"A Regular Swindle"

The Failure of Gifts in *Dubliners*

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It is a striking historical coincidence that the rise of modernist literature took place concurrently with the emergence of modern anthropology and sociology. Critics were not slow to recognize certain modernists' "anthropological" approaches to comparative mythology: one recalls, for example, T. S. Eliot's explicit references to Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* in his notes to *The Waste Land*, and Stuart Gilbert's explication of James Joyce's use of Greek myth and epic in *Ulysses*. However, early critics had little to say about the modernists' employment of specific sociological or anthropological paradigms, perhaps because most modernist authors derived their anthropological material from literary sources—classical epic, medieval legend, Chinese poetry—rather than from social science texts. Even now, when literary scholars boast of advancing "political" or "historical" readings of Joyce and other authors, we seldom bother to acquaint ourselves with actual works of sociology, economics, or anthropology, aside from rounding up the usual suspects—Adorno, Althusser, Jameson, Foucault, or Bataille—and parading them by the observation tower. What goes largely unappreciated is the way that modernist texts, and Joyce's in particular, exemplify the discoveries of modern and contemporary social scientists. This neglect is strange, since Joyce himself sometimes described his work as a sociological document: an author who announces his intention to write a "moral history" of his country (*Letters II* 134) is adducing examples as a scientist displays specimens or tests hypotheses. That "nicely polished looking-glass" in which Joyce hoped to reflect Dubliners' foibles is also a microscope, a scientific instrument designed to advance the "course of civilisation in Ireland" (*Letters I* 64).

Hence, as a first step toward bringing Joyce criticism into the twenty-first century, we must, paradoxically, look backward, re-reading Joyce in light of the sociological and anthropological texts of his age, and thereby

begin to recover the social contexts for his works. Doing so may enable us both to challenge current critical commonplaces and to establish new paradigms for the next century of Joyce studies, and indeed for an age of globalization in which the last pre-industrial economies are being converted to capitalism. Thus, in what follows I intend to scrutinize in detail the ways that Joyce uses one such socio-anthropological paradigm—that of the gift—to map his chosen terrain and to depict the collision between old and new values and practices and the effects of that collision on his fictional human beings.

One of Joyce's social science contemporaries was French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, whose brief 1925 treatise *Essai sur le don* (*The Gift*) is one of the seminal texts in comparative anthropology. Mauss compellingly argues that gifts in so-called "primitive" societies were "total social phenomena" that expressed and served religious, juridical, moral, political, and economic functions all at once (3). Mauss shows that what appear to be disinterested, gracious social rituals involve competition, obligation, and hostility as well as friendliness and generosity. By the end of his monograph, however, Mauss seems to lose sight of his own evidence and laments that the spirit of the gift has faded from modern society, much to our detriment. Those "primitives," he concludes, were "less sad, less serious, less miserly, and less personal than we are. Externally at least, they were or are more generous, more liable to give than we are" (81). He then exhorts his readers to learn from these generous "primitives," to substitute alliance and solidarity for hostility, isolation, and stagnation (82–83).

Most histories of the gift offer a similar narrative, here summarized by Jonathan Parry: "as the economy becomes increasingly disembedded from society, as economic relations become increasingly differentiated from other types of social relationship, the transactions appropriate to each become ever more polarized in terms of their symbolism and ideology" (466). According to this narrative, the domain of the gift has been gradually invaded, occupied, and finally displaced, so that it now plays only a minor role in the everyday economy, functioning almost exclusively among kin or close friends and posing no threat to the dominant ideology and practices of mercantile capitalism. Recently, however, Natalie Zemon Davis (among others) has challenged this story, arguing that gift giving and receiving have never faded entirely, and that "gift exchange persists as an essential relational mode, a repertoire of behavior, a register with its own rules, language, etiquette and gestures" (9). Even in the twentieth century (as, no doubt, it will in the new century), it takes its place beside

two other "relational modes"—the "mode of sales" and the "mode of coercion" (extortion, theft, and so on [Davis 9])—as a primary means of social interaction. Davis's statement about the persistence of gift exchange applies particularly well to early twentieth-century Dublin, a city lacking a strong industrial class, whose economy had been stifled for centuries by the British presence, and whose citizens clung to a mythic vision of Ireland as a kingdom governed by ancient traditions of honor, heroism, and self-sacrifice. Joyce's Dubliners, like their real-life counterparts, and like many citizens of postcolonial nations today, reside in a transitional economy that partakes uneasily of both the premodern and the industrial. In such circumstances, gift practices become particularly powerful markers of social status and connection.

Mauss's ambivalence about the gift—his recognition that it not only expresses a purer sense of grace and generosity but also remains an instrument of power and status—also finds exceptionally strong expression in *Dubliners*. For the most part, however, Joyce's citizens seem to exemplify Mauss's sad, ungenerous moderns. Indeed, our examination will suggest that each one of the three interlocking obligations analyzed by Mauss—the obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate (Mauss 39)—is distorted in Joyce's Dublin. Giving fails to generate good feeling or prestige but nevertheless remains an undeniable moral imperative; receiving gifts leads to resentment or onerous debt; reciprocity is withheld, disrupted, or neglected entirely. The result is a broad and profound sense of fragmentation, frustration, and alienation. Thus, although Phillip Herring has suggested that *Dubliners* demonstrates a "persistent advocacy of the gift exchange cycles of love, trust, hospitality, and friendship together with a deep suspicion of" commerce (178), those values are conspicuous mostly by their absence. The characters' performance in gift rituals is deeply flawed, as the volume repeatedly depicts gifts mislaid, unsent, misinterpreted, or unwelcome. Handicapped by poverty, duplicity, and delusions of grandeur, the characters nonetheless seek to promote fellowship and status through gift exchanges; but the results are bribery, hostility, and despair. Efforts at displaying generosity almost inevitably metamorphose into what Little Chandler's wife, Annie, calls a "regular swindle" (*D* 71).

