



Bridging literary cultures: Exploring cultural differences through P4C Analysis of *Dubliners* in English and Georgian

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ABSTRACT

This study employs Philosophy for Children (P4C) methodology to investigate how cultural differences between Irish and Georgian societies manifest through readers' philosophical engagement with James Joyce's *Dubliners*. The research examines how Georgian university students from different academic backgrounds—English Philology and Georgian Philology—interpret and respond to the text in its original language and Georgian translation, respectively. Through structured P4C sessions, students generate philosophical questions, engage in collaborative dialogue, and develop reasoned arguments based on their textual interpretation. The findings reveal significant variations in how students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds engage with themes such as paralysis, epiphany, and moral ambiguity in Joyce's work. English Philology students, reading in the original language, demonstrate greater attention to Joyce's subtle linguistic nuances and Irish cultural specificities. Conversely, Georgian Philology students, working with the translation, show stronger engagement with universal themes that resonate with Georgian cultural experiences and social structures. This research contributes to the fields of comparative literature, translation studies, philosophical pedagogy, and linguistics by providing insights into how cultural background influences literary interpretation, philosophical inquiry, and language use. The study also demonstrates the potential of P4C as a methodological framework for investigating cultural differences through literary analysis.



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Worldwide, P4C stands for “Philosophy for Children,” though it can also be interpreted as “Philosophy for Colleges” and “Philosophy for Communities.” The primary aim of P4C is to promote the virtue of reasonableness within both educational settings and society at large. The method, developed by Professor Matthew Lipman, was designed to encourage “young people (citizens) to be more reasonable—that is, ready to reason and be reasoned with” (SAPERE Level 1 Handbook, 2007: 2). Central to the method is the emphasis on the significance of questioning and enquiry in cultivating reasoning skills.

The P4C approach is highly adaptable. The selection of material is equally flexible, allowing for a wide range of stimuli—including a paragraph, story, poem, photograph, drawing, song, or quotation—to be used effectively.

This study employs the Philosophy for Children (P4C) methodology to explore how cultural differences between Irish and Georgian societies are reflected in students’ philosophical engagement with James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, specifically the story “Eveline.” The research compares how Georgian university students from two academic disciplines—English Philology and Georgian Philology—interpret and respond to the text in its original English and its Georgian translation, respectively. By analyzing the nature of student-generated questions, patterns of discussion, and philosophical insights, the study seeks to uncover how literary interpretation intersects with cultural perspective (Cupchik et al., 1998).

According to the SAPERE Level 1 Handbook, the structure of a Community of Enquiry includes the following components:

- **Preparation:** The group should sit in a circle, in a room arranged to allow all members of the community to maintain eye contact and hear each other clearly.
- **Presentation (Stimulus):** A stimulus introduces a shared topic for discussion. It can take many forms—a story, image, artwork, poem, piece of music, or video clip—intended to provoke thought or questioning.
- **Thinking Time (Private Reflection):** Participants are given time to reflect privately on the stimulus, exploring their emotional and intellectual reactions to it.
- **Formulation (Generating Questions):** Participants generate questions, issues, or ideas based on the stimulus. These questions should be clearly visible to the group and attributed to their authors.
- **Airing of the Questions:** Questions are discussed or categorized before selection, allowing for the identification of key issues or links between them.
- **Selection (Voting for the Question):** The group votes on the question to guide the enquiry. This process ensures democratic participation and fair consideration of all

contributions. Various voting methods may be employed (SAPERE: 22–23).

Suggested voting methods include:

- **Omnivote:** Participants may vote for any or all questions.
- **Multivote:** Participants are allotted multiple votes (e.g., three or four) which they may assign to one or several questions.
- **3/2/1 Vote:** A ranked system where participants assign three votes to their top question, two to their second choice, and one to their third.
- **OPOV (One Person, One Vote):** A simple method where each participant selects a single question.
- **First Words:** The author of the selected question begins the discussion by sharing their reasoning and initial thoughts.
- **Building:** Other participants respond, with an emphasis on respectful listening and collaborative exploration of ideas.
- **Final Words:** At the end of the discussion, participants reflect on what was said, what they heard, and their own evolving perspectives (ibid.: 23–24).

