

# Celtic Dualism in James Joyce's "Clay"

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## I. INTRODUCTION

"Clay" in James Joyce's *Dubliners*, along with "A Little Cloud," "Counterparts," and "A Painful Case," belongs to the third of four categories : childhood, adolescence, mature life, and public life. Joyce himself so arranged them (Ellmann, *Selected Letters* 77-78). Some critics regard Maria in "Clay" as a counterpart of Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case" because both are lonely and unmarried adults who have accustomed themselves to their monotonous daily routine, the former as a spinster and the latter as a bachelor. They seem to be even satisfied with their boring and monotonous life. However, Duffy in "A Painful Case" has dramatic experiences in his relationship with Mrs. Sinico : the encounter and meetings with her, the breakup of their relationship, and her death. Especially, her death causes him to feel a deep sense of isolation and to recognize his real condition, "paralysis" or living death. On the other hand, nothing special happens to Maria in "Clay," and there seems to be no way to let her change her way of life. We readers assume that she is resigned to her fate and expect that she will follow her ill-fated and humdrum course of life as a good-natured and innocent Catholic woman and die in misery. However, there are some specific allusions underlying the seemingly pointless and natural-

istic description of Maria's way of living, especially that of "her evening out" (D 110) on Halloween, because it is "Hallow Eve," the time in which something special or significant happens in myth (Ellis 205). This kind of setting leads us to the world of Celtic folklore and gives a broad expanse and depth to this story.

Joyce started to write this story in November, 1904, and it took two years to complete it ; in the meantime, he successively changed the title from "Christmas Eve," to "Hallow Eve," to "The Clay," and finally to just "Clay" (Rafroidi 46, Gorman 145, Magalaner 97). Owens mentions that "when he decided to switch the setting of his story from Christmas Eve to Hallowe'en, he knew better than any that he was himself entering the Celtic realms" (Owens 337). Halloween is the night of October 31 and is, in Celtic tradition, "a time when evil spirits can appear to triumph over the good" (Toulson 21). It introduces the beginning of the winter season, (O'Driscoll 197) "Samhain," November 1, which is the first day of a new year for the Celts. "It is now, when the darkness overtakes the light, that the Christian Church chooses to celebrate the feasts of All Saints and All Souls" (Toulson 21). In Celtic and Christian tradition, "both races count time from the cycle of dark to light, and not as we do from light to dark, beginning the day at sunrise and the year with the return of the sun from the winter solstice" (Toulson 20).

In this situation Joyce sets an old laundrywoman, Maria, as a main character. She is an ordinary Catholic woman, but she has the look of a witch : and "her evening out" (D 110) on Halloween reminds us of a banshee or the dead from "the other world" which originally comes from Celtic tradition. Moreover, her name, Maria, and the compliment to her as a "peace-maker" (D 110) in her place of work, the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry, allude to the Virgin Mary. These situations cause

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her character to be ambiguous and complicated. In short, Joyce harmonizes Christianity and Celtic Folklore in this story to show ordinary Irish people who are living like the dead in the dual world. They look as if they were sleepwalkers in a Celtic daydream and would never wake up. Magalaner states, "Joyce chose to concentrate his attention on this strain of Ireland's paralysis in stories like 'Two Gallants' and 'Clay'" (95). Additionally, Tindall says, "Not only a poor old woman, Maria is like the Poor Old Woman or Ireland herself" (30). In this sense, we can say that this is one of the stories in *Dubliners* which well describe paralyzed people both in the religious and political sense in a paralysed city at the turn of the century, while interweaving Catholicism with Celtic folklore.

## II. MARIA AS A CELTIC SYMBOL

The "Hallow Eve" which is the time setting of this story comes originally from the Celtic festival, "Feis na Samhain"; one of the four major pre-Christian festivals. It was held on the evening of 31 October into the following day, 1 November" (Ellis 205). The word "Samhain" means "end of summer" (Leach 968); and according to the Celtic calendar, "Samhain" is "the end of the Celtic year, the crossing-over time between old and new years" (Owens 338). "Christianity took this pagan festival over as a harvest festival. The feast became St. Martin's Mass (Martinmas). The festival also became All Saints' Day or All-Hallows and the evening prior was Hallowe'en" (Ellis 205).