John Gordon has wittily demonstrated how the theme of loss and subtraction pervades the stories. The Dublin condition, he notes, is an "inordinate degree of susceptibility . . . to loss" (347). And yet, as Mauss argues, loss is natural and healthy for a society, because through economic losses citizens generate gains in other registers. The "gifts" that Mauss described

in such rituals as the Kwakiutl potlatch ceremony—in which chieftains and other wealthy clansmen give extravagant reciprocal gifts and engage in orgies of property destruction in order to establish and solidify prestige—only look voluntary; in fact, he noted, they are obligatory and are practiced with the goal of crushing rivals (3, 41). In other words, what looks like generosity is actually an index of social power: citizens lose property in order to gain status. Through giving, economic capital is converted into what Pierre Bourdieu terms "symbolic capital" or "social capital"—fame, power, or rank (*Outline* 179).[1]

Mauss was, of course, far from the first to recognize this phenomenon, for the capacity to turn loss into gain through largesse has been recognized in the West as a sign of nobility at least since Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which outlines three forms of generosity, the greatest of which is *megalopsychia* (greatness of soul), usually translated as "magnanimity." According to Aristotle, the magnanimous person confers benefits but is ashamed of receiving them, and will "repay benefits with interest, so that his original benefactor, in addition to being paid, will have become a debtor and a beneficiary" (1124b; 70).[2] Much later, Nietzsche seems to have had Aristotle in mind when in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he lauded the "gift-giving virtue" as "the highest" of all (186).[3] The magnanimous person exercises the gift-giving virtue by giving freely and in return receiving greater gifts, enhanced prestige, or both. The concept of magnanimity thus reveals what anthropologist Annette Weiner has identified as the essential paradox of the gift: how to "keep-while-giving" (5).[4] Magnanimity is also the ideal to which Joyce's Dubliners, particularly the males, aspire. Constrained by poverty and wedded to unproductive social habits, however, they fail to transform their losses into moral or social gains. Even when they do give, Joyce's males are oppressed rather than enriched by the giving. This phenomenon is most clearly displayed in the stories of "mature life," which disclose a spectrum of aborted largesse: Chandler, of "A Little Cloud," is humiliated by his drinking partner's gay worldliness and his wife's ingratitude; in "Counterparts," Farrington deepens his poverty of spirit and purse by leading a barroom potlatch; in the painful case of James Duffy, emotional and financial meanness signifies a rejection of all social bonds and a permanent condition of alienation.

A second key principle drawn from the anthropology of gifts also comes into play here: inalienability. Certain objects, Mauss suggests, never move outside the family, and even when handed down to the next generation are surrounded by rituals of great solemnity; these possessions are never re-

ally given at all, because they continue to bear the identity of their first owner (Mauss 43). Such objects, never fully dissociated from their original possessors even when relinquished, are said to be *inalienable*. In the enchanted world of Mauss's "primitives," "everything speaks" (44), but inalienable objects always speak in the specific voice of a person, family, clan, or tribe. Such possessions function as a "force against change" by authenticating origins and kinship histories (Weiner 9, 33); they further suggest that we can understand exchangeable objects only by juxtaposing them with objects withheld from exchange. Indeed, inalienable possessions serve as the foundation of the gift system for anthropologist Chris Gregory, who expands the distinction between alienability and inalienability into an ambitious schema in which gifts and commodities embody two vastly different social systems and visions of identity. According to Gregory, "commodity exchange is an exchange of *alienable* objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal *independence* that establishes a *quantitative* relationship between the *objects* transacted, whereas gift exchange is an exchange of *inalienable* objects between people who are in a state of reciprocal *dependence* that establishes a *qualitative* relationship between the *subjects* transacting" ("Kula" 104; emphases added).[5] Imprinted with the identities of giver and receiver, gifts promote and express connection; commodities, on the other hand, bespeak alienation. In a gift economy, objects gain personhood; in a commodity economy, people become objects (Gregory, *Gifts* 41).

The principle of inalienability arises from a fourth obligation that Mauss mentions but never develops: the requirement to give gifts to the gods (14). (This obligation has, until recently, been neglected by anthropologists as well.) From this fourth obligation, Maurice Godelier traces the hierarchical effects of gift giving: since the gods can never be fully repaid, those humans who give the most or are most closely associated with the divine are elevated to quasi-godlike status (Godelier 30). Human gifts are material remnants of the original, divine gift. At once "substitutes for sacred objects and substitutes for human beings" (Godelier 72), gifts are thus caught between the inalienability of holy things—divine relics, family heirlooms, and kinship markers inextricably linked with tribal or national identities—and the alienability of commodities freely exchanged for profit (Godelier 94). Gifts are thus double-voiced, speaking now in the timbre of ancestors or divine beings, and now in the neutral tones of mere merchandise. In sum, gift practices are the Jekyll and Hyde of social interactions, sometimes cementing social relations and encouraging friendship but at

other times promoting debt and envy. Gifts may be freighted with historical or social significance, or they may dissolve into fungible objects.

These concepts help to explain the peculiar entrapment of Joyce's Dubliners, many of whom are victimized by their adherence to a rigidly binary reified understanding of gifts and commodities. Characters such as the "Araby" narrator and Chandler find themselves unable to move from an idealized realm associated with religion, love, art, and the gift to the materialist territory of commerce and purchase. Indeed, the three stories of male adolescence I'll treat here delineate a stark trajectory of diminishing idealism, descending from a quasi-religious faith in the radical separation of inalienable and alienable things, to a vision of largesse as nothing more than an engine to generate prestige, and finally to a desperate cynicism in which everything is alienable and presents are nothing but disguised bribes.