This research involved parallel reading groups: English Philology students read the original English version of “Eveline,” while Georgian Philology students read the Georgian translation. Through structured P4C sessions, students generated questions, engaged in collaborative dialogues, and constructed reasoned arguments based on their interpretations. A wide variety of questions were encouraged:

- **Closed Questions** which have a clear and non-negotiable answer.
- **Factual Questions** where the answers are contained in the stimulus itself, or they could be ones that the students could research or ask someone to explain, e.g. with questions about scientific or historical facts.
- **Open-ended Questions** are those for which various points of view or opinion can be presented and discussed. These questions are useful for working with in the enquiry and have the potential to lead on to philosophical discussion.
- **Philosophical Questions** are those which explicitly raise awareness of a profound concept about which there is potential for enquiry.

However, categorizing questions can be challenging due to overlap among types.

The comparative analysis investigates how cultural backgrounds influence the types of questions posed, the philosophical themes explored, and the interpretative strategies employed. This inquiry serves multiple objectives: it examines the role of culture in literary interpretation, evaluates the utility of P4C in cross-cultural analysis, and explores how translation mediates cultural understanding (Kwan et al., 2012).

Differences in question formulation and discussion patterns reveal distinct cultural paradigms, values, and philosophical tendencies in Irish and Georgian contexts.

Session One included Georgian students of English Philology reading the original text, while Session Two involved Georgian Philology students reading the translated version. (A table of questions and discussion themes from each group is provided at the article's end.)

Both groups centered their discussions on two primary themes: **religion** and the desire to **escape the suffocating environment of a small town**. English Philology students focused on the symbolism of the absent priest, interpreting his departure as a sign of hopelessness in Dublin. They also noted the **"yellowing" photograph**, associating the color with **decay and dust**. Georgian Philology students, in contrast, highlighted the **ritualistic retention of photographs** of relatives whose identities are often unclear. This was likened to a Georgian noble tradition of superficial respect aimed at impressing those even less informed—a critique of performative social norms.

English Philology students emphasized literary features, identifying the **subtle epiphany** in the narrative and paying close attention to Joyce's linguistic nuances. One example was the **comparison of Eveline to a helpless animal**, conveying her frustration and hopelessness.

Family obligations and promises emerged as a central topic. Eveline's decision to stay in Dublin was viewed as a result of a promise to her mother, which functioned as a moral constraint. Although "home" typically connotes warmth and love, for Eveline it symbolized mere survival. Her mother's final moments amplified her fear of inherited madness. Though she had little to lose, the **"burden" of the promise** anchored her. Eveline appears trapped—a sacrificial figure bound by duty, unable to break free from a dysfunctional environment.

Georgian Philology students, however, assessed Eveline more critically, focusing on **personal responsibility**. From their perspective, Eveline's **indecisiveness** and **inability to act** were greater barriers than filial obligation. The promise is viewed not as noble but as **a paralyzing burden**. Their interpretation was framed through a Georgian proverb: "Familiar hardship is preferred to unfamiliar pleasure." They saw Eveline's passivity as incompatible with Frank's adventurous nature, making their union implausible.

Frank, as a symbol, elicited divergent views. For English Philology students, he represented **freedom and possibility**—someone who had escaped Dublin and found success. They explored whether Eveline even **wanted** to be rescued from her

darkness. One question raised was: **"What would Frank's perspective be?"** Students speculated that Frank, although disappointed, would empathize with Eveline's difficulty.

Conversely, Georgian Philology students regarded Frank as **impulsive and unreliable**. His disapproval by Eveline's father was seen as potentially justified. They questioned the authenticity of love in Eveline's decision. Despite defying her father to meet Frank, her thoughts were not focused on **love or emotional connection**, but rather on **escape and societal validation**.

