The Dead Study Guide

The Dead by James Joyce

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Introduction

James Joyce wrote "The Dead" in 1907, three years after writing the fourteen other stories that were eventually published with it in his collection entitled *Dubliners* (1914). "The Dead" is the last story in the collection, and it unites the themes found in the earlier stories. In his book, Joyce wanted to give the history of Ireland. The prominent characteristic he saw in Ireland, and particularly in Dublin, was the spiritual paralysis of its people. The plot of "The Dead" presents the thoughts and actions of one man, Gabriel Conroy, on a night he and his wife attend a party given by his two aunts. With its meticulous detail, the story is realistic in style, focusing less on great events than on subtle symbolism. Conroy is presented as a rather awkward, condescending, and self-absorbed man, but he later has a moment of self-realization when his wife tells him about a relationship she had as a young girl with a youth who loved her passionately. Joyce does not make it clear, however, what kind of change Gabriel's revelation, or epiphany, brings in him. Critics disagree as to whether this change involves an acceptance of his own self-consciousness or whether he has a moment of spiritual growth, becoming a more compassionate and humane person. The story has many characters and a number of references to the dead, and many of the characters are based on people Joyce knew—his friends and family members. A great deal of critical attention has been given to the story over the years since it was published.

Author Biography

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce was born the oldest of eight children on February 2, 1882, in Rathgar, a suburb of Dublin, Ireland. His parents were John Stanislaus Joyce and Mary Jane Murray Joyce. From both parents Joyce inherited musical talent and, particularly from his father, a talent for playing with words and telling stories. Unfortunately, John Joyce liked to drink and spend money, which caused the family's gradual descent into poverty and forced them to move many times. Having lived in so many different addresses in and around Dublin (nearly twenty) allowed Joyce to gain an intimate knowledge of the city. Joyce dedicated his life to writing about the city and its people.

Despite the family's poverty, Joyce managed to get a good education at a series of Jesuit schools, where he was always an outstanding student. His academic career culminated in a degree in modern languages from University College, Dublin. While at the university he published an article about the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. This article launched his career as a writer and gave him the opportunity to meet other Irish writers, such as W. B. Yeats. Convinced that the best way to write objectively about his city was to exile himself from it, Joyce moved to Paris to study medicine upon graduation. While in Paris, with the help of Yeats and others, he began publishing reviews in the Dublin *Daily Express,* as Gabriel Conroy does in the short story "The Dead." Joyce temporarily discontinued his exile and moved back to Dublin when his mother was dying. Mary Jane Murray Joyce died in August of 1903 at the young age of forty-four. For two years Joyce stayed in Dublin, where he continued to write and attempted to support himself by singing and teaching at a boys' school. During this period he met Nora Barnacle, a young woman from the rural region of Galway, Ireland. Shortly thereafter, Joyce and Nora moved to Trieste, Italy, where Joyce was employed as a language teacher. For the remainder of his life Joyce lived in Europe, returning to Ireland only twice—once in a failed attempt to start a cinema in Dublin and again to visit Galway.

After publishing *Chamber Music* (1907), a book of poems, Joyce made his first attempt to depict the people of Dublin in the short story collection *Dubliners,* in which "The Dead" appears. Joyce wrote most of the stories in 1904 and finished "The Dead" in 1907. Because publishers objected to the profane language in some of the stories and to Joyce's use of real names and places, *Dubliners* did not see publication until 1914. Meanwhile Joyce wrote a piece called *Stephen Hero,* which he later revised into the autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). From then on Joyce's works became even more ambitious and complex. From 1914 to 1921 he wrote *Ulysses,* which was published in 1922. He devoted the next seventeen years to his last book, *Finnegans Wake,* which he published in 1939. When Germany invaded France in 1940, Joyce and his family moved to Zurich, where he died in 1941.

Plot Summary

Gabriel's Arrival

Sisters Julia and Kate Morkan are hosting their annual holiday party and anxiously awaiting the arrival of their nephew Gabriel Conroy, who is the son of their late sister Ellen. It is after 10 p.m., and so far he has not come. When Gabriel and his wife, Gretta, arrive, Gabriel tries to engage in small talk with Lily, the housekeeper, who meets them at the door. He asks whether he will be going to her wedding with her "young man," and Lily bitterly replies, "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you." Her reply flusters Gabriel, and he feels that he has made some sort of mistake. In an effort to make up for it, he gives Lily a coin, saying that it is a Christmas present. She tries to refuse it, but he is already running up the stairs to where the music and dancing are taking place.

Before entering the room where the guests are dancing and socializing, Gabriel waits for a waltz to finish and looks over the speech that he will give after dinner. He considers cutting a Robert Browning quotation from it because it might go over the heads of his audience, making him look as if he were "airing his superior education." He fears that he will fail with them just as he did moments before with Lily. His aunts and his wife good-naturedly tease Gabriel about how he fusses over his family's health, and Gabriel laughs nervously. When the waltz finishes, Freddy Malins arrives. Aunt Kate asks Gabriel to go downstairs to make sure their friend Freddy is not drunk. She is relieved to have Gabriel present. Another guest, Mr. Browne, flirts with several of the women, who ignore him. When everyone begins to dance again, Mary Jane pairs Miss Daly with Bartell D'Arcy, the tenor. Gabriel guides Freddy up into the back room where the refreshments are being served. Freddy laughs at his own stories and is soon given lemonade instead of whiskey.

Confrontation with Molly Ivors

In a later dance, Gabriel is partnered with Miss Molly Ivors, a longtime friend and fellow teacher. Molly has a "crow to pluck" with him because she saw a review of his in the *Daily Express,* a conservative newspaper supporting British rule in Ireland. Molly, an Irish nationalist, accuses Gabriel of being a "West Briton"—an Irish person who is loyal to England. Gabriel is taken aback by her accusation and feels uncomfortable responding to her in such a public place. Miss Ivors invites him to go on an excursion to the Aran Isles, a group of islands off of Galway in the western part of Ireland. She asks if Gretta is from there, to which Gabriel replies coldly, "Her people are." Gabriel tells her that he likes to go cycling in Belgium or France. When Molly asks why, he says that it is to keep in touch with the language and for a change in atmosphere. Molly accusingly asks why he doesn't keep in touch with his own language, Irish. Gabriel replies that Irish is not his language, and he grows increasingly nervous. Molly presses the point, asking whether he doesn't have his own land to visit and his own people, whom he knows

nothing about. Gabriel says that he is sick of his country. After dancing with Molly, Gabriel dwells on what she said as he visits with Freddy Malins's mother. Gretta comes over asking him to carve the goose, as he usually does. She asks what words he had with Molly, and he says that she invited him to go to western Ireland. Being from that region, Gretta excitedly encourages him to go because she would love to see Galway again. He curtly tells her that she can go alone if she'd like. He continues to dwell on Molly, wondering whether she has a life beyond her politics. He decides that in his speech he might contrast his aunt's generation with the current generation of Miss Ivors, which lacks the hospitality, humor, and humanity of the older.

The Dinner

To Gabriel's relief, Molly leaves before dinner begins. Gabriel carves the goose and serves everyone before himself sitting down to eat. The conversation turns to the opera, particularly to tenors past and present, Irish and Italian. The time finally comes for Gabriel to give his speech. In his speech he praises his hostesses, Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia, and Mary Jane, as the three Graces. He notes that their hospitality is like Ireland's own, unique among modern nations, and that while some would consider this trait a failing, he would call it a princely failing. The generation of his two aunts still has the hospitable trait, but he fears that the new "hypereducated" generation coming up and present in Ireland lacks it. Alluding to the earlier conversation about great tenors of the past, he encourages his audience to hail and regard the great people of the past. He cautions, however, that one can always dwell on the unpleasant thoughts of the past—past youth, changes, and absent friends—but one should concentrate on the living and one's current duties and affections. In that context he speaks again of his regard for his hostesses, and all the guests begin singing "for they are jolly gay fellows."

