Ivy Day in the Committee Room

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES JOYCE

Born in Dublin in the throes of Ireland's fight for independence from England, James Joyce was steeped in Irish patriotism during his formative years. His father, an abusive alcoholic, was staunchly anti-English, and his stint as an election worker likely influenced Joyce's "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." Joyce had a typical classical education, run by Jesuits, full of Catholic theology and heavily focused on ancient Greek and Roman literature. Young Joyce hated school but absorbed the classical texts and theological culture like a sponge. Sick of Dublin, he left home young and would return very few times in his life—never with joy—preferring continental cities like Paris and Trieste. As an expatriate, he struggled to support his wife and children. He taught English but, as a writer, he kept his literary standards high, producing only challenging, cutting-edge (and not necessarily commercial) fiction. His autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15), and his story collection *Dubliners* (1914), in which "Ivy Day" appears, both provide an embittered take on his hometown in a high realist style. Never smart with money but full of self-confidence, Joyce relied in later years on literary patrons who recognized his immense talent. His long novel *Ulysses* (1922), which follows two Dubliners over the course of a single day, was championed by fellow writers like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and was pushed to completion by a shrewd bookseller in Paris. Controversial at the time for its frank depiction of sex, *Ulysses* soon became—and remains—regarded by many as the greatest novel in English. Joyce's menacingly difficult magnum opus *Finnegans Wake* (1939), over which he labored for 17 years with a young Samuel Beckett as secretary and moral supporter, is one of the most creative and poetic commentaries ever produced on the way humans use language. These last two books continue to obsess and confound scholars; they have secured Joyce's reputation as one of the most creative novelists in history and an essential leader of the Modernist movement.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The main historical backdrop to "Ivy Day" is Ireland's ongoing fight for independence from England. The struggle had spanned centuries, well before Ireland was absorbed into the United Kingdom in 1801. When Joyce was born, Ireland was newly optimistic about splitting from England because a charismatic and effective figure, Charles Stewart Parnell, led the Nationalist party. At the peak of his powers, however, with unprecedented momentum behind him, Parnell was felled by a scandalous extramarital affair. The Catholic church put enormous pressure on his Nationalist colleagues to dissociate from the disgraced man, and in 1890, the technical majority of Parnellites left the party, effectively squashing it. Parnell died a year later, an event commemorated annually as Ivy Day and signaled by an ivy leaf in the lapel of his devotees. The party's division was felt country-wide, and many credited it with the failure of Ireland's drive for independence. Joyce, one of these many, intended "Ivy Day" as a vindictive lesson to the political establishment.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Gustave Flaubert's God-like narrator in *Madame Bovary* (1856) greatly influenced Joyce's methods in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." The playwright Henrik Ibsen's unforgiving domestic realism in works like *A Doll's House* (1879) so enchanted Joyce that he learned Danish just to read Ibsen untainted by translation. The embittered view of modern Dublin in "Ivy Day"—exemplified in the characters' negligent laziness—mirrors other stories in Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), especially "Eveline" and "Counterparts." In the latter, Joyce uses paternal violence as a metaphor for Ireland's antiquated toxicity; in all three, Joyce examines individual domestic lives to expose a broader feeling of national suffocation. Joyce's major novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-15) and *Ulysses* (1922) explore this suffocation in far richer psychological depth, each employing a stream-of-consciousness method to illustrate his characters' fears and hesitations with great realism. As a commentary on the Irish independence question, "Ivy Day" can also be compared to the *Dublin Trilogy* (1923-26) by the Irish playwright Sean O'Casey, or to William Butler Yeats's play "Cathleen ni Houlihan" (pub. 1902; about Ireland's 1798 rebellion) and his poem about the failed uprising of "Easter 1916" (1921). Like the melodramatic elegy at the end of Joyce's story, countless ballads and drinking songs commemorated the famous Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell after his death in 1891, with patriotic pieces like Yeats's "Come Gather Round Me, Parnellites" (1938). Yeats wrote his ballad in earnest, Joyce in satire.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Ivy Day in the Committee Room
- **When Written:** circa 1906
- **Where Written:** Trieste
- **When Published:** 1914
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Realism, political fiction
- **Setting:** The Nationalist party headquarters, Dublin.

October 6, probably 1902.

- **Climax:** Hynes reads an elegy to the late Charles Stewart Parnell
- **Antagonist:** Though two of the men—Bantam Lyons and Crofton—differ from the majority's opinion of Parnell's legacy, the story contains no traditional antagonists. Instead, Joyce wants readers to view certain negative qualities of the men—namely laziness and hypocrisy—as the enemies of Ireland's healthy political life.
- **Point of View:** third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Expatriation. Though Joyce spent most of his life avoiding his native Dublin, he always regarded himself as Irish. He begged his Irish visitors abroad for news from home and obsessively replicated Dublin, down to the street corner, in his hyperrealist fiction.

Finnegans Wake. Many readers consider Joyce's final work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939), to be unreadable. This is because he created his own language for it, a mishmash of all the languages he could find a dictionary for. Joyce hoped readers, upon hearing echoes of familiar and foreign phrases in the book, would feel surrounded by the world's cultures and discover something transcendent about the common human experience.

PLOT SUMMARY

Mat O'Connor, a political canvasser for the Nationalist candidate in an upcoming municipal election, has skipped out on work and is rolling cigarettes in the party's Committee Room headquarters, chatting with the room's caretaker, Old Jack, who stokes the dying **fire**. As Jack complains about his drunkard teenage son, describing the physical violence he uses against him and decrying the state of Ireland's young, O'Connor lights a cigarette with the business card of his boss, Richard Tierney.

In comes a fellow canvasser, Joe Hynes, who declares that their wages have still not been paid. He begins to rail against the corruption and shady reputation of Tierney, praising the opposing candidate, the blue-collar Colgan. In disbelief, he claims that Tierney is considering a welcome speech to Edward VII upon the monarch's visit to Dublin. John Henchy bursts in, decrying again that they haven't been paid and joining in the group's denigration of Tierney. When Hynes takes his leave, O'Connor and Henchy turn their gossip to him, suggesting that he is a spy for the opposition.

Father Keon knocks and is admitted to the room. Skittish and looking for a political official, he immediately exits, prompting further gossip among the men about Keon's recent disbarment from the clergy for an unnamed infraction and his shady affiliation with Tierney's campaign. Henchy, O'Connor, and Jack return to the subject of Tierney's laziness, calling him a "shoeboy" and complaining that they need a drink. They joke about nepotism and dream of distinguished roles in politics.

Finally some sign arrives from their absent boss: the pub delivery boy brings a case of stout from Tierney. Henchy takes back his complaints about the man and offers the boy a drink. Old Jack begrudgingly uncorks a bottle for him, and they make small talk before the boy leaves.

As they begin to drink and discuss their canvassing gains, Bantam Lyons and Crofton, yet more canvassers, enter the room. Crofton greets the men's questions with silence while Lyons makes small talk. Without the corkscrew, Henchy places bottles for the men in the fireplace, expecting the heat to expel their corks. Crofton is a Conservative and feels sulky about working in the presence of Nationalists—hence his silence. Henchy continues bragging about his canvassing prowess when Lyons starts to poke at the reputation of Charles Stewart Parnell, the late Nationalist leader who died in disgrace after the public learned of his extramarital affair. O'Connor and Henchy grow heated, refusing to let Parnell be denigrated on the anniversary of his death.

During this tussle, Hynes reenters and O'Connor urges him to recite his elegy for Parnell. Hynes first refuses, then agrees, unleashing an eleven-stanza ballad in praise of Parnell, full of bitterness for the "hypocrite" Nationalists who turned against him. The men clap then fall silent. The room returns to its prior state of quiet small talk; O'Connor rolls another cigarette.

CHARACTERS

Old Jack – Old Jack is the elderly caretaker of the political Committee Room where the story takes place. An Irish Nationalist, he is a patriot with seemingly strong political convictions, but he struggles to act on those convictions. As such, he represents the older generation of Irish Nationalists who have failed to act on the commitments and values of their party, leaving the movement mired in corruption and petty disagreement. Symbolically, Joyce represents this state of affairs by making Jack the guardian of the Committee Room's weak **fire**, which (although Jack unsuccessfully stokes and fans it throughout the story) never properly lights or heats the room. As the fire represents the spirit of Irish Nationalism, Jack's ineffectual stoking suggests that the older generation has betrayed the movement, letting its light nearly go out. Jack also embodies the factionalism and distrust that characterizes the party (he is skeptical of Joe Hynes's party allegiance, for instance), and he demonstrates the party's hypocrisy. For example, although Jack is bitterly disappointed in his 19-year-old son who has a drinking problem, he follows the other men's orders and—against his principles—allows a teenaged delivery

boy to drink a bottle of stout. This shows Jack's inability to act on his convictions, and it also casts blame on his generation for corrupting the young, showing that it is partially their fault that Irish Nationalism is in decline.

Mat O'Connor –Mat O'Connor—a young, lazy man with prematurely grey hair—represents the sorry state of the Nationalist Party's youngest generation. The story opens on him loafing in an armchair in the Committee Room on an evening when he should be out canvassing for his boss, the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney. While other party men are out working the streets, O'Connor is hiding out from the bad weather by rolling cigarettes in front of the **fire** and complaining that his paycheck is late. At the beginning of the story, he dips one of Tierney's campaign flyers—which he was supposed to be distributing to voters—into the fire to light his cigarette. As the fire symbolizes Ireland's dying Nationalist spirit, lighting his cigarette with the fire while skipping out on work shows how the party men are indifferent to the actual values of Nationalism and are instead using politics for selfish ends. Predictably, then, while O'Connor wears Charles Stewart Parnell's commemorative **ivy leaf**, he is an unconvincing and morally uncommitted Nationalist: he doesn't work for the party's goals, and he changes his opinions about politics and his coworkers easily, showing his spinelessness. Alongside the uselessness of Ireland's elders (represented by Jack), the young but lazy O'Connor completes the image of an Ireland that is past its political prime and lacking in promise for the future. Even his physical description emphasizes this: as a young man, O'Connor has grey hair and a blotchy face, suggesting early decline.