"Araby" initiates the motif of the failed gift.[6] Herring suggests that the narrator's quest for the ideal present starts with the uncle's gift of money, but in fact it commences much earlier, when the boy recalls the generosity of his house's former tenant, a "charitable" priest who bequeathed his money to "institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister" (*D* 21). These bequests are highly honorable, according to Aristotle's definition, because they are "connected with the gods" (1122b; 66); more important, the priest's death and his charity are implicitly linked to a longstanding historical affiliation between gifts and sacrifice (see Berking 48), so that his life gains meaning only through his sacrificial death. Although we may doubt whether leaving one's possessions to institutions after one's death constitutes true charity, nonetheless the boy's association of gifts and holiness seems clear.[7] He therefore tries to emulate the priest, protecting his romantic longing for Mangan's mysterious sister from the brutalities of the marketplace by figuring his emotions as a "chalice," the very container of Christ's sacrificial blood and the most tangible proof of a priest's power of transubstantiation. Juxtaposed and contrasted with the raucous commercial space is the "back drawingroom in which the priest had died" (*D* 23) and in which the solitary boy presses his palms together in erotic prayer. The space of gifts—of the sacred, of the inalienable—seems entirely at odds with the domain of commodities, where dwell the profane and the alienated. On one side is the treasured chalice; on the other are barrels of pigs' cheeks. The boy's image of the girl thus incarnates a narrative of perfect divine largesse that presages his ultimate loss. That is, because the only gift that will truly satisfy his idealized lover is the ultimate

sacrifice of the boy's life, his desire for very human erotic connection collides with his romantic narrative of Christly imitation, one that, he believes, has been enacted by the priestly steward.

The "Araby" narrator fails to grasp that the gift mode exists within and alongside the mode of sales. Indeed, to gratify his pseudo-ascetic impulses, the boy would be required to decline all rewards for his present.[8] Thus in "Araby" the gift partakes of a myth of saintly self-sacrifice that contributes a good deal to Irish social and political oppression, a myth embodied for Joyce by Parnell, and, as we'll see, for Gabriel Conroy by Michael Furey. In any case, far from being inspired by his uncle's present, the boy is delayed by the man's tardy handout and deterred from his planned expedition, so that what may have been a generous donation for the uncle "translates as a paltry sum for the recipient" (Benstock 95), one that could never be worthy of his yen for transcendence.[9] Worse, to perform his planned act of beneficence the boy must once again pass through a street "thronged with buyers" (*D* 26). When he arrives at Araby, it is bathed in a silence "like that which pervades a church after a service" (*D* 26): it has been transformed from a sacred to a profane space. One scarcely need mention the famous "fall of the coins" whose jingle aurally announces the gift's dissolution into the mercantile. Though tentatively fingering "porcelain vases and flowered teasets"—conventional symbols of femininity that seem to mock his vision of the gift as a sacred chalice—the boy is intimidated by the bazaar's crass atmosphere and fails not only to give a present but even to get one. His fervent desire to enhance his erotic capital (one that Bourdieu neglects to mention) through an extravagant gift to his loved one founders on the realities of Araby, and instead of imitating the generous priest, the boy ends up mimicking his dilatory uncle. Power borrowed from God gives way to weakness purchased at the expense of the boy's spirit; the "splendid bazaar" (*D* 23) is exposed as a cheap swindle.

This image of impotent idealism sets the tone for the rest of the volume, and the two other stories of male adolescence demonstrate how rapidly that idealism fades. In "After the Race," for example, Jimmy Doyle is depicted as little more than a tool for his father to cultivate people "worth knowing" and thereby secure for his son "qualities often unpurchaseable" (*D* 35, 37); in other words, Jimmy is nothing but human stock invested to earn social capital. Likewise, Daddy Doyle secretly approves of Jimmy's minor excesses because they reinforce his self-image as a "great-souled" man wealthy enough not to bother about small expenditures (*D* 35). Despite Jimmy's wealth, however, the other potential investors in the auto-

mobile firm act as though they are doing him a favor by including him in their card game, and eventually take him for a good chunk of that wealth. In the end, moreover, he loses his money without purchasing any of those valuable immaterial qualities. Extravagance and magnanimity thus appear here as a con-game's camouflage, and the "Araby" boy's fevered romance and spiritualized notion of the gift have yielded to a naked vulgarity unredeemed by that naïveté. Ironically, Jimmy and his father are victims not of idealism but of insufficient mercenariness. Yet in their attachment to the same bourgeois values that victimize them, they seem to epitomize the "gratefully oppressed" that populate Joyce's Dublin (*D* 34).

We can further explain Jimmy Doyle's victimization through reference to the work of another anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins. He has outlined a "spectrum of sociability" based on reciprocity, in which the friendlier the relations, the less specific and more extensive are the obligations. Parents, for example, do not calculate what they have given to their children and probably do not expect repayment. At the other end of the spectrum from this "solidarity" extreme lies so-called "negative reciprocity," the most impersonal sort of exchange, exemplified by haggling and theft. In these transactions, each party tries to gain advantage over the other by reciprocating with a lower value than what has been received. Between the two is what Sahlins called "balanced reciprocity," the desired goal of most exchanges in modern society, whereby each transactor receives something of roughly equal value, and in timely fashion (191–96).[10]

So far so good. But this system of relational modes depends upon what Bourdieu calls a "collective misrecognition." The delay between donation and reciprocation permits the flexible negotiation of kinship and friendship relations: time allows parties to "forget" that reciprocation is due and thus to maintain the "self-deception" that obligated repayments are really gifts and to pretend that presents are bestowed with no expectation of return (Bourdieu, "Selections" 198). Problems arise when parties disagree upon the nature of a relationship or transaction. Here, then, lies one significant source of the distortion of reciprocity in Joyce's Dublin, and, for that matter, in many transitional societies of the early twenty-first century: Bourdieu's collective amnesia has been partly cured, and the result is what I am calling *relational errors*, in which one party understands a transaction as a gift and another understands it as a contract or debt (see Herring 177). That is what occurs in "After the Race": flattered by the blandishments of his "friends," Jimmy fails to grasp that the real goal of their association is to liberate him from his money. In other words, he

mistakes one set of reciprocal relations for another. Another type of relational error involves treating the inalienable as a commodity. This is the case in "Two Gallants," where Corley and Lenehan's chicanery converts love and generosity into mere coins of vantage. In this world, the ideal of magnanimity seems ludicrously archaic.