After midnight, people begin putting on their coats to leave for home. While arranging cab rides and waiting for his wife to come downstairs, Gabri-el tells the story of his grandfather Patrick Morkan, who once drove his mill horse into town for a military parade. The horse was used to walking around in a circle in order to run a machine that ground starch, and when Patrick took the horse to the park, it started walking in circles around a statue of King William III of England. Gabriel imitates the action by walking around in a circle himself. As Freddy and Mr. Browne are leaving, Gabriel notices the figure of a woman standing at the top of the stairway listening to an air being sung. It is his wife. She seems pensive and dignified to Gabriel, and he imagines that if he were a painter and painted the scene, he would call it *Distant Music.* After the singing stops, Gretta asks Mr. D'Arcy what he was singing, and he replies, "The Lass of Aughrim." This vision of his wife arouses Gabriel's passion for her. On the ride home he admires her appearance and thinks about the early days of their courtship. When they get to the hotel, he is in an intense state of lust and passion, but Gretta seems distant and preoccupied. She finally walks over and kisses him. When they embrace he asks her what is the matter. She breaks down, falls on the bed, and cries. She tells him that the song Mr. D'Arcy sang reminded her of a young man she knew who also used to sing that song. His name was Michael Furey, and she feels that he died for her. They had courted, but one winter Gretta decided to move to a convent in Dublin. The night before

she left, Michael, already sickly, came to her house in the cold rain and threw gravel against her window. When she went outside to him and told him he should go so as not to become even more dangerously ill, he told her that he did not want to live because she was leaving.

The Epiphany

As Gretta sleeps, Gabriel thinks about what she has told him. He now sees his wife differently, and he watches her sleep as though he and she had never lived together. Remembering watching his Aunt Julia singing and the look on her aging face, he knows that very soon he will be going to her funeral. Everyone slowly fades away, "becoming shades." He thinks that perhaps it is best to boldly and passionately pass into the next world than to slowly wither away with age. Thinking of Michael Furey, Gabriel realizes that he could never love a person the way Michael loved Gretta. He feels his soul has reached the place of the dead and that the living world is becoming nonexistent, as if he is outside his body. He hears the snow tapping on the window pane and knows that it is time to begin "his journey westward." The snow falls on everything all over Ireland, on the living and the dead.

Characters

Mr. Bergin

Mr. Bergin is one of the young men attending the Morkans' party. Mr. Browne turns to talk to him after having been ignored by Miss Furlong and Miss Daly. He dances a dance called "quadrilles" with Miss Furlong.

Bessie

Bessie is Gabriel and Gretta Conroy's housekeeper.

Mr. Browne

One of the guests at the Morkans' party, Mr. Browne likes to drink whiskey and flirt with the ladies. People do not seem to take to him as well as he would like to think—Kate Morkan, for example, walks away when he begins to explain why women are so fond of him. Some critics see him as symbolizing English rule over Ireland. Aunt Kate says of him in an irritable tone, "Browne is everywhere," just as the presence of Britain is ominously everywhere in Ireland. Also, he is the only Protestant in the story, while the rest of the people are Irish Catholic. In Ireland it was and still is characteristic of Protestants to favor British rule, while Catholics tend to favor independence. He seems to be condescending toward other people. He continually mispronounces Freddy Malins's name as "Teddy," and after Miss Julia sings, he mockingly says she is his latest discovery, then "laughs heartily" at his comment. When Freddy tells him that he might make a worse discovery, Browne keeps his condescension, saying, "I think her voice has greatly improved." At one point, Kate signals to him to make sure that Freddy Malins drinks no more whiskey, as if Browne serves some authoritative function, like a policeman.

Constantine Conroy

Constantine is Gabriel Conroy's brother and a senior curate.

Ellen Conroy

Gabriel's mother, Ellen, was Julia and Kate's older sister. She has been dead some time. Gabriel remembers that she opposed his marriage to Gretta and that she called Gretta, in a derogatory way, "country cute." Unlike her sisters, she was not very musical, but her sisters considered her more intelligent. Her sisters have described her as "serious" and "matronly." Gabriel credits her with seeing that her sons got an education that allowed them to have a higher rank in life.

Eva Conroy

Eva is the daughter of Gabriel and Gretta Conroy. She is mentioned in passing when Gretta says that Gabriel forces Ellen to eat her "stirabout," or Irish porridge.

Gabriel Conroy

Gabriel, the nephew of Julia and Kate Morkan and cousin of Mary Jane, is the main character of the story. He is a young man, married and the father of two. Critics point out that Gabriel is the name of one of the archangels in the Bible, the messenger who announced the coming births of John the Baptist to Zechariah and the Messiah to Mary. The other archangel, Michael, is portrayed in the Bible as a warrior. In "The Dead" Gabriel is a more passive character than the dead Michael Furey. Critics note parallels between Gabriel and Joyce, surmising that Gabriel might be Joyce's portrait of his future self had he not left Ireland. Like Joyce, Gabriel lost his mother when he was younger; he writes reviews for the *Daily Express;* he is a literary person and an English professor; and he is less provincial than his contemporaries, seeing importance in absorbing European as well as Irish culture. Kate and Julia are both anxious for him to arrive at the party, give him the honor of carving the goose, and have him give a dinner speech every year. However, to some he comes across as condescending, for he smiles at the way Lily pronounces his surname, and when he inadvertently arouses her anger, he gives her money to appease her rather than making up for his carelessness in a more personal manner. He believes that if he quotes poetry by Robert Browning in his dinner speech, his audience will not understand his "superior education." Finally, he thinks his aunts are "two ignorant old women." Yet at the same time he is a sensitive, self-conscious, and timid person who is shaken by Lily's retort to his attempt at casual conversation. He does not know how to react to Molly Ivors when she accuses him of being a West Briton and thus sympathetic to English rule. He is afraid of "risking a grandiose phrase with her" in a public forum. Some believe that although he clearly loves and cares about Gretta, Gabriel treats his wife as more a prize than a human being. He fusses over her as if she were a child, making her wear galoshes although he knows she doesn't mind the snow. He jokes that she takes three "mortal hours" to get ready to go somewhere. When she becomes excited at the prospect of going back to Galway, where she grew up, his annoyance with Molly makes him curt with Gretta, and he tells her that she can go alone if she wants. For most of the story Gabriel takes Gretta for granted, beaming at her with pride and, later, lust. Not until after she tells him about Michael Furey does he see his relationship with her differently. Gabriel is the one character who seems to go through a change at the end of the story, where he has a sudden realization about his relationship with his wife as well as a realization about himself and the human condition.

Gretta Conroy

Gretta is the wife of Gabriel Conroy. Like Joyce's wife, Nora, Gretta comes from Galway, a rural region of western Ireland. She seems to love Gabriel and playfully teases him

about his solicitous manner toward herself and their children. Gabriel is not, however, the first person she has loved. After hearing Bartell D'Arcy sing "The Lass of Aughrim," she is reminded of a former love, Michael Furey, who she says "died for her." According to Gretta, Michael was passionately in love with her when she was a young woman. Knowing that she was going to a convent, Michael stood outside her window at the end of the garden in the rain the night before her departure. He told her that he didn't want to live, and he died after she had been in the convent only a week.

T. J. Conroy

Gabriel Conroy's father.

