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THE EVOLUTION OF THE MODERN METROPOLIS AS READ ACROSS THREE TEXTS:
JAMES JOYCE'S *DUBLINERS*, EDGAR ALLAN POE'S 'THE MAN OF THE CROWD' AND
ÉMILE ZOLA'S *THE LADIES' PARADISE*

FAYEZAH M. ALJOHANI

King Abdulaziz University



ABSTRACT

Charles Pierre Baudelaire (1821- 1867), the famous French critic, suggests that the modern urban metropolis is the masterpiece awaiting translation by the artist (4) and that the artist of modernity must be "an observer of life" before progressing to express it (15). Meeting Baudelaire's criteria, James Joyce (1882 – 1941), Edgar Allan Poe (1809 – 1849) and Émile Zola (1840 –1902), write a narrative of Dublin, London and Paris, respectively, through which an interpretation of the evolving modern metropolis can be read across the three texts. The transformation depicted is a movement, revolving around the private to the public sphere, particularly of woman, with an associated level of categorization. In Joyce's *Dubliners*(1914) the women are placed firmly within the private space of the home and categorization is seen only in an embryonic form. Poe's narrator in 'The Man of the Crowd'(1840), categorizes the London crowd as his vantage point, but his subjects, and therefore his lists, are composed of men. Zola's categorization is of the Parisian women, in *The Ladies' Paradise* (1883) as they move to occupy the public space of the department store that represents the modern city. Thus, while Paris, London and Dublin are all cities under scrutiny by modernist writers, an interrogation of each text conveys an impression that each city represents a different evolutionary stage.

By reading across the three texts, the alternation in the visibility of women in the public space, and their associated classification, can be interpreted as demonstrating the evolution in the transformation of the modern metropolis. This essay will show how this transformation can be mapped in a hierarchical context across the three cities, which basically serve as a focal point of each modernist text.

Key Words: Modern Metropolis, modernism, James Joyce, Edgar Allan Poe, Emile Zola

The transformation in the modern metropolis is represented by a movement of activity circulating from the private to the public sphere, which can be further read across James Joyce's *Dubliners*, Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd'and Émile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* (Brooks 17). This transformation can be mapped in a hierarchical context across the three cities, Dublin, London and Paris, which serve as the focal point of

each text. This particular movement activity from the public space to the private space is focusing on women, as they attempt to move out from their house, as presented in Joyce's *Dubliners* and successfully occupy the public arena that is the department store of Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise*. In accordance with this move in the modern metropolis, an increased level of classification and categorization, as read in Poe's 'The Man of the

Crowd', which is then expanded to embrace women in Zola's text.

These three cities represent an evolution of the modern metropolis from earlier forms of city just as the modern bourgeoisie society developed from the "ruins" of earlier society (Marx and Engels 220). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels state that the "[b]ourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing ... the whole relations of society" (222). Similarly, it is the nature of all cities to evolve if they have to survive and this transformation can be read across these texts from three modernist writers. As they place the city as the center of their narratives: James Joyce's *Dubliners* which is set in Dublin, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" in London, and Paris is the site of Émile Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* (Brooks 215)

The evolution of modern metropolis conveyed in the texts can be mapped to their contemporary hierarchical status relative to each other: Dublin the Irish capital city, London the capital city of the British Empire and Paris the capital city of modernity (Harvey 18). To support this argument, the motive of categorization, allied with the movement of women from the private to the public sphere as depicted in these texts, will be further investigated. In Joyce's *Dubliners*, the women are placed firmly within the private space of the home and therefore categorization is not required. The major influence of *Dubliners* is associated with Joyce's Dubliner, which has daily operations in Dublin and also it highlights the four stages of an individual's life; childhood, adolescence (self discovery), adulthood (maturity), and late adulthood (self realization).

