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Be not sad because all men

Prefer a lying clamour before you:

Sweetheart, be at peace again –

Can they dishonour you?

They are sadder than all tears;

Their lives ascend as a continual sigh.

Proudly answer to their tears:

As they deny, deny.

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Notes

This was No. 14 in the 1907 edition.

Dublin was full of a 'lying clamour' regarding Joyce's relationship with Nora Barnacle and their departure for the continent (including a rumour that she had 'lifted' a load of cutlery from the hotel she worked in).

Is she sad because of the loss of her virginity? Or because people are talking about the loss of her virginity?

The syntax of the final line makes for an ambiguous reading. Does the second 'deny' forcefully intensify the first? Or is it: 'Deny those who would deny you'? 'Denial', of course, is freighted with millennia of Christian significance.

Compare the sentiment here with Yeats's 'He Thinks of Those Who Have Spoken Evil of His Beloved' from *The Wind Among the Reeds* – the same reassurance that 'they' cannot dishonour the lady, and that those who try have lied.

Joyce even uses the Yeatsian technique of perfect rhyming familiar from that particular poem: 'pride / pride' in the latter, 'you / you' and 'tears / tears' in the former. In a typical Joycean manoeuvre, however, that which had been culpable in Yeats – pride – is positively reconstituted in this slight lyric.