Tom Conroy

Tom is the son of Gabriel and Gretta Conroy. Gabriel makes him wear green eye shades at night and work out with dumbbells.

Miss Daly

Miss Daly is one of the young women attending the Morkans' party. She plays a waltz and is one of the women with whom Mr. Browne flirts.

Mr. Bartell D'Arcy

D'Arcy, a tenor, is one of the guests at the party. Though he is self-conscious about his voice because he has a cold, he sings the song "The Lass of Aughrim," which reminds Gretta Conroy of her old lover, Michael Furey.

Michael Furey

Michael is the love of Gretta Conroy's past, a gentle and delicate youth, mentioned only near the end of the story. Critics point out that Michael is the name of one of the biblical archangels, who is portrayed as a warrior as opposed to the archangel Gabriel, who has a more passive role as a messenger. Even Michael's last name connotes passion. Michael is an example of living life passionately, where Gabriel Conroy lives it more timidly and passively. Gabriel realizes that he has never loved anyone the way Michael loved Gretta. Gretta tells Gabriel that Michael was an excellent singer and wanted to study music, but he had poor health and worked at the gasworks. When Gretta was a young woman, she left Galway to spend the winter at a convent in Dublin. At the time she had a relationship with Michael, who was seventeen. He came outside her home on the cold, rainy night before she left, told her that he did not want to live, and died a week after she reached the convent. Gretta believes he died for her.

Miss Furlong

One of the young women at the Morkans' party, Miss Furlong is a student of Mary Jane.

Miss Molly Ivors

Molly Ivors, a friend of Gabriel's with whom he shares a dance, functions in the story as a contrast to Gabriel's politics. Gabriel notes that their lives are parallel: they went to the university together and they both teach. A passionate Irish nationalist, she feels that it is important to know the Irish culture; Gabriel feels that one should also cultivate the European culture and languages. He tells her that Irish isn't his language, implying that English is what people speak. Molly accuses Gabriel of being a "West Briton" because he writes for the *Daily Express*—"West Briton" being a derogatory term denoting someone loyal to British rule in Ireland, and the *Daily Express* a newspaper with the political stance favorable to the British. Molly wears a brooch with an Irish design and uses an Irish good-bye, "beannacht libh," when she leaves the party before dinner.

Mr. Kerrigan

Mr. Kerrigan is one of the young men attending the Morkans' party. Mr. Browne turns to talk to him after having been ignored by Miss Furlong and Miss Daly. He dances a dance called "quadrilles" with Miss Power.

Lily

Lily is the first character introduced in the story. She is the caretaker's daughter, the caretaker being a fellow tenant in the building where the Morkans live. She works as the Morkans' housekeeper, and at the beginning of the story she is busy meeting the guests at the door. Lily makes Gabriel feel uncomfortable after she responds curtly when he asks her if he might be going to her wedding in the future. She says, "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you." Kate says that she does not know what has come over Lily and that "she's not the girl she was at all."

Freddy Malins

A friend of the Morkans' and a guest at their party. Freddy has a drinking problem—Julia and Kate are concerned that he will come to the party "screwed." Some critics think Freddy is Gabriel's counterpart because he comes to the party at almost the same time and they are physically similar. Freddy calls Mr. Browne on a sarcastic remark about "discovering" Julia's singing, defending her with the words, "Well, Browne, if you're serious you might make a worse discovery. All I can say is I never heard her sing half as well as long as I am coming here. And that's the honest truth."

Mrs. Malins

The mother of Freddy Malins.

Mary Jane Morkan

Mary Jane is Gabriel Conroy's cousin. She is the daughter of the now deceased Pat Morkan, who was the brother of Kate and Julia. Mary Jane moved in with her two aunts after her father died. She plays the organ on "Haddington Road," which is the conversational name for a Roman Catholic church. She is a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music and teaches children from upper-class families.

Julia Morkan

Julia is Gabriel Conroy's aunt and one of the hostesses of the party. Julia sings lead soprano at Adam and Eve's, a Catholic church in Dublin. The narrator says her face gives the appearance of a "woman who does not know where she is going."

Kate Morkan

Kate is Gabriel Conroy's aunt and one of the hostesses of the party. She is too feeble to go out much, so she gives music lessons to children at home. Though feeble, she is described as the more vivacious of the two sisters and gets rather passionate about the way she feels the Catholic church is unjust to women with Julia's talent.

Pat Morkan

Pat was the brother of Ellen, Julia, and Kate, and father of Mary Jane Morkan.

Patrick Morkan

Patrick was Ellen, Julia, Kate, and Pat's father and Gabriel's grandfather. Gabriel tells a story about him bringing a horse to a military parade in the park. The horse worked in a starch mill and was used to walking around in a circle in order to run a machine that ground the starch, so when Patrick took the horse to the park, it started walking in circles around a statue of King William III of England. Some critics note that the horse walking around the statue represents the state of Ireland beat into submission by Britain.

Miss O'Callaghan

Miss O'Callaghan is one of the young women attending the Morkans' party. While she, Gabriel, Gretta, and Mr. D'Arcy are crossing O'Connell bridge on the cab ride home, she points out an old saying that one never crosses the bridge without seeing a white horse. Gabriel says he sees a white man—the snow-covered statue of Daniel O'Con-nell, who was an Irish Catholic civil rights leader in the early 18th century.

Miss Power

A young woman attending the Morkans' party, Miss Power dances with Mr. Kerrigan.

Themes

When describing his intentions in writing *Dubliners,* Joyce said that the city of Dublin seemed to him the center of paralysis. By paralysis Joyce meant the inability to act, move, or grow beyond where one is spiritually and emotionally—the inability to live fully. In "The Dead," Gabriel is paralyzed by his self-consciousness. He is self-conscious about Lily's bitter remarks on marriage and about what he should say in his after-dinner speech. When Miss Ivors accuses him of being loyal to the British, he tries to avoid confrontation. He doesn't want to risk a "grandiose phrase" toward her in a room full of people. He fantasizes about using his speech to criticize Miss Ivors, but by the time he gives it she is gone, and he gives a speech that only serves to please his audience. The story Gabriel tells about Patrick Morkan's horse walking in circles around the statue of King William III suggests Ireland's spiritual paralysis, and Gabriel shows his own paralysis by walking in a circle himself while telling it. Finally, as he and Gretta are walking down the street to find a cab, he imagines himself making various romantic overtures to her, but he actually makes none of them.

Style

Point of View

Point of view is the perspective from which the writer tells the story. "The Dead" is told in the third person limited point of view. Although the narrator describes the action of many of the characters and even depicts some events Gabriel does not witness, only Gabriel's thoughts are given. Joyce's writing style is also relevant when discussing point of view. Joyce was one of the first writers to practice the mimetic style. Mimetic style—a style that mimics or imitates—does not report thoughts using objective language but shows the character's thoughts by using the character's language. In "The Dead," the first sentence is an example of mimetic style: "Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet." The last phrase of that sentence, "literally run off her feet," is actually mimicking what Lily would say. Another example is when Gabriel looks over his speech and is worried that he "would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry." The phrase is more akin to Gabriel's dialogue than to the words of an objective narrator, and it shows his frustration over his earlier encounter with Lily. This device has become common in fiction, but Joyce was one of the first to use it.

Realism

"The Dead" can be categorized with stories that are in the realist tradition. A realistic writer will simply try to present life as it is without making a sensational plot or interpreting events. A reader might say that nothing eventful really happens, as is so often the case in real life. In "The Dead" Joyce, for the most part, shows but does not tell. He simply presents the characters' thoughts and actions without comment. Even at the end, when Gabriel has his revelation, the reader is left not knowing exactly what his revelation means. Presentation without comment forces the reader to interpret the events for him or herself.