Dublin was placed at the foot of the hierarchy of the three cities and is emphasized in the text itself. As paralysis results into death (It began to confess to...paralysis...hissin) here paralysis may be defined in a way this character is suffering, where she is alive but dead. As she is in her private sphere where the character is not happy (Khorasand 99). Therefore, the story revolves around a framework which is organized chronically in accordance with human existence. As Mr. Doran notes that "Dublin is such a small city – everyone knows everyone else's business." (Joyce, *Dubliners*, 'The Boarding House',

7.156-7). This explanation of Dublin was more highlighted in the following episodes, where the city was described as wearing "the mask of a capital." (Joyce, *Dubliners*, 'After the Race', 5.148). Dublin is definitely not yet a capital city, if it is compared with London or Paris. However, embryonic indications of the transformation that will attend the modern metropolis are presented through the young women, who are poised to move into the public space. In the nineteenth century, for the first time, women began to work outside the home in "large numbers" (Benjamin 105). However, in *Dubliners* we are introduced to such women, who fail to successfully make this transition from the private to the public space. In 'Eveline', 'The Boarding House', and "A Mother", the young women at the center of these short stories, Eveline Hill, Polly Mooney and Kathleen Kearney, acquired an opportunity to move into the public sphere but they either retreat themselves or were pulled back into the private space of the home. Mrs. Kearney believes she was a victim of discrimination, as whatsoever happened to her was completely unfair. The overall evaluation of metropolis is on the basis how females can alter their sensibility, be it at any stage of life either private or their public life, when they were children, adolescents or grown adults.

Although Eveline Hill works outside the home, she can be classified as a woman existing within the private sphere, as she not only gives up "her entire wages" to her abusive father, but, also, struggles to run his home on the limited funds provided to her (Joyce, *Dubliners*, 'Eveline', 27). In this short story, readers learn that Eveline has the opportunity to leave her home in Dublin and emigrate with her lover to "Buenos Ayres" (28). However Eveline retreats from this opportunity for change and does not emigrate: "[s]he gripped with both hands at the iron railing....No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy" (31). Garry Leonard writes that it is "the reality of life in Dublin [that] entraps and paralyzes Eveline" (94).

Moreover, Eveline was living with a threat of going through the same stages her mother suffered. Her life is a conversion to an automaton which is deprived of expressing emotions. It could be argued that Eveline would only be exchanging one private

space for another, as she swaps her father's home for her future husband's. Her personality was influenced so much with her character trait that she could not even speak to Frank in the end "her white face to [Frank], passive, like a helpless animal" while she was standing at the dock (Joyce, *Dubliners*, 'Eveline', 32).

Nevertheless, the very process of emigrating from one hemisphere to another would entail substantial time in the public arena during her journey, an opportunity which Eveline retreated from. Another nineteen-year-old woman in Joyce's *Dubliners* is Polly Mooney, who lives and works in her mother's boarding house (Joyce, *Dubliners*, 'The Boarding House,' 49). Initially her mother, Mrs. Mooney, sent her daughter out of the home to work as a "typewriter in a corn factor's office" (54), but she quickly took "her daughter home again and set her to do housework" (57). In a world where woman inhabited the private space that is the home, marriage was the ultimate goal as expressed from Mrs. Mooney's reflection on "some mothers she knew who could not get their daughter off their hands." (56).

These stories highlight the traditional family issues, and they contribute to serving the same theme but "A Mother," sheds more light over the families who survive through an evident distance (MCKeown 30). While Polly worked for a short time outside the home. It was her mother who pulled her back into the private space and maneuvered her into marriage with Mr. Doran, a guest, who realizes that "he had been had" (Joyce, *Dubliners*, 'The Boarding House', 51). She only saw two choices open to him to "marry her or run away" (53-4).