John Henchy – John Henchy, a Nationalist canvasser, is an energetic and manipulative salesman. He is the smoothest talker among the story's characters, but he has no genuine moral values, no firmly-held opinions, and no allegiance to truth. Like the other canvassers, he cares more about getting wages and stout than about Richard Tierney, the candidate they've been hired to serve. Throughout the story, Joyce shows Henchy making convincing political arguments; he changes Mat O'Connor's opinions on several points, for instance, and boasts of his success canvassing voters. But none of this is in service of any coherent political goal or moral platform—Henchy, it seems, treats it all like a game. For instance, he makes a detailed case defending Tierney's alleged friendliness with King Edward VII—a position that is despicable to most Nationalists (since their party is, at heart, built on opposing the British monarchy). Furthermore, he boasts of earning votes by telling voters that Tierney doesn't belong to a political party, which is a flat-out lie. In this way, Joyce suggests that Henchy doesn't use his rhetorical skills constructively, since he has no principles to constrain him. What's more, Henchy likes to sow the seeds of discord among the group (he suggests that Joe Hynes is a spy for the opposing candidate, for instance). His negativity and skepticism towards others show how mistrustful and toxic the atmosphere of the Nationalist Party has become.

Joe Hynes – Joe Hynes, a fellow Nationalist canvasser and a convincing speaker on politics, delivers a pious and overdramatic elegy to the late Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell in the story's finale. Unlike his colleagues, it's clear that Hynes has *some* political principles; after all, he is not afraid to accuse their candidate Richard Tierney of corruption and royalism, calling Tierney "Tricky Dicky," speaking of his origins in illegal liquor, and chiding him for considering a welcome to King Edward VII (a gesture that would offend any true Nationalist seeking independence from England). Hynes even goes so far as to defend Tierney's opponent Colgan, a blue-collar working man who sticks up for the lower classes. In this way, Hynes draws attention to the serious corruption at the upper levels of the Nationalist party (while also drawing accusations from Henchy that he is a spy). Hynes is not perfect; he is revealed to be a blind follower of the late Parnell. He uses Parnell's commemorative **ivy leaf** as a prop in debate and invokes "this man" rather than speaking Parnell's name, two cursory gestures that suggest Hynes's inability to think for himself or to engage with Parnell's complex moral legacy. So, while he draws attention to the moral failings of current politics, Hynes also draws readers' attention to the ways in which political followers can become overly obsessed with their leaders' personas. In his concluding elegy to Parnell (recited at the end of the story), the shallowness of Hynes's investment in Parnell is made clear by his overdramatic language and his formulaic, uninspired use of Christian imagery and moral tropes like "hypocrisy." The poem teaches nothing insightful about why the late leader is worth lamenting. The other men's warm reception of the poem helps illustrate the dangers of blind political worship and helps make clear Joyce's argument that, ever since the Catholic church ousted Parnell on moral grounds, his followers have been scared out of engaging with deep, real-life moral questions. Instead, they have reverted to cardboard idolatry.

Father Keon – Father Keon, a defrocked priest who still wears his uniform and cozies up to politicians, pokes his head into the Committee Room midway through the story looking for Fanning, a political operator. Everything about Keon is suspicious. Though the men call him "Father," the men's gossip reveals that he has been stripped of his clerical order for some unnamed moral offence. In the poor light, Joyce says "it was impossible to say whether he wore a clergyman's collar or a layman's." By describing him this way and calling him "an actor," Joyce very clearly suggests that Keon, the only character with direct ties to the Church, is morally untrustworthy. Along with Old Jack's useless reliance on Catholic school to improve his drunkard son, Keon's sketchiness adds to the feeling that Catholicism is a fallible judge of moral character. Ultimately, it's Keon's shadiness that clinches Joyce's bitter argument that the

Church was wrong to oust the late Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell for an extramarital affair, a personal infraction that had no bearing on Parnell's sparkling political abilities. Several details surrounding Keon also help reinforce Joyce's view that the Church has no place in politics. First, Keon is the only entrant among the men to knock on the door, suggesting an unwelcome, outsider presence. Second, Joyce is clear that Keon's coat contains only buttons, whereas the other men's lapels show Parnell's commemorative **ivy leaf** (the absence of the leaf marks Keon as uninterested in the true principles of the party). Third, when Henchy leaps up to light Keon's way out with a candlestick, Keon "retreat[s]" from the flame—and since the candle's **fire** came from the room's fireplace, Joyce's symbol for the spirit of Nationalism, Keon's retreat symbolizes the Church's natural antipathy to politics. Readers learn, however, that Keon is unnaturally close with Fanning and the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney. For Joyce, this unholy marriage of Church and state contributed to Parnell's unjust expulsion as well as Ireland's enduring political malaise.

Mr. Crofton – Crofton, a Conservative who begrudgingly joined the Nationalists after his candidate dropped out, has exactly one line in the story, but he is crucial to illustrating the discord that consumes the men's relations. A "very fat," mustachioed man with piercing eyes, Crofton is a sulky and silent misfit. Like the others, Crofton works as a canvasser for the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney, but he dislikes his colleagues and he is reluctant to help them. Joyce goes out of his way to tell readers that Crofton's heart is not in it; he does *not* favor Independence from Ireland, and thus does not worship the late leader Charles Stewart Parnell. He works with the Nationalists only because his candidate has dropped out, and the two parties share some—but by no means all—concerns. Joyce depicts Crofton as sullen and ineffective, first when John Henchy complains about him behind his back for being "not worth a damn as a canvasser," and then when Crofton appears in the Committee Room toward the end of the story and remains silent to his companions, ignoring their greetings and questions. Joyce reminds readers of Crofton's silence in several places, a constant indication that, though they share an employer, respect and agreement among these colleagues do not exist as one would expect. When Joe Hynes recites his melodramatic elegy for Parnell, Joyce shows the room of gossipy men feeling awkward and not quite conciliatory, despite their mutual patriotism. Afterwards, when Crofton is forced to admit "that [the poem] was a very fine piece of writing," Joyce paraphrases Crofton's response, rather than quoting it. This condenses the entire story's feeling of disingenuousness into one line.

Bantam Lyons – A young, prudish canvasser with a "frail" frame and "thin" face, Bantam Lyons challenges his colleagues on the moral legacy of the late Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, whose affair cost him his party leadership. Lyons has a fussy "double collar" and a slight build, unlike many of the other men. Throughout the story, Lyons does not fit in with his colleagues. His moral objection to Parnell's scandalous reputation ignites an an upset among the other men, especially John Henchy. The men's short spat highlights their inability to engage with the deep moral questions that have haunted the party since their leader's death. Though his stance on the divisive issue is perfectly valid ("Do you think now after what he did Parnell was a fit man to lead us?"), Lyons is the odd man out in a debate with ardent Parnellites. (Even the bitter, anti-Parnellian Crofton admits that Parnell was a "gentleman.") As such, Lyons is a central force in the story's overall discord.

Richard Tierney – Richard Tierney, a corrupt and moneyed career politician, is the Nationalist candidate in an upcoming municipal election. He employs the canvassers in Joyce's story. As a Poor Law Guardian, Tierney is in charge of distributing welfare to the poor, but he seems far from qualified for this duty. John Henchy calls him a two-faced "little shoeboy," and Joe Hynes calls him "Tricky Dicky." As these insults suggest, Tierney's main function in the story is to illustrate a high level of corruption and moral degradation in the current Nationalist party. Readers never see Tierney, who hides out in his pub (his absence from the campaign's front-lines shows how little he cares about politics), but Joyce gives a sense of Tierney's arrogance and immorality through his employees' complaints about him. The major gripe, which nearly everyone shares, is that Tierney never pays on time. It's a complaint that damns both the insulted and the insulter: while Tierney's lateness proves that he doesn't care about others (a quality that no politician should have), Mat O'Connor's constant complaints about his lateness prove that O'Connor himself is only in the campaign for a paycheck. Furthermore, Tierney is considering giving a warm welcome to Edward VII's upcoming visit. This friendly gesture toward an English monarch would be unthinkable to most Irish Nationalists, which shows Tierney's lack of principle. That lack of principle trickles down to all of the party's underlings, who show themselves to be just as spineless and hypocritical as their boss. This demonstrates the rot that pervades the party from the top down.

Charles Stewart Parnell – Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) was the leader of Irish Nationalism until the Catholic Church ousted him for having an extramarital affair, a disgrace that led to his untimely death. A famously strong leader, Parnell rallied much of Ireland in the fight for independence from England. The scandal of his affair rocked the country and bitterly divided those who condemned him for the affair and those who remained loyal to his vision. "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" (set on Ivy Day, the anniversary of Parnell's death), focuses on a group of his devotees. Though long dead, Parnell is clearly the story's central character in spirit, as the men sport his commemorative **ivy leaf**, argue over his legacy, and urge Joe Hynes to recite a histrionic elegy to the

late leader. As the story unfolds, however, Joyce reveals the men's worship to be shallow. As attested by their unproductive arguments, their strange avoidance of Parnell's name, and Hynes's vague, rather formulaic poem, the men go to great lengths to celebrate the abstract ideals that Parnell stood for while avoiding any meaningful discussion of his complex moral baggage. The men's sidestepping of the elephant in the room is one way in which Joyce makes an important historical argument about Parnell's ouster. The Church, Joyce suggests, should never have expelled an effective leader on grounds of personal morality; doing so not only sapped Ireland of its political spirit but also ensured that people would avoid engaging with moral issues altogether.