It is considered that, on All-Hallows' Eve, hobgoblins, evil spirits, and fairies, hold high revel, and that they are travelling abroad in great numbers. The dark and sullen Phooka is then particularly

mischievous and many mortals are abducted to fairy land. Those persons taken away to the raths are often seen at this time by their living friends, and usually accompanying a fairy cavalcade. If you meet the fairies, it is said, on All-Hallows' Eve, and throw the dust taken from under your feet at them, they will be obliged to surrender any captive human being belonging to their company. Although this evening was kept as a merry one in farmsteads, yet those who assembled together wished to go and return in company with others ; for in numbers a tolerable guarantee, they thought, was obtained from malign influences and practices of the evil spirits. (Danaher 207)

Joyce describes the action of an old woman on this special night in this story ; he makes her take on the form of a traditional witch by describing that she is "a very, very small person indeed but she had a very long nose and a very long chin" (D 110) ; and when she laughs, "the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin" (D 112). She goes out in an old raincloak on "Hallow Eve" to visit Joe's house whom she wet-nursed when he and his brother Alphy were babies. Such action reminds us of the witches' visit to their relatives on "Hallow Eve," and the raincloak suggests a magical cloak which flitting fairies at Halloween usually wear to hide themselves (Jackson 90). Jackson points out that this is the reason why Maria has "difficulty being noticed in the cakeshops" (Jackson 90). The "big copper boilers" which Maria uses at work are a witch's equipment (Tindall 29). To sit down by the fire at Joe's is "another witch-like pose" (Jackson 91).

In mythology, the definition of a witch and witchcraft is as follows.

a person who practices sorcery ; a sorcerer or sorceress ; one having supernatural powers in the natural world, especially to work evil, and usually by association with evil spirits or the Devil : formerly applied to both men and women, but now generally restricted to women.

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divination, invulnerability and superlative strength, transformation of self or others, ability to fly, power to become invisible or cause others to become so, ability to impart animation to inanimate objects, to produce at will anything required, knowledge of drugs to produce love, fertility, death, etc., and, invariably, power over others through charms and spells. (Leach 1179)

As Carpenter remarks, witches are “of various gradations of evil from the relatively harmless to the positively fiendish” (3). Apparently, Maria does not represent the evil one because she is called a “veritable peace-maker” (D 111) in the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry and on the surface, she is depicted as an amiable old woman in the story (Carpenter 3). Owens defines her harmless character as that of a homeless, wandering “banshee” in Irish folklore (341). A “banshee” is “literally, a ‘woman of the hills’ or, in modern usage, a ‘woman of the fairies’” (Ellis 40), and “whose activities may be summarized as willful evil-doing” (Cowan 215). It was said, “after the gods went underground and were, in popular folk memory, transformed into fairies, a banshee became a female fairy attached to a particular family which warned of approaching death by giving an eerie wail” (Ellis 40). In this meaning, Maria is also related to the dead.

On “Hallow Eve,” the dead come out from their graves and wander around and “visit their old homes in order to warm themselves by the fire and to comfort themselves with the good cheer provided for them in the kitchen or the parlour by their affectionate kinsfolk” (Frazer 318). This is just the purpose of Maria’s visit to the Donnellys. She buys a two-and-four plumcake just to please them, which is an extravagant present for her and costs “more like an allowance than a salary” (Gifford 80). Moreover, Maria always tries to please and not to bother all the members of Joe’s family at their house. All of them also treat her

with scrupulous care in order to please her because they know she is a special guest : she is a witch, a banshee, and one of the dead who visit their house only once a year. "In this context, Maria's journey at Samhain from her laundry in Dublin to the Donnelly home represents symbolically the journey from the land of the dead to the abode of her living relatives" (Owens 341).

Additionally, the fact that Maria is closely connected with death is shown in the traditional game which is played on "Hallow Eve" in Ireland. Plates containing some items such as a ring, a coin, a prayer-book, food, water, and clay are set up on a table and a blindfolded person is led to the table and tries to touch one of them. Of course the plates are rearranged whenever the next person tries to do it. This is a traditional divining game which can tell the person's fortune with the item which he or she might choose. The ring signifies marriage, the coin wealth, the food prosperity, the water migration, the prayerbook the religious life as nun, brother, priest, etc., and the clay signifies death (Danaher 219) (Owens 344) (McDermott 227). The clay comes from the earth in the graveyard. For this reason, the clay which Maria touches first shows her situation as a witch or a banshee who is from the other world, that is, the world of the dead.