As a noted leech, Lenehan is one of the few male gift *receivers* in the collection; apparently his "vast stock" of stories and jokes lets him repay rounds of drinks with narrative currency (*D* 42). His pal Corley invokes the "Araby" boy's notion of gift giving, but only in order to mock it, boasting that he used to "pay the tram" for women, "or buy them chocolate and sweets. . . . I used to spend money on them," he confides, "And damn the thing I ever got out of it" (*D* 44). No longer chalices, women have been converted into cigars (*D* 43), boosters of phallic virility. Obviously Corley and his disciple inhabit Davis's third "relational mode" or Sahlins's domain of "negative reciprocity," where the goal is to take without paying back. Their poverty of "purse and spirit" (*D* 49) likewise drains the spirit from every transaction. Although for a moment Lenehan seems to recognize the emptiness of his life—like James Duffy, he eats alone, cast out from the social rituals associated with meals—his momentary despondency is dispelled by his fond reverie of marrying a "simpleminded girl with a little of the ready" (*D* 49): cash, that is, coin of the realm, preferably gold. The gravely revealed coin at the end of the story thus ironically reverses the fall of the coins at the conclusion of "Araby"; instead of failing to purchase a gift for a spiritualized female, these men crassly accept a "gift"—no doubt extorted—from a commodified female. Whereas the "Araby" boy weeps while gazing into the darkness, Corley smiles while opening his hand to the streetlight's blunt regard.

We might view these two as companion stories, inasmuch as they exemplify Jonathan Parry's point that the "ideology of the pure gift may . . . itself promote and entrench the ideological elaboration of the domain in which self-interest rules supreme" (469): that is, each is underwritten by a polarized notion of the gifts/commodities distinction. The "Araby" narrator's moist idealism is but the reverse face of Corley's brutal exploitation. If you can never attain the ideal, why not take what you can when you can? In each case, gift and commodity, love and exploitation, remain radically polarized. Lovers either give presents without any consideration of return or simply compete for scarce resources. But they never share anything or engage in true reciprocal exchange.

The stories of "mature life" manifest at least a vestigial belief in the

possibility of magnanimous gift giving. As I noted at the outset of this essay, however, these characters' attempts to create prestige through gifts also run aground. Indeed, we can follow the trail of inept giving inaugurated in "Araby" through these tales of misshapen spending, beginning with "A Little Cloud," a story that it resembles in many respects. In this story, Little Chandler at first seems to entertain few of the "Araby" narrator's illusions, the ages having "bequeathed" him the knowledge that it is useless to struggle against fortune (*D* 61). Yet struggle he does, first by attempting to appropriate symbolic capital from the name of Corless's (*D* 61), where he has observed women with their faces powdered, lifting their dresses as they touch the earth like "alarmed Atalantas" (62). For Little Chandler as for the "Araby" boy, women embody luxury and wealth. Having failed to glean much reflected shine from these memories, however, he conjures up a review of his nonexistent poems that attributes to him the "*gift of easy and graceful verse*" (*D* 63).

Once at Corless's he seeks to establish his potency through a treating contest—Dublin's own version of the potlatch—with the worldly Ignatius Gallaher, a man notable for extravagant habits that belie his saintly first name (*D* 62). Gallaher gives the impression of the magnanimity that Joyce's males so eagerly seek.[11] After the orange-tied journalist inaugurates the potlatch, Chandler reciprocates (*D* 66); Gallaher buys again, and finally Chandler returns the favor. But though the drink count is balanced, Chandler still loses: he ends up feeling that he has failed to "assert his manhood" in the exchange (*D* 69), perhaps because Gallaher snubs Chandler's invitation to visit his home, a refusal of hospitality that suggests disdain. Also, to the recently married Chandler, Gallaher speaks of matrimony in Lenehan's mercenary terms, predicting that for him "there'll be no mooning and spooning about it. I mean to marry money. She'll have a good fat account at the bank or she won't do for me" (*D* 70). His metaphors express the complete commodification of his future spouse's identity: her name is equated with currency (he'll "marry money") and her body with her bankbook (she is merely a "fat account"). Gallaher's materialist metonyms interfere with Chandler's misty Atalantas.

Unintentionally contradicting his earlier defense of marriage, Chandler finds himself borrowing Gallaher's own humiliating idiom: "You'll put your head in the sack . . . like everyone else if you can find the girl," he says stoutly (*D* 70). Marriage has become a form of sacrifice or suicide: that besacked head, we realize, is ready to be chopped off. Once he arrives home, Chandler is reminded of his own loss of manhood. First he is reprimanded

for forgetting to purchase the "parcel of coffee from Bewley's" that his wife requested, forcing her to venture out herself (*D* 71). He then recalls the "present" of a "pale blue summer blouse" he bought her, which cost him both the hefty sum of 10s 11d as well as an "agony of nervousness" (*D* 71). Chandler's generous intention was first undermined by his having to return for the "odd penny of his change," and then annihilated by his wife's reaction when she threw the "blouse on the table and said it was a regular swindle to charge ten and elevenpence for that." Scanning her picture and the room, Chandler sees his own limp largesse reflected in his wife's "mean" face—no statuesque Atalanta she—and in their "mean" furniture (*D* 72), still to be paid for. Imprisoned, the "little man" ends the story weeping, like the "Araby" narrator, over his abject failure to exercise the gift-giving virtue. Chandler has, however, sacrificed something: his ability to imagine a better future and a more generous self. Like the "Araby" boy, he is trapped by his inability to shift from one relational mode to another.