Edward VII – Son of Victoria, Edward VII ruled the United Kingdom from 1901-1910, including the year in which Joyce's "Ivy Day" likely takes place, 1902. The Nationalist canvassers in Joyce's story see Edward as a representative of English oppression over Ireland. Wherever "Edward Rex" or "King Eddie" appears, readers can expect a heavy dose of sarcasm and disdain. Edward is at the center of a small scandal within the Nationalist party: when Joe Hynes reveals that their employer, the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney, plans to welcome Edward on his upcoming visit to Dublin, his colleagues are aghast. Joyce uses Edward's visit (which actually occurred in history) not only as a means of anchoring his story to a specific time and place but primarily as a means of illustrating Tierney's selfish mishandling of hot party issues. Joyce also uses the Edward controversy to bring out telling attitudes in each of his characters: the jingoistic Hynes objects to Edward's visit simply because his hero Charles Stewart Parnell would have, the prudish Bantam Lyons objects because Edward has a bad moral reputation, and the sleazy John Henchy finds a way to brush off the issue in order to win voters.

Stout delivery boy – The 17-year-old delivery boy arrives with a case of stout (a type of beer) for the men in the Committee Room. The boy symbolically represents Ireland's youth, so when Old Jack (who has just railed against the dangers of youth alcoholism) hands the boy a drink, it's an example of Ireland's older generation willfully corrupting the young. Richard Tierney, the conspicuously absent Nationalist candidate, has sent drinks with the boy in lieu of the wages he owes to his workers. Ironically, in his brief appearance the boy stands in as Tierney's ambassador to his workers. That Tierney has sent a 17-year-old instead of showing up himself illustrates how mismanaged the Nationalist party has become. Furthermore, that the boy asks for the men's empty bottles before they have even been drunk shows how stingy Tierney is, a quality that does not bode well for a Poor Law Guardian.

Fanning – Mentioned twice briefly, Fanning is the sub-sheriff of Dublin. The party men discuss the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney's suspicious closeness with Fanning and suggest that Tierney buddies up to city officers to win higher office. Fanning also reveals an ugly reality about the Church's involvement in politics. Father Keon, the story's shady Church representative, enters the Committee Room briefly, asking for Fanning; this suggests that Fanning is in cahoots with the Nationalists and that Keon (a stand-in for the Church) has an undue closeness to the two men's scheming.

Colgan – Colgan is the opponent of the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney. Colgan never appears in the story, but Joe Hynes mentions him as an upright, blue-collar candidate who is possibly superior to Tierney. Though Hynes's defense of Colgan is reasonable, the other characters refuse to listen: Old Jack denigrates Colgan simply because he's poor, and John Henchy is too fixated on the idea that Hynes is a spy to take him seriously. In this way, Joyce suggests that a purer alternative might exist to the corrupt Tierney but that the Nationalists are too bitter and conspiratorial to discover it.

TERMS

Nationalism – A type of political patriotism that stresses the needs of one's country above all others. With respect to Ireland, the Nationalist party is historically anti-England and pro-independence. It was led most memorably by **Charles Stewart Parnell**. The story's main characters are employees of a Nationalist candidate, **Richard Tierney**, although Joyce argues that Tierney's party has lost its integrity in the decade since Parnell's death.

Ivy Day – Ivy Day is an annual commemoration of the late Irish Nationalist leader **Charles Stewart Parnell** who nearly emancipated Ireland from English rule. Held on October 6th, the anniversary of Parnell's death, it is meant to be a day of honoring Parnell and his legacy.

The Committee Room – The Committee Room is the headquarters of Ireland's Nationalist party, and the setting for "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." Joyce assumed his Irish readers would know that this was where the followers of the leader **Charles Stewart Parnell**, after his scandalous extramarital affair went public, defected from the party under pressure from the Church. By setting his story here, Joyce makes an implicit comparison between Parnell's famously strong team of Nationalists in the 1880s and the lazy group of bumbling, gossipy party men circa 1902.

Conservatism – The Conservative Party is an Irish political party. Unlike Nationalists, Irish Conservatives did not seek Ireland's independence from England. Consequently, Conservatives did not worship the late Nationalist leader **Charles Stewart Parnell**, as most of Joyce's characters do. **Crofton**, the story's sole Conservative, is silent and resentful of his Nationalist companions. He begrudgingly canvasses for the Nationalist **Richard Tierney** because his preferred candidate has dropped out of the Municipal elections.

Shoeboy – An insincere flatterer.

THEMES

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YOUTH AND POLITICAL PARALYSIS

In "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," seven men are supposed to be out drumming up votes for the Irish Nationalist Party (the group seeking independence from British rule). Instead, they are do-nothing gossips, sitting around the **fire** in the Party's meeting room. Their laziness is especially obvious in the context of Ivy Day, an annual commemoration of the late Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, whom Joyce (and many of his generation) idolized. Without Parnell, many (including Joyce) believed that the fight for independence stagnated. In "Ivy Day," Joyce vents his anger at his native Dublin's political paralysis by depicting intergenerational corruption and stagnation: the old have become selfish hypocrites and they have corrupted the young into the same attitudes. The uselessness of the young and old of "Ivy Day" illustrates Joyce's fear that political paralysis—especially of Ireland's Nationalist party after Parnell's death—is a self-perpetuating social illness that will doom the nation.

Old Jack—a well-meaning but useless character—embodies the weak spirit of Ireland's older generation. Jack's function is to keep the fire going in the hearth of the party's Committee Room (a historic place where Parnell's Nationalist team once rallied). But Jack only barely keeps the fire alive: he stokes the coals "judiciously," but "mechanically," "slowly," and "thinly." Symbolically, the fire stands for the political passion of the Nationalist party; in Parnell's day, the fire presumably roared, but now it is insufficient to even warm or light the room. Characters complain of the cold, rubbing their hands dramatically as if "to produce a spark from them." "Is that you?" they ask, squinting through the darkness. Symbolically, then, readers can see in the waning fire an embodiment of the great Parnell's dying legacy, and Jack's halfhearted, ineffective fire stoking suggests the inability of the older generation to inspire political passion in each other or in the youth.

In addition to failing to inspire the youth, Jack (and his whole generation) model poor behavior. This first becomes clear when Jack laments that, despite trying to raise his 19-year-old son right, the boy is a wayward drunk. Throughout this conversation, Jack reveals that he has been violent with his son: if he weren't an old man, Jack claims, he'd "take the stick to [his son's] back and beat him while I could stand over him—as I done many a time before." This violence, Joyce implies, has a harmful (rather than a disciplinary) effect on Jack's son, suggesting that his dissolute behavior may be Jack's fault. Due to this, Jack's son can be read as a metaphor for Ireland's self-replicating cycle of misplaced discipline and self-defeat, and for the improbability of the younger generation being better than their parents. Joyce doubles down on this point later in the story when a 17-year-old delivery boy arrives with stout from the men's boss and John Henchy offers the boy a bottle. Against his principles (after all, he's just been on a tirade about his drunkard son), Jack opens the boy's bottle and hands it to him, hinting at the older generation's damaging, willfully-negligent attitude towards Ireland's young. "That's the way it begins," Old Jack says of the cycle of moral decline to which he has just contributed. Clearly, Joyce finds the older generation to be harmful degenerates who are passing their behavior on to the young.

Joyce's final damning depiction of Ireland's decline is to depict the youngest generation with any political responsibility—represented by Mat O'Connor—as lazy. The story opens on O'Connor, a "grey-haired young man [...] disfigured by many blotches and pimples." Joyce makes this character physically both young and old, which suggests early decline. O'Connor's premature age comes not just in his grey hair but also in his lethargy. Rather than canvassing for Nationalist votes, as he is being paid to do, he has been hiding out in the committee room because it's cold and rainy outside. Instead of working for a political cause, he warms himself by Jack's weak fire and smokes cigarettes. Twice in the story, O'Connor lights his cigarettes with campaign flyers promoting his boss, the Nationalist candidate (flyers that O'Connor was supposed to be distributing). This is the ultimate symbolic rejection of his political responsibility to fight for Ireland's independence. With Old Jack representing the fall of the Irish Nationalist party, and the lazy Mat O'Connor and Old Jack's drunk son representing Ireland's bleak political future, the elderly and the young find common ground in their wavering principles and weak execution. This produces an all-encompassing image of doom for Ireland's political future.

ISOLATION AND DISCORD

The men in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room"—all employed by the Irish Nationalist Party—should seemingly be united by their political values. However, the story shows a disturbing disharmony among the seven colleagues, which reflects Ireland's political discord following the untimely death of the Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell. The word "silence" dominates the story, and—when the men do talk—their conversation is mostly two-faced gossip, which suggests mistrust and disrespect among them. This portrait of social isolation and petty feuding evokes

the discord Joyce saw in Ireland's political landscape. In this sense, Joyce suggests that the strength of a political movement depends on collective unity, a quality lacking from the Ireland he set out to depict.

Despite working for the same political party, the men in the story have differing political allegiances. This is clearest in the politics of Joe Hynes and Crofton, whose sympathies do not lie with the candidate they nominally support. The smooth-talking Hynes arrives in the Committee Room and immediately denigrates their candidate, Richard Tierney, as corrupt and hypocritically pro-England, which shows that he disagrees with the men who genuinely support Tierney, even though they're technically on the same side. Furthermore, Crofton is revealed not even to be a member of the Nationalist Party—he's a Conservative, a party that favors Ireland's union with Britain (which is the opposite of the Nationalist independence platform that Tierney supports). Crofton is now among the Nationalists instead of the Conservatives because, when his candidate left the race, he begrudgingly chose the Nationalists, "the lesser of two evils." Underscoring Crofton's alienation from the candidate he's there to support, his coworkers gossip behind his back, with John Henchy saying "he's not worth a damn as a canvasser. He hasn't a word to throw to a dog." When he enters the group, Crofton is resoundingly silent; "he considered his [Nationalist] companions beneath him," which leads him to answer others' questions with wordless nods. Crofton's lack of dialogue in the story ("he had nothing to say"), and Joyce's repetition of the word "silence" in describing him, reinforces the lack of communication between men who allegedly support the same cause.

