

Serving Two Masters: Economics and Figures of Power in Joyce's "Grace"

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Joyce's *Dubliners* depicts primarily the lower middle-class: clerks, journalists, and shopkeepers either barely clinging to respectability or falling from former prosperity (Benstock 193–94). Not surprisingly, then, in many stories both author and characters are much concerned with economic matters. While recent criticism has begun to explore social and economic contexts, none has fully investigated Joyce's exposure of the intersection of personal, political, and religious economics in "Grace."¹ Originally intended to be the last in *Dubliners*, this story reprises themes established earlier in the book: Irish economic paralysis ("After the Race"), complicity with their oppression ("Two Gallants"), willingness to accept substitutes for real sovereignty ("Ivy Day in the Committee Room"), confusion between spiritual and financial reparation ("The Boarding House"), and an impoverishing weakness for drink (virtually every story). In it Joyce calculates the cost of an equation between the spiritual grace promised by religion and the period of grace offered to debtors. But the economic problems sketched in the story lead ineluctably to the institutional sources of power in Dublin. Many of the other stories depict the economic and spiritual results of political tyranny, but "Grace" is Joyce's strongest indictment of the Church's appropriation of and accommodation with paralyzing economic and political ideologies, and its consequent failure to fulfill its worshipers' spiritual needs (Herr 238). In *Ulysses* (*U*) Stephen Dedalus remarks bitterly that he serves "two masters": "the imperial British state . . . and the holy Roman catholic and apostolic church" (*U* 17). "Grace"

employs economic and geometric tropes to expose the collusion of the two masters by tracing their arcs and lines of power and charting their intersection in economic ideology.

The story begins after Tom Kernan, dead drunk, has fallen down the stairs to a pub lavatory, and now lies insensible on the filthy floor.² Kernan's downward trajectory is but the first of many geometric figures in the story. He is soon surrounded by "a ring of men" (150), which "distend[s]" and "close[s] again elastically" in an image of birth (151). Although his friends promise later to "make a new man of him" (155) through the stewardship of the Church, Kernan's first rebirth occurs ironically, in a bathroom. In fact, what follows is the only truly graceful act in the story, as a mysterious young man in a bicycling suit washes the blood from Kernan, gives him medicinal brandy, and performs in "orthodox Samaritan fashion," as Leopold Bloom's similar ministrations are described in *Ulysses* (*U* 501). But in addition to the "ring," other geometric shapes—points, lines, arcs, squares, incomplete circles, parabolas—pervade the story. For example, Kernan's head rests on the "tesselated floor" (151), framed by its squares, surrounded by a "medal" of blood. The geometric terms, of course, recall the italicized word "gnomon," which appears on the first page of the volume (9), and refers to a parallelogram with a corner or piece removed, and hence an incomplete whole.³ Kernan's bitten tongue (the result of his fall—a shape with a piece removed) embodies physically the gnomon he has become. But in "Grace" Joyce consistently uses incomplete shapes to represent the characters' secret or inexplicable economic problems, and to describe the institutional and personal forces limiting their movements; like the gnomon, they are defined by what they have lost.

Kernan's "medal" of blood resembles a war-wound, and indeed he thinks of himself as a "veteran" (157), and of his profession (he is a tea merchant) as military service: his "Napoleon" is one Blackwhite (154), and he keeps a "little leaden battalion of canisters" in his tea-tasting office (154). Ironically, Kernan's name derives from "kern," a sixteenth-century "wild Irish" foot soldier; however, those warriors were both anti-English and rustic, whereas Kernan scorns rural folk and admires the British. But Kernan's war is merely verbal, his military terms revealing how Irish political will has been deflected into the bourgeois enterprises of selling (usually British) goods, just as its martial energy has been translated into harmless figures of speech. The occupying nation owns the product he sells and has appropriated and defused the terms in which he thinks of himself.⁴ Both Kernan's mock battle and the checkered floor on which he lies suggest a chess game,

which is an apt metaphor for both the underlying power struggle in the story and Joyce's careful deployment of its movements. But although Kernan perceives himself as a "knight of the road" (*U* 197), he is really only a pawn, subject to manipulation both by his more powerful friends and by the institutional forces—king, queen, and bishops—at work in Ireland.

