

The Crisis of Liberalism: Contracts and Promises in Joyce's Political Journalism and Dubliners

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IN THIS ESSAY I WANT TO CONSIDER James Joyce's *Dubliners*, published in 1914 but written between 1904 and 1907, in the context of nineteenth-century liberalism. In a broad sense, the dominant ideology of Victorian England could easily be grouped with the other norms and institutions of bourgeois society held up to ridicule in Joyce's "nicely polished looking-glass," so that the doctrines of liberalism are no more affirmed in the collection than the teachings of the Catholic Church or the pieties of the Irish Revival movement.¹ However, the political articles that Joyce wrote between 1907 and 1912 for the Trieste irredentist newspaper *Il Piccolo della Sera* suggest a more complex perspective on nineteenth-century liberalism than simple skepticism, informed in particular by a sense of disenchantment with liberalism's unfulfilled "undertakings and promises."² Liberalism, in other words, elicited an affective response from the young Joyce, crystallized around the theme of the Liberal Party's "faithlessness."³ In what follows, I suggest that Joyce's development of this theme corresponds, not only to the particular circumstance of a failed Liberal Home Rule policy for Ireland, but also to a more general cluster of nineteenth-century liberal values, which might be roughly described as the obligation of promise-keeping and the sacredness of contract. As the mechanism that allowed a private individual to enter into

¹ Letter to Grant Richards, 23 June 1906, in *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, ed. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 64.

² James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry, trans. Conor Deane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143.

³ *Ibid.*, 158.



noncoercive agreements in the pursuit of his or her own rational self-interest, contracts embodied one of the central axioms of nineteenth-century liberalism. Adjacent as it was to the explicitly moral domain of promising and promise-keeping, moreover, the idea of contract was particularly susceptible to slippages between the ethical norm of keeping one's word and the social technology of binding promissory agreements. Taking my cue from the theme of "faithlessness" in Joyce's political journalism, my discussion of *Dubliners* below will focus primarily on "A Mother" and "Counterparts"—two stories in which a contract plays a prominent role. Both stories, I suggest, are illuminated by the more explicit attacks on liberalism that Joyce would make in his journalism: by subjecting the ideal of contract to skeptical critique, Joyce expresses a sense of disenchantment with one of the central dogmas of nineteenth-century liberalism. The virulence of this reaction, moreover, was in part a consequence of the highly pitched emotional style of Gladstonian liberalism itself.

I. IL PICCOLO DELLA SERA

Between 1907 and 1912 Joyce published nine articles on Irish subjects in *Il Piccolo della Sera*. Along with a circumspect profile of Oscar Wilde, a supercilious review of George Bernard Shaw's *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet*, and two historical travel essays on Galway and the Aran Islands, five of the articles were political in nature, dealing with various aspects of Irish independence. This latter group of articles is more thematically cohesive than the literary and topographical pieces, and they are well known to critics for their treatment of English imperialism and Irish Nationalism, concerns that have become increasingly central to Joyce studies over the past two decades. Less often discussed, however, is the prominence of British liberalism as a theme of Joyce's Triestine political journalism. Three of Joyce's five political pieces address the question of Irish independence in the context of liberalism and of what Joyce saw as the lamentable Liberal handling of the Home Rule campaign between 1886—the date of William Gladstone's first unsuccessful Home Rule bill—and 1912, when the Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith tried for the third time in the party's history to enact Home Rule legislation for Ireland. Joyce's comments on liberalism in these essays have been largely neglected in accounts of his political attitudes, and it might be thought that the essays merely express a local dissatisfaction with recent Liberal Party policy, as opposed to grappling with the abstract concepts that define liberalism as a theory or an ideology.⁴ But if Joyce's articles contain little in the way of reflection on liberalism's

⁴ An exception is John Nash's illuminating study of "liberal domesticity" in *Ulysses*, which draws on the Triestine journalism as well as other sources—including Joyce's annotated copy of Mill's *On Liberty*—to reevaluate his attitude toward British liberal values. John Nash, "Liberalism and Domesticity in *Ulysses*," in *James Joyce in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Brian G. Carter discusses three of Joyce's political articles at length in his chapter on Joyce's politics in *James Joyce in Context* but does not address Joyce's attacks on liberalism. Brian G. Carter, "Trieste," in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 293–96. Dominic Mangienello notes that "Joyce showed an interest in liberalism . . . and possessed a copy of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*" but does not consider the allusions to liberalism in Joyce's political journalism. Dominic Mangienello, *Joyce's Politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 73, 139–40. Seamus Deane has examined the relationship between Joyce and the particular version of liberalism propounded by Matthew Arnold but similarly makes no reference to Joyce's Triestine journalism. Seamus Deane, "Masked with Matthew Arnold's Face: Joyce and Liberalism," *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 21. James Fairhall mentions Joyce's attack on "Gladstone's liberalism" in "Home Rule Comes of Age" but delves no further into this theme of the political articles, giving more attention, like Deane, to Joyce's relationship with "Arnoldian liberalism." James Fairhall, *James Joyce and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 52–53. Pericles Lewis's *Modernism, Nationalism,*

key conceptual topoi, they do engage with the rhetorical and emotional style of late Victorian liberalism in significant ways.