While some characters divide over party lines, others show almost no political principles at all. Although Henchy defends Parnell in conversation, he does not show much regard for political truth. He is portrayed as a salesman, pitching Tierney to voters however he can. Henchy recalls telling a Conservative that Tierney "doesn't belong to any party, good, bad or indifferent," laughing to his fireside company that "[t]hat's the way to talk to 'em." The truth would in fact have been to declare Tierney on "the Nationalist ticket," as O'Connor has already done for readers. Although Henchy is dishonest with voters, he has at least been out canvassing. O'Connor, on the other hand, has been by the **fire** in an easy chair all evening; he found the weather too cold. The only thing he does with "meditative" care is to roll his cigarettes. Tellingly, O'Connor lights his cigarettes with Tierney's campaign flyers, which he's being paid to distribute. He agrees with Hynes—"I think you're right"—when pressed to support Tierney's opponent, then reneges with a silent nod when Henchy urges him the other way. Later, when he offers a limp defense of Hynes's character, he does so "dubiously." If Henchy is actively slick and careless with truth, O'Connor is spineless and devoid of real opinion. As these men lack conviction and loyalty, it's no wonder they're all mistrustful and divided.

In the final scene, a melodramatic elegy for the dead Parnell, the men finally find common ground—but Joyce suggests that their agreement is weak at best. After Hynes recites his verse elegy for Parnell, the room erupts in applause. The men, it seems, have laid aside their differences and apathy, celebrating the spirit of a great man. However, Joyce subverts this reconciliation instantly. Before the applause, the room lay in "silence," which suggests, perhaps, that the men were calculating their response (and that, therefore, the applause may not be genuine). Afterward, "silence" returns, suggesting that the swell of feeling is gone. Earlier, Bantam Lyons voiced distaste for Parnell, and the fact that even he claps for the poem about Parnell suggests that not all the applause was genuine. If Lyons means to project agreement with the applauding Parnellians, then the reader knows he's not being heartfelt—but if he is merely praising their poetry, then his gesture is all the emptier. In the final line, when the anti-Parnellian Crofton is pressed to commend the poem, Joyce relates that he "said that it was a very fine piece of writing." As with Lyons, this sounds like an agreement. But Joyce uses a sly narrative tactic to suggest otherwise: he doesn't quote Crofton directly (as he almost always does throughout the story), but instead summarizes Crofton's statement. This suggests that, while the room got the impression that Crofton liked the poem, it might not even be what he said. As the story's finale, this note of insincerity and uncertainty rings loudly—it's an anticlimax, reflecting the fractured and disingenuous environment of the Committee Room.

MORALITY VS. POLITICS

Charles Stewart Parnell was once the star of the Irish Nationalist Party, fighting for independence from England until being ousted for an extramarital affair. "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" shows Parnell's once-ferocious Nationalist movement a decade after his untimely death: it's now an antagonistic group of lazy, immoral political canvassers who are working for a paycheck rather than for political principles. As this depiction suggests, Joyce believed that Parnell's political legacy was ruined by the scandal surrounding his personal behavior—and by the Catholic Church's insistence that Parnell's private life mattered more than his political goals. By showing how this scandal ruined the spirit of Irish Nationalism (and led to rife immorality among Parnell's uninspired, leaderless descendants), Joyce suggests that it's sometimes important to separate politics from personal morality. While personal morality *is* important to politics, throwing Parnell out for a personal transgression was destructive to both the political future of Ireland and to the moral character of its people.

From the beginning of the story, Joyce undermines the Church's moral authority to judge Parnell by painting the

institution as hypocritical and immoral. Early in the story, for example, Old Jack laments how poorly his son turned out, despite having sent him to a Catholic school. Jack's blind equating of Catholicism with a good moral upbringing did not pay off; his son is a wayward drunk now, which hints at the Church's inability to instill good morality (echoing, perhaps, how ousting Parnell also failed to improve Ireland). Furthermore, Father Keon—the story's only character directly associated with the Church—is a shady political operator who is revealed to be a defrocked priest, presumably having lost his position for a moral transgression. It seems that, despite having lost his status, he still wears his clerical uniform (in the dim light of the Committee Room, "it was impossible to say whether he wore a clergyman's collar or a layman's"). This suggests that members of the Church are falsely posing as moral authorities for their own personal gain. With this being the case, Joyce undermines the Catholic Church's credibility in ousting Parnell for his affair.

In addition to suggesting that the Church is hypocritical, Joyce also shows that their ouster of Parnell backfired; rather than making Irish politics more attuned to personal morality, Parnell's expulsion sapped his party of any morality at all. The story begins with Mat O'Connor's eagerness for a paycheck that he doesn't deserve and Jack's ruthless beating of his son. This sets a tone for the men's destructiveness and lack of integrity. On top of this, the canvassers are dishonest: John Henchy lies to voters on their doorsteps, bragging that the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney "doesn't belong to any party, good, bad, or indifferent." The men are also mean, eager to spread rumors about each other. Henchy and Jack, for instance, growl that Joe Hynes is a spy, while O'Connor gossips about Father Keon's excommunication. The men's behavior gives readers the feeling that, although Parnell was kicked out of office for an immoral act, no one has improved as a result of that disciplinary action.

Furthermore, the men's refusal to discuss Parnell's moral transgression shows that, instead of increasing attention to personal morality, the Church ousting Parnell has chilled any discussion of morality at all. When Bantam Lyons questions Parnell's character ("Do you think now after what he did Parnell was a fit man to lead us?"), his companions are outraged. But O'Connor nervously smooths things over with an obvious falsehood: "We all respect him now that he's dead and gone." O'Connor knows they don't *all* respect Parnell—he's simply avoiding making a constructive argument about how to learn from Parnell's scandal. In fact, although the men clearly worship the *idea* of Parnell, they hardly use his name in the story at all; O'Connor calls him "the Chief," while Hynes, silently pointing to his commemorative **ivy leaf**, calls him "this man." This gives the impression that the men are afraid of even mentioning a touchy moral subject.

The poem that Hynes recites at the story's finale—an elegy celebrating Parnell—encapsulates how the Church ousting Parnell has made Irish morality worse, not better. In Hynes' elegy, Parnell's name appears only in its final word, while the body of the poem calls him "Lord" and "Our Uncrowned King." These euphemisms show an obsession with Parnell's political mythology—a boilerplate rise-and-fall story—but not a constructive desire to learn from his real-life, complex character. The poem also combines these evasions with moral references that the reader knows to be insincere. For instance, the metaphor of Parnell as Christ—"with a kiss / Betrayed" (an allusion to Judas)—rings hollow after the whole story has painted the Catholic Church as immoral. Furthermore, Hynes's insults ("modern hypocrites," "coward hounds," "fawning priests") to those who ousted Parnell sound also like descriptions of Hynes and his colleagues, which shows that—while they easily judge others—they do not reflect on their own hypocrisy or try to do better. This self-implicating poem, then, shows two things: that after Parnell's scandal, the party men cannot deal with life's moral complexities (preferring instead simplistic narratives of heroes and villains); and, what's worse, that this avoidance has made them oblivious to their own failings. This, Joyce suggests, is the devastating result of Irish society demanding moral perfection of a political leader. While men in Parnell's time weren't saints, at least—the story suggests—they had real values and principles to guide them, rather than falling into empty hero worship, hypocrisy, and laziness.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FIRE

The weak fire that lights the Committee Room symbolizes the waning spirit of Irish Nationalism, since the party has failed to maintain the vision and passion of its former leader Charles Stewart Parnell. The story begins with Old Jack—an elderly Nationalist—unsuccessfully stoking a fire that gives barely any light or heat to the Committee Room, which is the headquarters of Ireland's Nationalist Party (where Charles Stewart Parnell used to work). It's significant that this room—the heart of the party—is cold, dark, and cheerless: the fire, in other words, is Nationalism's life force, and the room seems nearly dead. The flagging energy of the Nationalist canvassers matches their weak fire. Mat O'Connor lazily lounges in an armchair when he's supposed to be working, Jack's halfhearted efforts to stoke the fire are so ineffective that they have to light candles, and all of the men's political convictions and moral principles are as weak as the fire itself. Furthermore, several of the men use the fire for corrupt

purposes: O'Connor sticks a campaign flyer (one that he was supposed to distribute to voters) into the fire and uses it to light his cigarette, while Henchy puts bottles of stout in the fire so the heat will pop the corks. For these men to use this fire—a symbol of the burning political passions that once propelled the party towards noble causes—for such dissolute purposes as getting drunk and smoking idly shows that whatever energy is left in the Irish Nationalist movement is being grossly misspent by corrupt politicians and the immoral hacks who support them. Essentially, the fire is so weak that it barely affects the cold, dark room—likewise, the political values that once drove Nationalism are so weakened that the men are no longer touched by passion or vision at all.

IVY LEAF

Many of the story's characters wear an ivy leaf pin on their lapel to commemorate the late Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell. While these ivy leaves are meant to show respect for Parnell, the men's behavior and opinions would shame their late leader; the ivy leaf, therefore, represents the disconnect between empty symbolism and the true spirit of a political cause.

Readers first encounter the leaf in the lapel of Mat O'Connor, a canvasser who is smoking inside the party's headquarters instead of canvassing for the Nationalist candidate. As he warms himself by the dying **fire**, lighting his cigarette with the campaign flyer he has been paid to distribute, "the flame [lights] up a leaf of dark glossy ivy in the lapel of his coat." Joyce makes an extreme juxtaposition here between O'Connor's egregious political apathy and the ivy leaf symbol, which ought to remind him of the urgent political work Parnell left undone.

