James Joyce’s “Counterparts”: A Dramatization of the Nietzschean Ressentiment

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Abstract: Notoriously renowned as an iconoclast, Freidrich Nietzsche has turned to be the major philosopher whose idea about the suppressive function of the religious institution in Western culture staged what comes to be known as Modernism. Condemning the Christian morality inculcated in his contemporary society as a fetter debilitating the modern man, he evokes a bitter controversy by his contention that “God is dead.” Critical of the psychological practice of morality in current Christianity, his vision is that man has the potential to achieve the utmost freedom to set his own moral principles. This ideal man he calls the “Übermensch” or Superman is the extreme opposite of the “man of today” who frequently frustrated by various social apparatus has gradually lost his interest to realize his natural potentiality.

A modern writer that focuses on the notion of freedom and the issue of human frustrations, James Joyce is very similar to Nietzsche. Right before portraying the modern artist in his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, he sets to portray modern man in his Dubliners. This paper attempts to highlight “Counterparts” as a short story that adopts a Nietzschean slant vis-à-vis modern condition of man. It interprets Farrington’s constant frustrations in his daily as a reification of Nietzsche’s notion of “Man of Ressentiment.”

Keywords: Christian morality; man of today; ressentiment; frustration; freedom; passivity;
When "Counterparts" is considered within the tradition of the scrivener stories of the nineteenth century such as Charles Dickens's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and Gogol's "The Overcoat," Joyce's innovation and modernity becomes apparent. In violating the conventions of the scrivener narrative, Joyce interweaves modern issues such as identity, social aberration, abuse and self-effacement with the complex mechanism of modern Christian culture. With an eye on the environmental elements such as culture and economical condition, this study aims to substantiate "Counterparts" as a representation of the way the internalization of the false basically unnatural morality in Christianity leads to a stratified society in which men are kept into a hierarchy. It highlights the Nietzschean overtone of the story by stressing "Counterparts" as the story of dehumanization of modern man into a savage when robbed of his creativity, autonomy and human nature—the essential criteria for the ideal man in Nietzsche's eyes. This paper further suggests that, in being a reference to the surreptitious, debilitating operation of Christianity, "Counterparts" is actually a parody of Nietzsche's account of the historical origin of Christian morality.

In his critique of the modern practice of Christianity, Nietzsche glorifies the ancient Greek culture as the only culture that has granted its people the sense of integrity and the wholeness. He attacks Christianity because, radically dissimilar to the Greek culture, it basically goes against man's ambition to live according to one's nature, instincts and passion what Nietzsche calls "will to life." In his analysis of Greek tragedy as the embodiment of wholeness in Greek culture, Nietzsche recognizes two opposing forces in human nature; finding them at the root of cults in ancient Greece, he refers to Passion (the drive to act instinctively) and Reason as Dionysian and Apollonian principle respectively. Only when reason monitors passions, i.e., when Dionysian and Apollonian principles are reconciled can man realize his true nature. Since Christianity works upon the dissociation of the two opposing forces giving one an insurmountable priority over the other, it essentially goes against "will to life," the criterion stressed by Nietzsche for evaluating human existence.

The extirpation of passion means the stark denigration of life in Nietzsche's eyes hence his condemnation of Christianity; a "fervent yea-sayer," he deifies life as the highest value in his ideology. In his Thus Spoke Zarathustra the life-affirming Zarathustra says, "Listen rather, my brothers, to the voice of the healthy body: that is perfect and perpendicular: and it speaks of the meaning of the earth" (145). In Nietzsche's own words, "no longer may we judge life and denigrate it": on the contrary, "life must come to be the unquestioned standard of all thought, the supreme and highest good" (qtd. in Smith74). In this regard, "Christianity with its other-worldly emphasis on humility, atonement and salvation" (qtd. in Butler 1980:512) and the State with its stable, rigid limiting conventions can be nothing but the two modern obstacles to the sense of wholeness man enjoyed in ancient Greek culture; by ignoring man's "will to life," they actually reduce modern individuals into an inferior species, the people who cannot take advantage of the virtue of "self-transformation."