The title of Joyce's "Home Rule Comes of Age" (19 May 1907) neatly encapsulates his aim of confronting the Liberal Party of 1907 with the promise of its Gladstonian heyday, playing on the fact that the 1907 "Irish Council Bill" was separated from Gladstone's first Home Rule bill by an interval of twenty-one years. The article accordingly begins by recounting how an enthusiastic crowd gathered outside the office of "the nationalist newspaper of Dublin"—the *Freeman's Journal*—on the evening of 9 April 1886, in order to receive telegraphed reports of the parliamentary debate over the bill.⁵ Joyce turns next to Gladstone's second Home Rule bill, blocked in the House of Lords in 1893, before arriving at the attenuated Liberal devolution measure that had been introduced to the House of Commons in 1907, destined to be withdrawn after its first reading. The none-too-subtle aim of this historical narrative is to evoke for Joyce's Italian readers the mood of optimism and excitement that surrounded Gladstone's support for Home Rule in Ireland in 1886, in order to throw into relief the failure of the Liberals to make good on that original commitment. In 1886 "old people were actually weeping with joy" when Gladstone's Home Rule speech was reported in Dublin, and even the 1893 bill provoked "a new burst of enthusiasm."⁶ As Eugenio Biagini has shown, Gladstone's campaign for Home Rule from 1886 on, along with his opposition to the British policy of coercion, made him the center of a cult of personality in Irish Nationalist circles, where he was "eulogized . . . in terms which even his most enthusiastic constituents in Midlothian might have found extravagant."⁷ As with his condemnation of Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria in 1876, Gladstone's support for Irish Home Rule was couched in the language of a "politics of humanitarianism," summoning Irish Nationalists and English Liberals to bind together in what he called a "union of hearts."⁸ His Home Rule campaign was, that is, framed as an appeal to moral sentiments rather than political expediency, so that for Joyce to conjure up the Irish tears of joy that greeted Gladstone's Home Rule speech was to remind his readers of the overtly moralized attitude that Gladstone adopted toward the Irish Question. Recalling the adoration that was heaped on Gladstone in Ireland as well as the high emotional pitch of his original Home Rule campaign thus lends venom to Joyce's indictment of Gladstone's successors, who have travestied the "undertakings and promises" of the Gladstone era: his tone of sarcastic disenchantment is in proportion to the "joy" that these unrealized "promises" at first aroused.⁹

Joyce made only passing reference to Gladstone and the contemporary Liberal Party in his next political article, "Ireland at the Bar" (16 September 1907), which is primarily concerned with the misrepresentation of Ireland in the foreign press, but the renewed efforts of the Liberals to enact Home Rule legislation in 1910 and 1912 provoked a return to the themes of disillusionment

and the Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), which is explicitly concerned with "the liberal conception of society," focuses on the exploration of Irish identity in Joyce's fiction rather than the allusions to "Liberalism" contained in his journalism (10).

⁵ Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, 142. Joyce seems to be mistaken when he recalls that Gladstone's "magnificent oration" occurred on 9 April 1886; Gladstone had given a long speech on 8 April when the bill was first introduced, and the debate was taken up by other MPs the following day (142). *H.C. Deb.*, 8 April 1886, vol. 304, cc. 1035–36.

⁶ Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, 142.

⁷ Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876–1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 149.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹ Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, 142–43.

and betrayal that he had deployed in 1907. “The Home Rule Comet” (22 December 1910)—like the subsequent “The Shade of Parnell” (the title alludes to a cartoon in *Sinn Féin*)—was written in response to the 1910 constitutional crisis and the imminent curtailment of the Lords’ power of veto, which had killed Gladstone’s 1893 bill.¹⁰ Joyce was doubtful that the removal of this impediment would lead to Home Rule as inevitably as the Irish Nationalists were prone to assume, observing drily that “the history of Anglo-Saxon Liberalism” teaches otherwise.¹¹ In “Home Rule Comes of Age” Joyce had taxed Gladstone with the “moral assassination” of Parnell, and this notion of metaphorical bloodguilt perhaps informs his Shakespearean declaration in “The Home Rule Comet” that “[t]he Liberal ministers are scrupulous men.” The Liberal Party, Joyce claims, is more than capable of evading its commitment to Home Rule on the pretext of post-election soul-searching. In the meantime, the party will pursue “the Liberal tactic of deliberately and secretly undermining Nationalist feelings.”¹² The implacable cynicism of Joyce’s assessment thus develops further the themes of untrustworthiness and disillusionment propounded in the earlier article. If the Liberal Party welches on Home Rule, it will only be staying “[f]aithful to its long tradition of cynical faithlessness.”¹³

This theme of faithlessness is continued in the last and longest of the political articles, “The Shade of Parnell” (16 May 1912), which contains Joyce’s equally cynical assessment of the Home Rule bill finally proposed by the Liberals in 1912, following their reelection in December 1910 and the reform of the House of Lords. Again drawing on the imagery of Shakespearean tragedy, Joyce imagines Parnell as a “shade at the feast” of Irish autonomy and describes the alliance between Parnell’s Nationalists and Gladstone’s Liberal Party around the time of the 1886 Home Rule bill as a marriage of convenience.¹⁴ Joyce thus bluntly rejects the idea of the “union of hearts” and the image of Gladstone as a principled defender of Irish liberty, portraying him rather as a pragmatic “politician”: “Gladstonian Liberalism was an inconstant algebraic symbol whose coefficient was the political pressure of the moment and whose exponent was personal advantage.”¹⁵ Gladstone’s “eloquence,” which had elicited tears of joy in Dublin in 1886, “begin[s] to taste stale” after more than two decades of continued parliamentary inaction, while Parnell’s hauteur has, by contrast, come to seem more appealing in retrospect.¹⁶ As with “Home Rule Comes of Age” and “The Home Rule Comet,” the master conceit of “The Shade of Parnell” is disenchantment: the sense that the emotional Liberal rhetoric of the past has been exposed as hypocrisy.

Joyce’s relentlessly cynical assessment of Gladstone and Liberal Home Rule policy is polemical, and his remarks about liberalism might be dismissed as journalistic hyperbole. In at least two respects, however, Joyce’s screeds bear witness to important themes in the culture of liberalism at the turn of the twentieth century. In the first place, as I have suggested, the splenetic tone of the political articles reflects not only a generational sense of disenchantment with the ideals of the Victorian past but also a more particular response to the rhetorical complexion of late Victorian liberalism. The bitter sarcasm with which Joyce recalls the fervor surrounding the first Home

¹⁰ On the closeness with which Joyce was following *Sinn Féin* at this time, see Mangienello, *Joyce’s Politics*, 139–40.