Setting

Setting is simply when and where the action of the story happens. As with the rest of *Dubliners,* "The Dead" is set in Dublin, Ireland, in the early twentieth century. Joyce said that he wanted to write "a chapter in the moral history" of his country and that Dublin seemed the appropriate place because it seemed to him the center of paralysis. The action takes place in two specific places: at Kate, Julia, and Mary Jane's house in Usher Island, which is an actual section of Dublin, and at the Gresham, a fashionable hotel in Dublin. Critics conclude that it takes place on January 5th, which is the eve of Epiphany.

Epiphany

Epiphany is from a Greek word meaning *manifestation.* Christianity celebrates the feast of Epiphany on January 6, honoring the manifestation of the baby Jesus to the wise men from the East, and the term generally refers to the manifestation of God's presence in the world. Joyce, however, made the word into a literary term. He described it as a spiritual manifestation that reveals the true essence of an object or character, and he used it as the climax of many of his stories. In "The Dead" Gabriel has such a spiritual manifestation after Gretta tells him about Michael Furey, in the early morning hours of Epiphany.

Symbolism

A symbol is an object, person, or place that stands for something else, usually an abstract idea. For example, critics have said that Mr. Browne is a symbol for British rule in Ireland. The most debated symbol in "The Dead" is the snow which covers "all the living and the dead." Critics disagree over whether it stands for Gabriel's new ability to transcend his own self-absorption or whether it is a symbol of the paralysis that he still has and cannot overcome.

Historical Context

Imagism

Imagism was a movement in poetry founded around 1912 by the American exile poet Ezra Pound, along with Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and Richard Aldington. Some tenets of imagism were to make a "direct treatment of the thing whether subjective or objective" and "to use no word or phrase that does not contribute to the presentation." The goal of the imagist was to present an image directly without any excess use of sentimental feeling or even metaphor. Although the movement focused on poetry, writers such as Ezra Pound have seen similarities to imagism in Joyce's style. Joyce directly presents Gabriel's thoughts (subjective) and the action of the story (objective) with little or no comment. In a review of *Dubliners,* Pound wrote, "Mr. Joyce's merit . . . is that he carefully avoids telling you a lot that you don't want to know. He presents his people swiftly and vividly, he does not sentimentalise over them, he does not weave convolutions." Pound valued Joyce for the ways in which Joyce was similar to him. Joyce treats the thing directly. Although Joyce knew and might have been influenced by Pound, he wrote "The Dead" five years before imagism came into vogue as a movement.

Philosophical and Social Mind-set

Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, people were starting to see the world differently, particularly artists and thinkers. The three thinkers who most shaped the mind-set of the early twentieth century were Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. Freud asserted that mental illness is a result of repressed unconscious sexual desires. Marx challenged the assumptions of the capitalist economic system, and Nietzsche challenged the values and assumptions of Christianity, asserting that God is dead. The writings of these men changed the intellectual climate in the early twentieth century. Artists and writers could no longer take for granted the structures and values that people used to rely on. Joyce himself questioned the authority of

the Catholic church and later rejected it. He also questioned middle-class morality and institutions such as marriage. Because the old values were not as stable, artists were in a sense liberated to find new forms to represent reality, and they created works that questioned the usual ways people perceive reality.

Irish Cultural Revival

Around the turn of the century there was a movement to revive Irish culture and language. The Gaelic League was founded in 1893, and it still exists to preserve Irish culture and promote Gaelic as a spoken everyday language. Molly Ivors is sympathetic to the ideas of the Gaelic League. She chides Gabriel for not wanting to learn Irish but instead going to Europe to speak European languages. She says that Irish is his own

language, but Gabriel denies this. The spoken language of Ireland was in fact English, and Joyce too felt that trying to revive Gaelic was like trying to impose something artificial on the culture. There was also a literary renaissance that concentrated on Irish folklore. This movement was led by such writers as William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory—both contemporaries of Joyce. They collected Irish folk stories and wrote poems and plays based on Irish folklore. Joyce was not sympathetic with this movement either.

Critical Overview

"The Dead" was first published in 1914 as part of Joyce's short story collection called *Dubliners.* Joyce had actually written all the stories by 1907, when he finished "The Dead," but he struggled for seven years to get the collection published. The publishers were in a sense its first critics, refusing to publish the collection because some of the stories had mildly profane language and because they refer to real people and places in and around Dublin.

When *Dubliners* was finally published, the first critics were struck by Joyce's meticulous concentration on the ordinary and drab details of life. Joyce's subject matter, which avoids any attempt at the sensational, was noticeably different to them. A 1914 review in the *Times Literary Supplement* said that *Dubliners* "may be recommended to the large class of readers to whom the drab makes an appeal, for it is admirably written." Gerald Gould, writing for the *New Statesman,* had similar comments. He wrote that Joyce "dares to let people speak for themselves with awkward meticulousness, the persistent incompetent repetition of actual human intercourse." Although he thought Joyce a genius, Gould deemed it a pity that a man could write as Joyce does while insisting upon "aspects of life which are not ordinarily mentioned." But other critics approved of Joyce's examination of the mundane and ordinary. Ezra Pound praised Joyce for being a realist and not sentimentalizing over his characters, and in 1922 John Macy saw Joyce's work as superior to the usual stories of that time. Having little regard for the sentimental and genteel style found in most magazines of the period, Macy noted, Joyce's kinds of stories were "almost unknown to American magazines, if not to American writers." Macy called "The Dead" a masterpiece, but argued that it would never be popular because it is about living people.

As Joyce's popularity grew, his stories became overshadowed by his longer and more complex works, such as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses.* By the 1940s, critics looked back to "The Dead" and saw it as an important work. Much critical attention has been given to it over the years, and critics have looked at the story in various ways. "The Dead" started getting more critical attention from academic critics in the 1940s and 1950s. These critics tended to be formalists, focusing on the story's shape and structure and the manner in which it was made. In 1950 Allen Tate wrote an essay which examines Joyce's method of presenting details in a way that goes beyond description to the level of symbol. His main example is how the snow appears in the story first as a physical detail on Gabriel's galoshes then gradually encompasses the whole story when it is the central symbol in Gabriel's epiphany. Kenneth Burke writes in his "Stages of 'The Dead' " that the story is structured in stages. The first is one of expectancy, where all are preparing for the party and waiting for Gabriel. The second is the party itself, and the third is leaving the party. Finally, the fourth stage, when Gabriel and Gretta are alone, has many stages of its own, building up to Gabriel's final moment of revelation.

In 1959, Richard Ellmann wrote an important essay that examines "The Dead" from the vantage point of Joyce's biography. In "The Backgrounds of 'The Dead'" Ellmann

compares episodes in Joyce's life to similar ones in the story. Nora Barnacle, Joyce's lifelong companion and eventual wife, courted a man named Michael who was dying of tuberculosis when Nora decided to move from Galway to Dublin. This real-life Michael left his bed to visit Nora on a rainy night before she left for Dublin. Later, while she was in Dublin, she learned of his death. Ellmann also pointed out that Gabriel is similar to Joyce, as Gretta is similar to Nora. In fact, all the characters in the story seem to have real-life counterparts.

Another popular approach is a psychological reading of "The Dead." Michael Shurgot sees the paralysis of the characters in terms of Freud's theory of the death wish. Shurgot argues that characters in the story follow what Freud said was the aim in life, to go toward a state of inactivity or death. Daniel R. Schwarz examines Gabriel's psyche in relation to the author's and in a cultural and historical context. Still other critics approach the story in relation to the works of the psychologist Jacques Lacan, who believed that the unconscious is structured as a language.