This sense of the men paying empty tribute to Parnell pervades the story. While they wear Parnell's pin—supposedly to honor him—they do very little to advance the causes he cares about. Instead, they squabble amongst themselves, drink stout, and inadvertently reveal the depths of their party's dysfunction and corruption. The biggest betrayal of Parnell's legacy is that the Nationalist candidate, Richard Tierney, is apparently planning a welcome address for the British monarch Edward VII; this would have been odious to Parnell, who devoted his life to advocating for Ireland's independence from England. The only protest of Tierney's behavior, however, is weak and shallow; Hynes points to his ivy leaf pin, saying "if this man was alive [...] we'd have no talk of an address of welcome." Then the topic of conversation shifts. Clearly, wearing the ivy leaf pin does not indicate a real commitment to honoring Parnell—it's an empty gesture that covers up the men's apathy and spinelessness.

It's noteworthy that the story never names Parnell until the last word. The ivy leaf stands in for him, and the men—instead of naming him—use vague euphemisms, such as "this man," "the Chief," and "our Uncrowned King." That the ivy leaf and these epithets stand in for Parnell, while his name and his values remain conspicuously absent, shows the men's refusal to grapple with Parnell beyond empty symbolism. They cannot speak his name, advocate for his cause, or evaluate his legacy—instead, they use the empty symbolism of the ivy leaf pin as a way to pretend to honor Parnell without taking him or his values seriously.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Dubliners* published in 1967.

Ivy Day in the Committee Room Quotes

Old Jack raked the cinders together with a piece of cardboard and spread them judiciously over the whitening dome of coals. When the dome was thinly covered his face lapsed into darkness but, as he set himself to fan the fire again, his crouching shadow ascended the opposite wall and his face slowly re-emerged into light. It was an old man's face, very bony and hairy. The moist blue eyes blinked at the fire and the moist mouth fell open at times, munching once or twice mechanically when it closed.

Related Characters: Old Jack

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

The story's opening paragraph shows Jack, the caretaker of the Irish Nationalist Party's Committee Room, as he tends to a weak fire. This description introduces two of the central ideas of the story. First, Jack's advanced age represents the current state of Irish Nationalism: frail and in decline. Second (and related), the fire symbolizes the spirit of Irish Nationalism, which was once strong and vibrant, and has now receded to embers and ash. It's important to note that the fire is so weak that it can barely illuminate the features of Jack's face, even though Jack is close enough to fan it. This shows, symbolically, how close the spirit and values of Irish Nationalism are to dying out altogether.

That Jack spreads the embers "judiciously" is also important—this word suggests that Jack cares about his fire (or, symbolically, that he genuinely cares about the cause of Irish Nationalism). That Jack truly cares about the party but is still unable to kindle its spirit into something forceful is a

bleak omen for the future of Irish Nationalism. This will seem especially true as other Nationalists enter the committee room who don't even share Jack's judicious commitment to the coals.

Mr O'Connor, a grey-haired young man, whose face was disfigured by many blotches and pimples, had just brought the tobacco for a cigarette into a shapely cylinder but when spoken to he undid his handiwork meditatively. Then he began to roll the tobacco again meditatively and after a moment's thought decided to lick the paper.

—Did Mr Tierney say when he'd be back? he asked in a husky falsetto.

Related Characters: Mat O'Connor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Joyce has just described Jack, an older member of the Nationalist Party, and he now turns to describing the young Mat O'Connor. Notably, though, Mat O'Connor does not seem any more vigorous than Jack did—in fact, he might have even less energy than the older man. For one, he is seated while Jack stands, which indicates either laziness or incapacity. Furthermore, Joyce describes O'Connor as "a grey-haired young man," an oxymoronic description that suggests that O'Connor has prematurely aged. The disfiguration of O'Connor's pimply skin adds to this sense of degradation, and the tenor of his voice—a "husky falsetto"—suggests something thin and hollow. Overall, Joyce gives the impression of an oddly decayed youth, which suggests that the future of the Nationalist Party is bleak.

It's also worth noting O'Connor's action here: he is sitting in a chair rolling and unrolling the same cigarette. This suggests a futility and circularity in his actions, a need to kill time without any tangible result. In general, this reflects the state of Irish Nationalism. As readers will see, the members of the Nationalist party lack real purpose or values, so they talk in circles, kill time, and collect their paychecks, all without having done anything of political substance. Here, O'Connor's focus and skill at rolling cigarettes hints that perhaps (if his efforts were better directed) he could be useful, but instead, his energy will be misspent.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

ROYAL EXCHANGE WARD

Mr Richard J. Tierney, P.L.G., respectfully solicits the favour of your vote and influence at the coming election in the Royal Exchange Ward.

Related Characters: Mat O'Connor, Richard Tierney

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

This quote comes from a campaign flyer for the Nationalist candidate, Richard Tierney. Mat O'Connor pulls a pack of these cards from his pocket while sitting by the fire in the Nationalist headquarters. Tierney has hired O'Connor and the other men in Joyce's story to hand these flyers out to potential voters on the street.

The flyer's appearance here is important for two reasons. The first reason is the actual wording of the campaign message. The initials after Tierney's name stand for Poor Law Guardian, a public official in charge of dispensing welfare relief. Keep this in mind as O'Connor and the other men complain about Tierney paying them late; if Tierney can't pay his own men fairly, readers can only imagine how badly he treats Dublin's anonymous poor. As for the rest of the flyer, it gives absolutely none of the information voters would normally want to know about a candidate before casting their ballot. Tierney simply "solicits [...] your vote." This hollow "favour" (ask for a vote and receive it) is the first clue to a grim reality that looms larger as the story progresses, that politics no longer has anything to do with personal morals or beliefs. It is now a business transaction.

The second thing to note is what O'Connor does with these cards. He removes them from his pocket after rolling a cigarette, glances at one, dips it in the fireplace, and lights his tobacco. First, this shows O'Connor's obvious disregard for his job, which he has skipped this evening because the weather doesn't suit him. Instead of distributing these flyers to voters, he is literally burning them so that he can have a smoke. Second, his action symbolizes a greater mistreatment of the Nationalist party. The story's central symbol, the weak fire that Old Jack stokes in the party's headquarters, represents the waning life force of Nationalism. It can hardly light the room or warm the men as they arrive; that O'Connor uses it for this selfish purpose shows that what little heat the fire has left (symbolically,

what little spirit Nationalism has left) is being wasted.

> The working-man, said Mr Hynes, gets all kicks and no halfpence. But it's labour produces everything. The working-man is not looking for fat jobs for his sons and nephews and cousins. The working-man is not going to drag the honour of Dublin through the mud to please a German monarch.

Related Characters: Joe Hynes (speaker), Colgan, Richard Tierney

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

This comes from Joe Hynes's impassioned defense of Colgan, the opponent to his boss, the corrupt Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney. Tierney is late paying his employees' wages again, so the fed-up Hynes has been criticizing him to his colleagues Old Jack and Mat O'Connor. Hynes's speech here will later get him into trouble, when John Henchy accuses him of being Colgan's spy. But for now, Hynes's speech reveals two key differences between the "working-man" Colgan and the distasteful Tierney that are worth noting.

The first difference has to do with the value of Dublin's working class. Colgan is a blue-collar "working-man" who respects Dublin's "labour." Tierney, conversely, is a moneyed career politician who abuses his workers. He is perennially late with their wages, and, as readers will see, he sends his employees stout in hopes of shutting them up. This first opposition between the two candidates shows how deeply Nationalism has forsaken Dublin's workers and how complacent these workers—who thirstily sip the stout and forget their gripes—have grown in the face of this injustice.

The second difference revealed in this quote has to do with Dublin's "honour." When Hynes says Colgan won't appease a "German monarch," he means King Edward VII of England, son of Victoria, who descended from the Hanoverian (originally German) monarchs. Hynes goes on to explain that Tierney is considering a welcome for Edward's upcoming trip to Dublin, a gesture that would appall most Nationalists (Joyce's characters included). To refuse the King—the representative of Ireland's centuries-long oppression—was a matter of the utmost duty to the deeply patriotic Nationalists. That Colgan would never "drag the honour of Dublin through the mud" shows that he is in touch with the worries of average Irish citizens. Conversely, as readers will learn, Tierney's plan to welcome Edward shows a callous unconcern for these same worries. This comparison to Colgan is an early indicator that the head of the Nationalist party, in his pursuit of a "fat job," has completely lost touch with issues that matter.

> Musha, God be with them times! said the old man. There was some life in it then.

Related Characters: Old Jack (speaker), Charles Stewart Parnell, Joe Hynes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

This exclamation comes from Old Jack, the elderly caretaker of the Nationalist headquarters. Jack is nostalgic for the old days when the late Charles Stewart Parnell led a vigorous Nationalist campaign against English rule. Joe Hynes has just pointed to the ivy leaf pin in his lapel (a symbol that commemorates the dead Parnell) as he rails against the modern-day corruptions of a political party that used to be great. A decade prior, Parnell's expulsion from office over an affair—and his subsequent death—dealt a powerful blow to Irish politics and bitterly divided followers of the Nationalist party. Joyce thinks that Nationalist politics never regained its steam after Parnell's fall. To acknowledge this loss of grace and to join in the men's patriotism ("musha" meaning "indeed"), Jack blurts out his lament that the party no longer has "life in it" and has changed for the worse.

Joyce intends Jack's outcry to be partially sincere and partially ironic. It is sincere because Jack is the most senior person in the room. He has seen a great deal of history, so readers believe him when he says that things used to be better. Readers will discover, however, an ironic shade to Jack's statement as Joyce reveals Jack's own hypocritical failings. Soon, for instance, readers will see him give alcohol to a teenager, despite his fears of youth alcoholism. So, just as he diligently but uselessly stokes the room's fire, Jack sincerely laments the current state of politics but does nothing to return them to their former glory.

