

Passage Analysis – Part 1

Read the sections of text as outlined below and then write a brief discussion in which you answer the following questions:

- What was Colm Toibin suggesting and what conclusion might he have expected the reader to draw?
- What (if any) social, historical and/or cultural values are suggested?
- What different interpretations are possible?

Each discussion should take you no more than 15 minutes.

1. Read pp 4 (line 8) *Later, as her mother washed the dishes...– 6 (line 5)... closing her mouth tightly between each phrase.*
2. P15 *'I went into that shop once,' Rose said, 'on my way home from mass and she served Mary Delahunt before me. I turned and walked out.'*
3. P15 *Eilis found as the meal went on that she could do an imitation of Miss Kelly's voice that made her sister and mother laugh. She wondered if she was the only one who remembered that Jack, the youngest of her brothers, used to do imitations of the Sunday sermon, the radio sports commentators, the teachers at school and many characters in the town, and they all used to laugh. She did not know if the other two also realized that this was the first time they had laughed at this table since Jack had followed the others to Birmingham. She would have loved to say something about him, but she knew that it would make her mother too sad. Even when a letter came from him it was passed around in silence.*
4. P17 *'We'll get a name for being wallflowers,' Nancy said.
'You could be called worse,' Eilis said.
'Oh, you could. You could be called the Courtnacuddy Bus,' Nancy replied.*
5. P20 *...it must be sad for his parents having a pup for a son because he's an only child.*
6. Pp22 (line 9)... *Father Flood was tall... – 24 (line 12) ... to find Eilis a suitable position there.*
7. Pp 26 (line 31) ... *She found Miss Kelly– 27 (line 25)... 'And thank you too,'*
8. P28 *Now, she felt she was being singled out for something for which she was not in any way prepared, and this, despite the fear it carried with it, gave her a feeling, or more a set of feelings, she thought she might experience in the days before her wedding, days in which everyone looked at her in the rush of arrangements with light in their eyes, days in which she herself was fizzy with excitement but careful not to think too precisely about what the next few weeks would be like in case she lost her nerve.*

9. Pp28-29 ... *'Oh, it will kill me when she goes,' her mother said. Her face wore a dark strained look that Eilis had not seen since the months after their father died. Then, in the moments that followed, the neighbour appearing to have been taken aback by her mother's tone, her mother's expression became almost darker and she had to stand up and walk quietly out of the room. It was clear to Eilis that she was going to cry. Eilis was so surprised that, instead of following her mother into the hallway or the dining room, she made small talk with their neighbour, hoping her mother would soon return and they could resume what had seemed like an ordinary conversation.*
10. Pp 29 (line 6) ... *Even when she woke in the night...– 30 (line 6)... she talked about practical things and remained bright.*
11. P30... *Rose was thirty now, and since it was obvious that their mother could never be left to live alone, not merely because her pension was small but because she would be too lonely without any of them, Eilis's going, which Rose had organized so precisely, would mean that Rose would not be able to marry. She would have to stay with her mother, living as she was now, working in Davis's office, playing golf at the weekends and on summer evenings. Rose, she realized, in making it easy for her to go, was giving up any real prospect of leaving this house herself and having her own family. ...It occurred to her also, as she tried on some earrings, that Rose knew all this too, knew that either she or Eilis would have to leave, and had decided to let Eilis go.... Eilis wanted to suggest that that they change places.*
12. P30-31 ...*Eilis would have given anything to be able to say plainly that she did not want to go, that Rose could go instead, that she would happily stay here and take care of her mother and they would manage somehow...*
13. P31...*She wondered if her mother too believed that the wrong sister was leaving, and understood what Rose's motives were. She imagined that her mother knew everything. They knew so much, each one of them, she thought, that they could do everything except say out loud what it was they were thinking.*
14. P32...*Rose had dressed up beautifully for the day, and Eilis had tried to look as well as she could. Rose, merely by smiling at the hotel porter, seemed to be able to make him stand in O'Connell Street to get a taxi for them, insisting that they wait in the lobby. No one who did not have a ticket was allowed beyond a certain point; Rose, however, made an exception of herself with the assistance of the ticket collector, who fetched a colleague to help the ladies with their suitcases. He told Rose she could stay on the boat until half an hour before it was due to sail, when he would locate her, accompany her back and then find someone to keep an eye on her sister for the crossing to Liverpool. Even the people with first-class tickets would not get this treatment, Eilis remarked to Rose, who smiled knowingly and agreed.*
15. P32 ... *In the early morning when the boat arrived in Liverpool she was helped with her luggage by a porter who was Irish. When she told him she was not sailing to America until later that day, he advised her to take her cases immediately down to a shed where a friend of his worked, close*