Critics have disagreed about the two most important aspects of the story: the meaning of Gabri-el's epiphany and of the snow symbolism. The interpretation of Gabriel's epiphany falls into two camps: Some critics argue that Gabriel transcends his paralysis and will likely go on to live a different, less self-absorbed life; others think that Gabriel comes to understand himself, but this understanding is a reconciliation of who he actually is rather than a beginning for growth. The snow seems to many critics a symbol of death or paralysis, while to others it is a symbol of Gabriel's transcending his own self-consciousness to see things more compassionately and be sympathetic to the state of humanity. Robert Billingheimer considers the snow a more ambivalent symbol. Ice, he argues, usually symbolizes death, while water symbolizes life. Therefore snow symbolizes a state of death in life or life in death.

Beneath the story's surface of meticulous realistic detail, critics have found in "The Dead" many levels of meaning. Consequently the work has produced a large body of criticism treating the story from a variety of approaches.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Rapp, who has taught English composition, has a master's degree and is a Ph.D. candidate in English literature at the University of Toledo. In the following essay, he argues that Gabriel's epiphany allows him to overcome paralysis by giving him a deeper understanding of his own mortality.

A major point of contention for critics of "The Dead" has been whether Gabriel overcomes his paralysis through his epiphany. Many critics, such as Kenneth Burke, feel that Gabriel does transcend his own paralytic self-consciousness. Others argue that he does not transcend his condition but rather, in a way, gives up any such notion and simply accepts that he is one of the spiritually dead. Mi-chael Shurgot sees Gabriel being motivated by what Freud called a death wish. That is, he desires to avoid the problems and pressures of life and hopes to escape them by turning to some unfeeling state which would be ultimately similar to death. I would argue, like Shurgot, that death does play a role in Gabriel's epiphany; however, Gabriel's epiphany allows him to overcome his paralysis. Rather than achieving a death wish, Gabriel becomes aware of what philosophers and other twentieth-century writers call the subjective truth of death. This philosophical concept asserts that one must be aware of the possibility of one's own death to live an authentic existence. A person truly aware of his or her own death can concentrate on life as it is lived, not regretting the past or fearing the future, but living fully in the present.

Throughout most of the story it is clear that Gabriel is trapped in his own self-consciousness. It is interesting that many of the characters in the story are in fact dead. There is Gabriel's uncle Pat Morkan, his mother, the tenors of the past, Patrick Morkan his grandfather, and of course Michael Furey, among others. These figures from the past show up to subtly remind Gabriel of his own mortality.

A need to be more aware of one's mortality is hinted at while the guests of the party are eating the Christmas pudding. Mrs. Malins informs the rest of the dinner party that her son Freddy will be visiting the monastery in Mount Malleray. The rules of the religious order are mentioned—that the monks never speak, they get up at two in the morning, and they sleep in their own coffins. Mr. Browne shows his materialist tendencies by questioning why anyone would want to live as the monks do. A Protestant, he seems unable to understand the deeper spiritual meaning inherent in the monastic lifestyle. The Catholics, however, do not seem to understand the spiritual meaning either, for Aunt Julia simply says that it was the rule, as one would say who simply lives an unexamined life, by rote. But Mary Jane offers an explanation for why the monks sleep in their coffins that is one of the keys to the whole story: "The coffin . . . is to remind them of their last end."

Another place where the dead exert their in-fluence on Gabriel is in his speech. In it he speaks of Ireland's tradition of genuine, courteous, warm-hearted hospitality. He looks at the current "hypereducated" generation and fears that they will lose the humanity, hospitality, and kindly good humor of the past generation. Ironically, such things as

humanity and kindly good humor are precisely what Gabriel lacks. One sees this when examining the symptoms of Gabriel's paralysis.

Perhaps the first symptom of Gabriel's paralysis that is apparent is his condescending attitude toward others. With this attitude he tends to limit people to his own conceptions of them rather than seeing them with the complexity of human beings. He smiles at Lily for the apparently uneducated way she pronounces his name. He seems to see her still as the child he knew who sat on the front steps with a rag doll. When he attempts a conversation with her, he asks her if she still goes to school—the same sort of question one would ask a child. Judging from her answer, Lily has been out of school for some time, for she says, "I'm done schooling this year and more." So Gabriel modifies his question to one geared playfully toward a naive, lovestruck young girl: "I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?" Lily's response indicates that she isn't as naive as Gabriel would suppose: "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you." With this answer, Lily isn't responding with the same friendly tone that Gabriel tries to use. Instead she glances back at him over her shoulder and says it "with great bitterness." The reason for this bitterness isn't explained, but I suspect one can interpret it in two ways. The common and quite likely interpretation is that she is thinking of a man who has taken advantage of her in some way, and the recollection causes the angry response. One could also conclude that she is frustrated with the condescending level of Gabriel's questions. His questions are those that one might ask a child or teenager rather than a sophisticated adult. Gabriel's condescension is shown in other instances as well. Shortly after his encounter with Lily, he goes upstairs, where he is reminded that the men dancing are of a different grade of culture by the sound of the "indelicate clacking" of their heels and the "shuffling" of the soles of their shoes. Also he is undecided about using a Robert Browning quote in his after-dinner speech because the lines might be above the heads of his listeners.

The concern about the Browning quote reveals another facet of Gabriel's paralysis. At the same time he is condescending, he is concerned about what others think about him:

He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry.

Gabriel seems like a man who feels awkward because he is out of his element of university professors and is instead among a bunch of what he would probably call working-class brutes. Although he considers himself superior to them, he is frightened that they will reject him. This is why he is flustered after Lily's quick-tempered retort to his question about marriage. This fear of rejection occurs also when he is around someone he considers his equal. Molly Ivors has been a longtime friend of his, and they have had parallel careers. Both went to the same university, and both have become teachers. But when Miss Ivors confronts him about writing for the *Daily Express* he becomes tongue-tied and nervous. He answers her questions awkwardly because he wishes to flee from the confrontation altogether, and he can barely muster the strength to defend himself because he might displease her. Because she is a fellow teacher and

of equal education, "he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her." Still he manages to be condescending to her as he privately denounces her in his own thoughts afterwards: "Of course the girl or woman, or whatever she was, was an enthusiast but there was a time for all things." By referring to her as a girl, Gabriel is slightly degrading Molly by reducing her to a child as he does earlier with Lily.

Another symptom of Gabriel's paralysis is his need to control reality. His solicitude has been a long-running joke between his two aunts. Although care and concern can be good character traits, Gabriel seems overly fussy when it comes to his wife and children. He makes his son wear green shades at night and lift dumbbells, forces his daughter to eat her "stirabout" (Irish porridge), and frets about his wife. He decides not to travel all the way back to his suburb of Monkstown after the party because he fears Gretta will catch cold as she did last year, and he insists that she wear galoshes. This insistence has other motives as well. Aside from protecting her feet from the wet and cold, it is apparent that they are the new trend—Gabriel is concerned about appearances.

The story reveals the symptoms of Gabriel's paralysis, which are condescension, concern about what others think, and a need to be in control. But through his own memories and the memories of others, he encounters figures of the past. His memories of the dead slowly enable him to have his epiphany and cure him of his paralysis. Gabriel's first encounter with the dead is when he reminisces about his dead mother, Ellen Conroy. She gave Gabriel and his brother Constantine their names because she was concerned about the dignity of the family. Gabriel has her to thank for his position, for though she and her husband were of modest means, her efforts made sure that Gabriel and his brother Constantine moved beyond her position in society to become professionals: Gabriel is a teacher and Constantine a priest. It is evident, then, that Ellen had a desire for her children to escape the position in which she found herself.