The boarding house itself is positioned as representative of the private space through its description of open windows where "lace curtains ballooned gently towards the street beneath the raised sashes" providing images reminiscence of the home and the brothel (53). Therefore, Polly's return to "housework" from employment as a "typewriter" can be read as a retreat into the private space, after a brief sojourn working in the public environment, before her final retreat into marriage. However, ambiguity arises as it is possible to read Mrs. Mooney's boarding house being the boundary

between the private and public space. The home is also providing a business accommodation for "tourists" and "clerks" working in the city (55). While marriage and the home were closely associated with the private space in both Eveline and Polly's stories, whereas for Kathleen Kearney, it was employment that would open possibilities for her to move into the public arena. Kathleen probably had the best chance of the three women to make this transition as a result of both her forename with its nationalistic resonance (Joyce, *Dubliners*, 'A Mother' 117) and her musical talent: "[s] on the name of Miss Kathleen Kearney began to be heard often on people's lips". (119). She was trying to build a musical career going outside her private space.

However, this opportunity was curtailed through her mother's behavior when she acts on her daughter's behalf. In this short story it is proposed that Mrs. Kearney's daughter "should be the accompanist at a series of four grand concerts" (119-121) and "a contract was drawn up by which Kathleen was to receive eight guineas for her services" (121). However, when the series of concerts turned out to be "too many" (122) and that "the Friday concert was to be abandoned" (123), Mrs. Kearney, was quick to point out that "her daughter had signed for four concerts" (125). The negotiations were done by Mrs. Kearney, for the ransom of the services rendered by her daughter: "[s]he won't go on without her money" (126). Excluding consideration regarding the correctness of Mrs. Kearney's behavior, the final result was the declaration by the "widely respected" Mr O'Madden Burke (126) that was the time where, "Miss Kathleen Kearney's musical career was ended in Dublin" (127-128). Ultimately Kathleen "followed her mother meekly" out into Dublin (128) and readers can only assume that she returns to the private space that is her mother's home.

Furthermore, during the whole scenario, it was observed that Mrs. Kearney was arguing for her daughter's life but nowhere in the novel Kathleen fought for her right. This is also a trait found in many women in the short stories of Joyce, which was passivity in their personality. She does not have the confidence to repel the way Mrs. Kearney did, hence, her actions to defy norms associated with gender will

be futile. Mrs. Kearney even “wrap[s] the cloak round her daughter” (128), proving that Kathleen cannot do any activity on her own and in every scenario is dependent. In this way the reader understands that while the three young women ultimately returned to the private sphere, each had a brief opportunity to move into the public sphere, even that experience was an embryonic one.

Similarly embryonic, is the level of classification that can be read in *Dubliners*. Mrs. Mooney’s boarders are classified as either, “a floating population made up of tourists” or a “resident population ... of clerks” (Joyce, *Dubliners*, ‘The Boarding House’, 49-57). Again, a level of ambiguity is apparent in the text as the classification is simultaneously descriptive of the public and the private space. For example, the word “resident” calls to mind concepts of permanence and belonging. As applied to the boarding house residents, the term also represents the home which is the private space. However, the word “resident” also acts in contrast to the “tourists”, who are representative of the public, both in terms of people and place. In ‘Eveline’ there is also an example of classification, as Eveline catalogs her activity within the home when “she looked around the room reviewing all its familiar objects which she had dusted once a week for so many years” (Joyce, *Dubliners*, ‘Eveline’, 26-7). As the critic Garry Leonard identifies Eveline’s home as a “psychological prison,” he also labels Eveline’s activity as cataloguing all she dusts (100). Eveline’s cataloguing also extends to her family and friends: “Her father was not so bad then, and besides her mother was alive. That was a long, time ago: she and her brothers and sisters were all grown up; her mother dead. Tizzie Dunn was dead, too, and the Waters had gone back to England. Everything changes. Now she was going to go away like the others, to leave her home” (Joyce, *Dubliners*, ‘Eveline’, 26-30). With the final line of this quote a link is created between Eveline’s cataloguing and her possible move from the private space.

A similar link between cataloguing and the move from private to public space is created in the other short story ‘A Mother’. It is Kathleen’s mother, Mrs. Kearney, who is seen to catalogue as she organizes the concert programs: “in such delicate

matters as the wording of bills and the disposing of items for a programme. Mrs. Kearney helped him..... She had tact. She knew what artistes should go into capitals and what artistes should go into small style” (Joyce, *Dubliners*, ‘A Mother’, 117- 119). Ultimately, Mrs. Kearney’s interference undermines her aim of supporting her daughter’s career, with the link between this cataloguing of the program and with her final failure, ironically signaled by the phrase “[s]he had tact.” While the importance of organizing, classifying and listing the “artistes” is stressed, in the context of Kathleen’s story. This categorization will not support her movement into the public space.