A "commercial traveller of the old school," Kernan is not a particularly successful businessman; "modern business methods," along with his drinking and old-fashioned beliefs, have left him only "a little office in Crowe Street" (153–54). Although in decline, Kernan retains an inflated sense of self-importance: "He had never been seen in the city without a silk hat of some decency and a pair of gaiters. By grace of these two articles of clothing, he said, a man could always pass muster" (154; the latter, of course, is a military expression). His wife remembers their wedding, at which he was "dressed smartly . . . and carried a silk hat gracefully balanced upon his other arm" (156). For Kernan, grace is a matter of sartorial, rather than spiritual conversion, and consists merely of purchasable commodities.⁵ But if Kernan's vanity makes him a touch ridiculous, his business difficulties are at least partially attributable to British hegemony: O'Brien documents how British rule had "stifled economic progress" in Ireland by preventing the establishment of competing industries (36). Stripped of self-determination, the Irish can earn only their own economic paralysis.⁶

Kernan's friend, the allegorically named Mr. Power, is his second rescuer in the opening scene. Their economic and social relations are described geometrically: "the arc of [Power's] social rise intersected the arc of his friend's decline" (154). Described as a "new-comer," Power works for the much despised Royal Irish Constabulary and wears a "yellow ulster" (152). By name, appearance, and vocation, then, Power embodies Irish complicity with the British masters. But his power is also evident on the plane of personal economics: he has provided "small, but opportune loans" to the Kernans, thus adding financial indebtedness to personal obligations (155). Thus, in addition to restoring Kernan's physical balance, Power also helps the Kernans balance their books by providing the most common form of grace, a period of leniency in repaying loans. But his generosity may be less altruistic than it seems.

Socioeconomic research has demonstrated that maintaining debtorship solidifies a creditor's power, whereas allowing the payment of a debt depletes it (Gouldner 175; Blau 135). In other words, by lending money, Power makes himself more powerful. Marshall Sahlins describes a continuum of exchange relationships that ranges from "generalized

reciprocity" (gift-giving and the extension of long grace periods in repayment of loans), through "negative reciprocity" (characterized by "transactions opened and conducted toward net utilitarian advantage" [194–95]). While generalized reciprocity is usually restricted to kinfolk, "rank distinctions, or attempts to promote them, tend to extend generalized exchange beyond the customary range of sharing" (Sahlins 211). That is, allowing a grace period for repayment of a debt subtly reinforces the lender's power over his debtors by offering them a false sense of kinship. Thus Power's calculated generosity helps him to gather a personal following; his loans keep others beholden to him, just as England maintains her economic hegemony by making Ireland economically dependent upon her. But Kernan may also get a payoff: his outstanding debts help to keep his socially superior friends around, if only to dun him occasionally. Yet Mr. Power is also Irish, and thus his "inexplicable debts" (154) suggest an economically compromised condition. Hence, even as he asserts his ownership and status through lending money, his loans entrap him in reciprocal relationships with people unlikely to repay him. In sum, the circle of mutual indebtedness seems to contribute, not to equality, but to inequality and mutual decline.⁷

The second section of the story takes place upstairs in Kernan's house, where he is laid up with his bitten tongue, and where his friends use peer pressure and inaccurate history to persuade him to accompany them to a religious retreat for businessmen. The other friends are also subtly shown to be economically troubled. Martin Cunningham is described as a respected and influential man (157). Like his friend Power, he works for Dublin Castle (on the chessboard, he might be the castle piece), and has "secret sources of information" (159). The other men consistently defer to his knowledge, which is a good deal less impressive than his assertiveness; his "immersion" in the "waters of general philosophy" has been "brief"—just enough to make him smug in the knowledge of half-truths.⁸ However, like Power, he also has a hidden problem both domestic and economic—his wife. An "incurable drunkard," she has "pawned the furniture" on him six times (157). Although Cunningham promises to rehabilitate Kernan, he has had no luck doing so with his wife, which certainly casts doubt on his powers of conversion. Perhaps Cunningham's domestic troubles are the reason he needs to associate with social inferiors: to compensate for his lack of domestic authority, he lords it over his friends. Thus, while within his circle he seems to be a significant figure in Dublin's geometry of power,

his inability to cure his wife's recidivist pawning implies that in other realms he is little more than a pawn.

The other member of the triumvirate is Charlie M'Coy, who has neither influence nor money. Although he was at one time a "tenor of some reputation," his life, to continue the geometric motif, has "not been the shortest distance between two points" (158), but instead a series of dodges to escape his creditors. Formerly an ad canvasser (he lost the job at the *Freeman's* when he "levanted with the cash of a few ads"—U 92), among many other positions, he is now secretary to the City Coroner. His wife, a former singer, now teaches piano to children at "low terms." M'Coy is still somewhat shady, and uses his wife's "career" as an excuse for chicanery, making crusades "in search of valises and portmanteaus to enable Mrs. M'Coy to fulfill imaginary engagements in the country" (160), apparently promising free tickets to her nonexistent shows in exchange for the valises (see U 512). One of his recent victims has been Mr. Power, who resents "such low playing of the game" (160). This trick is the ineffectual M'Coy's revenge on his social superiors, and Power hesitates to confront him because he does not want to admit he has been duped.⁹ The obscure point of the ruse is that M'Coy presumably takes the valises and pawns them for a modest profit. Because of his shifty reputation and checkered past, the others ignore M'Coy, who must therefore try to "enter the conversation by any door" (161), but is usually barred from completing any "case in point" he may have (163).