Furthermore, the clay has another meaning in the Celtic tradition. The word "clay" in English is associated with the word "clé" in Gaelic, which has the same pronunciation as the English. "Clé" in Gaelic means "left" against the right. The word which means "left" in Latin is "siniser" which denotes "misfortune or disaster ; full of dark or gloomy suggestiveness ; inauspicious, unfavorable" (McDermott 227-228). The English language has inherited this kind of symbolism (McDermott 227-228). Even in Ireland, "left" seems to have a rather bad meaning because when Irish people face north, their left side shows west. It is a very

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special direction for them since it implies the “other world,” the world of witches, banshees, and the dead. Consequently, this story is enveloped in “Celtic death” like a mist in the evening.

### III. MARIA AS A CHRISTIAN SYMBOL

Because the setting of this story is “Hallow Eve” in Dublin, it has both Celtic and Christian significance. Likewise, Maria, the protagonist of this story, has a double identity. She is a person associated with Virgin Mary in Christianity as well as a harmless witch “banshee” in Celtic Folklore. For example, her name “is the Continental name for the Virgin Mary, and the character here is (or seems to be) as innocent (and virginal) as She” (Jackson 88). Her unmarried state also is associated with the Virgin Mary. She plays an important part as a mediator in the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry and sometimes soothes the women like the Holy Mother did those around her. She “always succeeded in making peace” (D 110), so the matron calls her a “veritable peace-maker” (D 110). “Peacemaker” is a Christian term in the New Testament: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God” (RSV: Matt. 5: 9). It is obvious that Maria has this Christian quality. For example, the narrator of “Clay” says, “Every one was so fond of Maria” (D 110) and Maria herself believes every one was always “so nice with her” (D 111, 115 117). The nickname of “peacemaker” and her character emphasize her possession of innocence which is attributed to both the Virgin Mary and her Child.

Her actions to others are done out of her simple goodwill, whether they succeed or fail in their intended purpose. She always does her best. This is the reason why Ginger Mooney “proposed Maria’s health” (D 112) and Joe and his wife invited her to their family party. She is also

described as a devout Catholic woman because she sets her alarm at six in order to attend a morning mass for All Saints' Day. Thus, her character in this story reflects that of the Blessed Virgin.

Ironically, however, her well-meant actions tend to bring with them several sorts of misfortunes or miseries such as bad luck, discord, trouble, a breakup, a quarrel, a failure, or some kind of disorder. For instance, Joe and Alphy of the Donnellys, whom Maria was nursing when they were babies, quarrel and break up their relationship. This episode suggests a story of conflict between brothers such as those of the Old Testament's Cain and Abel and Jacob and Esau (Jackson 92). Even Maria about whom Joe has said, "Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother" (D 111), cannot make peace between the two brothers, Joe and Alphy. According to Irish tradition, a trip or presents on Whit-Monday brings bad luck (Jackson 88) (Owens 342), but Maria uses a purse which Joe and Alphy have given her as a present from Belfast on "a Whit-Monday trip" (D 111). The words "A Present from Belfast" which are written on the purse symbolize their discord. Her indecisive character irritates "the stylish young lady behind the counter" (D113-114) of a cakeshop in Henry Street. Her lost article in the tram causes trouble at Donnelly's. She fails to please Joe and his wife; and Maria's suspicion that Joe's children have stolen the plumcakes offends them.

Her song at the party, "I Dreamt that I Dwelt in Marble Halls," is believed by the musicians to "bring bad luck to the orchestral pit, and also to the musical show on the stage at the time" (Rafroidi 179). This also means that Maria "brings bad luck" to all the members of the Donnelly Family.