> A person resembling a poor clergyman or a poor actor appeared in the doorway. His black clothes were tightly buttoned on his short body and it was impossible to say whether he wore a clergyman's collar or a layman's, because the collar of his shabby frock-coat, the uncovered buttons of which reflected the candlelight, was turned up about his neck. He wore a round hat of hard black felt. His face, shining with raindrops, had the appearance of damp yellow cheese save where two rosy spots indicated the cheekbones.

Related Characters: Father Keon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

Father Keon, the sketchy, defrocked priest, has just entered the Committee Room looking for Fanning, the sub-sheriff. Here, the narrator is describing his appearance before the canvassers. Joyce pays very close attention to the ambiguity of Keon's attire. Keon is either "a poor clergyman or a poor actor." He wears the standard issue cappello romano hat of the Church, but in the dim firelight "it was impossible to say" whether he wore a Church or lay collar. That Keon's clothing is somewhere between ecclesiastical uniform and lay clothes suggests that the external trappings of the Church could be falsified by anyone, and that Keon himself is a fraud. By extension, the Church's moral authority can also be falsified, and its basis might be fraudulent, as well.

Joyce's use of the pejorative "actor" reinforces this sense of imposture. Even though readers will discover through John Henchy and Mat O'Connor's gossip that Keon, "a black sheep," has been stripped of his clerical role, Keon remains the only character in the story with direct ties to the Church. Joyce uses him symbolically to undermine the Church's moral authority, because he wants to make the broader argument that the Church was wrong to expel the late Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell on moral grounds after catching him in an affair. Just as Keon is not very clearly a churchman, the Church, argues Joyce, is not an infallible judge of character. So Joyce makes that especially clear with Keon's symbolic ambiguity.

Also worth noting are the buttons on Keon's lapel. The other men, in contrast, wear the commemorative ivy leaf in their lapels to honor Parnell. This carefully noted difference suggests that Keon (and, by extension, the Church) has no idea what's best for politics and has no business meddling in it.

> He told me: *What do you think of a Lord Mayor of Dublin sending out for a pound of chops for his dinner? How's that for a high living?* says he. *Wisha! wisha*, says I. *A pound of chops*, says he, *coming into the Mansion House. Wisha!* says I, *what kind of people is going at all now?*

Related Characters: Old Jack (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

Old Jack, the elderly caretaker of the Nationalist headquarters, is joking around with the canvassers Mat O'Connor and John Henchy as they sit by the fire and wait for a delivery of stout to arrive. Henchy has just unspooled a silly fantasy of becoming a City Father, living large in the Mansion House and giving jobs to his friends. Jack joins in with an anecdote about a manservant to the Lord Mayor, who has just told Jack how frugally his master lives. In this quote, Jack recounts a story of the man's stinginess. Exclamations like "wisha!" (close to "indeed!"), and his rhetorical question—"What kind of people is going at all now?"—show Jack's disbelief that a man in political power could eat mere pork chops for dinner. His laughing disbelief about saving taxpayer money is evidence for Joyce's argument that Jack may care earnestly about Ireland but that he is blind to his own moral degradation. On a moral level, Jack's disbelief is worth noting because it heightens the falseness with which the new Nationalists claim to stick to firm morals. Why would anyone make fun of saving taxpayer money? Readers will recall that during Joe Hynes's defense of the opposing candidate Colgan, Jack insulted Colgan's lack of money, disparaging that honest, blue-collar "working-man" on purely economic grounds. As Jack represents Ireland's elderly generation, Joyce is making a wider accusation against a supposedly wise group of people.

On a linguistic level, too, Jack's speech is worth noting for the sense of real life it conveys. Joyce understands that, in spoken English, people invert clauses like "he says," they force singular verbs ("is") onto plural subjects ("people"), and they repeat themselves for rhetorical effect, as Jack does with the slang "wisha." Jack's dialogue in the story is a major part of Joyce's realism.

Mr Crofton sat down on a box and looked fixedly at the other bottle on the hob. He was silent for two reasons. The first reason, sufficient in itself, was that he had nothing to say; the second reason was that he considered his companions beneath him. He had been a canvasser for Wilkins, the Conservative, but when the Conservatives had withdrawn their man and, choosing the lesser of two evils, given their support to the Nationalist candidate, he had been engaged to work for Mr Tierney.

Related Characters: Mr. Crofton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

The canvasser Crofton has just entered the scene and, unlike the other gossips in the room, Crofton is totally silent. Here, the narrator explains why Crofton is so silent: Crofton dislikes his Nationalist colleagues and feels superior to them because he is at heart a Conservative. It's rare that Joyce steps in to explain what his characters are thinking; he does so here to heighten the sense of isolation between the silent, bitter Crofton and the rest of the men. John Henchy, for example, had just been gossiping that his partner Crofton "is not worth a damn as a canvasser"; that Crofton enters the room straight after this back-stabbing makes it comically clear that the men, though outwardly kind to each other, don't really get along. That there is so much unspoken party turmoil between the Conservative Crofton and the other Nationalists suggests that any kind of feud could be taking place among the others without the reader's explicit knowledge. This adds to the sense that, though they are working for the same cause, these men are divided.

—But after all now, said Mr Lyons argumentatively, King Edward's life, you know, is not the very…

[…]

—What I mean, said Mr. Lyons, is we have our ideals. Why, now, would we welcome a man like that? Do you think now after what he did Parnell was a fit man to lead us? And why, then, would we do it for Edward the Seventh?

Related Characters: Bantam Lyons (speaker), Edward VII, Charles Stewart Parnell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

The young and prudish canvasser Bantam Lyons has just entered the Committee Room, grabbed a bottle of stout, and challenged his colleague, the fast-talking John Henchy, on a sensitive subject: the despised King Edward VII is planning a visit to Dublin, and, what's worse, the men's boss, the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney, is planning on welcoming him to town. Lyons argues that Edward shouldn't be welcomed because of his poor moral reputation: his "life, you know, is not the very…" Lyons's diction here is roundabout and sheepish, and before he gets to the meat of Edward's failings, Henchy cuts him off. So he starts again more resolutely, with an example Henchy won't ignore: the late, great, beloved Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell, whom the Church ousted from office after a scandalous extramarital affair.

Lyons clearly believes Parnell wasn't fit to lead Ireland and that the Church was right to expel him. His objection to Parnell's leadership on moral grounds ("Do you think now after what he did Parnell was a fit man to lead us?") most directly addresses the baggage that has been looming throughout the whole story: that the men idolize Parnell as a political figure but can't seem to bring themselves to discuss his obvious moral reputation. For the directness with which Lyons's voices this awkward truth, Lyons's question is one of the most important lines in the story. But the way his companions dismiss him is even more telling: Henchy is outraged without providing a good explanation, while O'Connor concocts a nervous white lie to change the subject. In short, Lyons has put these devoted Parnellians to the test, and they prove themselves unready to examine their idol with any moral seriousness. This is a telling moment for Joyce's wider argument that Parnell's ouster, rather than cleaning up morality in politics, has made any constructive discussion of morality taboo.

O, Erin mourn with grief and woe
For he lies dead whom the fell gang
Of modern hypocrites laid low.

He lies slain by the coward hounds
He raised to glory from the mire […]

Shame on the coward caitiff hands
That smote their Lord or with a kiss
Betrayed him to the rabble-rout
Of fawning-priests—no friends of his.

Related Characters: Joe Hynes (speaker), Charles Stewart Parnell

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 131-132

Explanation and Analysis

This excerpt comes from Joe Hynes's elegy to the late, great Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell. The poem arrives at the story's finale. The men have just had a fitful and unhelpful argument about their beloved leader. In order to smooth things over among them, O'Connor and Henchy urge Hynes to recite his elegy. Joyce gives the melodramatic, eleven-stanza poem in full.

Hynes's word choices are especially important to story's main irony: a bunch of immoral guys fawning over the memory of a famously upright political leader. Hynes intends phrases like "gang of modern hypocrites," "coward hounds," and "fawning-priests" to insult the Nationalists who, following pressures from the Church, turned their backs on Parnell after his scandalous affair. But in Joyce's story, these phrases might also refer to the men in the room. The "kiss" refers to Judas' betrayal of Christ in the Bible and is doubly ironic. First, this misused act of affection resembles not just the ancient story but the empty idol worship of Joyce's Parnellites. In this way, the Nationalist canvassers resemble the Biblical story they condemn. Second, Hynes's use of Christian imagery in his morality piece comes across as empty after Joyce has driven home the uselessness of the Church (through Old Jack's reliance on Catholic school to fix his broken son, for instance, and the defrocked Father Keon's moral sketchiness).

Unwitting ironies like these in the poem show how far Nationalists have come from being aware of their own moral failings—the exact opposite of the effect intended by the Church when ousting Parnell for immorality.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

IVY DAY IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM

Old Jack stokes a weak **fire** in the Committee Room, the headquarters for the Irish Nationalist party. Next to the fire, Mat O'Connor, a young, pimply-faced, prematurely grey-haired man is rolling a cigarette "meditatively." He dips a campaign flyer for the Nationalist candidate Richard Tierney into the fireplace, then lights his cigarette with it. Although O'Connor has been contracted to canvass for Tierney, he stayed inside today to avoid the rain. It is October 6th, and the weather is "dismal." As O'Connor lights his cigarette, the flame glints against the **ivy leaf** on his lapel.

The opening image, an ageing man tending a dying fire, shows Joyce's view of current politics in Ireland: the old generation can't keep the spirit of Nationalism alive. But the younger generation is even worse: O'Connor is skipping work because he doesn't like the weather, and he's mooching off the party's dwindling energy (the fire). In short, the elders care about politics but are useless, and the young can't be bothered to try. Joyce has chosen the date—Ivy Day, the anniversary of the great Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell's death—in order to juxtapose this dismal current reality with Parnell's once-promising political past. The ivy leaf (Parnell's symbol) brings this irony to the foreground when placed in the lapel of do-nothing O'Connor and lit by a dying fire.