Thus Kernan's friends, even those in the employ of the Castle, have secret financial problems. The late arrival to the sickroom scene, Mr. Fogarty, repeats the pattern. A "modest grocer" who has failed in a pub business "because his financial condition had constrained him to tie himself to second-class distillers and brewers," he now owns a shop near Kernan's house, depending on a "certain grace" in his department to win business (166). Ironically, since the purpose of the conference is to get Kernan to curb his drinking, Fogarty brings "a half-pint of special whisky" as a gift (indeed, the men lubricate the entire discussion with bottles of stout—an unorthodox detergent with which to "wash the pot" [163]). Kernan appreciates the present, especially since he has a "small account for groceries unsettled" (166). Fogarty thus (unwillingly) provides a practical form of grace to Kernan by allowing him a leniency period to repay his grocery tab, but at the same time contributes to the problem that has impelled Kernan's fall. Fogarty, too, is pictured geometrically: his "oval face" is set off by a mustache and eyebrows that "arch" like half-moons, suggesting that he too is a gnomon (166). Like

the others, his missing parts mostly consist of lost money, perhaps because he tenders credit to men like Kernan. Again an incomplete geometric shape metonymically represents the secret problems that complete the story; but, as in real life, the most damaging absences are not geometric but financial.

The economy of debt thus pervades Dublin, as the men are connected by a web of mutual indebtedness. But while such a financial network would usually just solidify the social relationships among the parties, in "Grace" it also reveals the economic and political dominance of the British master. If, as Georg Simmel remarks, the "feeling of personal security that the possession of money gives is perhaps the most concentrated and pointed . . . manifestation of confidence in the socio-political order" (179), then the economic insecurity of these characters also betrays the political anxiety in Ireland. Moreover, both religious belief and the credit economy are founded upon faith and trust: the former depends upon a belief that Higher Powers will eventually repay right action, and the latter relies upon an agreement between the parties that debts will eventually be repaid (Simmel 179). But both structures have collapsed in Joyce's Dublin. Just as the characters' belief in economic well-being has been misplaced or undermined by their political condition, so (the rest of the story demonstrates) their religious faith has been betrayed by an equally unfair and hypocritical economic ideology. The inequities and obligations among the characters, far from uniting them in mutual prosperity, only testify to their social paralysis: the reasonably prosperous must be tied to bad debtors, and the debtors must contrive increasingly desperate schemes to wriggle away from their obligations. The economic "grace" given to these Dubliners does not save them, but instead only condemns them to economic purgatory.

Lines of power are traced throughout the sickroom scene, which consists of a covert battle among the men. Underlying the conversation is the unspoken agreement that the men's economic troubles and the battle for authority itself are to remain veiled. Kernan prefers "the details of the incident [in the pub] to remain vague" (160), and Power wishes his debts to remain "inexplicable." Cunningham's authority depends upon the sources of his "information" remaining secret, which enables him to carry out a kind of blackmail: he is rarely challenged, because he may know something damaging about each friend. Indeed, it is almost as if the narrator were part of the plot; he, too, seems to be a gnomon, always keeping some important fact hidden and his intentions obscure. Bourgeois in tone and diction, the narrative is

defined, like the characters, by its absences. Thus the reader must pierce the gentlemanly diction and urbane tone of the story to perceive its scathing irony. Nonetheless, the conversation manifests the characters' acquiescence to subtle exercises of power, an acquiescence which, according to Joyce, also typified Irish politics in 1902.