¹¹ Joyce, *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, 158.

¹² *Ibid.*, 142, 158.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

Rule bill and with which he observes that Gladstone's "eloquence" now seems hollow depends for its effectiveness on the "politics of emotionalism" (in A. J. P. Taylor's phrase) that had characterized Gladstone's liberalism from the time of the Bulgarian massacres.¹⁷ In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Stephen and Simon Dedalus travel to the latter's natal city of Cork, where Stephen responds with aloofness to his father's expressions of sentimentality and nostalgia. Stephen is impassive as he notices a "sob passing loudly down his father's throat" during a visit to his alma mater, Queen's College, and later, as Simon Dedalus and his "cronies" exchange sentimental platitudes in a public house, Stephen reflects that "his mind seemed older than theirs: it shone coldly on their strifes and happiness like a moon upon a younger earth."¹⁸ Joyce's cynicism is a response to the high emotion of the Liberal Home Rule campaign, which now appears to belong to a more sentimental political dispensation. Like Stephen's father's nostalgia, this form of liberalism seems naïve to a younger generation.

Second, the failure of either Gladstone himself or his successors to redeem the Liberals' "undertakings and promises" allows Joyce to make "faithlessness" a central theme of his indictment. This accusation of "faithlessness" derives its force from the moralized political discourse I have discussed, and especially from the fact that sincerity was so integral a part of the Liberal "politics of emotionalism." Crucial to Gladstone's public persona was not only the pathetic appeal of his eloquence but also the ethical appeal of his personal moral integrity. As the *Freeman's Journal* put it in 1880, the "sincere and genuine" Gladstone was "a man with a heart as well as a mind," animated by a heartfelt moral commitment to Irish liberty.¹⁹ Joyce's mockery of Gladstonian liberalism hinges, we have seen, on the Liberal Party's failure to keep its "promises." But because of the moralized nature of Liberal discourse under Gladstone, this accusation of broken promises evokes not only the party's particular failure to honor its commitment to Home Rule but also the perceived betrayal of a whole political ethos of truthfulness. "Faithlessness" thus illustrates one important way in which the discourse of morality and the discourse of politics were blended together in the culture of liberalism. What is also important to note here about Joyce's harping on liberalism's broken "promises" is the fact that truthfulness and trustworthiness occupied a prominent place, not only in Gladstone's personal version of ethical liberalism, but also in the ideology of nineteenth-century liberalism more generally. There is thus an additional layer of irony to be detected in Joyce's complaint that liberalism has broken its own "promises," because promise-keeping itself was an unofficial tenet of Liberal ideology.

II. LIBERALISM AND CONTRACTS

Although promise-keeping had been an object of philosophical inquiry since antiquity, the topic took on a new kind of significance for early modern philosophers seeking to provide a scientific explanation for the existence of civil society. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, and William Paley, among others, all found it necessary to address the existence of promises and contracts as a basic condition of collective life and to attempt to explain why social creatures are inclined to keep their promises. The sense in which promising presented itself as a problem for theorists of civil society is aptly illustrated by Hume's discussion of promise-keeping in

¹⁷ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Troublemakers: Dissent over Foreign Policy, 1792–1939* (1957), quoted in Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, 34.

¹⁸ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 80.

¹⁹ Quoted in Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, 166.

A Treatise of Human Nature (1739–40). Beginning from the premise that “fidelity is no natural virtue, and that promises have no force, antecedent to human conventions,” Hume must explain how the convention of promise-keeping comes about, which he does by invoking the principle of self-interest.²⁰ The argument that the inclination to keep promises is social rather than natural, similar to the position taken by Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651), directly contradicts the natural-law account of truthfulness proposed by Locke. “Truth and keeping of Faith,” Locke declared in the second treatise on government (1690), “belongs to Men, as Men, and not as Members of Society.”²¹ In “Essays on the Law of Nature” (1663–64), he postulated that the social contract depends on a prior natural injunction to faithfulness: “Without natural law the other basis also of human society is overthrown, i.e. the faithful fulfilment of contracts.”²² Later in the essay, Locke again emphasizes the fundamental importance of promise-keeping as a presocial directive, without which the social contract itself would be untenable. If self-interest is the law of nature, as Hobbes had supposed, then “men are, as they say, by the law of nature in a state of war; so all society is abolished and all trust, which is the bond of society.”²³ Contra both Hobbes and Hume, trust for Locke is a precondition of the social contract—not a product of it.

Locke’s reflections on faithfulness exemplify more general themes in the liberal political tradition: the tendency to “favor,” as Martin Jay puts it, “negotiated contracts or compacts resting on mutual trust rather than countervailing fear,” as well as the affinity between “the founding fiction of a contract or compact” (a “fundamental attitude of liberalism”) and the value of “truthfulness.”²⁴ As Locke’s language in the “Essays on the Laws of Nature” makes clear, there is an obvious relationship between “contracts” or “compact[s]” and the idea of an “obligation to keep promises.” The reliability of contracts is difficult to separate from questions of personal morality, and the moral importance of keeping one’s word certainly influenced the way that nineteenth-century Liberals thought about contracts.²⁵ Arguably, however, the discourse that did most to shape nineteenth-century Liberal attitudes toward contractual agreements was not moral philosophy but political economy, which had enshrined freedom of exchange as a fundamental condition of the creation of wealth. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith argued that the universal human “propensity to truck, barter and exchange” was at the root of the division of labor, and hence of economic development.²⁶ Because the bargains struck by individuals are guided “by an invisible hand” to increase the prosperity of the nation as a whole, moreover, any impediment to free exchange was to be resisted.²⁷ Thanks to this doctrine, as Patrick Atiya has pointed out, “[t]he notion of Exchange, and of Free Exchange, now became of overriding significance in the whole system of political

²⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 571–75.

²¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 82.

²² John Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁴ Martin Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 95, 143.