to where the transatlantic liners docked; if she gave the ma at the office his name, then she would be free of them for the day. She found herself thanking him in a tone that Rose might have used, a tone warm and private but also slightly distant though not shy either, a tone used by a woman in full possession of herself. It was something she could not have done in the town or in a place where any of her family or friends might have seen her.

16. P33... *'Rose sent me a list of instructions, and they included one that said no kissing and hugging.'*

17. P33... *'This is going to take you to America,' Jack said. 'It's like time and patience.'*
'What about time and patience?'
'Time and patience would bring a snail to America. Did you never hear that?'
'Don't be so stupid,' she said and nudged him and smiled.
'Daddy always said that,' he said.
'When I was out of the room,' she replied.
'Time and patience would bring a snail to America,' he repeated.

18. Pp 41(line 1) ... *In the cabin, when she went to brush her teeth... – 45(line 8) ... She fell into a light, sleepless sleep.*

19. P46... *'Did you not hear them saying it when we were coming on board? It's the worst storm in years. It's always bad down here, but this one is terrible.'*

Passage Analysis – Part 2

20. P50 (line 7) ... *Georgina made Eilis sit on the bottom bunk... – end of the chapter. ... if she were dressed up like this every day in Brooklyn.*
21. P53... *Mrs Kehoe, who owned the house, was from Wexford town and loved to talk to her about home, about Sunday trips to Curracloe and Rosslare Strand, or hurling matches, or the shops along the Main Street in Wexford town, or characters she remembered.*
22. Pp 54-55... *Before dinner each evening they stood up solemnly and joined their hands and Mrs Kehoe led them in saying grace. As they sat at table, she did not like the girls talking among themselves, or discussing matters she knew nothing about, and she did not encourage any mention of boyfriends. She was mainly interested in clothes and shoes, and where they could be bought and at what price and at what time of the year. Changing fashions and new trends were her daily topic, although she herself, as she often pointed out, was too old for some of the new colours and styles. Yet, Eilis saw, she dressed impeccably and noticed every item each of her lodgers was wearing. She also loved discussing skin care and different types of skin and problems. Mrs Kehoe had her hair done once a week, on a Saturday, using the same hairdresser each time, spending several hours with her so that her hair would be perfect for the rest of the week.*
23. P61... *Eilis did not tell Miss Fortini that she never made mistakes when she did addition. Instead, she worked slowly, as she had been advised, making sure that the figures were correct.*
24. Pp66 (line 6) ... *The letters told Eilis little... – 67 (line 22)... It was as though she had been locked away.*
25. P68... *But her dream had no screaming women, just a group of silent children, Eilis among them, standing in a line, knowing that they would soon be led away on the orders of the judge. What was strange for her now as she lay awake was that she had seemed to be looking forward to being led away, she had felt no fear of it. Her fear, instead, was of seeing her mother in front of the courthouse. In her dream she found a way of avoiding her mother. She was taken out of the line, and through a side door and then on a car journey that appeared to last as long as she could stay asleep.*
26. P69...*she tried to seem busy, but she found that she could, if she did not stop herself, move easily into a sort of trance, thinking over and over of the same things, about everything she had lost....*
27. Pp70 (line 16) ... *That night was the worst she had ever spent. – 71 (line 3) ... had to realize what this would be like for her.*
28. P75 (line 17) ... *'It's a funny place, Brooklyn,' Father Flood said. – 75 (line 25)... 'And I'll drop by Ma Kehoe's later.'*