Similarly, for scrivener Farrington of "Counterparts," the gift economy only reinforces his subjection. Afraid to beg for an advance on his meager salary, he pawns his watch for six shillings, and as he walks from the pawnshop he "preconsidered the terms in which he would narrate the incident to the boys" (*D* 81). His legalistic language ("preconsidered the terms") reveals his vision of the treating contest to come as a kind of contract in which he will tender his story in return for drinks and prestige. As Carol Shloss notes, the man inarticulately believes that such gift exchanges allow him "to feel part of a larger, self-regulating system" and thinks "that each donation is an act of social faith" (193). But, as Aristotle reminds us, a poor man cannot be magnanimous and "anyone who tries is a fool" (1122a; 66). Farrington fails to heed this ancient warning.[12] Paul Delany has brilliantly illuminated the story's pattern of "homosocial consumption"—similar to the pseudo-potlatch system I have traced in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses*—in which each treater feels momentarily that he is the master of revels (Delany 382; see also Osteen, *Economy*, 250–79). For a while Farrington seems able to command this economy and to bolster his social capital through the narrative currency of his sharp retort to his boss (Delany 385). It is thus no accident that the middle section of the story, where the drinking and storytelling are narrated, is the only section in which Farrington is given a name. But once again the pretense of brotherhood masks a swindle: as Delany shows in detail, Farrington spends almost all of his six shillings to pay for nineteen drinks but receives only

eleven, whereas the sponger Paddy Leonard accepts nine drinks without once springing for a round.[13]

The boy in "Araby," clinking his remaining pennies together as he exits the bazaar, is, Delany reminds us, "father to the man Farrington, feeling his pennies as he waits, defeated, for his homebound tram" (386). But whereas Delany suggests that Joyce accepted such homosocial consumption as a legitimate refuge for his beleaguered males (388), "Counterparts" starkly reveals the darker side of the system on which that consumption is based. Farrington's attempts to manipulate the gift economy merely reconfirm and deepen his lack of status: in the end he spends almost all of his money and doesn't even get drunk. At home, the alleged solidarity of the pub gives way to the brutality of negative reciprocity: someone must pay for Farrington's losses, and little Tom Farrington is elected to the position. The boy tries to stave off a beating by bribing his father with a Hail Mary—a metaphorical sacrifice and ritual gift. But this Tom, like the one in the previous story, is a prisoner as well as a scapegoat. Clasping his hands in supplication, he cries "O papa," his words pathetically echoing the "Araby" boy's fervid "O love" (*D* 86). Alas, Tom is also his father's son, and his pitiful attempt to offer grace is arrested by the patriarch's stick.

Unlike Farrington, whose lack of magnanimity results partly from his poverty, James Duffy of "A Painful Case," with his secure middle-class position as a bank clerk, could afford to be generous, though that is not his habit. Still, during the initial stage of his relationship with Emily Sinico, Mr. Duffy loosens his usually tight grip, as shown by the verbs depicting their intimacy, all of which relate to bestowal: he "lent her books, provided her with ideas, shared his intellectual life with her." In return, she "gave out some fact" about herself (*D* 98). She even becomes his "confessor," as if to reinforce the "Araby" narrator's linkage of gifts and sacred ritual. But Duffy abruptly halts these tender exchanges by rejecting the obligations they have engendered: "We cannot give ourselves," his soul pronounces, "we are our own"; alas, "every bond . . . is a bond to sorrow" (*D* 99). Not only is Duffy guilty of emotional meanness (and Joyce's style here emulates that scrupulosity), but he is also a poor reader. That is, he should have studied more carefully his copy of *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* wherein Zarathustra urges his followers to practice the rich selfishness in which "your soul strives for treasures and gems, because your virtue is insatiable in wanting to give. You force all things to and into yourself that they may flow back out of your well as the gifts of your love" (Nietzsche 187). Zarathustra declares that the highest virtue is to become "sacrifices and gifts

yourselves" (187); this is precisely what the "Araby" boy (and Michael Furey) attempt to do. In contrast, Duffy epitomizes what Nietzsche calls "sick" selfishness, which hungrily "sizes up those who have much to eat; and always it sneaks around the table of those who give" (187). The ironic result for this self-professed Nietzschean is to remain an "outcast from life's feast" (*D* 104). His inability to give cheats him of all solace.

So far we have seen how poorly male characters exercise the gift-giving virtue. As in the stories of adolescence, the stories depicting mature men trace a pattern of diminishing spirituality and shrinking gifts. Thus in Duffy the impulse to give that so tortures Chandler and Farrington has withered; whereas the latter two are frustrated by seeking and not finding it, Duffy voluntarily seeks no "communion with others" (*D* 97). But it is not only gift rituals that fail to produce solidarity in *Dubliners;* there is a paucity of meaningful rituals of any kind. Even the rituals that do exist—the elliptically narrated funeral in "The Sisters," the shotgun wedding in "The Boarding House," Duffy's solitary mealtimes, the pandering sermon in "Grace"—fail to satisfy the characters' needs for community and compassion. One might similarly argue that the males' inadequate performance in gift rituals results from an unfamiliarity with their protocols. After all, most theorists agree that the modern gift economy is generally associated with females, and several sociological studies confirm that women both give and receive gifts more frequently than do men.[14] Not in *Dubliners*, where women are no more adept at giving than their male counterparts. But whereas males in *Dubliners* attempt to generate prestige through magnanimity, women's gifts fail because the women, like Jimmy Doyle, misread their social positions and misinterpret communal norms. Their errors are relational errors.

Immediately after little Tom Farrington promises to say a Hail Mary, a virgin appears, as if invoked by that promise, in the diminutive form of Maria, who in "Clay" is initially portrayed as exactly the sort of "veritable peacemaker" needed in the Farrington home (*D* 87). She has garnered tributes in the form of gifts, such as the purse she received from Joe and Alphy Donnelly as *A Present from Belfast* (*D* 88). The two half crowns inside that purse might allow her to reciprocate for this present with gifts of her own, and indeed, she is associated with generosity throughout the early pages of the story: when she has visitors she unfailingly gives them "one or two slips from [the plants in] her conservatory" (*D* 88), and she habitually supervises the distribution of the barmbrack cakes that her fellow employees take with tea (*D* 89). She also shares the "Araby" narrator's faith in the

power of the gift and, flushed with good feeling on her way to the Donnellys', buys penny cakes for the children and tops them off with an expensive slice of plumcake for the parents (cost: 2s 4d). These cakes are, of course, pale imitations of the wedding cake she desires but will never receive, as her blushing response to the brusque salesclerk's remark suggests (*D* 90). Although she manages to purchase her planned gifts, she fails to complete the transaction, and her humiliation again echoes that of the "Araby" boy.