"Self-transformation," in Nietzsche's discourse, is the "drive to overcome oneself"—the highest virtue of mankind. "A fundamental life-making source," affirms Butler, it makes man construe life in accordance with its primary drives (1980:514). It is a "return to nature," i.e., "not a going back but an ascent--up into the high, free, even terrible nature and naturalness where great tasks are something one may play with" (The Portable Nietzsche 552). Caught in the tangles of modern morality, what he Twilight of the Idols calls the "negation of Will to life" and "the very instinct of decadence, which makes an imperative of itself" (The Portable Nietzsche 491), people are no more, as Childs maintains, in touch with the tragic myth, with the sensuality, intuition and truth embodied in the in the Dionysian principle of the Greek tragedy (57). "Fragmented and in piece," they consequently, cannot
help “living a completely hidden life” which by quenching their natural desire to go beyond themselves prevents them from obtaining the true self which is the ultimate happiness.

The protagonist in “Counterparts” is a scrivener who is not only exhausted by mundane copying but caught in a cycle of brutal abuses sets to subjugate others to his will. Clearly obvious in his exchange with the weak, he absorbs the rhetoric of abuse to take advantage of others. As Norris suggests, “the narration places the reader in a position of ethical scrupulosity in having to adjudicate the painfully paradoxical moral situation in which victimization turns a human being into a victimizer” (123). Farrington, the copying clerk in Alleyne and Crosbie’s organization, is so much under control and pressure to produce accurate eligible copies on deadlines that it is not wrong to call him a Xerox machine, one deprived of all his human needs and identity. The plot in “Counterparts,” thus, strongly represents Farrington’s frustrations in his quest from workplace to pubs and finally home in the hope of achieving self-glorification; approaching the story from the Nietzschean perspective, Farrington’s mainly psychological rather than physical abuse of his son can be taken as a symptom of the degeneration of human quality into savagery; hence, a sign of weakness rather than power. Everything both at the workplace and outside turns out to be an obstacle to his comfort and to the satisfaction of his physical, social and sexual hunger that otherwise would have given him a self-knowledge. By extending the frustrating ambience beyond the workplace and making exasperating restrictions the inevitable outcome of all atmospheres, Joyce puts it forward that it is not just the ethos of the workplace but the effect of a more general value system that has stripped Farrington of the eventual state of happiness he would attain if undergoing the process of “giving style to one’s character” which, in Nietzsche’s worldview, demands man’s highest power.

The frustrations Farrington goes through and the shock of his brutal abuse of his son in the final scene, one may assume the story as a portrayal of the process of brutalization, but a concentration on Farrington’s characterization shows that it is more than that. Unlike the delicate, pale and starveling scribe of nineteenth-century fiction, Farrington is a robust physical presence—“tall and of great bulk” (97), who, as Norris rewords, possesses “a volatile body and a psyche structured like a human volcano” (124). The description of his gross physicality and violent temperament, his sharp aural sense, as well as his mood in terms of its exterior bodily signs, “A spasm of rage gripped his throat for a few moments and then passed, leaving after it a sharp sensation of thirst” (98), impress the reader to accept him mostly as an animal rather than a human being.

Reducing the two qualitatively different principles of strength and reason into the fundamental force of “will to power,” Nietzsche arrives at a touchstone which measures everything in terms of the quantitative degree of power. For Nietzsche, the weak are those who possess a hatred of self-discipline and experience ressentiment as a result of “the frustrated will to power.” Averting self-discipline, the weak are deprived of any sense of self-satisfaction achieved through giving style to one’s character, a process that helps man to “recreate himself, and become a ‘single one’.” Nietzsche’s analysis of slave morality as the stratagem of “making virtue of necessity” discloses that it “well goes together with impotent hatred and immeasurable envy, with ressentiment which would like nothing better than revenge” (Kaufmann 1950:319). According to him, the weaklings’ inability to conquer their master arise “ressentiment” in them—“a chance to outdo the master’s insult” (319). That is why the weak and the slave idiosyncratically crave a heaven in which the experience is reversed and they sense their power. To be powerful, however, requires “to be above any ressentiment or desire for vengeance” (320).