Jack laments to O'Connor that his 19-year-old son has turned out poorly, even though Jack tried to raise him right. If he weren't an old man now, Jack says, he would beat his son, just like he used to. He has sent him to the "Christian Brothers" school to no avail. O'Connor suggests getting the boy a job, but Jack says, "it's worse whenever he gets a job; he drinks it all." O'Connor nods silently.

As with tending the fire, Jack tries but badly fails to help his son. The drunk teenager stands in for Ireland's youth, betrayed by the ignorant and useless generation above them. That a Christian education can't improve the boy is the first indicator that religion is a fallible moral guide. Joyce expected his readers to know Parnell's history and to remember that, after his scandalous affair went public, the Catholic Church pressured Nationalists to abandon Parnell, leading to his downfall. If Christian morals have done nothing for Jack's son, how could they have been expected to put a whole political party on the right path? With a useless Church and dissolute political force, Joyce casts this question early on. O'Connor's small talk and silence further shows his limpness.

Joe Hynes, a fellow canvasser, enters the room. As Jack asks, "Who's that?" Hynes jokes that they're having a Freemason's meeting and complains about the dark. Jack lights some candles for him, which reveal a bare, "denuded" room, making the **fire** "los[e] all its cheerful colour." Hynes asks if Tierney has paid them yet, and O'Connor says no, but he hopes they'll be paid tonight. Jack says that Tierney at least has the money, unlike the other candidate, Colgan.

Hynes's immediate concern with money echoes O'Connor's selfishness and sets the scene for subsequent gripes about their boss's late payment. Joyce's party men are clearly not as concerned with effecting political change as with fattening their pockets. At Hynes's bidding, Joyce introduces a second light source: Jack's candles. Earlier, the symbolic Nationalist fire showed only close-up details like O'Connor's ivy leaf. The fire was so dim, Jack couldn't recognize Hynes when he entered. But the candles' clearer light now shows their full surroundings: a "denuded" place, empty and cheerless. This revelation implies that the party is nothing without its historic spirit, or without a strong leader like Parnell.

Hynes argues that Colgan doesn't have money because he's a laborer, unlike Tierney who owns a pub. Rhetorically, Hynes asks if a working man has as much a right to be in government as anyone else, and then suggests that a working man might deserve elected office *more* than men like Tierney who are simply in it for a job. O'Connor and Jack tepidly agree, and Hynes suggests that working men don't run for office to secure "fat jobs" for their families or to "drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch."

Hynes's support of Colgan introduces discord into the story—after all, like Jack and O'Connor, Hynes works for Tierney, Colgan's opponent. But Hynes hates Tierney's careerism so much that he clearly prefers the opposition. This shows how fractured the Nationalist Party is. Hynes's views aren't treasonous; actually, he advances very reasonable opinions about political leaders' need to be in touch with the working class. His fixation on "honour" and his rhetoric against "fat jobs" are hard to argue with. But the fact that he knowingly works for Tierney, the more corrupt of the two, is strange—his words seem principled, but his actions don't match. The mention of a German monarch refers to the King of England, whose ancestry is German. In this moment, Hynes is emphasizing the King's foreignness, suggesting that the King has no legitimate claim to rule over England, let alone Ireland.

Jack asks what Hynes means, and Hynes references plans for a welcome address honoring King Edward's upcoming visit, which he characterizes as "kowtowing to a foreign king." O'Connor insists that Tierney, a Nationalist, won't vote for this, but Hynes doesn't believe it, noting that the candidate's nickname is "Tricky Dicky Tierney." O'Connor concedes that Hynes might be right, then quickly moves on to wishing Tierney would show up and pay them. After a moment of silence, Hynes points to the **ivy leaf** pinned to his lapel and says that if "this man was alive" nobody would be talking about welcoming the King. Jack agrees, lamenting that there was "some life in it then."

The argument over Edward VII's planned visit to Dublin brings the issue of Irish Nationalism (independence from England) to the center of the story. Any friendliness with the English monarch would undermine a cause these men are supposed to care deeply about. Tierney's alleged plans show how far the Nationalist party has strayed from its founding principles. The morals of the party, according to Hynes's "Tricky Dicky" rhetoric, have sunk, following the demise of Parnell, a famously steadfast leader. Hynes makes the comparison clear by pointing to his ivy leaf without a word. That nobody mentions Parnell by name, even as they clearly reference him, is odd. Perhaps this suggests that the Church's ouster of Parnell has made people reticent to talk substantively about Parnell's morals and legacy. .

Another canvasser, John Henchy, comes in from the cold and notes that they haven't been paid yet. He questions O'Connor about whether he canvassed certain streets and people, and O'Connor, fumbling for proof, weakly reassures him, repeating "I think it'll be alright." At Henchy's urging, Jack steps out for coal, and the men trash talk Tierney some more, calling him "the little shoeboy" and "the tinker," and mocking Tierney's excuses for late payment. Henchy gossips about Tierney's humble but corrupt origins, surprising O'Connor with his revelations: Tierney's father ran a second-hand shop and sold liquor before the pubs opened. "How does he expect us to work," asks O'Connor, "if he won't stump up?"

The first thing Henchy does is ask about money, which emphasizes that all of these men are primarily concerned with money rather than political ideals. His strong rhetoric against Tierney—rife with colloquial slang—shows both that he is a captivating performer and, at the same time, another example of a disaffected Nationalist lacking the gumption to change things. Henchy is, essentially, an energetic but useless political worker. His misplaced energy adds to the overall feeling of paralysis in the story.

Hynes leaves the men to run an unexplained errand. Henchy, who does not say goodbye to Hynes when O'Connor does, starts gossiping that he may be a spy for the opposing candidate. O'Connor sticks up for Hynes, calling him honest. Henchy disagrees; Hynes's father, he says, was respectable, but Hynes is shifty. Jack assures them that he doesn't like Hynes but O'Connor, still unconvinced of Hynes's treachery, simply rolls a cigarette. Henchy rails against "these hillsiders and fenians" for being too clever, as well as "Castle hacks." Henchy denounces an unnamed person as being related to Henry Charles Sirr.

Henchy's coldness when Hynes leaves shows the first real group tension. That he jumps into gossip suggests a deep paranoia concerning other people. Readers might wonder what he would say behind O'Connor's back, for instance. Henchy's rhetoric shows him to be a smooth-talking but somewhat illogical orator: "hillsiders and fenians" are Irish independence rebels, and "Castle hacks" are British loyalists working secretively against independence. So, after damning both anti- and pro-independence parties, Henchy's insults don't come across very effectively against Sirr, a British general who quashed an Irish rebellion in the previous century. If independence rebels are the problem, then what was wrong with a general who got rid of them? And if Henchy really hates the "little shoeboy" (i.e. the flatterer) Tierney, why does he interpret Hynes's criticisms of the man as treachery?

Father Keon knocks on the door, and the men let him in. In the dim light, Keon resembles a poor clergyman or a poor actor—it's difficult to tell whether his outfit belongs to a priest or a layman. Keon is looking for Mr. Fanning, for "a little business matter." Henchy welcomes him warmly, but Keon is skittish and refuses the invitation. Henchy suggests Fanning might be at the Black Eagle pub, where Tierney has been all night, and Keon quickly leaves. Henchy trails with a candle to light his way.

Father Keon marks the second appearance of Christianity in the story. His ambiguous uniform and his comparison to an actor suggest fraudulence in the Church, questioning its moral authority. The Church is an especially dubious authority in the political realm, suggests Joyce, as Keon sketchily hunts for Fanning, the sub-sheriff, to settle an undefined "business matter." That he looks for a government official in a political headquarters is indeed strange. This undue intersection of religion, politics, and government in the context of "Tricky Dicky's" pub suggests a high level of corruption in political life. Henchy's warm welcome suggests the men don't much mind this corruption.

Once Keon is gone, O'Connor dips another flyer in the **fire** to light a cigarette. He turns to Henchy and notes Keon's suspicious closeness to Fanning, pondering what their relationship might be. Henchy calls Keon a "black sheep." He says Keon was stripped of his clerical position, that the church is no longer funding him.

Again, as with Hynes, Henchy is all too happy to talk behind someone's back, promoting the idea that every man is for himself. If Keon's odd description as an "actor" gave readers any doubts as to his moral character, Henchy confirms them now by explaining that the Church has officially revoked Keon's title. Whatever the Church's moral failings, excommunication is serious. That this corrupt priest might still pretend to hold a position is further evidence for Joyce's view that the Church had no business enforcing its rules on a perfectly strong leader like Parnell. Keon's closeness with Tierney is made all the more ironic when O'Connor lights another campaign flyer on fire—a gesture of total unconcern for the state of the Nationalist party.

Henchy and Jack complain of their thirst because Tierney has failed to send them "a dozen of stout." Henchy again mocks the "shoeboy" Tierney, whom he has just seen at the pub. Tierney dismissed him, says Henchy, as soon as Tierney saw a city alderman in the room. "*That'll be all right, Mr. H*," Henchy recalls Tierney saying to him. O'Connor suspects that the alderman, Tierney, and Fanning are cooking up a deal. Henchy suggests that Tierney is buttering up Dublin's officials, and he notes that City Fathers control local politics.

This passage suggests that these men are, in part, paid in stout (a kind of beer). This adds to the sense of misspent energy paralyzing Ireland's political spirt. The gossip about Tierney's corruption takes an ironic turn towards O'Connor; the line with which Henchy recalls being dismissed by Tierney in the pub ("That'll be all right") mimics O'Connor's prior dismissal of Henchy's questions ("I think it'll be all right"). All the while, O'Connor joins in gossiping about Tierney's crooked "deals." This similarity in speech shows a lack of self-awareness in O'Connor and it suggests that his passive laziness is not much better than Tierney's active corruption.