Maria's fragile well-being cracks when she discovers that she has mislaid the plumcake on the tram, ruining any hope of earning gratitude from the Donnellys. Her loss of the cake serves as the story's turning point: from this moment on everything she gives or receives—her song, the clay she touches in the game, the wine that Joe forces her to accept (*D* 93)—is either incomplete or unwelcome. However, her loss of the plumcake really signifies an unconscious acknowledgment of hostility: the gift can't be given because the family who would receive it has been torn apart by fraternal feuding. Hence, in failing to reciprocate for their joint present she unconsciously reenacts the absence of generosity and grace in the Donnelly household. Maria's lost present, then, embodies the fractured moral economy of her hosts.

Joe claims that "Maria is my proper mother" (*D* 88). If so, she is as ineffectual a parent as Chandler and Farrington are. Maria's problematic motherhood also foreshadows that of "A Mother," where Mrs. Kearney's relational error again results in hostility, conflict, and exploitation. She is another character caught between "romantic ideas" she has never fully relinquished (*D* 124) and the mercenary reality in which a daughter is a commodity whose value one enhances with a dowry. Disguising that investment as a gift does little to change its status as a purchase price. But mixed messages end up confounding the mother. When Mr. Holohan proposes that Kathleen accompany the artistes performing for the *Eire Abu* Society, her mother enters "heart and soul" into the details of the enterprise, and finally signs a contract specifying that Kathleen will receive eight guineas for four concerts (*D* 125). For her mother, the contract is a business deal. Yet her behavior—"invariably friendly and advising: homely in fact" (*D* 125)—sends conflicting signals about the transaction that reveal her ambivalence. Indeed, it is precisely her carefully practiced hospitality during negotiations, when she insists that Mr. Holohan help himself to their biscuit barrel and beverage decanter (*D* 125), that complicates matters by implying that the transaction belongs within the domain

of the gift, where obligations are flexible and the time for repayment elastic.

Thus when the Society decides to cancel one of the four concerts, Mrs. Kearney's insistence on obeying the letter of the contract makes her appear petty and grasping. On Saturday night, when she receives a little less than half of the money stipulated, she is outraged: "She had spared neither trouble nor expense and this was how she was repaid" (*D* 134). Mrs. Kearney's ivory indignation not only causes her to forfeit the remainder of the fee but prompts everyone to condemn her actions, and the magniloquent O'Madden Burke announces that Kathleen's musical career in Dublin is ended (*D* 133). Was the contract a market transaction or a friendly agreement? Public opinion in Dublin's clannish middle-classes proclaims the latter, decreeing that Mrs. Kearney's pinched generosity amounts to a betrayal of the "spirit" of the gift. Of course, this is a convenient charge for the sexist males of the Society who can project their meanness onto her by implicitly invoking women's historical affiliation with gifts. She too is ensnared, like Little Chandler, albeit from the opposite direction, by an inability to negotiate a smooth transition between gift and marketplace. Caught between the vestigial kinship mores of the friendly gift and her bourgeois adherence to commercial values, she makes a relational error that leads to the loss of the social capital she has so laboriously accrued.

"The Dead" both consummates and supplements these distressing patterns.[15] At the story's opening, another male, Gabriel Conroy, attempts to impress a woman with his generosity; again he fails, this time because the coin he gives to Lily looks less like a gift or tip than what Bernard Benstock calls a "bribe to cover an embarrassing gaucherie" (105).[16] Like most tips, Gabriel's stands "at the boundary of other critically different transfers, not quite a payment, not quite a bribe, not quite charity, but not quite a gift either" (Zelizer 95). He has committed, like Mrs. Kearney, an error of relation, failing to recognize that any "gift" made to Lily at this moment can only be taken as a sign of contempt, an attempt to "get something" out of her—in this case, a sense of his own magnanimity. But Gabriel departs from the pattern established by the "Araby" boy, because his lame attempts at generosity derive not from male elders but from female ones. His aunts, the Morkan sisters, may indeed offer the volume's only examples of authentic generosity. Though far from wealthy, the aunts believe in the "best of everything" (*D* 160), both practicing largesse and condemning its absence in others, as when Aunt Kate questions the church's lack of "politeness and gratitude" to female choir members (*D* 177).

Gabriel's mother seems to have shared their graciousness, for he fondly recalls the present of a purple waistcoat that she made for him (*D* 169) and realizes that it was only "thanks to her" that he attended a university (*D* 170).

In his historical study of giving, Helmuth Berking traces the norms of gift exchange and sacrifice to the distribution of foodstuffs by primitive hunters, in which the "roast meat hierarchy corresponded to the social hierarchy" when dividing up the sacrificial meal (69). Likewise, in "The Dead," Mr. Conroy tries to solidify his role as big chief by carving and distributing the goose (see *D* 179). He also attempts to reciprocate for his aunts' generosity by praising them fulsomely in his speech as the "Three Graces of the Dublin musical world" (*D* 186), though his accolades are soured by his ungracious allusions to Molly Ivors.[17] The Three Graces invoke the spirit of the gift, that ideal which many Dubliners fail to attain, but the women pass it not to Gabriel (at least not at first) but to Gretta, who possesses an "attitude" of grace as she stands listening to Bartell D'Arcy sing "The Lass of Aughrim" (*D* 191). Gabriel's praise, of course, is meant to show what a generous soul *he* is. And even after the party he continues trying to generate social and erotic capital through giving, first overtipping the cabman (*D* 196), and then soliciting Gretta's compliment when he mentions lending a pound to Freddy Malins.

