once seriously considered becoming a priest. Why, then, does Annie (perhaps named for St. Ann, the mother of the Virgin Mary) call this nameless, nebulous, yet noisy child "little lamb of the world"?

48 To answer this question, we can turn to Joyce's already firm conviction in 1906 that the artist's role was superior to the priest's. Although the strongest evidence for this development occurs in later works, Joyce had already rejected the priesthood and aspired to a literary career, claiming a morally and spiritually ascendant position as early as 1904 in "A Portrait of the Artist":

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\text{To those multitudes, not as yet in the wombs of humanity but surely engenderable there, he would give the word: Man and woman, out of you comes the nation that is to come [...]; and amid the general paralysis of an insane society, the confederate will issues in action" (48)}. \]

49 Calling the child "lamb of the world" instead of "lamb of God" reminds us of an artist's vocation, and the ending of "A Little Cloud" encourages a reexamination of some of the basic facts of the story.

50 We know that Chandler's son is approximately the same age as Giorgio was when Joyce wrote this story, but fundamental differences between Tommy and Joyce discourage direct parallels. Still, Joyce's disparagement of Gogarty is evident in his portrait of Gallaher, and Chandler's age, thirty-two, also invites scrutiny. Jackson and McGinley report that this places him in Yeats' and Synge's generation, evoking Joyce's artistic rejection of the Celtic movement (64). Walzl offers another helpful theory which suggests that, in describing protagonists to match the "childhood, adolescence, maturity, and public life" paradigm of the stories, Joyce adopts "the Roman divisions of the life span" in which "young manhood (\textit{juvenus}) [extends] from thirty-one to forty-five" ("Life" 410). While these critics offer helpful information, Joyce's precise choice of thirty-two justifies further speculation.

51 Joyce was twenty-four when he wrote the piece, Chandler's age when Gallaher left Ireland, and he may have envisioned a Dublin alter ego years later. More significant, however, is the age of Joyce's father, John, when the artist was born. According to Ellmann, John Joyce was born on 4 July 1849--recall that Nora also gave birth to Giorgio in July. Joyce's birthdate was 2 February 1882, making John thirty-two at the time. Although Chandler's age may be coincidental, the religious overtones encourage another interpretation which explains both Annie's strange cooing and Chandler's epiphany: Little Chandler represents both John and James Joyce while the infant symbolizes James, Giorgio, and the creative product. Struggling in a small apartment in Trieste with a screaming infant in the background, Joyce recalls his homeland and first family. And in both locales the significant element involves a father's recognition of the primacy of his son.

52 Culleton succinctly reminds us that "allusion was a serious business" in Joyce's creative paradigm (11). Despite the irony of a "candle-maker" or "candle-seller" as a failed artist, Little Tommy Chandler's tears suggest that he has turned from the worship of a false god (Gallaher and, perhaps, Romanticism) to the true religion of hearth and home through the unconscious intervention of his son as savior. The final clause of the story, "tears of remorse started to his eyes" (85), is precise. Joyce does not write "tears of self-pity"; nor does he promote ambiguity by merely saying "tears started to his eyes" When Chandler
“back[s] out of the lamplight” (85), he passes the torch to the next generation, genuinely contrite.

Nonetheless, I do not envision a changed life for Chandler; unlike Gallaher, Stephen Dedalus, and Joyce himself, Chandler will remain in Dublin, return to his daily tasks, and pay off the furniture. Yet, like Stanislaus and John, he may also foster the growth of an artist. He is, indeed, "a prisoner for life" (84), but the prison walls offer the hope of graffiti, for the child represents creativity as well as responsibility, and the story offers an early treatment of a central Joycean theme.

NOTES

1. See Beja’s “Farrington the Scrivener.” His lucid comparison of Melville and Joyce doesn’t mention Chandler whose job description, unlike Farrington’s in Dubliners’ “Counterparts,” remains nebulous.

2. See Reynolds’s “Introduction” to the 1993 publication James Joyce: A Collection of Critical Essays. Her overview of important critical approaches also emphasizes shifting opinions, sometimes within the minds of individual scholars (4-15). Another excellent piece, Sosnowski’s “Reading Acts and Reading Warrants,” examines interpretations of Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man in light of his belief that “hypotheses generate evidence” (43), a claim which I believe also holds true for Dubliners. Finally, Attridge’s essay in the Fritz Senn Festschrift (1998) provides a carefully reasoned plea for “originality, rigour, responsibility, and precision” in Joyce studies (28) while recognizing the validity of many schools of criticism.

3. Critics who soften the emphasis on paralysis and hopelessness include Beck, Beja (“One”), Daiches, Hedberg, Jones, Leonard, O’Grady, and Williams.

4. Ellmann reports the date as July 27 (204).

5. Although debate about the nature and importance of the Joycean epiphany is ongoing, for general definitions see Silverman, and Scholes and Kain (3-9). Bowen’s "Joyce and the Epiphany Concept" offers a helpful overview of the scholarship as well as a concentration on Dubliners. For specific discussions of the epiphany at the end of "A Little Cloud," see Daiches (87), French (458), Garrison (236), Jedynak (48-49), and O’Grady (400).

6. Leonard (166-67) and Henke (13-14) have also concentrated on Annie’s situation.

7. A more intense accusation, that Joyce killed her by “telling her what he thought,” originated from Gogarty (Ellmann 173), further evidence of Joyce’s negative opinion of Gallaher.

8. Although the following information may not be relevant to Joyce’s attitude when he composed “A Little Cloud,” when Nora miscarried her third child at three months’ gestation, Joyce carefully examined the embryo and mourned its “truncated existence” (Ellmann 268-69).

9. Lea Baechler reports an interesting trans-generic experiment in which a theatrical adaptation of five of the stories from Dubliners, including “A Little Cloud,” was produced in New York’s House for Contemporary Theatre in 1987 by DearKnows Productions. Slicing the narrative into portions and assigning lines to characters who seemed appropriate—the infant, for example—but who were not always designated as speakers by Joyce, the company focused on Chandler’s inability “to overcome his paralysis” and interpreted the ending as a “near epiphany” which resulted in an “ambiguous end[ing]” (369, 373). Although I disagree with DearKnows’
interpretation, the staging demonstrated the rich, dramatic texture of Joyce's literary technique in *Dubliners*.

10. I agree with Bernard Benstock's general premise in "Joyce's Rheumatics." His focus on references to air, breath, and wind in *Dubliners* suggests that "the aura of the Holy Ghost [is] more notable in its absence than in its presence and [is] consequently a fitting augmentation of the paralytic and simonic themes" (2). However, I do not agree with his placing this story in the same rubric. After all, the infant does catch its breath and recover as his father recedes into the darkness.

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