²⁵ For a fascinating account of the intersection of linguistic, moral, and legal discourses on promise-keeping in Victorian England, see Randall Craig, *Promising Language: Betrothal in Victorian Law and Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

²⁶ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 456.

economy, both internally, and also internationally.”²⁸ Although Utilitarianism would transform the vocabulary of political economy in the Victorian era, this precept of the sanctity of freedom of exchange remained axiomatic for Liberal political economists and, by extension, Liberal politicians during the nineteenth century.

One of the most influential contemporary expressions of the importance of contract in Victorian society was Henry Sumner Maine’s *Ancient Law, Its Connection to the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861). A pioneering work of comparative legal history, *Ancient Law* drew on Roman as well as Indian and Irish legal codes to make the case that “the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement *from Status to Contract*.”²⁹ Premodern societies, in which rules of conduct are determined by one’s “station” and by “imperative command[s]” backed by patriarchal authority, leave “the very smallest room for Contract.”³⁰ In the modern world, conversely, contract is everywhere: “Few general propositions concerning the age to which we belong . . . seem . . . likely to be received with readier concurrence than the assertion that the society of our day is mainly distinguished from that of preceding generations by the largeness of the sphere which is occupied in it by Contract.”³¹ Maine explicitly links the prestige of political economy to the fact that modern individuals are left “to settle rules of conduct for themselves with a liberty never allowed to them till recently.”³² His discussion of contemporary attitudes toward the enlarged sphere of contract also illustrates the tendency I have mentioned for descriptive accounts of contractual agreements to shade into normative judgments about trust and faithfulness. Alluding to the contemporary “reluctance” to admit that “good faith and trust in our fellows are more widely diffused than of old,” Maine argues that, on the contrary, contemporary instances of fraud demonstrate just how widespread “the moral obligations of which they are the breach” have become: cheats and swindlers are the exception, abusers of the “scrupulous honesty [that] is displayed in the average of the transactions.”³³ Faithfulness is a modern disposition, and it is anachronistic to look for it in ancient civilizations: premodern societies have not yet reached the “epoch of their development when the promise of the contractor has a higher sacredness than the formalities with which it is coupled.”³⁴ The story of the rise of the contract society is also a Whig history of telling the truth.

III. DUBLINERS

By the time that Joyce came to write both his political articles and the stories contained in *Dubliners*, the sanctity of freedom of exchange was no longer a standing article of Liberal orthodoxy. Faith in unfettered market relations as an engine of prosperity for all had waned, and the political exponents of a more collectivist brand of “New Liberalism” had achieved a landslide victory in the British general election of 1906.³⁵ However, as I have suggested, Joyce’s political

²⁸ Patrick Atiya, *The Rise and Fall of Freedom of Contract* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 300.

²⁹ Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law, Its Connection to the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1917), 101.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁵ The “New Liberalism” that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s—Michael Freeden (2) offers 1886 as a nominal inception date—essentially replaced the traditional Liberal insistence on individual liberty with a more

journalism owes a large part of its polemical force to the persistence of classic Liberal rhetoric: the debunking of Liberal politics he undertakes is very much a debunking of “Gladstonian Liberalism.” An important part of this skeptical project is Joyce’s accusation of “faithlessness,” which responds not only to the moralized style of politics that Gladstone embodied but also, I suggest, to a more general liberal ideal of truthfulness and trustworthiness. For Joyce, to accuse liberalism of breaking its “promises” was to hoist both Gladstone and liberalism more generally by their own petard. In the discussion of *Dubliners* to which I now turn, I want to pursue a similar line of argument. The predominantly lower-middle-class world that Joyce depicts in *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses* (1922) is structured by microeconomies of credit and debt, reflecting, as Mark Osteen points out, the economically depressed city in which Joyce came of age, as well as the downward social trajectory of his own family.³⁶ As Osteen and other critics have shown, a complex poetics of borrowing and lending can be traced through all of Joyce’s writings, present not only in the naturalistic representation of everyday debts—like the three shillings that Joe Hynes owes Bloom or Stephen’s mock-scholastic ruminations on the pound lent him by George Russell—but also in the hyperallusiveness of his fiction, which foregrounds its metaphorical indebtedness to other texts.³⁷ So close-knit is the web of borrowing running through Joyce’s stories and novels that some of the debts incurred in *Dubliners* have still not been repaid by the time of *Ulysses*.³⁸ A consideration of Joyce’s representation of contracts might well be extended to include this pervasive theme of credit, which typically embodies the kind of deferred exchange of goods or services that Liberal political economists thought was fundamental to national prosperity. For the purposes of this essay, however, I want to confine my attention to two stories in *Dubliners* in which Joyce portrays the social mechanism of the contract with particular explicitness. The cynical portrayal of contractual agreements in “A Mother” and “Counterparts,” I suggest, expresses some of the same attitudes toward nineteenth-century liberalism that Joyce would espouse in “Home Rule Comes of Age,” “The Home Rule Comet,” and “The Shade of Parnell.” Although neither story evokes this context directly, Joyce’s Triestine journalism shows that he was ironically aware of the association between Liberal politics and trust or faithfulness. By stripping the institution of contract of the aura with which it is imbued in, say, Maine’s *Ancient Law*, “A Mother” and “Counterparts” express, not only contempt for the bourgeois “social order” that Joyce had rejected, but also a more particular sense of disenchantment with the liberal tradition.³⁹

Unlike *Ulysses*, in which Stephen ironically applies Gladstone’s sobriquet, “the people’s William,” to William Shakespeare, and Bloom approves of Gladstone’s “peace, retrenchment and reform” mantra, the claustrophobic world of *Dubliners* contains no explicit allusion to

collectivist conception of the relationship between the individual and the state. For a detailed account of the New Liberal movement, see Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

³⁶ Mark Osteen, *The Economy of “Ulysses”: Making Both Ends Meet* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 3–7.