Seen in the light of the Nietzschean concept of power, Joyce’s objective in animalizing Farrington is to highlight the suppression of essential human qualities in modern societies. In fact, “Counterparts” is an account of how Farrington is kept in this deprivation
and any way of escape is blocked. Contaminated by a debilitating value system, his soul lacks the desire for freedom and comfort so much so that “ressentiment” is formed in him. In Nietzsche’s philosophy, “ressentiment” is the state in which man (the slave) turns against his own natural instincts. Resenting the animal qualities that he possesses but his superior (master) lacks, he envies his master and decides to avenge him for his superiority. The existence of a degenerating paralytic internalized ideology is symbolically hinted to in Farrington’s possession of dirty-white eyes which are several times referred to. His dim eyes embody the jaundiced and obscure view of the world he has yielded to.

Being a massive, unregulated, dynamic creature, Farrington simply wants to be an authentic human being with natural instincts; he intensely desires to express his passion, to be satisfied sexually and eat and drink enough, what in Nietzsche’s philosophy are essential for man’s self-satisfaction and his experience of wholeness. As a result of a series of humiliations, Farrington is left at the end deprived of any sense of self-glorification hence devoid of identity. Throughout the story that can clearly be divided into three distinguished parts—Farrington in or out of the office, his idling at pubs, and finally his late arrival home—Joyce constructs so many scenes of repression that it prompts Parrinder to call “Counterparts,” a “simple and, indeed, crude illustration of the reproduction of repression” (59). In the first part of the story, the physical and psychological symptoms of the drastic subjugation of an individual like Farrington are clearly delineated. In this way Joyce turns his protagonist, as Norris points, against type (123). Farrington is seen in his workplace degradingly abused by his superiors. Though on a careless reading the narrative voice seems to be against Farrington so that one finds fault with him as a lazy irresponsible person who, as Alleyne complains, takes things easy and shirks work, a close reading with attention to the elliptic nature of narrative evokes our sympathy for his tragic situation and, to quote Jones’s words, for his rebellion against the drabness of his copying job and the tyranny of his employer (21).

Farrington is called upstairs to Alleyne’s room who bullies him in a graceless way giving him no opportunity to defend himself. He chides him for not completing the copy of the contract between Bodley and Kirman in time. Once Farrington wants to explain he cuts him short. Back at his desk, Farrington counts “the sheets which remained to be copied” and staring a few seconds on an incomplete sentence—”In no case shall the said Bernard Bodley be...”—he decides to defer his work until a few minutes later when “they would be lighting the gas.” The following sentence: “then he could write” implies that maybe Farrington sight is dim and he is unable to see in the oncoming darkness. In this regard, his snip out of the office to “slake the thirst in his throat” after Alleyne’s reprimand is less a sign of laziness than a wise decision to spend the intervening time till the room is lightened somewhere to stifle his anger.

The excessive control the clerks are inflicted with becomes clear here as they are compelled to overlook their human needs and allot all their time to work. The “general reprehensibility” of Farrington’s behavior though at the first sight appears forcibly to justify the oppressive workplace regime, in fact hints to its very inexcusable suppression of workers’ autonomy and dignity (Beck 187). Farrington is so disgracefully under control that he is forced to play a trick on the chief clerk to get out of the office vividly portrayed as a hell, a cage with a gate keeper. In this respect, “Counterparts” is in accordance with the tradition of clerk narratives, a reflection of the real oppressive situation of the offices in bourgeois society in which as Norris explains,

> Clerks are oppressively monitored, their work presumably checked for accuracy and their attendance clocked for diligence. In this environment the human body is instrumentalized as a mere mechanical tool, with its need, feelings, and urges completely peripherized as extraneous to the workplace. (124)
Under the pretense of needing the toilet, Farrington succeeds to leave the office for a drink. But as soon as he returns the chief clerk Mr. Shelley again interrogates him: “Where were you?” He even neglects Farrington’s refusal to answer in front of the two male clients and sneeringly says, “I know that game . . . Five times in one day is a little bit . . .” (100). The humiliating effect of this “address in the presence of the public” as well as Alleyne’s and Miss Delacour’s disregard of his bow contribute to his concomitant lack of concentration that prevents him from completing his work and intensifies his anger and heat. That is why the narrator adds the following general explanatory statement: “All the indignities of his life enraged him” (101).