The discussion of **family ties** naturally led to the **father figure**, whose descent from a loving parent to an abusive one was attributed to **loss, hardship, and the oppressive Dublin atmosphere**. The mother emerged as a symbol of lost joy and hope. Students saw this not as a personal tragedy, but as reflective of **a generational pattern**—parents numbing their despair through alcohol, while the youth yearned for escape.

Paralysis and stagnation were unanimously identified as the story's central motifs. Even when presented with an opportunity, Dubliners, like Eveline, are **incapable of change**. This led Georgian Philology students to reflect on **nostalgia and idealization of the past**, a sentiment common in Georgian culture as well. They drew parallels to Georgian expressions such as "those times were better," revealing a shared cultural tendency toward idealizing the past despite its hardships.

Another point of cultural convergence was the **power of public opinion** in small societies. Eveline fears societal judgment if she elopes, a fear that resonates deeply with Georgian cultural values. The tendency to measure one's life through others' approval, the fear of deviating from social norms, and avoidance of decision-making are shared between the two cultures.

The question **"Why is it a man from Belfast who takes away Eveline's childhood playground?"** prompted dual interpretations. Some saw it as a literal symbol of modernization; others viewed it as metaphorical—a coming-of-age moment marked by confrontation with change.

Finally, students discussed their own connections to Eveline's experience. As residents of small Georgian towns, many expressed a desire to seek better opportunities abroad. However, Georgian traditions—emphasizing family, home, and generational responsibility—anchor them. Most students indicated a reluctance to permanently leave, aspiring instead to build a better future at home (Lewis & Ferretti, 2011).

Compared to English Philology students, who are more familiar with Irish history and culture, Georgian Philology students analyzed the story predominantly through a Georgian cultural lens.

The findings highlight significant differences in how students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds engage with themes like paralysis, epiphany, and moral ambiguity in Joyce's work. English Philology students showed greater sensitivity to Joyce's stylistic subtleties and Irish-specific cultural contexts, while Georgian Philology students related more strongly to universal themes that resonated with Georgian sociocultural frameworks.

Session No. 1	Session No. 2
4 th year English Philology Students	4 th year Georgian Philology Students
Book – <i>Eveline</i> (in the original)	Book – <i>Eveline</i> (Georgian translation)
Questions:	Questions:
When does Eveline have a moment of epiphany?	Was Eveline unable to break the promise she had given her mother or was she afraid of novelty?
Who is the priest in the yellow photograph and what does his departing mean?	What is Eveline's psychological portrait?
Does Frank have symbolic meaning?	Is Frank the man Eveline is familiar with?
What would Frank's perspective be about the same situation?	What conditioned the father's severe character?
What happened to Eveline's father? Why did he change from loving father to abusive one?	What is life like in Dublin?
What happened to Eveline after she refused to go with Frank?	
Why does Eveline's father hate Catholics?	
Was Frank not good enough for Eveline to leave everything behind?	
What is Eveline's attitude towards religion?	
What is the main motif of the story?	
What was the reason that kept Eveline in Dublin?	
Why is specifically a man from Belfast responsible for taking away the most cherished memories of her childhood playground?	
Chosen Question	Chosen Question
Who is the priest in the yellow photograph and what does his departing mean?	Was Eveline unable to break the promise she had given her mother or was she afraid of novelty?
Themes	Themes
The role of religion	Attachment to the past, idealization of the past
Strong bonds with family	Unhealthy family relationships
Mother as a symbol of hope and happiness	The influence of public opinion, what others will say
The importance of keeping promises	Lack of love
Tradition vs. innovation	Materialization of emotions
Frank as a symbol of freedom	Influence of everyday reality
The detrimental effect of Dublin on its citizens	Personal responsibility
Escaping as the means of finding freedom	

This research contributes to comparative literature, translation studies, philosophical pedagogy, and linguistics by illustrating how cultural backgrounds shape literary interpretation,

philosophical enquiry, and language use. It offers practical implications for cross-cultural literary education, the design of culturally responsive pedagogies, and a deeper understanding of how translation and cultural context mediate textual meaning. Moreover, it demonstrates the potential of P4C as a powerful methodological tool for cross-cultural literary analysis.

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