

# An essay about a painful case english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



A conventional, conservative bank cashier, Mr. Duffy lives a life of cautiousness and order. He keeps a neat home, consumes food at the same restaurants, and uses the same route every day. Every now and again, Mr. Duffy allows himself an evening out at the opera or a show, and on one of these evenings he engages in a discussion with another spectator, Mrs. Sinico, an attractive lady who sits beside her young daughter. Successive encounters follow at other shows, and on the third event Mr. Duffy sets up a time and day to meet intentionally with her. Because Mrs. Sinico's husband, a captain of a ship, is constantly away from home, Mr. Duffy feels somewhat awkward with the secret nature of the affiliation. However, they carry on meeting, always at her home. Their talks revolve around their similar intellectual interests, including books, political theories, and music, and with each meeting they draw more closely together. Such sharing slowly softens Mr. Duffy's tough nature. However, during one of their meetings; Mrs. Sinico takes Mr. Duffy's hand and places it on her cheek, which deeply bothers Mr. Duffy. He feels Mrs. Sinico has misinterpreted his acts of friendship as sexual advances. In response, he ends the relationship, first by stopping his visits and then by arranging a final meeting at a cake shop in Dublin, purposely not at Mrs. Sinico's home. They agree to put an end the relationship, but Mrs. Sinico's emotional presence at this meeting suggests she is less willing to say goodbye than is Mr. Duffy. Years later, one evening, during his habitual dinner in town, Mr. Duffy reads a newspaper article that shocks him enough to stop eating and rush home. Once at home, he reads the article, entitled "A Painful Case," once more, the article tells of the passing away of Mrs. Sinico, who was struck by a train at a station in Dublin the previous evening.

Witness accounts and a report from the coroner conclude that the death was the cause of shock and not from the injuries from the train itself. The article also explains that Mrs. Sinico was a drinker and had become ever more isolated from her husband over the past two years. The article ends with the declaration that no one is to blame for her death. Joyce cautiously positions his character in situations built around turmoil and divisive interpellation. In "A Painful Case" Mr. Duffy's fascination with his obvious life costs him a golden chance at love. Eveline, in the tale that shares her name, gives up her chance at love by choosing her well-known life over an indefinite journey even though her familiar routines are tinged with sadness and abuse. The circularity of these Dubliners' lives effectively encages them, preventing them from being open to new experiences and joy. Encounters between the newly dead and the living, such as in "A Painful Case," openly explore what kind of aftershocks a death can have for those that are still living. Mr. Duffy, for example, re-evaluates his life after learning about Mrs. Sinico's death in "A Painful Case." Nearly all of the characters in Dubliners eat or drink, and in most cases food serves as a reminder of both the frightening tediousness of routine and the joys and complications of togetherness. Mr. Duffy's private, duplicated meals are finally interrupted by the shocking newspaper article that reports Mrs. Sinico's passing away. This disruption makes him recognize that his behaviour cuts him off from society and the love and pleasure of "life's feast." Like other stories in Dubliners, a person has a longing to do something, he in some way overcomes obstacles in order to achieve this desire and then they eventually surrender. These moments of paralysis show the individuals incapability to alter their lives. It shows how they are unable

to change the things that affect them from reaching their longings. Such stasis fixes the Dubliners in sequences of continuous recurrences. These moments suggest the idea of death in life as they demonstrate, via the characters, a state of inactivity and emotionlessness. With regards to epiphanies, they do not create new experiences and the likelihood of improvement. These epiphanies rather enable the individuals to better comprehend their particular situations typically full of sorrow and monotony. This occurs frequently with much frustration. Sometimes these epiphanies occur only on a storyline level in order to tell the reader that they have overlooked an instant of self-reflection. "A Painful Case" ends with epiphanies that the individuals fully acknowledge yet these epiphanies are tinted with irritation, grief and remorse. For Joyce, an epiphany means a sudden eye-opener. Joyce conveyed this throughout Dubliners. . The fundamental meaning of Joyce's work is stipulated not so much by the storyline but by the sudden revelation. The person in the narrative is shown the truth about him/herself and the position they are in." By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments." In A Painful Case the epiphany is attained by means of a direct conflict of eye and ear. Mr Duffy has trouble in dealing with the non-visual world because he has taught himself only to see. His relationship with Mrs. Sinico is dangerous and delicate because they fit into two diverse hemispheres: "He lent her books, provided her with ideas... She listened to