Another person from the realm of the dead who influences Gabriel this night is his grandfather Patrick Morkan. Gabriel tells the story of how his grandfather once drove his mill horse into town for a military parade. He became indignant when the workhorse began circling a statue of King William III of England the way he would circle in the mill harness. As many critics have pointed out, the action of the horse symbolizes the paralysis of Ireland, and Gabriel's imitation of it as he tells the story represents his own paralysis.

That person from the realm of the dead who finally manages to make Gabriel aware of his own mortality and thus have more compassion for his fellow human beings is Michael Furey. When Gretta tells him about her relationship for Michael and the way in which he passionately loved her, dying for her, as she says, Gabriel seems to look at himself differently:

A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own

Gabriel seems like a man who feels awkward because he is out of his element of university professors and is instead among a bunch of what he would probably call working-class brutes."

clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror.

This is just the beginning of his change. He feels the influence of the dead Michael Furey as an "impalpable and vindictive being . . . coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world."

After Gretta falls asleep, Gabriel has his epiphany, and it seems clear that what this epiphany involves is a new, deeply felt awareness of his own mortality. The beginning of this awareness is when he remembers Aunt Julia's haggard face as she was singing earlier that evening. He thinks to himself that she will soon be "a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse." Then he realizes not only that Aunt Julia is becoming a shade, but that everyone will eventually die, and that it is better to live passionately like Michael Furey. Because of his own self-consciousness, he had never felt for a woman in the way Michael Furey had for Gretta, but he knows that such a feeling must be love.

At the height of Gabriel's epiphany comes the most curious passage in the story:

The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.

Kenneth Burke finds this passage to be the moment where Gabriel transcends the world of conditions. According to Burke, since the world of conditions is the world of the living, then the world of the dead would be the place where one has transcended those conditions and reaches the divine. But I would hesitate to make such a mystical reading. By being in the region of the dead, Gabriel has reached that state of consciousness where one has an inward awareness of death. If one were to actually lose the ability to feel and live in the "solid world" as the dead have lost the ability, he would come to have a greater appreciation for existence. As another twentieth-century writer, Wallace Stevens, said, "The greatest poverty is not to live in the physical world." Even the story's much-quoted last passage reiterates the importance of the awareness of one's own death:

His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

Some readers see the snow symbolizing paralysis, while others see it symbolizing transcendence. I would argue that the snow does symbolize death, but more specifically the awareness of death. The phrase "like the descent of their last end" echoes Mary Jane's earlier observation of the monks sleeping in their coffins: "The coffin is to remind

them of their last end." Gabriel is able to see beyond his own self-consciousness to a broader perspective. He is now profoundly aware of his own mortality and is in a state of consciousness where he can live to the fullest what Martin Heidegger called being-toward-death.

In "The Dead" Joyce examines an issue common among twentieth-century writers: the need to live with an awareness of one's own death. Such an awareness is not easy to achieve, but with it, knowing that life will soon be gone, one can appreciate life to its fullest. Wallace Stevens put it almost as well as Joyce when writing about the dead:

They were those that would have wept to step barefoot into reality, That would have wept and been happy, have shivered in the frost And cried out to feel it again, have run fingers over leaves And against the most coiled thorn, have seized on what was ugly. And laughed . . .

Source: Eric Rapp, Overview of "The Dead," for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Garrett offers six perspectives on "The Dead" by applying the principles of six different literary theories.

BIOGRAPHY. Joyce once said of one section of *Ulysses,* "I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant." Similarly, he inserted in his writings remnants of his own life and environment, so that scholars scour the details of his experience, and the people and places that he knew, for clues to the meaning of his work.

The most famous example in "The Dead" is the tragic love that Nora Barnacle knew in Galway when she was not quite sixteen years old, before she moved to Dublin, met Joyce, and ran off with him. Joyce was jealous of his dead rival, but Nora remembered the love fondly. In a conversation years later she spoke on the subject of "first love": "There's nothing like it. I remember when I was a girl, and a young man fell in love with me, and he came and sang in the rain under an apple-tree outside my window, and he caught tuberculosis and died." The dead boy had worked for the local gas company in Galway where Nora then lived. Joyce not only used that part of Nora's life as a model, but saw Nora as Gretta. He once wrote to Nora: "Do you remember the three adjectives I have used in "The Dead" in speaking of your body. They are these: 'musical and strange and perfumed.'" And the bedroom scene in "The Dead" captures Nora's character. Ellman says that "these final pages compose one of Joyce's several tributes to his wife's artless integrity"; she was "independent, unselfconscious, instinctively right."

Do we understand "The Dead" better when we know these things? Why not? It seems a narrow and exclusive sense of understanding to deny this. Joyce put in the story his wife, his dead rival, his city, his language, and elements of his national history. You could construct an interpretation of the text that ignored his wife, just as you could construct an interpretation that ignored Dublin, say, or even the English language (could the series of written marks that we call "The Dead" actually be a secret code that can be used by an Italian-speaking accountant in Trieste to record debits and credits?). But why should we want to be so unkind to the Joyces, or to isolate a literary work from the context of its creation? Joyce himself once said, "Imagination is memory." It would seem unreasonable for me to take my own imaginative interpretation of a literary work seriously without anchoring the interpretation at least in my own memory, and therefore setting it (unless I turn solipsist) in a larger history.

One great difficulty with biographical approaches to art is that we often know so little about the genesis of the work, so little that it is frequently counterproductive to look for personal sources. And our understanding of the work often seems still strangely incomplete even when we think we have found the personal sources. So we often make do with the little that we know, such as that a story is in English, is set in Dublin, and was written in 1907 by a man brought up as a Catholic. There often seems to be a kind of incompleteness to any finite summary of any particular meaning, anyway. And

perhaps, given our interests, we do not really need to know too many details from the artist's life or environment.

DECONSTRUCTION. However, since our needs and interests often respond to and build on incompleteness, we might want to focus on a theory that stresses the phenomenon of incompleteness in the meaning of a text. In what way is a deconstructive approach to "The Dead" useful? Are we helped in understanding the story if we take seriously the principles that meaning is endless signification, that all interpretation is misinterpretation, or that all texts say also the opposite of what they seem to say?

Gabriel thinks: "Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age." Every word here except "wither" occurs elsewhere in *Dubliners,* and a recent detailed study of the occurrences of the words led to the following conclusion: "in fact, practically every word of Gabriel's maxim-like sentence is directly or indirectly contradicted by the rest of the text." The therapy implied in the maxim is thus "purely hypothetical," a "belated insight" that is "clearly shown to rest on delusive hopes." Perhaps we do not need an extensive word study like this to sense such a contradiction in the end of the story, but just a glance at the history of interpretation, where some critics have seen death and others rebirth; some mutuality, others personal isolation; some a dissolution of the subject, others a deeply personal reverie. Shifting, incompatible voices have been found in the narrative, like the "wayward and flickering" spirits that haunt Gabriel's vision. Allen Tate once said that "the snow is the story." But it has also been suggested that snow is a suitable symbol for the inclusiveness in the story precisely because the color white encompasses all the contrasting colors of the spectrum. Long ago the *Dubliners* expert Florence Walzl called Gabriel's prospective westward journey "one of the most remarkable ambiguities in literature, a conclusion that offers almost opposite meanings, each of which can be logically argued," although in those days before deconstruction it was felt appropriate to say that the ambiguity at the end of the story "was deliberate on Joyce's part."