But Gabriel's most abject failure to give is disclosed only in retrospect, when Gretta romantically—if probably inaccurately—tells him that Michael Furey made the ultimate sacrifice for her, giving his life for her love. Furey's martyrdom finally fills the "Araby" narrator's chalice of desire: the perfect gift is possible after all. Once Gretta relates Michael's story, the Morkans' feast appears as a kind of Last Supper, with Michael Furey's body serving as host for Gabriel's pseudo-priestly offices. If only Gabriel could take Michael's place, or could ingest that spirit of perfect self-sacrifice and ideal largesse that Furey embodies! Gabriel seems doomed to fall short of such extravagant giving. Such a romantic gesture, sanctified in Gretta's memory and then embellished by Gabriel, would perhaps trump any human male's attempt to equal it. But should he even try? Or is Joyce pointing to the ultimate emptiness and sentimentality of the very ideal of self-sacrifice, an ideal that has contributed so much to Ireland's stultification? This question, in turn, bears on the issue of Gabriel's "generosity." Does Gabriel achieve a more authentically generous vision at the end of the story? Or does his culminating epiphany, as Vincent Pecora suggests, merely exemplify "the codified expression of the myth of

self-sacrifice, of grateful oppression, lying at the heart of Joyce's Dublin" (243)? Pecora's description of the characters' self-delusion rings true, but his suggestion that Gabriel's final, impersonal vision of the unity of the living and the dead simply repeats his earlier tendency to heroicize his own self-pity fails to grant Gabriel the capacity to change.[18] Although Gabriel's previous actions were indeed designed to display a generosity that seems ultimately bogus, one could argue that one aim of the story is precisely to suggest that Gabriel, alone among Dubliners, begins to move toward a less self-absorbed appreciation of his own condition. Perhaps Gabriel's tears aren't entirely "generous" (*D* 203), but cold-hearted readings like Pecora's risk duplicating the very absence of generosity they condemn.

Behind the question of Gabriel's generosity lies the question of Joyce's. Richard Ellmann argued years ago that the Morkan sisters' graciousness may embody Joyce's regret, expressed in a letter to his brother Stanislaus, that he had not reproduced "the attraction" of Dublin, particularly its "ingenuous insularity and hospitality." According to Ellmann, "The Dead" marks his attempt to make amends for having been "unnecessarily harsh" to his native city (*JJII* 245; *Letters II* 166). After all, what is Joyce's meticulous verbal parsimony—that vaunted "scrupulous meanness" of style that he described to Stanislaus (*Letters II* 134)—but the Dublin affliction translated into the practice of composition? If so, then Joyce's admitted harshness proves nothing so much as his kinship with his characters, for his merciless dissection of his citizens' foibles—their poverty of soul, their shriveled generosity, their economic and religious paralysis—smacks of a meanness that is not only stylistic but also moral (see *Letters II* 134). In indicting their failures of generosity, Joyce mimics them, thereby proving himself even more a Dubliner. At the end of "The Dead," however, it is clear that, on the stylistic level at least, something unprecedented is occurring that may signal a shift in Joyce's attitude. The key change from scrupulous meanness to swooning melody may herald a dawning self-awareness on the part of the author, as Joyce himself shifts from the negative reciprocity of vengeance to a recognition of shared community. Although the transition remains tentative and complicated, Joyce's final story achieves, if not magnanimity, then at least tolerance.

For Pecora, there is in *Dubliners* "no distinction between princely generosity and the necessary sacrifices of poverty; the former is simply the ideological transubstantiation of the latter, the transformation of damaged experience into a mythic surplus of value" (244). But the characters' failures to act magnanimously do not necessarily invalidate the ideal. Isn't it

still preferable to attempt largesse, that "princely failing" (*D* 184), than to acquiesce in the mercenary machinations of Lord John Corley or emulate the desiccated loneliness of James Duffy? Even if, as we have seen, many Dubliners are victimized by their adherence to an impracticable or archaic ideal of grace and magnanimity, the only alternative offered—a soulless bourgeois self-interest characteristic of contemporary society as well—seems even more disabling. *Dubliners* suggests, in fact, that Joyce was ambivalent about the role of the gift, understanding and exposing the paralysis that the myth of the perfect gift inflicts but also respecting its heroic quality and moral grace. *Dubliners* finally implies that only those flexible enough to negotiate the transition between the realms of gift and commodity escape self-swindling. And in the twenty-first century, a similar flexibility will be required not only of postcolonial subjects who must accommodate shifting economic and social values and habits but also of Americans or Europeans who find capitalism's drive to commodify everything, including themselves, increasingly sterile and unfulfilling. No character in Joyce's Dublin, however, except perhaps Gabriel Conroy, seems able to make this transition, because to do so requires first that they gain a clearer picture of their own world and their own natures, and then that they take active steps to change that world and that nature.

Why, then, do gifts fail in Joyce's Dublin? Certainly the pressure of Catholicism, with its powerful ethos of self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, and contempt for the world, affects both male and female characters, in some cases handicapping their economic and social agility, as we see in "Araby." Some of Joyce's Dubliners—Farrington of "Counterparts" and Maria of "Clay," for example—fail to exercise the gift-giving virtue because they lack the economic capital needed to generate social capital. For others, such as Mrs. Kearney, the transition from a precapitalist to a capitalist society has fostered conflicting, and ultimately imprisoning, norms and practices. That is, the market economy—itself distorted and crippled by the imperial British presence—coexists uneasily with a gift system left over from the country's tribal past. We may attribute both the absence of largesse and the relational errors to such forms of cognitive dissonance, to the characters' adherence to ideals that no longer fit their society. A similar rigidity in gender roles—the belief that males must give large gifts to show power, whereas females must remain flexible and receptive while also managing the domestic economy—traps certain characters in humiliating circumstances. Finally, characters such as Corley, who have bought into capitalism

and scoff at any but the most self-serving motives, swindle themselves by remaining wedded to an ideology that works against their own interests.

For most of the collection, Joyce shows no propensity to forgive his city for its real and imagined slights to his genius, and his harsh scrutiny of its citizens' gracelessness dramatizes his own lack of magnanimity. In declining to tender humane compassion for their condition as victims, he may himself be perpetrating a regular swindle, blaming them for problems over which they have no control. Fortunately, Joyce's mature fiction largely abandons this Duffyesque verbal and emotional parsimony for a generosity of style, vision, and spirit. This literary largesse commences, perhaps, with "The Dead": its arguably more expansive style and ambiguously redemptive resolution exhibit signs that Joyce was learning, perhaps from his own miserable characters, the value of the gift-giving virtue. Twenty-first-century Joyce critics who hope to remain worthy of these works' enduring power to illuminate contemporary experience might well learn the same lesson.