Additionally, in line with the other two short stories from the *Dubliners*, this cataloguing takes place within the private space which contrasts with Poe’s ‘The Man of the Crowd’ where classification and cataloguing take place, within the public arena. If Dublin, as viewed through the lens of Joyce’s text, is the embryonic modern metropolis, then London as read through Poe’s ‘The Man of the Crowd’ provides the next step in the transformation of the modern metropolis. All of the action in this short story takes place in the public space, a coffee shop (Amaral 228), as the unnamed narrator surveys the crowds on the London streets: “I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations” (Poe 101). The narrator who is watching the crowd is seated in “the large bow window of the D -- -- Coffee House” (101), which is a boundary place between private and public space, and inside it offers refreshments and seating of home but in a public setting (Hayes 446). This position of the narrator, is in a transition position between fully private and fully public space. It also supports the argument that London, as depicted in this text is poised between Dublin and Paris as a transforming modern metropolis.

The main aspect which the narrator noticed was the grouping of the crowd based on the physiognomies he also characterized people through their dressing (Werner 5). Supporting Joyce’s own description of Dublin as “the center of paralysis”, the three women from the *Dubliners*, were unable to move into the public space successfully. In contrast Poe’s London-based text, allows the narrator to make that transition as he is described as “[h]urriedly

putting on an overcoat, and seizing my hat and cane, I made my way into the street" (Poe 105). Yet another way of reading Poe's story as a transition text, is to consider how private space is stressed less, but is still present, though in a coded manner.

The coffee house mentioned earlier, provides echoes of the private space but the narrator soon exits that space to follow "a craving desire to keep the man in view" (105). Time passes as the narrator follows the man and as "the night deepened"(104), readers are provided with another association between private and public space as "the rays of the gas-lamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day ... now at length gained ascendancy, (104-5). Walter Benjamin noted how Gaslight, by illuminating the streets, was a "way of increasing safety in the city [which] made the crowds feel at home in the open streets even at night" but it also created the "appearance of the street as an intérieur" (104) and thus doubled the association of public with private space for readers. The escalation in the evolution of the modern metropolis across the three selected texts, can also be read through categorization and classification of the crowd as the narrator observes: "[s]oon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of detail, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance" (Poe 102). As a result of his survey, the narrator is able to categorize those passing as "noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesmen, stockjobbers" (102), members of the "tribe of clerks" (103), "the race of swell pick-pockets," (103), the "gamblers" and the "gentlemen who live by their wits" (103). While Poe's narrator categorizes the London crowd, as it passes by his vantage point, his subjects and therefore his categorizations are focused on men. This contrasts with Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise*, which represents the next level in the transformation of the modern metropolis. As the women come to the fore in the public space that is the department store, however linking both texts is the use of clothing to aid in the categorization.

For Poe's narrator, frequently it is the attire of the passing crowd that distinguishes one group from another. Reliable clerks of reputable businesses were "known by their coats and pantaloons of black

or brown, made to sit comfortably, with white cravats and waistcoats, broad" (103) and could easily be separated from the "junior clerks of flash houses - - young gentlemen with tight coats, bright boots, well-oiled hair, and supercilious lips" (102). This categorization of men has its mirror in Zola's *The Ladies' Paradise* as women moving into the public space are observed and classified by their external behavior and appearance.