Henchy jokes that he could run for City Father. O'Connor laughs as Henchy spins a fantasy: Jack will become his valet, O'Conner his secretary, and Keon his chaplain. "We'll have a family party," he chuckles. Jack laughs that he'd spend more extravagantly than one City Father he heard of, who eats mere pork chops for dinner. Shocked by that City Father's frugality, Jack exclaims, "*Wisha! [...] what kind of people is going at all now?*"

Yet again, the men's joking about hiring each other and using city money to have extravagant meals shows a flagrant disregard for the political values they pretend to uphold. While they bash Tierney for buddying up to Fanning and various aldermen, here they are entertaining themselves with the same visions of grandeur. Jack is in laughing disbelief at the idea that government officials might save money, a view that contradicts his earlier longing for the "times" of Parnell's day, when there was "some life in it." The contradiction here shows that Jack's faith in a certain moral standard is in fact empty.

At the height of this joking around, a delivery boy steps in with the promised stout. While Jack takes the crate, the boy asks for their empty bottles. Jack tells him dismissively to return for them tomorrow. Henchy sends the boy out for a corkscrew, and while they wait for it, he retracts his previous insults to Tierney, noting that Tierney has now kept his word. Jack reports that there are no glasses, which Henchy says he doesn't mind. When the boy returns, Henchy offers him a bottle. Jack opens one for the boy "grudgingly," asking the boy his age. The boy says he is seventeen, gulps down the drink, then leaves. Jack warns that, "That's the way it begins." Henchy, unconcerned, agrees as he takes a drink.

Jack's behavior toward the delivery boy is a perfect example of the paralysis that, as Joyce sees it, Ireland foists on its young. Here, Jack knowingly intoxicates the youth against his own principles (he himself knows how drinking destroys young boys because of what's happening to his own son). Jack's "grudging" awareness makes his perpetuation of Ireland's ills all the more poignant. Even Henchy is in on it, remarking on this cycle without much concern. The speed with which Henchy, placated by alcohol, retracts his former insults against Tierney gives readers yet another example that these men have no real morals or values—they simply act in their own interest.

After a silence in which they drink, Henchy brags about his canvassing results. He denigrates his partner Crofton for not speaking up to potential voters on doorsteps. Crofton then appears with Bantam Lyons, a younger canvasser. Henchy greets him with great warmth and is repaid with silence. Lyons scolds the men for being indoors while he and Crofton have been canvassing; spotting the bottles, Lyons asks if "the cow" has "calved," then he asks for one himself. Since the delivery boy left with the corkscrew, Henchy lays two bottles in the hearth, asking "Did you ever see this little trick?"

Crofton walks straight into the room just as Henchy is insulting him, which emphasizes the mistrust and dislike among these men, despite that they all belong to the same party. Crofton's silence when Henchy greets him creates a sense of isolation between himself and the others. Henchy's party trick of popping a cork by putting bottles in the fire helps develop his character as someone with plenty of charismatic energy to spare, but who is putting it to poor use. Since the fire symbolizes the Nationalist spirit of Parnell, Henchy's bottle trick symbolically perverts the Nationalist spirit. This misspent energy gives the overall sense of paralysis in the party.

As the men wait for the **fire** to pop the corks, Crofton is silent; he has nothing to say and considers his companions beneath him. Crofton is a Conservative; He only supports Tierney here because, after his candidate dropped out of the race, Tierney was his second choice.

Crofton's isolation from the group deepens as the narrator explains that he feels superior to the men and is allied with a different party altogether. That he, a Conservative, canvasses with the Nationalists against his wishes gives a clear sense of how dysfunctional and discordant the party has become in Parnell's absence.

A cork shoots from Lyons's stout bottle. Henchy continues to brag about the Conservative voter he won on the street, remembering the speech in which he claimed that Tierney "*doesn't belong to any party, good, bad, or indifferent.*" Lyons asks how Henchy handles the issue of Tierney's rumored plans to welcome Edward VII, but Henchy brushes this off not just as inconsequential, but as beneficial to Dublin's economy. O'Connor, citing Parnell, wonders whether they really ought to bar Edward. Growing warm, Henchy stops him mid-sentence, insisting that Parnell is dead and that his example needn't be followed. After praising Edward, Henchy asks Crofton to back him up. Crofton nods his head.

Henchy's flexible principles remain on full display here as he recounts lying about Tierney's party affiliation. The truth would have been to say Tierney runs on the Nationalist ticket, but Henchy will say anything to get a vote. He exemplifies the group's infighting by laughing right in front of Crofton, his Conservative partner, about the time he lied to a Conservative on his own doorstep. The subject of Parnell moves from the story's background to its foreground, as readers get a much better sense of how reluctant some of the men are to discuss him as a person. O'Connor tries to make a point about Parnell's anti-English principles, but Henchy cuts him off mid-sentence, precluding any in-depth discussion of the man.

Lyons says that Edward's character is the wrong kind to welcome to Dublin. Again, Henchy rejects him mid-sentence, so Lyons questions whether Parnell was fit to lead "after what he did." Henchy is aghast at this question. O'Connor tries to smooth things over, insisting that "We all respect [Parnell] now that he's dead and gone." Even Crofton agrees, noting that Parnell was a "gentleman." Henchy agrees "fiercely," and then reenacts Parnell's behavior in Parliament.

Lyons alludes to Parnell's moral life, suggesting that Parnell's public affair justly barred him from office. But the fact that any conversation about Parnell's moral transgression ends here speaks volumes to the group's unwillingness to discuss him as a person rather than as a figurehead. O'Connor's insistence that "we all respect him" is verifiably false, since many people in Ireland did not respect Parnell. Though Crofton musters a kind word, Lyons is very clearly among Parnell's moral detractors. It's as if the subject of Parnell's actual moral legacy is ironically off limits to those who claim to love him most. Despite the Church's hopes that walking out on Parnell would focus the party's attention on moral conduct, the men, paradoxically, can't seem to discuss morals at all. They can't even finish their sentences on the subject.

Hynes returns and O'Connor tells him to sit down, since they're discussing "the Chief." Silently, Hynes enters and sits. Henchy announces that Hynes was one of the loyal few who never turned his back on Parnell, and O'Connor urges Hynes to recite "that thing you wrote." Henchy agrees. Hynes, not seeming to remember, refuses, then bashfully agrees as the men press him.

The fact that the men cannot say Parnell's name—and instead call him "the Chief—underscores their collective inability to grapple with Parnell's complicated legacy. The euphemism "the Chief" suggests that the men discuss their own private version of the man: an abstract Chief, not Charles Stewart Parnell as a full, complex person. Henchy conveniently forgets that he once accused Hynes of being a spy, which further suggests that Henchy is spineless and ingratiating.

Hynes stands and delivers from memory an elegy titled "The Death of Parnell: 6th October 1891." Beginning "He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead," the poem is worshipful. Hynes invokes an untimely death and notes Ireland's sadness in his absence ("The Irish heart [...] bowed with woe"). Then the poem considers what could have been achieved, had Parnell lived ("The green flag gloriously unfurled, / [Ireland's] statesmen, bards and warriors raised / Before the nations of the World"). Next, the poem calls out Parnell's enemies (the "modern hypocrites," the "coward caitiff," the "fawning priests" who "betrayed their Lord" "with a kiss"), and Hynes ends by foretelling a glorious future of "Freedom" for Ireland (rising, "like the Phoenix from the flames").

That Hynes recites his poem from memory shows how committed he is to the worship of Parnell. The elegy contains eleven stanzas of iambic tetrameter, a form especially suited to Irish drinking songs. Lines like "The green flag gloriously unfurled" are meant to sound like classic melodrama. Though the subject is obvious from the poem's title, Parnell's name does not appear until the final word. Until that point, readers get the sense that the elegy could be for any public figure at all. This omission echoes the moment earlier when Hynes pointed to his ivy leaf without naming Parnell, or O'Connor's "Chief" euphemism—each shows a preference for remembering Parnell as a political figurehead, rather than remembering Parnell as a morally fallible human being. Accusations like "hypocrites," "kiss" (a reference to Judas kissing Christ), "coward caitiff," and "fawning priests" certainly refer to Parnell's original critics, but these insults could also implicate the other characters in the story. To worship only a very limited aspect of Parnell (his political persona) without working to further his values is indeed a sort of betrayal.

Hynes sits. A silence ensues for a moment, then the men burst into applause (even Lyons) before returning to silence as they drink. A cork shoots from a bottle in the **fire**—it's the bottle placed there for Hynes, who "did not seem to have heard to invitation." O'Connor congratulates Hynes before returning to rolling cigarettes in order to "hide his emotion." Henchy asks Crofton what he thought. Crofton agrees that the poem was "very fine."

After this moving poem, Joyce drives home the emptiness of the men's patriotism by plunging the room into silence before and after their applause. Throughout the story, silence has signified the men's disconnection from each other, due to mistrust, dislike, or having little in common. This silence after the poem, then, suggests that the men aren't certain that everyone has the same opinion of Parnell, or that they're at a loss for meaningful conversation. The fact that Lyons applauded an elegy for someone he doesn't like suggests that his praise is disingenuous. Finally, when Crofton admits that the poem was good, Joyce is careful to paraphrase this praise, instead of giving Crofton a quoted line of dialogue. Elsewhere, Joyce almost never describes *dialogue; to do this now is a sly commentary on Crofton's disingenuousness, suggesting that perhaps the room got the impression that Crofton found the poem fine, even if that's not precisely what he said. The story ends with the suggestion that the discord between these men will not ease—the political future of Ireland is no more secure than it was before Hynes read his poem.*

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