Furthermore, it is unfortunate that her dreams and wishes are never fulfilled. In spite of Lizzie Fleming's forecast of Maria's getting

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a ring in the barmbrack for so many "Hallow Eves," she can never get one. Barmbrack is a sort of "bread with a light mixture of cornmeal, with raisins, eaten at other times too but on" Hallow Eve "a ceremonial requirement even in the poorest families" (Beck 206). On "Hallow Eve" these kinds of bread are used in a fortunetelling game. Some goods (a ring, a small silver coin, a button, a thimble, a chip of wood, a rag, etc.) are mixed in with the dough and baked. "The ring meant early marriage, the coin wealth, the button bachelorhood and the thimble spinsterhood while the chip of wood revealed that the finder would be beaten by the marriage partner" (Danaher 219). We don't know whether or not Joyce intentionally included all of these in this story, but a ring is at least mentioned by Lizzie in jest. She always announces the good fortune of Maria's marriage. This relationship between Lizzie and Maria in "Clay" alludes to a Biblical parallel (Magalaneer 96). "Lizzie," which is a nickname for Elizabeth, is a parallel character to Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, who announced Mary's pregnancy when she went to visit Elizabeth and her husband. Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1 : 41) and said to Mary "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1 : 42) ; on the other hand, Maria in "Clay" never marries and so is never pregnant. Obviously, she still wishes to marry because when "she didn't want any ring and man either : and when she laughed her grey-green eyes sparkled with disappointed shyness" (D 112). When she tries to buy plumcakes at a cakeshop, the teasing about a wedding cake by the young lady makes her blush. In the tram to Drumcondra, Maria misunderstands the kindness of "a colonel-looking gentleman" and "thought how easy it was to know a gentleman" (D 114). This misunderstanding makes her cherish a hope of the possibility of an encounter with her future husband as if she were a young girl. Anyone would know this to be

hopeless except Maria.

As these episodes indicate, Joyce emphasizes Maria's childishness throughout this story. She is too immature mentally to understand exactly herself and her situation. This helps us feel the irony of her character. The romantic song, "I Dreamt that I Dwelt in Marble Halls" which she sings at the Donnelly's family party concerns a girl's dream of dwelling in "marble halls" and finding lovers or suitors. This ironic unreality of the situation in the song makes Maria's hopelessness more conspicuous.

Thus, there is double image in her actions. They sometimes bring the opposite of what she has expected. And she also has duality in her character like that of a witch and the Virgin Mary ; the former represents "death" and the latter "eternal life." The other things which show this double figure in this story are her "plants" and "clay." The "plants" are "ferns and wax-plants" (D 111) which she raises in the conservatory in the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry. "The fern carries Christian associations of both saintliness and everlasting life. The wax-plants suggest both witchcraft and death" (Kieckhefer 56). "The very plants Joyce chooses for Maria to raise, then are emblems of the polarity in her character and existence—of witch and saint, of death-in-life everlasting" (Kieckhefer 57).

Apparently the title of this story arose from Maria's choice at the divination game at the Donnelly's family party. This also carries a double image as "death" which reminds us of the grave and "life" out of which God created man in the Genesis story. When God made Adam, "the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2 : 7). The human race might have been given "eternal life" at this time, had it not been for the sin of Adam and Eve ; however, with

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their sin, mankind was condemned to live the mortal life.

And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you : in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life ; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you ; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken ; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'" (Gen. 3 : 17-19)

In short, clay is a material out of which God created us ; it is also an indispensable element which provides food for us to maintain our lives. Moreover, it is a place to which we return for God has said, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3 : 19). From this point of view, we can say that there is also the suggestion of the "Celtic circulation" — the characteristic of Celtic culture — in the title "Clay," the comings and goings of people between this world and the other world.

#### **IV. THE SOCIAL SITUATION IN IRELAND**

One more important thing we need to consider with regard to our focus of this story is the social situation of Ireland in those days which Maria faced, especially the marriage and employment rate of women. First of all, the social situation and the marriage condition in Ireland were as follows :

Maria's situation and that of thousands of her counterparts in real life in Ireland were affected by the socio-economic conditions and marriage practices of the generations she was born into. For a century

after 1845, the year of the Great Famine, deprivation drove millions abroad. In Ireland poverty was widespread, jobs few, and salaries low. It often took a young man 15 to 20 years to achieve enough security to marry. As a result, Ireland had the lowest marriage and birth rates in the civilized world. It also had the highest proportion of bachelors and spinsters. Statistics show that marriages for most men were delayed until the period between thirty-five to forty-five, and that they tended to marry women younger than themselves, often women around thirty who had nest eggs themselves. Irish families necessarily had to be concerned about spinster daughters, and if it was possible to have them participate in a family business enterprise, that was often arranged for. In other families, an attempt was made to find a useful niche for them somewhere within the family relationship. (Walzl, *Renascence* 129-130)