In the *Ladies' Paradise*, Zola's text focuses on the women who work and shop in the department store, that is known as The Ladies' Paradise, in order to highlight, both the movement from the private space to the public space. With an increasing categorization associated with the modern metropolis the store is representative of Paris and is clear, as Zola writes, "[a] whole world was springing up amidst the life echoing beneath the high metal naves." (Zola 234). In the store Octave Mouret, creates a public space for women to meet, as he claims that his customers "aren't in my shop, they're at home here!" (248). This phrase perfectly describes not only the aim of his store, but also the result of the modern metropolis, which successfully facilitates the movement of women from the private to the public sphere. Mouret creates a replacement of home for both his customers and his workers who spend most of their time at store. For his customers, he created "the reading- and writing-room" (246), decorated with "monumental fireplaces," along with "pictures, very ornately framed" and "tall green plants in majolica pots" (246).

This space conveyed the impression of home and privacy so efficiently that gloves worn in public are discarded without hesitation, while personal letters are written in public (246). In addition, the control women are assuming is reinforced with the "stroke of the pen" as they rebrand the store's notepaper (246). This assumption of female control of the public space is further emphasized, as husbands waited while their wives were "wandering freely through the departments [and] young ladies [were] discreetly looking out for their lovers (246). Thus these women are comparable to the flâneur, where they are comfortable in the public space of the department store as they are within their "four walls" (Benjamin 105). Echoing the

store's "reading- and writing-room" is the shop girls' "common-room" (Zola 272), which is "furnished with a piano, a pedestal table in the center, and armchairs and sofas protected with white covers" (272). Unlike the society ladies who used the reading room as an extension of their home, the sales girls "had yet to be educated" to the use of their common-room (272). By presenting a space that is neither private nor public, Zola highlights an environment that was still in transition and where "[p]eople had to adapt themselves to a new and rather strange situation, one that is peculiar to big cities" (Benjamin 105).

Throughout *The Ladies' Paradise*, life in all its variety and inexhaustible wealth of permutations" (106) is depicted through the classification of women by type, such as "ladies", "wet-nurses", "shopkeepers and housewives" (Zola 249), "workmen's wives" and "tradesmen's wives" (241), along with the shop girls themselves. However this classification goes further, though Zola's depiction of the commodification of women by describing them by either their clothing alone or body parts: "multi-coloured hats ... "[h]eads were half cut off ... faces in reverse, bits of shoulders and arms" (250) which captures Charles Pierre Baudelaire's "essential quality of being present" in the modern metropolis (2)

In conclusion and as Charles Baudelaire suggests, the modern urban metropolis is the masterpiece that is awaiting translation by the artist (4) and that the artist of modernity must be "an observer of life" before progressing to express it (15). Therefore, and in accordance with Baudelaire's criteria, Joyce, Poe and Zola write a narrative of Dublin, London and Paris, respectively, through which an interpretation of the evolving modern metropolis can be read across the three texts. The transformation depicted is a movement from the private to the public sphere, particularly of woman, and an associated level of categorization can be traced. In Joyce's *Dubliners* the women are placed firmly within the private space of the home and categorization is seen only in an embryonic form. Female characters in "James Joyce's – *Dubliners*" mostly comprised of characters who were passive in nature. They easily accept the way they are living in those surroundings and obligations. They are not at

all happy in the way they are living but they do not put any effort to change the aura.

Joyce, in his short stories is trying to study the paralysis in the society, especially in Dublin, where the desires to achieve their goals have reached to a level where they cannot achieve it. Instead of struggling to surmount the obstacles, the female characters relent in continuing their dreams and change the picture of their life.

Poe's narrator in 'The Man of the Crowd' categorizes, the London crowd as it passes by his vantage point, but his subjects and also his lists, are composed of men. He is trying to be judgmental in his novel and make judgments regarding the personalities, which he observes sitting at a coffee shop. Zola's categorization is of the Parisian women in *The Ladies' Paradise*, as they move to occupy the public space of the department store that represents the modern city. Thus, while Paris, London and Dublin are all cities under scrutiny by modernist writers, an interrogation of each text conveys an impression that each city represents a different evolutionary stage. By reading across the three texts the alternation in the visibility of women in the public space, and their associated classification, can be interpreted as demonstrating the evolution in the transformation of the modern metropolis.

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