Both Cunningham and Power work for the imperialist power, but claim that they act as Castle officials only "during office hours." Yet Cunningham bullies his friends, assuaging his guilt over his politically suspect profession by allowing his friends to let off steam harmlessly in his presence. Staunch Catholics who defend such doctrines as papal infallibility, the characters nonetheless accommodate the Protestant political power. In this instance secular and economic concerns dominate spiritual ones. This is reflected in the characters' assessment of the Jesuits. Cunningham admires them as "the grandest order in the Church" (163), but "grand" refers to class, not intellect or piety. M'Coy says that they "cater for the upper classes," which appeals to Kernan's snobbism: "That's why I have a feeling for them," he boasts (164). The Church, supposedly an alternative to secular institutions, in fact exploits its believers' social and political insecurities by reinforcing the class distinctions in the larger culture. As presented in "Grace," the Church pretends to elevate its believers socially while at the same time harnessing their political unrest and directing it toward spiritual rather than political improvements. And yet even these spiritual improvements only reproduce the bourgeois ideology that drives the Kernans of Dublin but that also bars them from attaining secure bourgeois status: not only has Britain appropriated the economic infrastructure, but it will never allow an Irishman to be fully British, even when, as in Kernan's case, he wants to be. Acquiescence to the class-based authority of the Church thus induces a political and social apathy that masks intellectual and economic poverty.¹⁰

Martin Cunningham embodies the political authority of the Castle and, as the discussion proceeds, the theological authority of the Church as well. Several times he halts debate peremptorily with "that's history," or "of course I'm right" (164). When Kernan quotes Crofton's assertion that they "all worship at the same altar," Cunningham ends discussion with "but of course . . . our religion is *the* religion" (166). What matters is not what he says but, like the Pope speaking *ex cathedra*, the Authority invoked when he says it.¹¹ The final section of their conversation on papal infallibility is thus a charade in which Cunningham plays Pope to the other men's Cardinals; once a castle piece, he is now translated into a bishop. MacHale, their symbol of

nationalist rebellion, eventually succumbs to religious authority. In echoing his "Credo!" (which was never actually uttered) Cunningham proclaims his own power over the others at the same time that he reiterates words of submission by the original speaker (Kershner 134). "You must submit to me as MacHale submitted to the Pope," he implies, in effect authorizing his own infallibility.

By the end, even Power is "completely outgeneralled" by Cunningham's authority (171) and, now both mock-priest and symbol of disenfranchised Irish institutions, is reduced to the strictly ceremonial function of distributing the liquor. Cunningham's words have "built up a vast image of the church in the minds of his hearers. His deep raucous voice had thrilled them as it uttered the word of belief and submission" (170). Cunningham's exercise of spurious authority reveals how the Irish have battered upon their two masters to borrow the very power that oppresses them. The others have given Cunningham their credit and belief, the ground of verbal authority just as it is the basis of both economic and religious life. Father Purdon, who gives the sermon at the retreat, is thus Cunningham's counterpart, and the men's political and economic uneasiness, coupled with their *theological ignorance*, makes them perfect targets for his falsely authoritative version of scripture, just as it led them to acquiesce to Cunningham's dogmatic verbal mastery.

The actual nature of the retreat is implied in the strategy that Cunningham uses to arouse Kernan's interest in it. He first mysteriously alludes to it (and to their meeting afterward at a pub) as if it involves more of his secret sources of information. Then Power tells Kernan "point-blank" that "we are going to make a retreat" (162). The military nomenclature appeals to Kernan, but also shows the simultaneous motion forward and backward, the concurrent commitment and denial that characterizes this retreat. They plan to progress toward grace by retreating; in military terms, their movement is not a victory but an admission of defeat. The same conflicting impulses are seen when Kernan "draws the line" at carrying a candle in the service (171). Although only symbolic, nonetheless the candles signify genuine *commitment to the aims of the service*, and a confession that one wishes his errors exposed in the full glare of conscience. This denial of light is congruent with the sense of concealment and deception pervading the story. To deny the candles is to deny the efficacy of the entire service. Kernan thus wants it both ways: to appear to repent while denying that he actually needs grace. The retreat is just that—a retreat from grace. The incompleteness of the retreat is also depicted in the geography of

the story. It begins in the center of Dublin, then moves north to Kernan's home in Glasnevin Road at the city's edge. The retreat, which takes place in Gardiner Street, is only halfway back to the center of the city. The plot thus describes a trajectory that is neither linear nor a full return, but rather an incomplete ellipse. The loop, like the parabolic tale that ends the story, fails to make ends meet, and thus mirrors the characters' unbalanced economic ledgers. Once we hear Purdon's sermon, this equivocation seems appropriate. True repentance has no place in this retreat, designed specifically for "business men" by "a man of the world" (164).