As this fact indicates, we are justified in believing that there were then many spinsters like Maria. Maria's civil state is not the exception but the norm. It is natural for Joyce that he, as we know well, describes many spinsters and bachelors in *Dubliners*. It just reflects their social situation and the problems involved in them. Additionally, it is a fact that "most women who reached forty-five and men who reached fifty-five without marrying would remain single all their lives" (Walzl, *Women in Joyce* 34). From this point of view, Maria probably fits this situation. She is one of those women who never had any opportunity for love and marriage until forty-five so that she is even now a spinster.

The reason why Irish men got married at that late age was to "establish in a secure position or they had inherited family land, money or a business" (Walzl, *Women in Joyce* 36). This reflects the economic condition in Ireland in those days. "The effects of the 1845 famine and English rule on the Irish economy, the resulting mass emigration and its exacerbation of the stagnant economy made Ireland one of the poorest countries in the world at the turn of the century" (Innes 69). As a

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matter of course, the unemployment rate was high : “jobs few and salaries low” (Walzl, *Renascence* 129). Especially, it was much harder for women to find jobs compared with men. In this sense, we can say that it was very fortunate for Maria to have gotten the job in the institute at the time. She could “be independent and to have her own money in her pocket” (D. 113) because of this job.

The place in which Maria is working, the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry (D 111), is “a real Magdalene institute which was located at 35 Ballsbridge Terrace in Ballsbridge in Dublin” (Gifford 77). It was founded by the Protestant Church of Ireland for the relief and rehabilitation of drunkards and prostitutes in 1856 and continued to do this service until 1917. There were some of such institutes in Dublin at the time which were run by both Catholic and Protestants as charity organizations (Jackson 89) (Gifford 77) (Walzl *Renascence* 127) (Beck 204-205). “It had a Chaplain and was supported by wealthy members of the Anglo-Irish Establishment” (Walzl, *Renascence* 127). “The laundry, built in 1877, was one of the largest and best in the city” (Beck 204). The signification of the name of the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry probably is derived from the “street evangelism under the lamplight of Dublin’s notorious Nighttown or elsewhere in the city” (Beck 204). Maria has lived there for many years and probably has been working as “a scullery maid of employees not an inmate” (Gifford 77) and “has a little bedroom of her own ; but as a resident she comes under the matron’s supervision” (Beck 205).

Interestingly, Joyce did not mention the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry in his first draft ; and when he changed the title from “Christmas Eve” to “Hallow Eve,” he also changed the characters and his focus with the addition of the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry. He wrote about the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry in his letter of November 13, 1906, to

his brother Stanislaus.

The meaning of *Dublin by Lamplight Laundry*? That is the name of the laundry at Ballsbridge, of which the story treats. It is run by a society of Protestant spinsters, widows, and childless women — I expect — as a Magdalen's home. The phrase *Dublin by Lamplight* means that Dublin by lamplight is a wicked place full of wicked and lost women a kindly committee gathers together for the good work of washing my dirty shirts. I like the phrase because 'it is a gentle way of putting it.' Now I have explained. (Ellmann, *Letters* 192)

This was his answer to the question which Stanislaus had asked in his last letter. Through this letter, we know that Joyce was well aware of the importance of this institute as the setting of this story in order to focus on Maria's loneliness and isolation which are highlighted in the description of three kinds of contrast. The first is spinsterhood and prostitutehood. Maria has to work to take care of many prostitutes in the institute, but it is doubtful whether they can understand each other very well because of the differences in their situations as a spinster and prostitutes. The second contrast is religion: Catholic and Protestant. The religious "tracts" (D 111) on the wall of this institute signify its purpose of proselytizing Catholics. "Maria is in an unusual position: a census within a few years of this time shows only one Roman Catholic on the staff of the laundry" (Jackson 89). Maria is working as only one Catholic employee among many Protestant workers. The third contrast is an employment relationship such as Anglo-Irish Protestant employers and Irish Catholic employees. This is a veritable epitome of the relationship between the Anglo-Irish ruler and the Irish ruled in both politics and economics in Ireland. Thus every setting in this institute helps us to understand Maria's loneliness and isolation, not to

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mention her miserable surroundings.