As Norris affirms, at the time the story is written the scribes were still needed since only handwritten copies were accepted as legally valid copies of legal documents. Such legal validity requires “a legible hand, accuracy, speed and the ability to meet deadlines” for any scribe (124). However, Farrington’s financial problems obvious in his demand for a an advance, his entanglement in a net of a great deal of works still to be done, and his enraged by the humiliating, abusive behavior of his superiors do not let him meet the demanded qualities. His mind is in such a chaos that he not only makes a mistake writing “Bernard Bernard instead of Bernard Bodley” and has to “begin on a clean sheet” (101), but does not realize the presence of Alleyne and Miss Delacour till his name is called twice. Here once more, Farrington, experiences a drastic bout of humiliation. In a tirade of abuse, Alleyne reprimands him for the two missing letters of Miss Delacour’s contract, what he has wished not to be noticed by Alleyne. Being short of money, Farrington needs the job. Therefore, having in mind Alleyne’s previous double threat to lay his idleness before Mr. Crosbie for serious decision, he knows that telling the truth about the missing letters would exacerbate the situation. Undoubtedly, in such a condition that the completion of the demanding amount of work under which the clerks are buried is necessary to maintain a substance, no truth is capable of being uttered in Crosbie & Alleyne law firm. Therefore, Farmington lies in order to keep his job: “The man answered that he knew nothing about them, that he had made a faithful copy” (102). However, the tirade continues “so bitter and violent that the man could hardly restrain his fist from descending upon the head of the manikin before him” (102). Telling the truth or lie makes no difference; Alleyne treats him like a machine that should work within deadlines.

Ignoring the exigencies of the exaggerated clerical body of Farrington, Crosbie & Alleyne Law Office with its control, restrictions and regulations functions like a microcosmic penal system in which people are disciplined with certain ethos to employ their real potentiality to produce the most accurate, sincere work. Terribly humiliated and enraged by the tightness of the restrictions imposed on him, Farrington could not help revolting, though temporary, against the subjugating effect of the system as he finally avenges Alleyne for his abusive power. As a scrivener under the authority of Alleyne, he has never succeeded in expressing his own subjectivity because of the nature of his job and Alleyne’s verbal mimicry of him. According to Norris, “copying, or written mimicry is dehumanizing because it forces a speaking subject to endlessly produce the words of another.” Moreover, verbal mimicry is “a contrapuntal form of social violence that cruelly uses a person’s own spontaneous words to mock them” (127). Verbal mimicry is Alleyne’s weapon to enslave his clerks. Twice we hear Alleyne mimicking Farrington: when he cuts him in his explanations, “Mr Shelley says, sir . . . kindly attend to what I say and not to what Mr Shelley said, sir” (98), and the time he responds to Farrington’s answer “I know nothing about any other two letters” with a mimicry that has, in Norris’s words, a cruel literal twist: “You-know-nothing of course, you know nothing” (102). Feeling his identity on the verge of collapse as Alleyne’s contempt heaps upon him, when Farrington finds himself subject to the attack of the “unfair” rhetorical question (“Do you take me for a fool?”), designed to force him into self-abasement rather
than the assertion of the truth, he mimics Alleyne’s own strategy and literalizing his words he throws them back in his face: “I don’t think, sir, that that’s a fair question to put to me.” (102)

In Norris’s words, “Farrington does the only thing he can do: he converts it into a verbal boomerang whose wit lies in the comment’s direction rather than in any overt words” (131).