all" (108). There is no actual exchange between the two. While she is ready to listen, he is able to listen only to himself in an egotistic way: " Sometimes he caught himself listening to the sound of his own voice" (109). Joyce uses Duffy to highlight that he has utterly no worth in terms of connecting with other humans. As one person notes: " It is a squalid epiphany, so that " a painful case" might refer to Duffy himself rather than Mrs. Sinico's death." (Valente: 1997) Joyce depicts a highly cultured, highly intellectual man who rejects his chance at love when the woman, with whom he is sharing a relationship with, reaches out and touches him on the cheek. Even the expressive lives of Dublin's wealthy are paralyzed - absent in the essential energy necessary to support themselves at any meaningful level. The report of Mrs. Sinico's passing is the catalyst for Mr. Duffy's revelation. The situations surrounding her passing seem to propose that suicide was an option, although Mrs. Sinico may only have been drunk. The report showed that she was taken entirely by surprise and died of trauma, although one could reason that a moving tram comes as a shock even when one has walked in front of it deliberately. The narrative's peak, as with many other narratives in *Dubliners*, is the protagonist's epiphany. Once her presence departs, he grasps that he is all alone, that he has been alone all along, and that he will always be by himself. Reading in the tabloid, about the death of Mrs. Sinico, would have been insignificant had it not been accompanied by the intrusion of stillness and barrenness. In this stillness he finds the coordinates of his chosen solitude and the key to grasping his past decisions and his current guilt: He waited for some minutes listening. He could hear nothing: the night was perfectly silent. He listened again: perfectly silent. He

felt that he was alone. (115) Mr Duffy felt lonely and began to think about all the things he should and could have done. James Duffy's epiphany in A Painful Case is rather alike to that of Little Chandler in A Little Cloud in that it is marked by remorse of what could have been. The focus of A Painful Case is Mrs. Sinico's death; the emphasis of the connection should be on death rather than simply the loss of faith in the idea and the various reasons for this. However, while this connection made in the adulterous affair makes sense, this isn't the full body of Mr. Duffy's epiphany. His ultimate realization is that " he [feels] like he [is] alone" (Joyce 92), in other words, the death of a small trace of hope for approval of his writing in Dublin. Mr Duffy finds someone who shared his opinions of poetry and art, then loses her. The news of Mrs. Sinico's death at first angers but later saddens Mr. Duffy. Perhaps suspecting suicide or weakness in character, he feels disgusted by her death and by his connection to her life. Disturbed, he leaves his home to visit a local pub, where he drinks and remembers his relationship with her. His anger begins to subside, and by the time he leaves to walk home, he feels deep remorse, mainly for ending the relationship and losing the potential for companionship it offered. Upon seeing a pair of lovers in the park by his home, Mr. Duffy realizes that he gave up the only love he'd experienced in life. He feels utterly alone." A painful Case" places the epiphany back into the realization of the characters way of life, such as was the case for " A Little Cloud." Mr Duffy, and a family, is replaced with a friendship, something that can be abandoned more quickly than the ties of a family. After pursuing an intellectual friendship with Mrs Emily Sinico, Duffy breaks it off abruptly when she makes a physical advance. Duffy returns to his odd, previous way

of life which led him down the same streets and into the same restaurants that have become his habit. To the reader, Duffy's decision to break off the relationship may seem justifiable; he protected both his own emotions and protected her marital fidelity. Duffy came to the conclusion that "love between man and man is impossible because there must not be sexual intercourse and friendship between man and woman is impossible because there must be sexual intercourse" (123). The epiphany for Duffy, while it provides him closure in the matter, is unsatisfying for the reader as it lacks decisive finality. It does not force Duffy to re-examine his way of life; rather, it justifies his commitment to it. The final epiphany occurs after Duffy reads that Mrs Sinico has been "knocked down by the engine of the ten o'clock slow train from Kingstown, thereby sustaining injuries of the head and right side which left to her death" (125). Though he uses her death as further justification for his breaking off the relationship, it does force him eventually to reevaluate his life of solitude. The end of the story ironically depicts the first time in his adult life that he has felt loneliness. Such a realization of self-imposed isolation is far more satisfying to the reader as an epiphany. While no decision is made, the character comes to realization-through the death of his former friend-of his situation that the reader has known all along.