## V. CONCLUSION

Joyce completely finished writing a final form of this story in 1906 (Gifford 77) while he was in Trieste. It had been two years since Joyce left Ireland with his wife, Nora, determined to be an artist, “a priest of the eternal imagination” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 200). He was not banished ; he was a “self-exile.” The purpose of his writing *Dubliners* was to show “his moral history of his country” by describing the people who lived in Dublin, “the center of paralysis” with the “special odour of corruption” (Ellmann, *Selected Letters* 83). “The center of paralysis” is his definition of Dublin, and he used this word in his letter to Grant Richards, a publishing company in England, when he asked them to publish *Dubliners*. He also regarded Ireland as a country which “had undergone the visitation of an angered Jove” (Mason 171). He expressed this belief in his speech in Trieste in 1907. He thought that “the soul of the country is weakened by centuries of useless struggle and broken treaties, and individual initiative is paralysed by the influence and admonitions of the church, while its body is manacled by the police, the tax office, and the garrison” (Mason 171). Thus, we can see his criticism of Ireland and the Irish through his letter and speech. Obviously, he wanted to use *Dubliners* as a mirror which would reflect the true character of Dubliners in those days who lived in such a limited society politically, economically, and religiously ; indeed, in “Clay,” every character is described clearly, objectively and realistically as the typical Irish in those days. Joe is a drunkard who yearns for his past, while Maria works very diligently as a Catholic employee in a Protestant institute surrounded by many prostitutes. Then there is a young girl in a cake-

shop and young men in the tram destined for Drumcondra who are not kind to the aged at all.

In "Clay," however, Joyce seems not only to criticize Dubliners but also to demonstrate affection for them, especially to Maria who represents Irish women. He appears to show compassion for these victims of social problems.

That Joyce felt sympathy for women caught in restrictive social conditions is clear, but it is a sympathy often tempered by ironic dissection of feminine weakness or hypocrisy or sometimes biased by male ambivalence or even hostility to the smothering role of women in the various developing phases of their lives (Walzl, *Women in Joyce* 53).

Actually, Maria faces a severe situation in Ireland : poverty, few marriage opportunities, joblessness, low salaries, and many other disadvantages. It was much harder for spinsters to support themselves in such severe conditions than it was for bachelors. Maria's acceptance of her fate, her powerlessness and weakness of character, represent the Irish women's mode of living who had neither the will nor the energy to fight against their miserable fate. Therefore, Maria's peculiar innocence might be a disguise for her wisdom which she has acquired over a long period of time in her struggle for survival.

Besides this realistic element, Joyce, in his character drawing of Maria, adds something mysterious, a Celtic quality which is witchlike or bansheelike. This reflects the Irish popular imagination who lived and still live in the dual world of fact and fiction even in their daily lives. The former is the world which was politically ruled by the English and religiously by the Roman Catholic Church and the latter is that which coexisted with fairies. As Dumbleton mentions, the Irish have a

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special ability to see a dual world : the reality and the supernatural (9) and they believe the existence of not only the real world but also the imaginary world (12). This way of thinking originally comes from the Celtic imagination which is a special characteristic of their ancestors. In a sense, they need to have the world of fiction in order to escape from harsh reality and to survive. Their bitter memories of the long history of being under the rule of the English remain in the dual world of their hearts and minds. Also, the terrible natural environment stirs them to yearn for the other world in the far west, the world of death in both pagan and Christian thoughts. Irish people can live in two different worlds at the same time even if they are contradictory. These characteristics make the Irish character “ambiguous” and “complex.”

Maria is described as a typical Irish woman in this story who has a dual image : a witch and Virgin Mary. We feel something mysterious in the witch-like figure and see something graceful in the Virgin Mary-like one. Maria's existence itself is also ephemeral like that of a ghost. One of the reasons for this is that she lives in a dual world, the real one and the imaginary one in a typically Irish manner. Another reason is that as the title of this story and the divination game indicate, she is certainly approaching death. It is coming soon for Maria. When the time comes, her body would return to the clay of Ireland which bears every plant as a part of the motherland. And her spirit will become a banshee and fly around between this world and the other world whenever “Hallow Eve” comes around in order to divert people from their overwhelming fate.

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