Caught in a tight-shut cage with its punitive discourse and public context, Farrington’s brave momentary counteraction to the imposed self-abasement leads into a more severe, degrading consequence that Joyce spares us the detailed account. After an eclipse in the narration, it is hinted that of the two alternatives—“you’ll apologise to me for your impertinence or you’ll quit the office instanter” (103)—he chooses the first one (“He had been obliged to offer an abject apology to Mr. Alleyne for his impertinence” [103]) which is “as inevitably forthcoming as Mr. Doran’s proposal of marriage to Polly” in “The Boarding House” (Beck 192).

Disappointed by his failure to get any money from the cashier personally as he “came out with the chief clerk” (103) and deflated by the series of indignities he undergoes, he feels so “savage and thirsty and revengeful, annoyed with himself and anyone else” (103) that he assumes it necessary to resort to the comfort of pubs where he could forget the suppression of the working hours and dispel the debilitating impact of oppressive atmosphere of the workplace. To gain the money required to go to pub, Farrington pawns his watch, the essential tool for scribes as they always need to keep track of time in their jobs. In this regard, the pawning seems to be a symbolic act of rendering himself of the shackles of schedules and time demands, after which Farrington is free enough to utter “muttering to himself that they could all go to hell because he was going to have a good night of it” (104). In the pub, out of his desire to revenge, he really succeeds to arouse the appreciation of people by turning momentarily as some sort of hero. As Norris points out, “indeed, Farrington makes a heroic attempt to salvage something of his pride and his dignity—and, not insignificantly, his manhood by appropriating the story of this smart retort to Alleyne and transforming it into a repeatable and circulating pub anecdote that will feature him as a kind of workplace hero” (132).

Although Farrington could have returned home with some money still in his pocket and with some sort of satisfaction out of restoration of his pride that the story of his retort has secured him in the pub, Joyce protracts the scene of pub-going to two more pubs not only to keep his story as realistically close as possible to pub customs in which, as Norris explains, “drinking is interrupted or terminated only when funds dry up or bar closes,” but to show the metamorphosis man undergoes when deprived of his instincts that are in Nietzsche’s view integral to human nature. Farrington’s temporary success in self-assertion in the next two pubs evaporates and he is worn away into frustration that revives the desire for revenge in him. The second phase of pub-crawling is, moreover, intended by Joyce to indicate that repression is not exclusive to the workplace; it “disrupts an easy dichotomy between an oppressive working life and a liberating social life,” as Norris states, to show that society is capable of inflicting frustration on its inhabitants in more covert ways (135).

In the second pub, the Scotch House, the allure of Farrington gradually shatters as Weathers, a young fellow of a higher social and cultural class “performing at the Tivoli as an acrobat and knockabout artiste” (105), is introduced to the party; hence, the balance shifts to Farrington’s disadvantage. Not only is he forced to stand the expansive round he has not intended but he is also no longer the center of attention as the talk diverse to theatre. It is here that for the first time Farrington is depicted as a married man unsatisfied with his marital life and more clearly with his friends chafing him for that.

It is in the third pub, Mulligan’s, that Farrington’s unsatisfactory connubial relationship comes into the foreground. Farrington is seen enchanted intensely by a fair young lady who in company of a young man and woman sits at a table close by:
“Farrington’s eye wandered at every moment in the direction of one of the young women.”

The woman is sexually attractive to him:

There was something striking in her appearance… Farrington gazed admiringly at the plump arm which she moved very often and with much grace; and when, after a little time, she answered his gaze he admired still more her large dark brown eyes. The oblique staring expression in them fascinated him. (106)