The opening description of the service exposes its secular nature. All the men are "well dressed and orderly," and all find seating "accommodation" (172). "Accommodation" carries multiple associations here: not only do the Irish accommodate their English masters, but the Church accommodates the business world with its message; instead of conversion, it offers compromise. The attendees, all businessmen and political figures, also bear witness to its intention. Our five friends are seated "in the form of a quincunx," with Kernan and Cunningham constituting the front line, as if Kernan is borrowing Cunningham's reputation and authority by sitting next to him (172). The others include Fanning, the mayor-maker, along with a city councillor; Grimes, a pawnbroker; and various other commercial figures, including the failure O'Carroll, a friend of Kernan: twelve in all, disciples of Purdon's mercantile gospel (Torchiana 10). Their clothing exhibits the superficial motives behind their presence, as the men lay "their hats in security," and Mr. Kernan's damaged hat is seen to be "rehabilitated" (173), enacting the grace that he himself fails to achieve. Also in attendance is Mr. Harford, one of the drinking cronies who deserted Kernan on the night of his fall. Harford had

begun life as an obscure financier by lending small sums of money to workmen at usurious interest. Later on he had become the partner of a . . . Mr. Goldberg, of the Liffey Loan Bank. Though he had never embraced more than the Jewish ethical code his fellow-Catholics, whenever they had smarted in person or by proxy under his exactions, spoke of him bitterly as an Irish Jew and an illiterate and saw divine disapproval of usury made manifest through the person of his idiot son. At other times they remembered his good points. (159)¹²

Harford's "good points" are, of course, his financial resources, which become lines of power that he extends over his acquaintances, now creditors. On the night of Kernan's fall, perhaps he was with Harford

because he again needed to borrow money, and Harford slipped away to avoid further importunities from a man known to be a poor risk, or at least to avoid a public association with his humiliating plight. Harford is presumably called upon to offer grace to his debtors when they are unable to repay, but his desertion of his "friend" when he truly needed rescuing suggests that his financial exactions are equally graceless. But now the title of the story acquires its religious burden. At the retreat "grace" refers both to the debt-relief that they all need—something to wipe the economic slate clean through an overwhelming benefaction—and to the spiritual gift of forgiveness. But the presence of the usurer Harford where Kernan is supposed to find the gift of redemption implies that Harford's moneylending mentality underlies the economic ethos of Father Purdon's sermon: freely given grace is replaced by balancing accounts, and rebirth becomes merely a reversion to paralysis.

Much comment has been devoted to the sermon. Critics have discussed a few of the doctrinal inaccuracies and moral ambiguities present in the scene and noted Purdon's inadequate theology. Herr, however, has recently argued that readers who find here "primarily a critique of the church rather than an anatomy of its cultural function attribute to Joyce an underlying belief in religion as the vessel of truth; they ignore his identification of the church as an economic institution" (244–45). But we scarcely need attribute piety to Joyce to comprehend his ironic portrayal of the Church's spiritual inadequacy. Indeed, the story's social critique remains incomplete unless we understand its theological satire, which emerges through the misleading economic ideology revealed in Purdon's interpretation of the parable. The story's missing part can only be discovered by analyzing Joyce's parabolic method. Just as the characters' social relations are dominated by incomplete debts and betrayals of credit, so the sermon is a gnomon, an incomplete parable with a hidden ideological agenda that betrays the faith upon which it is based. Purdon's sermon justifies the men's earlier acceptance of the Jesuits as the order catering "to the upper classes" (164), and its theological inaccuracies reveal the Church's collusion with the forces maintaining Ireland's economic and political status quo.

The sermon bears a parabolic relationship to the rest of the story. I mean this in a dual sense. First, it demonstrates how the Church's arc of power intersects with and influences the characters' lives through its mercantile ideology. Purdon's smooth reassurances replace the miraculous and hyperbolic (that is, unearned and hence excessive) workings of grace with the curve of a parabola, a figure whose slopes balance to accommodate an appearance of regularity.¹³ Second, the sermon is

itself based upon a parabolic text: a biblical parable that is also a gnomon, a shape with a missing piece, which traces a steward's fall from his master's good graces. Once the missing part of the parable is restored, its congruence with the concerns of the story becomes palpable. Both "parable" and "parabola" come from the same Greek root, *parabole*. This in turn derives from "*para*" ("beside") + "*bole*" ("throw").¹⁴ As Purdon cynically tosses comforting words at his audience of businessmen, the relationship between priest and congregation imitates the one in the joke Cunningham told earlier in the story, in which country policemen are lined up and told to catch the cabbage their superiors fling at them. The likelihood that the policemen will catch the sailing cabbage with their plates is roughly equal to the likelihood that this audience will gain genuine religious insight from Purdon's distortion of the Bible.