³⁷ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 115, 182. On the “intertextual economy” of *Ulysses*, see Osteen, *Economy of “Ulysses,”* 203–49. For a deconstructive account of credit and debt in Joyce, see Tony Thwaites, *Joycean Temporalities: Debts, Promises, and Countersignatures* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001).

³⁸ Osteen suggests that in the “Hades” episode, Simon Dedalus insinuates that Fogarty the grocer, to whom Tom Kernan owes money in “Grace,” has still not been paid. Osteen, *Economy of “Ulysses,”* 161; Joyce, *Ulysses*, 96.

³⁹ Letter to Nora Barnacle, 29 August 1904, in *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 48.

Gladstonian liberalism.⁴⁰ Because Irish Nationalism was both rhetorically and politically allied with liberalism during this period, however, the collection's frequent references to Nationalism and the cultural revival do indirectly evoke the liberal context. This rhetorical convergence is particularly striking in Joe Hynes's elegy to Parnell in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," which recalls how the fallen Nationalist leader "dreamed (alas, 'twas but a dream!) / Of Liberty," and looks forward to "The day that brings us Freedom's reign."⁴¹ Although, as Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, nineteenth-century liberalism certainly did not entail a priori support for all nationalist movements, the language of this doggerel—based on a sentimental poem that Joyce himself wrote at the age of nine—emphasizes the connection between Liberal and Nationalist politics.⁴² Gladstone's public support for Home Rule from 1886 necessarily threw the full weight of Liberal rhetoric behind the Irish Nationalist cause, so that the rallying cry of "Liberty" was formally shared by both political movements. Indeed, as Biagini argues, some Irish Nationalists saw Nationalism and liberalism not only as political bedfellows but also as ideological blood brethren and denounced the Liberal government's policy of coercion in the name of liberalism's own values.⁴³ When Joyce invokes Nationalism, liberalism and its rhetoric are never far away. As Hynes's mawkish tribute to Parnell suggests, moreover, Joyce's perspective on this golden age of constitutional Nationalism is tinged with the same jaundiced irony as his evocation of Irish tears of joy in 1886. Having failed to bear practical fruit, both liberalism and Nationalism now seem sentimental, surviving only as nostalgia.

Loans and other promissory financial agreements are a constant motif in *Dubliners*. Excluding the two stories that I will discuss in more detail below, a miscellany of such agreements would include the life insurance policy belonging to the deceased Father Flynn in "The Sisters" (*D* 8), the gambling IOUs and proposed capital investment in "After the Race" (*D* 34), the furniture purchased on installment in "A Little Cloud" (*D* 63), Mr. Harford's usurious loans (*D* 124), Tom Kernan's debt to Fogarty (*D* 130), Mr. Power's "inexplicable debts" and "small, but opportune loans" in "Grace" (*D* 120), and even the sixpence that Leo Dillon "forfeit[s]" when he fails to play hooky as agreed with the narrator of "An Encounter" and their classmate Mahony (*D* 13). These various loans and liabilities in turn form part of a larger pattern of naturalist demystification, according to which personal or spiritual relationships are described or imagined in pecuniary terms. Hence, for example, as in *Ulysses*, masculine sociability is shown to be inseparable from webs of financial obligation: Kernan appreciates Fogarty's gift of whisky all the more because of his outstanding grocery bill, while Lenehan fawns on Corley in "Two Galants" in order to be able to share in the sovereign he extracts from his servant sweetheart. In "A Boarding House," the term that Mrs. Mooney uses repeatedly to denote Mr. Doran's duty to her daughter—"reparation"—emphasizes the mercantile aspect of this transaction, while Father Purdon's sermon in "Grace" explicitly likens spiritual self-appraisal to accountancy (*D* 48, 136). Far from constituting an extra-economic refuge from market relations, sociability and morality are perfectly translatable into the language of money and commerce.

⁴⁰ Joyce, *Ulysses*, 196, 669.

⁴¹ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 104. All subsequent references to *Dubliners* will be to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

⁴² On the "threshold principle" of nineteenth-century liberal nationalism, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 30–35.

⁴³ Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism*, 137.

In “A Mother” (completed in September 1905), this device of reducing social relationships to the calculus of the market intersects with Joyce’s treatment of the institution of contract. The action of “A Mother” turns on Mrs. Kearney’s fierce assertion of her economic self-interest: her rigid insistence on the “rights” assured by the “contract” she has made on her daughter Kathleen’s behalf and her refusal to be got around or embarrassed by the committee of the Eire Abu Society, who have commissioned Kathleen to sing at a cultural revival concert (*D* 115–16). Much is made in the story of Mrs. Kearney’s bourgeois gentility, which is in ironic discord with her blunt insistence on being paid. The bargain she strikes with Mr. Holohan is made in guineas, like a professional honorarium, although this nicety is symbolically forgotten when the two parties to the contract begin to dispute their obligations, and Mrs. Kearney is forced to observe that the four pounds she is offered as partial payment is “four shillings short” (*D* 114). The economic nature of this contract is further disguised at the start of the story by ritualized civility. The dainty “decanter and silver biscuit-barrel” laid out for Mr. Holohan’s visits and the graciousness with which Mrs. Kearney invites him to refill his glass contrast starkly with the wrangling over shillings at the theater, as well as with the rather less genteel bottles of stout consumed in an upper room on the night of the performance (*D* 107, 113). The story’s opening act and its dénouement thus juxtapose the idea of the contract as a civilized agreement, shoring up the mutually beneficial relationships of trust that bourgeois society is supposed to foster, and the underlying conflict of competing interests.