His easy fascination with this young woman despite his married state hints to the coldness of his marital life, to the fact that, despite all his difference form Little Chandler, like him he is sexually deprived. This incident, however, proves to be actually another evidence of the frustrations that Farrington undergoes incessantly. Disappointed as the lady did not turn back and look at him when leaving the pub, he gets disillusioned with his “self” and huge bodily features he assumed attractive and impressive; this turns his mind into such a chaotic state that he loses the arm-wrestling match. It is a surprise to see Farrington beaten up “by such a stripling” (107) since the narrator’s report of the violence he imagined to vent throughout the day—”He longed to execrate aloud, to bring his fist down on something violently,” and “He felt strong enough to clear out the whole office single-handed” (101)—never evokes any other expectation in the reader but an easy win on his part. Although unexpected, this defeat encapsulates much import than it seems; Farrington’s loss of his title as a strong man to a stripling whose symbolic name (Weathers) intensifies more his fragility against him, is a symptom of the psychological turmoil he is thrown in. The failed attempts to forget at least momentarily his frustrations and humiliation to, obvious in his failure to win the attention of the “woman in the big hat” and all his previous losses—”He had done for himself in the office, pawned his watch, spent all his money, and he had not even got drunk”—end in the loss of his self-assurance; that is why he cannot command his physical power to function properly. With these final dual frustrations “his remaining assets as a man have also been despoiled” (Norris 136). The young woman’s brush-off and Weathers’s victory finish Farrington up since he feels his identity, his selfhood obliterated in their negligence of his great bulk and its seeming sexual attractiveness obliterates his sense of identity and selfhood. In this regard, “Counterparts” can be taken as a persuasive account of how Farrington with his huge, massive body is reduced under the process of repression into a helpless, weak creature full of ressentiment and revenge hoping to get others down to his resentful status.

When he finally gets home, Farrington is in extreme raging and hatred: “He was full of smouldering anger and revengefulness. He felt humiliated and discontented” (108). It is here that Joyce sheds more light on Farrington’s barren life in which love is absent and there exists a wide void between family members. Before the reader gets into the private domain of his home, Farrington’s feeling towards it is provided—”He loathed returning to his home” (108)—with no further immediate explanation. Later on, the delayed image of his domestic life acts as an explanation.

The hatred he experiences when thinking of his home foreshadows the frustrated soul that he has developed out of his cold and barren life. In this regard, the narrator’s assertion that “His wife was a little sharp-faced woman who bullied her husband when he was sober and was bullied by him when he was drunk” is of significant import. As Norris says, it leads one to accept Farrington’s alcoholism as “his defense against an intolerable shrew” (137). Consequently, not yet drunk, he fears or loathes returning home to be subject to the tirade of his angry reproachful wife hence another bout of humiliation. Though physically absent from the scene, her gnomic presence is enough to elucidate that she is Alleyne’s counterpart, “another small person with the power to harangue and humiliate him” (137).

The kind of home Farrington returns to after the terrible day he had is not soothing and warm enough to subside his dark violence and rage; being without any fire, heat, light, dinner, wife and children to welcome him, it cannot help him impair his shattered identity.
Not a supportive haven, it reminds him that he is like Mr. Duffy “an outcast to the life feast” (129), thus, exacerbates his violent mood. No longer able to stand his miserable empty life, he could not help the extreme anger and violence that bursts forth in his vicious beating of his young son who innocently has waited up to get supper for him. Of course, finding a cold, dark kitchen with no wife, fire and dinner waiting for him is no justification for beating an defenseless, innocent little child; it is, however, a possible way a man frustrated of his work and his connubial relationship can vent his “anger and anguish” out when he finds his home not soothing and comforting. Joyce himself in a comment on the story’s point to his brother, Stanislaus, alerts us to this problem, “I am no friend of tyranny, as you know, but if many husbands are brutal the atmosphere in which they live (vide counterparts) is brutal and few wives and homes can satisfy the desire for happiness” (qtd. in Norris 200:124).