The sermon is based upon Christ's gnomonic parable of the unjust steward, one of the strangest and most difficult in the New Testament, and yet one Father Purdon (whose name is taken from a notorious street in Dublin's red-light district) develops with "resonant assurance" (173). This "powerful-looking" priest can barely struggle to the pulpit: his power of conversion is as deceptive as his sermon. According to Stanislaus Joyce (*Keeper* 227), Purdon is modeled on Father Bernard Vaughan, a Jesuit especially suited to interpreting a text "for business men and professional men" (174). Vaughan blithely proclaimed himself "God's advertising man, the drummer of the church" (*Torchiana* 219), and saw no contradiction in reconciling religion and commerce, nor in the Church's ambiguous position as a source of economic power. He announced that he was a member of "the oldest firm in religion on the planet," a firm that "defied all competition" (cited in Herr 239, 254). Typically, then, Purdon claims that his out-of-context passage is "specially adapted for the guidance of those whose lot it was to lead the life of the world" (173). Christ, he says, sets before men "as exemplars in the religious life those very worshipers of Mammon" who are the least religious (174). In Purdon's mercantile version of grace, Christ is the men's "spiritual accountant," asking only that they open the books of their spiritual lives to see "if they tallied accurately in every point" with their conscience. There is nothing otherworldly about grace; it merely involves the same balancing of debit and credit done daily in the business world. One need only map one point to another in a tidy and regular skein of lines. And God is not a supernatural being, but a commercial magnate who gives nothing away as he trafficks in human souls.¹⁵

The parable is taken from Luke 16.1–13. Briefly summarized, it tells of a steward (in Greek, *oikonomos*, from which comes “economy”) who has wasted his master’s money and is called before him to give an account of his poor management. Attempting to ingratiate himself with the master’s debtors so that he will have some place to turn later, he affords them debtor’s grace by accepting partial payment for payment in full. But the master unexpectedly commends him for this, saying that “the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. And I say to you: Make unto you friend of the mammon of iniquity: that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings” (Luke 16.8–9).¹⁶ But in a passage left out of Purdon’s explication, Christ goes on to admonish his hearers that they who are unjust in small things will also be unjust in large. If one is loyal to his friends (children of this world) he cannot also be loyal to his Master. The text ends with these famous words: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other: or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16.13).

First of all, then, Purdon severs his text from Christ’s own gloss, thus taking His ironic pronouncement at face value and totally omitting His most explicit admonition. Moreover, he fails to fulfill the duties of a good Christian (let alone a priest) as described in the New Testament. Peter, for example, exhorts all Christians to become good stewards: “As every man hath received grace, ministering the same one to another: as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4.10). A good steward distributes grace as freely as he has been given it. Likewise, Paul cautions believers to become “ministers of Christ and dispensers [*oikonomoi*] of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4.1).¹⁷ Instead, Purdon makes the mystery of grace merely a matter of bookkeeping. In fact, he imitates the unjust steward in the parable, making friends of the “mammon of iniquity,” and capitulating to the secular through his distorted theological accounting. On the one hand Purdon is a priest, and thus in Pauline doctrine a steward of God; on the other, he makes his text palatable to businessmen by offering them reduction of their spiritual debts, just as the unjust steward in the parable offers relief to his master’s debtors. The priest fudges the books. In so doing, he is both a poor steward (*oikonomos*) and a bad economist. In sum, the priest is doing precisely what Christ warns his listeners not to do—serve two masters. Purdon’s grace is financial, not spiritual, and he himself is the unjust steward.¹⁸

In terms of the chess motif, Purdon is a bishop, a more valuable

piece than the pawns who constitute his audience. But a bishop has a special charge. In Titus 1.7–9, Paul describes a bishop as the “steward of God,” and urges such ministers to hold fast to the “faithful work which is according to doctrine, that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to convince the gainsayers.” Purdon violates this charge, as well, instead promulgating errant doctrine that validates precisely what Christ warns against. Rather than instructing his listeners in “the mysteries of God,” he pretends that they are not mysteries. Indeed, he is one of those whom Paul warns against in the same passage, those who teach “things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake” (Tit. 1.11). According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (6: 658), grace is “the free and *unmerited* favour of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners” (emphasis added). This gift is “totally gratuitous”: it can be refused, but it cannot be paid for or earned by an act of will.¹⁹

According to Paul, the steward of God receives grace in order that he “should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3.8). The riches of grace are *unsearchable*: they cannot be found in cost-accounting books. In economic terms, then, Purdon’s model of salvation as a matter of balancing books violates the fundamental quality of grace: it is a *gift*, not a payment, and it cannot be generated, like business profits, by shrewd or industrious activity. Accommodating his audience of businessmen, Purdon substitutes an economy of mercantile cost-accounting for one of the freely given gift. Trafficking in the spiritual, defined as “those things that exist for the good of the soul, such as grace,” is simony (*Catholic Encyclopedia* 13: 228). Purdon, then, like the priest in “The Sisters,” is a simoniac: he trades spiritual grace for popular and commercial success. In so doing he regularizes the arc of the parable, blunts its disturbing effect, and reforms it in the image of his audience of account balancers.