The governing conceit of “A Mother” is heterotopia: the dissonance between the priggish bourgeois world represented by Mrs. Kearney’s parlor and the comparatively coarse community of the Eire Abu Society and the theater, epitomized by the “flat”-accented larrikin Mr. Fitzpatrick (*D* 108). This dissonance clearly operates along class and gender lines—social identities that converge when Mr. Holohan accuses Mrs. Kearney of behavior unbecoming to a “lady”—but it also depends on a collision between the contractual “rights” that Mrs. Kearney asserts so indignantly and the context of the Irish Revival itself (*D* 116). It is suggested early in the story that Mrs. Kearney’s involvement in the Irish Revival movement is opportunistic, and this theme of hypocrisy can be heard in the story’s language as a collision of mercenary and altruistic vocabularies. “When,” we are told, “the Irish Revival began to be appreciable Mrs. Kearney determined to take advantage of her daughter’s name and brought an Irish teacher to the house” (*D* 107). Overtly here, Mrs. Kearney imagines that social “advantage” is to be gained by associating her daughter with the revival movement, but “appreciable” also carries a more subtle economic connotation, signifying not only “capable of being recognized by the senses” but also “capable of being estimated, assessed” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The Irish Revival has become “appreciable” in the same sense as a commodity or other investment opportunity: its value has become capable of being assessed and, hence, exploited. In the same paragraph, Joyce describes the high-minded “musical” and “Nationalist” friends of the Kearneys playing “every little counter of gossip” before parting company after Mass: the banality and meanness of “gossip” combines here with another monetary metaphor, tidbits of news compared to betting tokens in a game of chance (*D* 107). Clearly, Joyce is satirizing bourgeois cultural nationalism, portraying revival enthusiasts as not only fatuous but also hypocritical. But this collision of mercenary and altruistic vocabularies also foreshadows the larger conflict that erupts at the climax of the story, where Mrs. Kearney’s determination to be paid is made to seem indecent in the supposedly disinterested context of Irish patriotism. The impropriety of Mrs. Kearney’s stickling in such a context is everywhere implicit in her awkward face-off with Fitzpatrick and Holohan, and it is explicitly

alluded to when Holohan says reproachfully that “I never thought you would treat us this way” (D 116). “Us” signifies here not only the Eire Abu Society and its committee but also the larger cause of Irish cultural regeneration and, by extension, the Irish people itself. It is in the name of this cause that Holohan can accuse Mrs. Kearney of lacking “decency” (D 116).

What does it mean for Joyce to introduce a particularly belligerent defense of the “rights” of “contract” into the midst of an Irish Revival concert? Joe Hynes’s doggerel verse reminds us of the rhetorical and ideological affinities between Irish Nationalism and British liberalism: “Liberty” and “Freedom” are the goals of Parnell’s struggle, as they are the themes of so many of Gladstone’s speeches. Yet, as Hobsbawm points out, significant contradictions emerged at the end of the nineteenth century between the concepts of nation and nationalism as they were construed in bourgeois liberal ideology and the new wave of identitarian nationalisms that took shape in the years between 1870 and 1918.⁴⁴ Whereas liberalism had tended to emphasize the principles of popular sovereignty and representative democracy without giving much theoretical attention to the concept of the “people” itself, the new nationalisms placed culture, custom, language, and ethnicity at the heart of the struggle for national independence. “It is a commonplace,” writes Terry Eagleton, that “revolutionary nationalism unites the archaic and the avant-garde”: nationalism wants both to restore a lost national past and to realize a future utopian state, erasing the fallen historical present of modernity.⁴⁵ With respect to the unstable alliance between Irish Nationalism and nineteenth-century liberalism, however, we can assign a slightly different meaning to this “commonplace.” As Hobsbawm shows, liberal nationalisms embraced rather than denied modernity, seeing the assertion of national sovereignty as an instrument of modernization rather than an assertion of atavistic ethnic identities. The modernizing call to “Liberty” and the revivalist emphasis on tradition thus straddle an ideological fault line within the Nationalist movement.

It would be a mistake to reduce “A Mother” to the status of allegory, but even so, Joyce’s depiction of Mrs. Kearney’s run-in with the Irish Revival movement could scarcely be better conceived as an illustration of these tensions. On the face of it, the story is designed to satirize the insincerity of bourgeois appropriations of cultural Irishness, as well as to draw a bathetic comparison between the exalted aims of the revival movement itself and the prosaic social rhythms of Dublin life: as throughout *Dubliners*, romantic ideals are stripped away to reveal cronyism, meanness, and mediocrity. But the motif of the contract gives a particular inflection to this general satirical intent, conjuring, as it does, one of the sacrosanct axioms of nineteenth-century liberalism. Joyce’s depiction of Mrs. Kearney takes aim at this Liberal touchstone itself, reducing the alchemy of contract to the ugly *caput mortuum* of competing interests. In addition to this, however, Mrs. Kearney’s insistence on her “rights,” in opposition to the claims of “decency” and Irish communal solidarity, also pits the values of modern liberalism against a more primitive form of collective cohesion. “A Mother” pokes fun at the internal incoherence of the Nationalist movement—the way it yokes together unsavory chancers like Mr. Fitzpatrick and socially ambitious prigs like Mrs. Kearney—but it also draws attention to the instability of the temporary alliance between nineteenth-century liberalism and Irish Nationalism: in order to succeed, this alliance would have to reconcile two antithetical models of nationhood, one founded on the idea of contractuality, the other on blood and soil.

⁴⁴ See Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 101–30.

⁴⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London: Verso, 1995), 285.