29. P76... *she would try to put those two days behind her. No matter what she dreamed about, no matter how bad she felt, she had no choice, she knew, but to put it all swiftly out of her mind. She would have to get on with her work if it was during the day and go back to sleep if it was during the night. It would be like covering a table with a tablecloth, or closing curtains on a window; and maybe the need would lessen as time went on, as Jack had hinted it would, as Father Flood had suggested. In any case it was what she would have to do.*
30. P79...*there were very few women in her class and no one Irish at all, no one even English.*
31. P83... *Eilis did not tell any of them what she was doing for Christmas; at breakfast one day the following week, however, it was clear that Mrs Kehoe had told them.*
'Oh, God,' Sheila said, 'they take in every oul' fella off the street. You'd never know what they'd have.
'I heard about it all right,' Miss Keegan said. 'They put funny hats on the down and outs and give them bottles of stout.'
'You're a saint, Eilis,' Patty said. 'A living saint.'
32. P84... *'How many are you expecting?'*
'Two hundred last year. They cross the bridges, some of them come down from Queens and in from Long Island.'
'And are they all Irish?'
'Yes, they are all leftover Irishmen, they built the tunnels and the bridges and the highways. Some of them I only see once a year. God knows what they live on.'
'Why don't they go back home?'
'Some of them are here fifty years and they've lost touch with everyone,' Father Flood said.
33. Pp 86 (line 28) ... *As Eilis, on instructions, went out to encourage the men ... – 87 (line 14)... she remembered quickly, dead for four years.*
34. P88 line 5 ... *At first the men seemed shabby... – line 26... talking to the Irish man beside him.*
35. P 89... *'No, we'll wait,' Father Flood said. 'It'll stretch the day out.'*
36. P 89 ... *... and Eilis thought, as she sat down with a glass of sherry in her hand, that it could have been a parish hall anywhere in Ireland on the night of a concert or a wedding when the young people were all elsewhere dancing or at the bar.*
37. Pp86 (line 12) – 91 (line 10) *Má bhíonn tú liom, a stoírín mo chroí* translates as: *If you are with me my sweet darling.*

Passage Analysis – Parts

38. Pp95 (line 20) *One evening, as she was about to go upstairs... - end of p100... banging the door so the whole house would hear her.*
39. P104 ... *'That's good for them,' Patty said, 'as long as I can sit out for the céilí stuff. God, it should be abolished. In this day and age!'*
40. P106... *She determined that once her exams were over in May she would spend time looking at stores and prices and trying to work out what sort of American clothes would suit her best.*
41. P108 ... *Eilis would have given anything now to have been with them, dressed like them, to be glamorous herself, too easily distracted by the jokes and smiles of those around her to watch anyone with the same breath-filled intensity as she was watching them.*
42. P111 ... *It was only the next day that Eilis spotted two middle-aged coloured women coming into the store and being approached by Miss Fortini and directed towards her and Miss Delano. She found herself staring at the two women and then, when she checked herself, looked around the store to find that everyone else was staring at them.*
43. P117... *Eilis suddenly felt brave.
'I'll tell Mr Bartocci that. He'll be very upset, Sheila. You and your friend here are famous for your style, especially for the ladders in your stockings and the fussy old cardigans you wear.'
'That's enough from the whole lot of you,' Mrs Kehoe said. 'I intend to eat the rest of my dinner in peace.'
By the time silence had descended and Patty had stopped shrieking with laughter, Shelia Heffernan had left the room, but Miss McAdam, white-faced, was staring directly at Eilis.*
44. P 117... *She could see no difference between Brooklyn and Manhattan when she went there the following Thursday....*
45. P118... *it would be something that she could not mention in a letter home as she did not want to worry them or send that news that might cause them to feel that she could not look after herself. Nor did she want to write them letters that would depress them.*
46. Pp119 (line 11) ... *'Is this your handwriting?' - 120 (line 22) ... and there was nothing she could do to make him tell her anything more.*
47. Pp121 (line 11).. *After supper, as she was settling back down ... - 122 (line 14)...She firmly closed the door in their faces.*
48. P125... *With extra clips that she carried in her bag, Patty put Eilis's hair up for her.*

'Now you look like a ballet dancer,' she said.