Notes

1. Bourdieu's definitions of the various types of capital are notoriously vague and overlapping. In essence, however, he defines "symbolic capital" as "prestige and renown attached to a family and its name" (*Outline* 179); "social capital" refers to "obligations . . . and the advantages of connections or social positions, and trust"; "cultural capital" designates embodied or institutionalized knowledge or expertise. For a clarification of these terms, see Smart, who writes that symbolic capital "involves claims by the possessor that he or she be treated in particular ways by classes of others. Social capital consists of claims to reciprocation and solidarity from particular others" (396). As many critics have suggested, Bourdieu's various forms of "capital," like his description of gift practices, is flawed by economism. See, for example, Koritz and Koritz 411, and Osteen, "Questions," 23–25.

2. It's not certain how well Joyce knew the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ellmann asserts that he had copies of the *Psychology* and the *Poetics* in his Trieste library (*Consciousness* 99). In a December 1904 letter to Stanislaus, James mentions completing a "short course in Aristotle" (*Letters II* 71). It is difficult to imagine that Joyce was not at least somewhat familiar with the *Ethics* as well.

3. For a helpful discussion of Nietzsche's debt to Aristotle in the matter of gifts and ethics, see Woodruff.

4. Richard Rowan voices a similar paradox in *Exiles* when he declares that "while you have a thing it can be taken from you. . . . But when you give it, you have given it. No robber can take it from you" (*E* 46–47): giving, in other words, is gaining,

because in giving one places one's signature upon the gift. Unfortunately for Rowan's prestige, the "thing" to which he is alluding here is his wife, Bertha.

5. Gregory's work has been widely challenged, and it is clear that the two realms interact in countless ways. For example, a single object may be at one point in its "biography" a gift and at another point a commodity. His formula also neglects one of the most significant ideas in Mauss's work: the essential duality of gifts, which are at once disinterested and interested. But despite its oversimplified picture of the complex ways that people interact with objects, Gregory's dichotomy—gifts signify inalienability, social interconnectedness, and personhood, whereas commodities stand for alienation, independence, and neutrality—underlies much anthropological, sociological, and literary scholarship on the gift. For critiques of Gregory, see Frow 127, and Mirowski 444–46. For a fuller treatment of the principle of inalienability and the gift/commodity distinction, see Osteen, "Gift or Commodity?" 233–39.

6. One might argue that the pattern really begins with the narrator's gift of snuff to Father Flynn in "The Sisters," a gift that, as Bernard Benstock notes, may be "payment" for his tutorials (93; *D* 6), but that would be stretching the point.

7. Vincent Pecora has remarked on the ambiguities of attribution here: does the word "charitable" issue from the naïve boy's mind, or is it the older narrator's implicitly ironic view of such a definition of "charity" (Pecora 239)? Such discourse, he aptly suggests, is already "dispossessed."

8. As Parry observes, in Christian morality, "the unreciprocated gift becomes a liberation from bondage to [the world], a denial of the profane self, an atonement for sin, and hence a means to salvation." The erection of a wall between sacred and profane domains prompts the "development of a *contemptus mundi* which culminates in the institution of renunciation, but of which the charitable gift—as a kind of lay exercise in asceticism—is also often an expression" (468).

9. Joyce never tells us precisely how much money the boy receives. As the boy strides down Buckingham Street he holds "a florin [a two-shilling coin] tightly in [his] hand" (*D* 25); yet when he arrives at the bazaar, he hands the gatekeeper a "shilling" (*D* 26), which suggests that the uncle's gift consists of a florin and a shilling, for a total of three shillings. But at the end the boy describes allowing "the two pennies" to fall against "the sixpence" in his pocket—"the" meaning "the only remaining" sixpence (*D* 27)—which wouldn't make sense if he had originally had three shillings. In any case, the female pictured on the florin and shilling would scarcely have contributed to his idealization of the female form, since it depicted the decidedly unromantic figure of the elderly Queen Victoria (see Seaby 158).

10. It is tempting to associate a particular economic practice with each realm (for example, generalized reciprocity = gift; balanced reciprocity = sales; negative reciprocity = theft), but in fact many transactions and relationships mix the forms.

11. By Aristotle's definition, however, Gallaher falls short, for the truly great-souled person is "like an expert, since he can see what is fitting and spend large

amounts with good taste" (1122b; 65). In contrast, even the dazed Chandler perceives Gallaher's essential vulgarity (*D* 69).

12. Farrington even fits Aristotle's example of a fool: one who feasts the members of his dining club as if they were at a wedding (1123a; 67).

13. See Delany, 383–85, for a full accounting of the drinks and costs involved.

14. The reasons for this phenomenon are complex. One is certainly the historical separation of spheres, in which men practiced business and women kept house. It is not clear, however, whether the inequality in gift giving generally exposes women's lack of genuine power, or instead becomes a method of exerting indirect authority by regulating the range and nature of kinship relations. For discussions of this issue, see Komter 124–31; Cheal 6; and Hyde 103–5. For a treatment of the connection between women and gifts in Joyce, see Osteen, "Female Property," and Osteen, *Economy*, 29–32, 423–25, 430–39.

15. I have already discussed at length the perversion of the gift system in "Grace," so I won't rehash my arguments here. Those interested may wish to read my article "Serving Two Masters," particularly 85–89.

16. Tipping became fully acceptable only around the turn of the twentieth century, and the practice incited a good deal of outrage as theory caught up with practice. In the United States there were even nationwide efforts to abolish it. For a discussion of the practice of tipping in the context of the limits on monetary gifts, see Zelizer 94–96.

17. To promote the requital of services, according to Aristotle, the Greeks gave a prominent place to the temple of the Graces, for "one ought both to perform a return service to someone who has been gracious, and another time to make the first move by being gracious oneself" (1133a; 89). Of the Three Graces, Seneca writes, "one of them bestoweth the good turne, the other receiveth it, and the third requiteth it" (quoted in Davis 12–13). This cycle of reciprocity is figured in conventional representations of the Graces, where they are often shown dancing, hands linked, in a circle. See Davis, 12, for one such representation.

18. Pecora here seems to cling to a rigidly Marxist notion of characters as mere vectors of social and economic forces. This ideological lumber weighs down any critic attempting to keep pace with Joyce's verbal and moral dexterity.

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