The sermon parabolically reveals the complicity of the Catholic Church with the capitalist ideology of British imperialism. The men cannot expect genuine conversion from this retreat, because it is based on a justification of the conditions that oppress them. Just as Irishmen like Martin Cunningham accommodate and abet those who keep Ireland down, the Church, by validating the economic basis of secular authority in sermons like Purdon’s, not only offers no alternative but in fact encourages submission. By serving two masters the Church justifies those Irishmen who do the same. The Church’s equation of financial and spiritual grace, Joyce suggests, paralyzes Ireland both economically and spiritually. Thus, while the story’s satire is directed at the men who comply with their own oppression, much of the blame lies with the

institutions that promote it. Instead of a retreat from the cost accounting and usury which oppresses them, the Church offers more of the same.

Not only, then, does economics underlie theology in Purdon's doctrine, but theology also authorizes exploitative economics. The parabolae of power extended by both Church and State intersect in their shared economic ideology. The Church implies that God supports the class-based economic order in which men like Harford prosper (cf. Herr 232, 243). Of the two, however, Joyce implies that the Roman master's socioeconomic power is more covert and hence more insidious. Thus in 1907 he wrote, "I do not see what good it does to fulminate against the English tyranny while the Roman tyranny occupies the palace of the soul" ("Saints and Sages," in *Critical Writings* 173). In fact, both mansions have been erected on the same site. The Church twists the desire for a spiritual alternative to material concerns into an acceptance of the status quo. Simply eliminating the British will not do; with the Church in power, Home Rule is still Rome Rule. Thus, according to Joyce, Ireland is doomed to serve two masters; she "has fulfilled what has hitherto been considered an impossible task—serving both God and Mammon, letting herself be milked by England and yet increasing Peter's pence" ("Fenianism," in *Critical Writings* 190). Finally, then, "Grace" demonstrates how the joint efforts of Ireland's two masters make all stewardship unjust, and genuine grace, either financial or spiritual, impossible.

NOTES

¹ Williams discusses the political and economic resistance to British imperialism shown throughout *Dubliners*. While Cheryl Herr's excellent study discusses the final sermon in "Grace" as a means of addressing the political contexts of the story (237–45), she does not explore how the intriguing portrayal of small-group economics illuminates those contexts. Of course, many of the other stories also revolve around money: one might recall the small gold coin that provides the epiphany in "Two Gallants," the boy's disappointment at his lack of funds in "Araby," Jimmy Doyle's economic catastrophe in "After the Race," Mrs. Kearney's stubborn haggling over her daughter's fee in "A Mother," and so forth. See Benstock and Somerville for general discussions of the role of money in *Dubliners*.

² According to Stanislaus Joyce, the story is an ironic gloss on the *Divine Comedy*, moving from Inferno to Purgatorio to Paradiso. In contrast, Moseley finds at the same time "a backward movement from Paradiso to Purgatorio to Inferno—a retreat" (10). While the irony in the Dantean parallel is obvious, it is difficult to see how lying face down on a lavatory floor can be construed as Paradiso, no matter how drunk one is. For Stanislaus's account of the

backgrounds to this story, see *Keeper* 225–28, and *Diary* 77–78. In life, the object of the friends' solicitude was actually John Joyce, James's father. Kernan is based on Joyce's father's friend, Dickie Thornton, whom Stanislaus describes as a "bird-like" and "drunken little man" (*Keeper* 226–27).

³ Geometry also plays a major symbolic role in the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses* and, of course, throughout *Finnegans Wake*. For a helpful diagram of a gnomon, see Albert 356.

⁴ Kernan is employed by a British firm (154), "Pulbrook Robertson and Co. 2 Mincing Lane, London" (*U* 597). See Williams 440–46 and Rossi-Landi 190–91 on linguistic ownership as a sign of political domination.

⁵ For a discussion of the importance of clothing in the story, see Kauver. Appropriately, the trajectory of Kernan's hat mirrors his physical fall: in the opening scene, Kernan's "dinged" hat has rolled away from him, and his clothes are "smeared with the filth and ooze of the floor" (150). For a man so concerned with attire, soiled clothes represent profound humiliation. The hat's loss of its graceful balance also metonymically captures his economic decline.