49. *Pp 130 (line 20)...It was freezing outside; ... - 131 (line 16) ... it would serve as an excuse not to have to accompany Dolores.*
50. *P136... she explained to him then that she had been homesick, and that Father Flood had inscribed her on the course as a way of making her busy, and how studying in the evening made her feel happy, or as happy as she had been since she had left home.
'Don't I make you feel happy?' He looked at her seriously.
'Yes you do,' she replied.
Before he could ask her anymore questions that might, she thought, lead her to say that she did not know him well enough to make any further declarations about him, she told him about her classes, about the other students, about bookkeeping and keeping accounts and about the law lecturer Mr Rosenblum.*
51. *P137... It was a warm smile, sincere, and it suggested to her that he was stable, almost mature and that, whatever was happening now, he meant business. She smiled back at him but then looked down and closed her eyes. She was frightened.*
52. *Pp 138 (line 9) ... Each Saturday he took her to a movie... - 140 (line 15) ... as long as she pledged in advance that she was a Dodgers fan.*
53. *Pp 142 (line 9)... 'You know what I really want?' 143 (line 30) ...She knew him well enough to know that.*
54. *Pp 143 (line 35)... Carefully she went back up the stairs and found that if she moved along the first landing... - 146 (line 4) ... if only around the block.*
55. *Pp 152 (line 11) ... 'In Ireland, no one looks,' said Eilis... – 155 (line 13) ... turned all the lights off in the store and they left by a side entrance.*
56. *Pp 155 (line 17) one evening when she came home from work... - 156 (line 20) In case people thought that she was mad.*
57. *P160... The thought had come into her mind of telling him who the last person to touch her bottom was. The idea of his reaction to this made her laugh so much that she did a vigorous backstroke, letting him presume, she hoped, that he was being too free under the water with his hands.*
58. *P165 (line 10) ... As she sat quietly watching the game ,... - (line 33) ... and sat back silently with him when the team seemed to be losing.*
59. *P166 (line 19) ...Because she spent Thanksgiving with Tony's family... - (line 33) ... greater than the pleasure of the meal itself.*

60. Pp166 (line 34) ... *In the days after Christmas... - 168 (line 2) ...held his hands and pulled him toward her.*
61. Pp170 (line 35) ... *She stood back and let Eilis enter. – 173 (line 3) ‘What will I say to her?’*
62. P177 (line 4) ... *Eilis looked at the pile of letters... - 178 (line 7) ... she went through each moment of Rose’s death and her removal.*
63. Pp179 – 181. *The letter from Jack.*
64. P181... *She moved around the room, wondering what she should do. It struck her for a second that she could get a subway to the harbour and find the next boat going across the Atlantic and simply pay the fare and wait and get on the boat. But she realized quickly that she could not do this, they might not have an empty place and her money was in the savings bank. She thought of going upstairs, and in her mind she went through each of her fellow lodgers but none of them could be any use to her now. The only person who could be any use to her was Tony.*
65. P184... *but as he walked her from the subway station through the dark cold empty streets to Mrs Kehoe’s, she felt that she was being held by someone wounded, that the letter had somehow, in its tone, made clear to him what had really happened and made plain to him that she belonged somewhere else, a place that he could never know. She thought that he was going to cry and she felt almost guilty that she had handed some of her grief to him, and then she felt close to him for his willingness to take it and hold it, in all its rawness, all its grief-stricken confusion. She was almost more upset now that she had been when she had ventured out in search of him.*
66. Pp189 (line 33) *When she told the priest she had had sexual intercourse... - 190 (line 23) ...and we will help you in every way we can.*
67. P194...*Before she had seen Father Flood, it had not occurred to Eilis that she might go home for a brief stay. But once it had been said and did not sound ridiculous and had met with Father Flood’s approval, then it became a plan, something that she was determined to do. At lunchtime the following day she went to the travel agent and found prices for liners crossing the Atlantic. She would wait until her exam results came out, but once she knew them she would go home for a month; it would take five or six days each way, so she would have two and a half weeks with her mother.*
68. P196 ... *‘I read the letter your brother wrote. I know how hard it would be for you to go home and then leave again. I know it would be hard for me. I know what a good person you are. I would live in fear of getting a letter from you explaining that your mother could not be left alone.*
69. P198... *In all the good cheer that followed the dessert she almost began to hope that he had told them that he and she were getting married.*