The ambiguity is also found in reactions to the poetry of the concluding paragraphs of the story. What some see as musical or lyrical beauty, others see as a "highly rhetorical" manner with "narcotic verbal effects" in a passage that fulfills the image of paralysis with which *Dubliners* begins. Or even possibly as "exaggerated alliteration" in "an overwritten passage that conveys emotional deadness taking its last refuge in sentimentality," with repetition and syntactical reversal at the end that "are disturbing and create discord, at the very climax of the rising hymn."

When you survey in the bedroom scene alone the muttering, mumbling, noises, and silences, the interruptions and failures of communication, the immense distances between thought and speech, his "false voice" and her "veiled" voice, "the quaintness of her phrase" and "the failure of his irony," the "lame and useless" words and the now communicative sound of the snow at the window—it is not hard to see here a meditation on language that would be dear to deconstruction. In hindsight it is possible to see too the maid Lily at the outset of the story taking a step toward the theme of the world as text. "The men that is now," she said, "is only all palaver and what they can get out of

you." Even Derrida felt "resentment," although an admiring resentment, at the generalized equivocality of writing in Joyce; "the endless plunge throws you back onto the river-bank, on the brink of another possible immersion, *ad infinitum.*" Derrida added: "every time I write, and even in the most academic pieces of work, Joyce's ghost is always coming on board."

There is a peculiar logical problem in its stance, however. Since no one can list the endless number of separate immersions, we have at any moment a finite list, in which each item is distinguished somewhat from the others. Deconstruction, insofar as it is warranted, thus rests on some distinction, definite-ness of description, and discovered pattern. What structure of language, image, or narrative in "The Dead" lead to the identification of ambiguity? Presumably we do not assume that all of these are themselves ambiguous in every way, or we could not build an argument on them. We could hardly conclude that the story says also the opposite of what it seems to say unless we are able to identify what it actually does seem to say. And if we conclude that, say, the snow is ambiguous, we presuppose not only definite evidence for that but a recognizable nature to the ambiguity. To describe the snow as ambiguous is not the same as to describe it as both-ambiguous-and-non-ambiguous. I think therefore that deconstruction, as a reasoned method, rests on discovery of structure.

STRUCTURALISM. How would structuralism work in an interpretation of "The Dead?" We might start, as Lévi-Strauss typically does, with familiar binary contrasts, such as, in this case, old and young, east and west, up and down, silence and sound, cold and warm, and see how these contrasts develop and connect in the course of the story. Connections are sometimes concrete, as when the window relates inside and outside, or the mirror relates the face to its mirror image. Or, we might look at a division based on some principle of sequence or relational context, such as the breaks Joyce inserted between sections of the text, or the dominance of certain characters in different parts of the story. In the bedroom scene we can construct a variation on these approaches which abstracts temporarily from other themes in order to explore what the physical motion of Gabriel and Gretta contributes to the sense of the story.

When Gretta and Gabriel enter the hotel room, she stops before the mirror while he crosses the room to the window, looks out, and turns toward her, leaning on a chest of drawers. She then turns away from the mirror, walks toward him, exchanges a few words with him, and walks beyond him to the window. While she looks out the window, there is another exchange of words; then she comes unnoticed from the window to Gabriel and gives him a kiss. "Perhaps," he falsely surmises, "her thoughts had been running with his." He embraces her, but shortly she breaks loose and runs away from him to the bed. Gabriel follows her toward the bed, stopping a few paces away from her. He listens to her story of young Michael Furey and is close enough to her to caress one of her hands. Then he walks back to the window. An hour later Gretta is lying in bed asleep and Gabriel is observing and meditating, first leaning on his elbow, then lying down beside her.

What happened here? She followed him, and passed him; then she passed him again, and he followed her; then he walked away and returned. The structure of movement is

that of two separate entities, moving in a single time and space, and in similar, connected patterns, almost chasing one another; but not moving together. When Gretta recalls her early love, she says: "He was very fond of me and he was such a gentle boy. We used to go out together, walking, you know, Gabriel, like the way they do in the country." Gabriel and Gretta do not walk together, just as their thoughts in fact do not "run" together. At the end she is "fast" asleep, while he swoons "slowly." The theme of miscom-munication is thus reflected in the structure of movement.

"The Dead" is fertile ground for structuralism, of which this analysis of walking in the hotel room is one small example. Structuralism, although not necessarily in the familiar forms of binary contrasts or analysis of movement, typically contributes in some form or other to the range and utility of other methodologies in literary criticism.

Structuralism floundered, however, on questions of perceptibility and importance. Which structures count in literature, and why? Only those we are able to perceive? Only those that reflect what we do or ought to value? Are not some "binary contrasts," for example, just more important than others, given who we are and how we relate to one another? So one important binary contrast that structuralists utilize has taken on a critical life of some independent interest: the contrast of male and female.

FEMINISM. There are varieties of feminist approaches to Joyce, variously focused on background or works and mixing various levels of ethical judgment. Some critics, of course, like the statement attributed to Joyce that "the emancipation of women" "has caused the greatest revolution in our time in the most important relationship there is—that between men and women; the revolt of women against the idea that they are the mere instruments of men." At the turn of the twentieth century, Ireland had already for decades had the lowest marriage rate in the civilized world, and therefore the highest rate of unmarried men and women. Marriage before or at the age of twenty-five was rare, with most men marrying when they were between thirty-five and forty-five years old, and tending to marry women ten years or more younger than themselves. Florence Walzl presents this data and adds: "The results [for men] of abnormally delayed marriages, of sexual abstinence or guilt over illicit sex, and of long years of primarily male company led many to take a cold-blooded, unromantic view of marriage.... The results for women were often most unhappy. Girls, generally reared with a ladylike abhorrence of sex and with their emotions channeled into a frustrated romanticism, were ill prepared for the realities of marriage." In "The Dead" Gretta and Gabriel seem to be the only married couple at the party, and, in a general way (disregarding specifics in Walzl's description), their marriage seems colored by such cold-bloodedness and frustration. The story is in fact sometimes seen as a sequence of troubling encounters between Gabriel and a series of women—first Lily, then Miss Ivors, then Gretta.

The song "The Lass of Aughrim," which young Michael sang to Gretta, and which Joyce had heard from Nora, is a dialogue between a young woman standing in the rain with a baby, asking to be let in, and Gregory, whom she accuses of being the child's father but who refuses to recognize her as "the lass of Aughrim." Gregory demands "tokens" of proof and the young woman provides details. Since the woman sings that "we swapped rings off each other's hands, / Sorely against my will," and "you had your will of me,"

some feminists have introduced in interpretation the phrase "date rape." Similarly, a threat of "mate rape" is seen in Gabriel's angry, sexual desire to "crush" Gretta's body against his own, "to overmaster her." It has been said that "The Dead" is tailor-made for feminist interpretation.

As with other literary theories, though, a single heuristic can be misleading as well as suggestive. In "The Lass of Aughrim" the sequence of verses alternates with accusation and doubt, and Gregory interestingly does not challenge the general sexual accusation; he simply doubts that this is the woman. Is "date rape," or leaving the woman to stand in the rain, of greater interpretive importance for this song than the momentousness of ambiguity? Some interpretations of "The Dead" have actually omitted from quotation the first clause of Joyce's sentence reflecting Gabriel's thinking: "He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her." And few critics are bold enough nowadays to even raise the question whether Gretta shares the responsibility for her suffering because she chose to lock her secret in her heart for so many years, to say nothing of the degree to which, if Gabriel is determined by his maleness, that ought to affect judgment of him. Some recent ethics-oriented criticism thus in some ways seems to resemble the older religious criticism, which is, like the feminist, insightful and fruitful, although similarly "thought-tormented." ("So it is that snow is the perfect symbol for the Christian dead. It is the waters of life in a state of suspension.")