If what is at stake in “A Mother” is the agreement that a contract symbolizes, in “Counterparts” (completed July 1905) Joyce is preoccupied, not with the contract’s symbolic referent, but rather with its material form. This interest in the physical-technical apparatus of the contract rather than its meaning is signaled by the story’s title, which refers in a legal context to the twin parts of an indenture or deed, traditionally cut or torn from a single sheet in such a way that reuniting the two documents verifies their authenticity. The title thus draws attention to the occupation of the story’s central character, Farrington, whose role as a scrivener in the legal firm of Crosbie and Alleyne precisely consists in producing copies of contracts—“counterparts”—and other documents. It is Farrington’s failure to copy the contract between parties known as Bodley and Kirwan that precipitates his dressing down at the hands of his employer, Mr. Alleyne, and thus, indirectly, the bout of drinking in which he indulges that evening with Nosey Flynn, O’Halloran, Paddy Leonard, Higgins, and Leonard’s English acrobat friend, Weathers. The tedium of Farrington’s labor is encapsulated by the line of boilerplate that is twice printed in full in the story, mimicking the act of clerical duplication itself: “*In no case shall the said Bernard Bodley be*” (D 67, 69). The jargon of the phrasing combines with the meaningless proper noun to produce an effect of empty formalism: as Farrington’s alertness wanes over the course of the afternoon, he finds himself pondering the alliteration of “Bernard,” “Bodley,” and “be,” as if to emphasize the priority of form over meaning (D 69). When Farrington is subsequently called into Mr. Alleyne’s office and cannot resist making a quip at his employer’s expense, the background of clerical copying serves to throw this ill-advised witticism into relief. Whereas the text that Farrington writes is mechanical, his insolent utterance is described as spontaneous and unpredictable. It escapes his lips “before he was aware of it” and brings the monotonous routine of the office to a standstill: “There was a pause in the very breathing of the clerks” (D 70).

Farrington’s act of insubordination seems, then, to connote an upsurge of originality within the otherwise-oppressive cycle of bureaucratic duplication. In the story’s second act, however, which sees Farrington drinking with his friends in a series of Dublin public houses and bars, this moment of spontaneity is undercut, ironically reabsorbed into a different but no less tedious cycle of repetition. Farrington’s supposed escape from the drudgery of labor into the free realm of friendship and leisure opens with an inauspicious echo of his day at the office. Walking excitedly toward Davy Byrne’s public house with the six shillings obtained by pawning his watch in his pocket, Farrington imagines himself recounting the story of his retort to his friends: “*I don’t think that that’s a fair question to put to me, says I*” (D 71). This near-verbatim repetition of a line of dialogue that we have just read—Farrington omits the deferential “sir” from his imagined anecdote—recalls the story’s other instance of textual duplication (“*In no case shall the said Bernard Bodley be*”), and sure enough, the masculine sociability of the public house is found to be no less governed by repetition than the dull routine of the office. Having arrived at Davy Byrne’s, Farrington duly recites the story to Nosey Flynn, then repeats it a second time to O’Halloran and Paddy Leonard when they arrive, this recital drawing forth a similar story from O’Halloran about *his* retort to a clerical superior. The arrival of Farrington’s colleague Higgins allows yet another “version” of the story to be recounted, this time from the point of view of a third party, so that the anecdote is retold three times in the space of two paragraphs (D 72). Joyce’s own story thus begins to replicate itself, dramatizing the dreary manner in which a single spontaneous event—Farrington’s unexpected quip—is swiftly transformed into a stock anecdote, portraying social intercourse as little more than a series of ritual recitations.

The way that the men are said to “exchange” stories, as well as the description of Farrington’s losing “count of the conversation,” suggests that this mode of interaction follows an economic logic, with tellers and listeners involved in an implicit contract (*D* 72–73). In this respect, the circulation of stories mirrors the rounds of drinks that punctuate the evening section of the story, which are likewise presented as a reciprocal contractual agreement. As elsewhere in *Dubliners*, masculine sociability in “Counterparts” is depicted as closely intertwined with implicit financial obligations, incurred and expunged in this case by taking part in rounds. Joyce meticulously catalogs the drinks “stood” by those members of the group who can afford it, beginning with the half measure bought by Nosey Flynn for Farrington in response to his story (immediately reciprocated) and continuing through several rounds of hot whiskeys purchased by O’Halloran, Farrington, and Weathers. That rounds are reciprocal agreements rather than gifts is emphasized by Farrington’s irritation with Weathers, whose order of whisky and Apollinaris violates the etiquette of round buying because it costs more than the other drinks. The drinking contracts entered into at the public house may be less formal than the deeds that Farrington spends his days copying out, but the vocabulary belonging to these informal contractual agreements is scarcely less arcane: vernacular expressions like “half-one,” “tailors of malt,” “small Irish and Apollinaris,” “tincture,” “small hot specials,” and “one little smahan” make clear that this world, too, has its technical jargon (*D* 71–72, 74). The repetition of stories, recalling Farrington’s work as a scrivener, and the implicit contracts involved in both telling stories and buying drinks establish an analogy between the work and leisure sections of the story. This symmetry reveals a further connotation of the story’s title: although seemingly antithetical, work and play in *Dubliners* are counterparts of one another.

In a suggestive reading of “Counterparts” in the context of Irish “temperance nationalism,” David Lloyd argues that the public house and drinking culture operate as sites of “recalcitrance” within the Nationalist project, strongholds of “cultural difference” that nonetheless prove “unincorporable either by colonial or by nationalist modernity.”⁴⁶ With respect to the workplace in which the first act of “Counterparts” is staged, the public house and bar constitute “heterotopic sites,” operating “outside the norms and rhythms of alienated labor or the hierarchies of the work space that impinge on Farrington’s daily life.”⁴⁷ The symmetries of Joyce’s story, however, which assimilate the tedious copying of the office to the dreary social mimesis of the bar, suggest that work space and leisure space are counterparts rather than heterotopoi, governed by an identical logic of imitation and routine. What is most dismal about Farrington’s attempt to let off steam is that it does not succeed in rebelling against the habitus of alienated labor; rather, repetitive scribing recurs as the slavish repetition of stories, and the fabrication of contracts is ironically echoed by the “exchange” of anecdotes and of drinks. The bar in “Counterparts” thus appears not as a heterotopic space of anarchic freedom but rather as an extension of the oppressive regime of the office, where Farrington’s behavior is similarly regulated and, indeed, disciplined.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault makes the case that the nineteenth-century emergence of modern, industrial, democratic—in a word, liberal—societies was accompanied by a new form of social control, which demands to be understood, not as a centralized system of repression, but rather as a “‘microphysics’ of power,” controlling behavior by means