Passage Analysis – Part 4

70. P204... *Eilis wondered for a moment what might happen were she to interrupt her mother and say: 'I am married.' She thought her mother would have a way of not hearing her, or of pretending that she had not spoken. Or else, she imagined, the glass in the window might break.*
71. P204... *She had sent Tony a postcard from Cobh saying that she had arrived safely, and had written him a letter from Rosslare describing the journey. She was glad she did not have to write now from her bedroom, which seemed empty of life, which almost frightened her in how little it meant to her. She had put no thought into what it would be like to come home because she had expected that it would be easy; she had longed so much for the familiarity of these rooms that she had presumed she would be happy and relieved to step back into them, but, instead, on this first morning, all she could do was count the days before she went back.*
72. P205... *When she came back into the kitchen, having had her bath and put on fresh clothes, her mother looked her up and down in vague disapproval.*
73. P205... *'Now the whole town has been asking for you,' her mother said. 'God, even Nelly Kelly was asking for you. I saw her standing at the door of the shop and she let a big roar at me...'*
74. Pp205 (line 34) ... *They sat at the dining-room table... - 206 (line 13) and she had not been actively involved.*
75. P207... *Every letter note Eilis wrote had to be inspected by her mother, who often wanted it done again or a paragraph added at the end. And in her own letters, as in Eilis's, she wanted it emphasized that, since Eilis was home, she had plenty of company and needed no more visitors.*
76. P210.. *They walked home by Summerhill and then past the Fair Green to the Back Road because her mother said that she did not want to meet anybody else that day, but it occurred to Eilis that she did not want anyone to see Eilis who might invite her out or cause her to leave her mother's side at any point.*
77. P210 ... *It would be easy to explain to Tony that her mother had misunderstood her date of departure, even though Eilis did not believe that her mother had misunderstood anything.*
78. P211... *For the next few days as she moved around the town, and on Sunday, when she went to eleven o'clock mass wither mother, people commented on Eilis's beautiful clothes, her sophisticated hairstyle and her suntan.*
79. P215... *If this had been years ago, Eilis thought, she would have worried during the entire journey from Enniscorthy about her swimsuit and its style, about whether she was too unshapely or awkward on the beach, or what George and Jim would think of her. But now, however, that she was still suntanned from the boat and from her trips to Coney Island with Tony, she felt oddly*

confident as she walked down the strand, passing Jim Farrell paddling at the edge of the water without saying a word to him, wading out and then, as the first high wave approached, swimming into it as it broke and then out beyond it.

80. P216 (line 25) ... *'Well, the big news is.... – 217 (line 11) the day dealing with the wages at Davis's and then the weekend.*
81. P217 -18... *She wished now that she had not married him, not because she did not love him and intend to return to him, but because not telling her mother or her friends made every day she had spent in America a sort of fantasy, something she could not match with the time she was sending at home. It made her feel strangely as though she were two people, one who had battled against two cold winters and many hard days in Brooklyn and fallen in love there, and the other who was her mother's daughter, the Eilis whom everyone knew, or thought they knew.*
82. P 218... *In the morning it was hard not to imagine that she was Rose's ghost, being fed and spoken to in the same way at the same time by her mother, having her clothes admired using the same words as were used with Rose, and then setting out briskly for work. As she took the same route Eilis had to stop herself walking with Rose's elegant, but determined walk, and move more slowly.*
83. P223... *She realised, as they turned back and Jim began talking to her again, letting the other two go ahead, that she liked his bulky, easy going presence and the tone in his voice, which came so naturally from the streets of the town. He had clear blue eyes, she thought, that saw no harm in anything. And she was fully aware that these blue eyes lingered on her now with an interest that was unmistakable. She smiled at the thought that she would go along with most of it. She was on holidays and it was harmless, but she would not go into the sea with him as though she were his girlfriend. She would, she reasoned, like to be able to face Tony knowing that she had not done that.*
84. P227... *Now that she was back from America, she believed, she carried something with her, something close to glamour, which made all the difference to her as she sat with Nancy watching the men talk.*
85. Pp228 (line 18) *Outside, when the dance was over, ... 229 (line 3) ... on the part of Nancy and George.*
86. P230... *'You have changed,' Nancy said. You look different. Everything about you is different, not for those who know you, but for people in town who only know you to see you. ... You seem more grown up and serious. And in your American clothes you look different. You have an air about you.*
87. P231... *Upstairs on the bed Eilis found two letters from Tony and she realized, almost with a start, that she had not written to him as she had intended. She looked at the two envelopes, at his handwriting, and she stood in the room with the door closed wondering how strange it was that everything about him seemed remote. And not only that, but everything else that had happened in Brooklyn seemed as though it had almost dissolved and was no longer richly present for her –*

her room in Mrs Kehoe's, for example, or her exams, or the trolley-car from Brooklyn College back home, or the dancehall, or the apartment where Tony lived with his parents and his three brothers, or the shop floor at Bartocci's. She went through all of it as though she were trying to recover what had seemed so filled with detail, so solid, just a few weeks before.