When Farrington reaches home, his wife Ada has already gone to chapel. Her absence despite the fact that it may relieve him is ironically significant. It subtly suggests that the main portion of blame is on church, on Christianity whose restricting rituals and false ideology has severed people of their earthly life. What Joyce does in “Counterparts” is not questioning the nature of married life or propagating the corrupted life Farrington leads. In reverse, his aim is to show how, in the paralytic Dublin life, the relationships that should include “the wholeness of man and the wholeness of woman” (Lawrence 538), i.e., both masculinity and femininity that Nietzsche finds only in the wholeness of Greek experience, just bring together two passion-castrated persons who gradually repel each other. When he delays coming home, in an anticipation of a bullying inebriated husband, Ada leaves home not worried about the defenseless little child who may become the subject of his harshness. Much worse than she is Farrington who even does not recognize the voice of his children from each other. When “a little boy came running down the stairs” he cannot identify him:

-who is that? said the man, peering through the darkness.
-Me, pa.
-Who are you? Charlie?
-No, pa. Tom. (109)

This drab situation with no committed relationship is the direct outcome of the lack of passion in Ada and Farrington, a condition imposed on them by a false morality which, obvious in Tom’s offer to say a Hail Mary, has penetrated into the recess of their soul preventing them from any access to their true nature. Farrington is “as near a villain”, according to Jones (1955:21), “as Joyce ever created,” and is really what Casey (1980:266) refers to: a betraying father whose name (the Middle English farr [pig]) and behavior relates him to the swine species. The noteworthy point is that he is not so by nature but has been transformed into it by a repressing system which rules him from outside and inside. Brought up in Christian morality whose fundamental tenet is passivity in the face of injury, Farrington, who has a large family of five children to support, is compelled to bear the bullying and disgraceful treatment of his superiors and suppress his natural passion for freedom to the extent that the only remaining way to vent it up is in beating his child savagely.

This shocking conclusion illustrates, as Beck remarks, “how the innocent can fall victim to those who have been brutalized by environment” (187). It is a counterpart to the way Farrington is abused by his superiors. Through this parallelism Joyce strongly suggests self-effacement as the inevitable effect of abuse. Being bullied, both Farrington and his son are reduced to the ones with no subjectivity. Under a penal, oppressive system, Farrington is often referred to in the text as “the man,” moreover, as Benstock maintains, “in losing his wrestling match with Weathers he is unmanned, becoming a Noman” (1988:537). Beaten by his father, similarly the boy’s identity is obliterated; according to Beck (1969:197), “the father did not recognize this son’s voice, much less this child’s implied claim as an
individual”—"I'll say a Hail Mary for you" (110) (the bold mine). The narrative voice magnifies more the boy’s lack of identity when he is referred to with a common name “the little boy” instead of his proper name Tom. In addition to their similar lack of identity, the final submission of the boy to Farrington when he sees “no way of escape” from his father’s maltreatment brings to mind Farrington’s very inevitable apology to his boss as he finds himself caught under the net of a system of suppressions, moral passivity and economic necessity.

According to the foregoing and Beck’s comment that the story “is not more psychological than sociological” (186), it is not unfair to take “Counterparts” as a vivid reflection of Dublin life. It actually represents those “bat-like souls” that constitute Dublin’s population: “the people who had their individuality, propounds Childs, taken away from them, subsumed in a religion which removed responsibility from individuals” (202). Displaying a working day of a scribe, Joyce encapsulates much of the import of the story in the final upsetting scene in Farrington’s home when the little boy crying in fright implores Farrington, “I’ll say a Hail Mary for you, pa, if you don’t beat me” (110). Despite its economy and simplicity, the scene is, indeed, “an epiphany of Ireland’s inner corruption” but not in the sense Litz has in mind (1966:51). This pathetic scene demonstrates the unfortunate consequence of the belief in Christian morality. It reveals that the virtues of passivity and life-denial in such morality never let people divert or distrust the animal state and servitude in order to realize their true nature; on the contrary, it constantly encourages them to descend willingly into them.