⁴⁶ David Lloyd, “Counterparts: *Dubliners*, Masculinity, and Temperance Nationalism,” in *Semicolonial Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 130, 140.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

of “exercises” rather than “signs.”⁴⁸ In institutions like the school, the factory, the army, and the prison, a whole technical apparatus of “disciplines” was developed, permitting “the minute control of bodily operations” and tending “to blanket the entirety of the social body.”⁴⁹ Importantly for my purposes here, Foucault’s description of the rise of disciplinary power takes the form of a counterhistory of liberal society, in which the extension of contractual freedoms is offset by techniques of corporal control. In the sphere of retributive justice, there are “two highly distinct manners . . . of reacting to infractions”: one aims to “reconstitute the juridical subject of the social pact”; the other, to form the “the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders.”⁵⁰ Alongside the liberal theory of the state of nature, there is a “military dream of society,” preoccupied not with the idea of a “primitive contract” but with “permanent coercion.”⁵¹ In Foucault’s account, this technical and discursive history is liberalism’s other: to the recto of the rise of contract is affixed the verso of the rise of discipline.

This recto-verso relationship between liberty and control is given figural form in the office of Crosbie and Alleyne. In a general sense, the repetitive tasks that Farrington is constrained to perform provide an image of alienated labor under capitalism, while also drawing on a common turn-of-the-century trope of clerical work as emasculating or degenerative. In addition, as Lloyd points out, there is some suggestion that Farrington’s office drudgery doubles as a vector of colonial power, since Mr. Alleyne’s Northern Irish accent and his partner’s English surname connote British ownership, or at least an affiliation with the colonizing power.⁵² In this context, the particular form of work in which Farrington is engaged—copying a contract—acquires an additional ironic significance. At a symbolic level, the contract between Bodley and Kirwan enshrines their right of freedom of exchange. By portraying this contract from the point of view of clerical labor, however, Joyce inverts the significance of contractual agreements as a liberal social technology: seen from the bottom up, the contract involves not free enterprise or agential self-realization but rather mechanical repetition and disciplinary subordination. Like the dénouement of “A Mother,” which reduces the civilized contract introduced at the start of the story to an ugly squabble over money, the depiction of a clerk producing a counterpart shows how the institution of contract, cornerstone, as we have seen, of the liberal social vision, is literally dependent on the “micro-physics” of a discipline. In an eloquent illustration of Foucault’s thesis, Joyce’s back-office portrait of a sacrosanct liberal institution implies that the mechanism of progressive freedom celebrated by Maine and other nineteenth-century liberal thinkers is allied to a peculiarly modern form of power. The second half of “Counterparts,” shaped in a number of ways as a counterpart to the first, further extends this Foucauldian argument, suggesting that the habits and exercises to which Farrington submits in the office continue to regulate his behavior in the putatively autonomous space of the public house. The repetition of stories ironically echoes the duplication of contracts, while sociability itself is shown to depend on quasi-economic contractual agreements.

When Joyce wrote the stories that compose *Dubliners*, followed shortly afterward by the first of his political articles for *Il Piccolo della Sera*, liberalism in Britain was widely perceived to

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 151. These are my translations.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 161, 163.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 151–52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵² Lloyd, “Counterparts,” 128. Don Gifford notes that a solicitor named C. W. Alleyne had offices at 24 Dame Street, but that there was no Crosbie in *Thom’s Official Directory* (1904). Don Gifford, *Notes for “Dubliners” and “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 74.

be undergoing an ideological “crisis.”⁵³ This was the language used by Liberals themselves, and the rise of the “New Liberalism” in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods was at least partly driven by the recognition that small government and freedom of exchange no longer constituted an adequate policy platform. In some respects, Joyce’s attacks on “Gladstonian Liberalism” coincide with the end of a cycle in the Liberal political tradition in England, expressing a sense of dissatisfaction with Victorian political norms that was also shared by a new generation of Liberals. Because this perspective on liberalism was refracted through the particular lenses of “faithlessness” and betrayal, however, Joyce’s essays offer a revealing insight into the corresponding importance of faith and trust within the Liberal tradition. Similarly, the vitriol that informs his Triestine journalism reminds us of the important role played by the “politics of emotionalism” in British liberalism. Joyce’s response to liberalism’s broken promises thus mirrors Stephen Dedalus’s attitude toward his father’s maudlin nostalgia on their visit to Cork: to reject liberalism in the early years of the twentieth century was not only to discard a political program or ideological tradition but also to adopt a certain, characteristically modernist emotional posture, critical of the supposedly “stale” sentimentalism of an older generation.

The emphasis that Joyce lays on Liberal “promises” in the Triestine journalism also allows us to appreciate the full significance of the contracts that feature so prominently in “A Mother” and “Counterparts,” which likewise present an ironic contrast with the emotional rhetoric surrounding promises and contracts in nineteenth-century liberalism. In this perspective, Mrs. Kearney’s appeal to the “rights” assured by her “contract” invokes a central axiom of Liberal political economy and Liberal social thought, and the collision between this discourse and the heteronomous values of the revival movement dramatizes an important tension within Irish Liberal Nationalism. In “Counterparts,” the demystification of the ideal of contract focuses on the Foucauldian chiasmus of liberty and discipline: the central instrument of Liberal progress is figuratively inverted, portrayed instead as a discipline of control. In both stories, the depiction of contract is a far cry from the “sacredness” of promise-keeping enshrined in nineteenth-century Liberal rhetoric. Read in the light of his political journalism, Joyce’s portrayal of contracts in *Dubliners* implies, not only that the promise of Gladstonian liberalism had not been realized, but also that the Liberal ideal of promise-keeping itself was in need of refurbishment. A

⁵³ In 1909, for example, the New Liberal economist J. A. Hobson published a collection of essays entitled *The Crisis of Liberalism*.