88. *P232... The idea that she would leave all of this – the rooms of the house once more familiar and warm and comforting – and go back to Brooklyn and not return for a long time again frightened her now. She knew as she sat on the edge of the bed and took her shoes off and then lay back with her arms behind her head that she had spent every day putting off all thought of her departure and what she would meet on her arrival.... She tried to think of Tony now as a loving presence, but she saw instead someone she was allied with whether she liked it or not, someone who was, she thought, unlikely to allow her to forget the nature of the alliance and his need for her to return.*
89. *P234... As her mother watched the weather, Eilis knew she was hoping for rain, that it would please her more than anything for Jim Farrell to come in his car to collect her and Eilis and take them the short distance to the cathedral. It was one of those days when the neighbours, because of the wedding, would feel free to come openly to their doors to inspect Eilis and her mother in all their style and wish them a nice day out. And there would be neighbours, Eilis thought, who already were aware that she had been seeing Jim Farrell and would view him in the same way as her mother did, as a great catch, a young man in the town with his own business. Being collected by Jim Farrell, she thought, would be for her mother the highlight of everything that had happened since Eilis came home. ... When the first drops of rain hit against the glass of the window, a look of undisguised satisfaction appeared on her mother's face.*
90. *P236... She could not stop herself from wondering, however, what would happen if she were to write to Tony to say that their marriage was a mistake. How easy would it be to divorce someone? Could she possibly tell Jim what she had done such a shirt while earlier in Brooklyn? The only divorced people anyone in the town knew were Elizabeth Taylor and perhaps some other film stars. It might be possible to explain to Jim how she had come to be married, but he was someone who had never lived outside the town. His innocence and his politeness, both of which made him nice to be with, would actually be, she thought, limitations, especially if something as unheard of and out of the question, as far from his experience, as divorce were raised.*
91. *P236... She pictured Tony and Jim opposite each other, or meeting each other, each of them smiling, warm, friendly, easygoing, Jim less eager than Tony, less funny, less curious, but more self-contained and more sure of his place in the world. She saw all three of them – Tony, Jim, her mother – as figures whom she could only damage, as innocent people surrounded by light and clarity, and circling around them was herself, dark, uncertain. ... It occurred to her, as she walked down the aisle with Jim and her mother and joined the well-wishers outside the church, where the weather had brightened, that she was sure that she did not love Tony now. He seemed part of a dream from which she had woken with considerable force some time before, and in this waking time his presence, once so solid, lacked any substance or form; it was merely a shadow at the edge of every moment of the day and night.*

92. P242 (line 3) *It rained all the following weekend... (line 23) She would have to go back.*
93. Pp244 (line 7) ... *Miss Kelly opened the entrance ... - 246 (line18) ... don't forget your umbrella.*
94. P247... *On the way up Friary Hill she discovered that she had left her umbrella in the post office but did not go back to collect it.*
95. Pp247 (line 14) *Her mother was in the kitchen... - 249 (line 19) as she walked out of the room in a way that was slow and dignified and deliberate.*
96. P250... *She heard her mother coming back and walking slowly up the stairs to her room and she thought of following her, of asking her to stay with her while she packed, and talk to her. But there had been something, she thought, so steely and implacable about her mother's insistence that she wanted to say goodbye only once that Eilis knew it would be pointless now to ask for her blessing or whatever it was she wanted from her before she left this house.*
97. P251... *and placed the two photographs face down safely at the bottom of the case and then covered them over again. Some time in the future, she thought, she would look at them and remember what would soon, she knew now, seem like a strange, hazy dream to her.*
98. P252... *'She has gone back to Brooklyn,' her mother would say. And, as the train rolled past Macmine Bridge on its way towards Wexford, Eilis imagined the years ahead, when these words would come to mean less and less to the man who heard them and would come to mean more and more to herself. She almost smiled at the thought of it, then closed her eyes and tried to imagine nothing more.*