⁶ Joyce makes the same point in his essay "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages" (1907): "Ireland is poor because English laws ruin the country's industries" (*Critical Writings* 167). Cullen, although noting that Dublin bore many marks of a "relatively prosperous city" (166), likewise reports that the Irish industrial base remained extremely narrow and centered primarily around Protestant Belfast (159–64); Catholic Dublin continued to be largely impoverished and unhealthy (O'Brien *passim*; Cullen 165). As for Kernan, Jackson claims that he is "simply a bad businessman" (722), but Kernan's wife mentions his diligence (156), which is reinforced in the "Wandering Rocks" episode of *Ulysses*, where he is fresh from doing some successful business with a grocer (*U* 196–97). Thus, it would seem that Kernan's "decline" is as much a product of Dublin's lack of industry as of his own. Of course, the kind of drinking bouts displayed here probably do not conduce to financial solvency. Kernan might well entertain old-fashioned beliefs, however, since "'Grace' takes place in 1901 or 2 . . . [and] Kernan would have been born in 1848" and thus would be about 54 years old here (Joyce, *Letters* 2: 193).

⁷ Somerville (113) argues that Power's inexplicable debts are the results of gambling losses, but this seems unlikely. As we find in *Ulysses*, many of the others in his circle play the horses but, despite having many opportunities, Power never mentions the Gold Cup race or having wagered on it. On the contrary, we also discover in *Ulysses* where at least some of his money is going: to support a mistress (*U* 7). Moreover, his loans to such hopeless credit risks as Simon Dedalus probably keep his finances from balancing (see *U* 196).

⁸ Joyce may be having a private joke here, since Matthew Kane, the model for Cunningham, met his death by being "immersed" in the waters of Dublin Bay on July 10, 1904 (Adams 62). Joyce began the story in October 1905, and thus Kane had already drowned (*Letters* 2: 124). This drowning-man motif acquires important economic connotations in *Ulysses*.

⁹ In *Ulysses* M'Coy tries his luck with Bloom, but he is up to the dodge: "Didn't catch me napping that wheeze. The quick touch. . . . Valise I have a particular fancy for. . . . Bob Cowley lent him his for the Wicklow regatta last year and never heard tidings of it from that good day to this" (*U* 62).

¹⁰ HEIT (242) makes similar points about the sickroom scene.

¹¹ Adams (178–82) details the misinformation Cunningham and the others offer as fact in this discussion.

¹² As Boyle has observed (65), Harford is probably an early version of the much despised moneylender in *Ulysses*, Reuben J. Dodd.

¹³ I am using "arc" loosely here, to refer to a pattern of extended influence, rather than in a strictly geometric sense (an arc in geometry refers to a pie-shaped section of a circle). A parabola is a plane curve derived from the intersection of a cone with a plane parallel to the side of the cone; its points remain equidistant from a fixed line (the directrix) and a fixed point not on the line (the focus), so that the shape of the curve remains regular, unlike a hyperbola (another conic section), which is irregularly shaped.

¹⁴ This etymology also applies to the "Parable of the Plums," Stephen Dedalus's sardonic story in *Ulysses*, which describes two elderly virgins spitting plumstones down at the citizens of Dublin. While Jackson uses "parabolic" in his title, he is referring only to Christ's parable, not to the geometric figure.

¹⁵ This is, of course, not Joyce's only examination of the economy of grace. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus imagines a giant cash register by means of which God purchases or sells souls on the basis of the amount of prayer they earn from the living (148).

¹⁶ All biblical quotations are from the Douay-Rheims version, the Catholic Bible at the time, and the one Joyce used. Purdon misquotes the passage (cf. 173) and, as Torchiana points out (220) changes a key word, "fail," to read "die." In so doing the priest makes the text even more accommodating to those whose businesses might fail, substituting a more general word for the specifically commercial one.

¹⁷ The King James version uses "stewards" rather than "dispensers"; both are translations of the same Greek root. For a discussion of the term *oikonomos* in the Pauline writings, see Shell, *Economy* 105 and *Money* 25.

¹⁸ Jackson's interpretation, that Kernan plays the role of the unjust steward (722), is thus mistaken. Purdon's mediating position between the Master and the children of this world recapitulates the steward's position in the parable. Also, unlike the steward, Kernan is not a creditor but a debtor. He and his friends are, however, entrapped by Purdon's attempt to serve both Church and State.

¹⁹ See also Rom. 5.15–20, where Paul reiterates several times that grace is a "gift."

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