Owing to the conventions of his society, its morality, and the anti-creative nature of his work, the Dionysian principle which is fundamental in Nietzsche’s perspective for the realization of life and the function of the Overman is suppressed in Farrington. Consequently, the balance between Farrington’s Apollonian and Dionysian principles which “is essential in order to have some meaning in life” (“Nietzsche’s idea of an Overman,” parag.6) gets upset. In effect, instead of upholding the Dionysian principle whose importance “in living a life with values and meanings” is underlined in Nietzsche’s later works (“Nietzsche’s idea of an Overman,” parag.6), Farrington succumbs to “resentment” hence becomes a sheer formidable force, or, as Beck acknowledges, “an eruption and extension of chaos” (198).

With its local setting and its zoom on the shabby, cold life of the obscure, half-submerged Dubliners, “Counterparts” shares what interweaves Dubliners stories: the image of the decadent modern life of the Westerners; with its animal imagery in terms of Farrington’s characterization and the generic figures—"The man," and “the little boy”—the narrative evokes in mind an allegorical fable of wide relevance whose moral lesson does not advocate Christianity; in line with Nietzsche’s opinion that Christianity “was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life’s nausea and disgust with life” (The Birth of Tragedy, part 5), the narrative covertly regrets man’s estrangement with life in general and his nature in particular due to his submission to social conventions hence promulgating a different morality which glorifies life. Farrington, “though strong in particulars,” comments Beck, “is a simple but unhappily common type, and more than locally representative” (198).

He is, indeed, a symbol of the modern man who controlled by the repression of his bourgeois society is robbed of its vitality, dynamicity and autonomy and is kept in a state of passivity and stagnation in which he abuses his own potentiality and creative energy against himself in an act of self-destruction that according to Nietzsche in Genealogy of morals is the natural outcome of “resentment” and “bad conscience” (qtd. in Puri, et al.).

Beside illuminating the falsity of the authorities and disparaging their dominance, Joyce satirizes Farrington’s submission and alerts his reader that people like Farrington are to blame for the oppressive situation they live in since they have yielded to a debilitating, paralyzed ideology. That is why despite the sympathy that he arouses in us, the narrative deck
is most of the time stacked against Farrington. In this regard, more than being an individual, Farrington is an epitome of Nietzsche’s “the man of today” who with a great potential for freedom is ignorant of the basic cause of his paralysis.

In the light of the foregoing, “Counterparts” is less an account of the fall of a strong, great man than a mirror which reflects the entrapment in conventions. Farrington’s honor has been trampled much before the events of the story that include further examples of the indignities that has suffocated his self-respect and stirred him to be ashamed of himself as an inferior. On one level, the narrative exposes Farrington as the victim of his own sloth and impertinence; on the other level, it insinuates that his working life is already a hell to him. In describing Farrington, Joyce uses negative adjectives such as dark, heavy and dirty to show literally that he has already been worn out by disappointment and anger to the extent that he is no longer capable of protecting his self-respect properly; in a self-judgment he blames himself for his momentary rebellion in defense of his human nature: “He had done for himself in the office” (108). This implies Farrington’s internalization of the office’s oppressive practices and abusive treatments, and his subservience to its ideology.

Another “man of today,” content with his imposed fate and obedient to unfair controls, Farrington is trapped into passivity. Rewording Nietzsche, Lucas gives voice to this negative state of modern life saying:

*Caught in the tangles of this oppressive modern life, Farrington turns into an irredeemable shameless savage, someone who acts out his socially suppressed fantasies “in spaces where privacy, control and impunity give him sway” (Norris 126). After a great deal of humiliation and frustration, he gets so envious of his superiors’ status that when home he imitates their abusive abrasive practice and translates his physical size, strength and aggressive temper, that cannot be converted into social power as his bad fare in the pubs and office shows, into authority and literal power. Our sympathy with Farrington and our shock with the scene of beating his son open our eyes to the decadent modern condition through the virtuosity Joyce develops while being “aware of the dangers of a provocative workplace and the genealogical nature of abusive behavior” (127); this deep insight makes him prodigiously a “modern” writer, the artist with the Nietzschean concerns about man’s paralysis in his quest for freedom.*

**Works Cited**


Jones, William Powell. *James Joyce and the Common Reader*. Norman: University of