In any case, feminist approaches do often seem to recognize that they undercut their own success if they neglect or simply stand in conflict with other approaches. The lass of Aughrim could hardly be a wealthy aristocrat struggling for admission to a poor man's home. Not all "binary contrasts" are equally important, but it hardly seems reasonable in life or art to emphasize just one. And of course, as Walzl points out, the famine and poverty of nineteenth-century Ireland contributed to the suffering of women such as those Joyce describes.

MARXISM. What leads Gabriel to want to cry out to Gretta and "overmaster" her? Talk about money, that he cannot help taking; in fact, it is talk about a "sovereign," which is both money and politics. That is what gets Gabriel the "generous" kiss. It is Christmas time, but Christmas is mentioned in the hotel room only as an occasion for a shop that sells cards. The hotel setting is a similar commercialization of the marital bedroom; Gabriel realizes he is a "pennyboy" for his aunts and reflects how "poor" a part he has played in Gretta's life. Michael Furey worked for the gas company; perhaps, it has been suggested, in the young man's job of shoveling coal for coal-gas, which could contribute to the illness that kept him from a singing career and brought his early death. Presumably there was something in his experience that led him to tell Gretta that "he did not want to live." In the ballad of "The Lass of Aughrim," suffering is turned into ambiguity and the pleasure of music. Likewise, Gretta's tragic young love becomes a romantic story for the book reviewer and critic Gabriel. "So she had had that romance in her life," he thinks, "a man had died for her sake." In view of the reverie that follows, in which, as in the ballad, suffering seems to be assimilated to aestheticism, there is something to be said for the need to "decode the bourgeois agenda of the narrative voice," and even for the claim that "Joyce dramatizes in 'The Dead' the politics of art's determination to conceal its own politically oppressive functions."

A logical difficulty with this view, however, is suggested by the question of how art can effectively dramatize what it is determined to conceal. If the story is perceived as a drama of this sort, it seems the story then has no such concealing function. The problem is similar to the one we noticed in deconstruction, when taken as a reasoned general theory; the theory is undermined by its own evidence. The critical methods and insights of Marx-ism are often shrewd and valuable, as in the case of deconstruction, despite epistemological difficulties of this sort. But there is an obvious danger in one easy, elitist solution to the logical problem—the solution that claims that there really is concealment in art because the ignorant masses do not realize they are duped, so that a few capable people (presumably exempt from superstructural self-deception) must elect themselves to educate the rest. It is well to remember that Gabriel's reverie, in which suffering is assimilated to aestheticism, is that of a literary critic, not an artist. There seems paradoxically to be such an aestheticism in the Marxist critic's play with political language that is diverted from the effort and risk of serious political conflict, and that, by its conceptual abstraction, in fact floats at a distance from the artistic work. Self-criticism is not Marxism's strong suit.

Consider the point in "The Dead" when Gabri-el sees himself as a "pitiable fatuous fellow." A Marxist response is as follows: "The moment is one when false consciousness gives way to a potentially revolutionary insight, when the masks of ideology are lowered." In view of the multiple, shifting perspectives in Joyce, is it really so obvious which ones are "true" and which ones are "false"? Does everyone get to vote on where to draw the line, including people like those in the story who find Gabriel helpful and appreciate his speech at the party? Are perspectives or ideologies really like "masks," that can all be removed at once to reveal the true face? The certainty about truth and falsehood, which is introduced into literary criticism from external sources, has the unfortunate consequence that Marxism, by its own reasoning, often becomes one more ideology that art is not allowed to test or challenge. Thus it imposes on itself a separation from art.

The logic of this situation can be illustrated by the fact that "The Lass of Aughrim" has a version that does not speak of "Lord Gregory" but simply of "Gregory." Is that version of the song devoid of class consciousness, to a fault? Or is it rather evidence that significant conflicts between men and women are sometimes unexplained by Marxist concepts of class structure, and that these concepts are therefore of limited value? One thing that seems needed is a psychology of concealment that recognizes its immense human and social complexity.

PSYCHOANALYSIS. It is easy to tack psychoanalysis on to this list of literary theories, since we have been talking about many of its interests: the author's background; miscommunication and psychic repression; walking around and talking instead of sex in a bedroom; concealment and sublimation; a dream-like reverie and a death-wish. Walzl describes the "maternal domination of both daughters and sons" in Irish society. She quotes a statement that the "Irishman is the world's prime example of the Oedipus complex," and adds: "Joyce knew this type well." We do learn in "The Dead" that Gabriel's mother was considered by one of her sisters to be the "brains carrier" of the Morkan family, that she is the one who gave Gabriel and his brother Constantine their

distinctive names, and that some of her sons' professional achievements were realized "thanks to her." Perhaps she is the one who taught her sons to read, for there is a picture Gabriel notices at the party that shows her pointing out something to young Constantine in an open book, a photograph that critics have noticed is a cropped version of a family photograph that includes Joyce and his own mother in the same pose. Presumably there is some psychological source or mechanism for the artist's selection of elements from the environment, for one's fascination with language, for the structures one identifies, and for the oppressions one creates or suffers; and Joyce seems to have thought of these issues along some psychoanalytic lines. Gabriel also is made to remember at the party his dead mother's "sullen opposition" to his marriage with Gretta. Is it reasonable to say that "with 'The Dead,' Joyce breaks with his need to identify with the father and authoritatively fix the meaning of the mother?" Or that Gabriel has an "oppressive superego," i.e., is "a thrall to the ghosts of his parents?" Psychoanalysis is another fruitful approach to "The Dead," although, as with some of the other approaches, the technical external terminology often adds little to perception and in fact, as illustrated by the abstract conclusions I have quoted, introduces another unfortunate dimension of critical self-assurance.

GENERAL REFLECTIONS. This sample of critical approaches is sketchy and incomplete, but perhaps useful still for some broader reflections.

First, each of these approaches has its strengths and each, taken in isolation, seems about as good and as bad as the others in accommodating "The Dead." This should not be surprising, since I have deliberately chosen one useful story for illustration, and a complex, much-studied story at that. There are also insightful interpretations of this story that utilize very different perspectives, from Irish mythology to the effect of structure and pace on the reader's response. Perhaps the critical history of the story would now permit an equally successful historical hermeneutics, in which the various approaches could be seen and evaluated as links between Joyce and the various social or moral cultures of his readers. There is a detailed recent study of the story which finds "all major film techniques" in it, such as varying focal lengths, flashbacks, soft focus, dissolves, zooms, backlighting, and the rest. "The Dead" (the story, not the movie) contains "six sequences, fourteen scenes, and one hundred and eighty-four shots," with a certain pattern in the "Average Number of Words per Shot." One earlier reading referred to a "dialectical form" in the story, like that of Plato's *Theaetetus,* and suggested that you might call "The Dead" "the narrative equivalent of a Platonic dialogue." Well, why not? Perhaps not *the* equivalent. But there is something to the comparison with Platonic dialogue.

Second, the utility of diverse theories in interpretation does not imply the simultaneous truth of all the claims in the theoretical inventory. One critic says "the central question of the text" is "whether or not art serves a political function"; another that "the story's major commitment is to noise, to noise as social disturbance and cosmic disorder, the two functions performed by D'Arcy's singing"; and a third that the "irreverence of Joyce's depiction of Epiphany Day nineteen centuries later is the crucial element of 'The Dead.'" It seems to me that there is not a clear enough conception of evidence or a clear enough formulation of principles to warrant any of these conclusions. The same applies

to several other interpretive claims we have encountered, partly because they are often influenced by ideas uncritically imported from other fields of interest or inquiry. Even apart from the exclusivist claims of some critics there is a conflict of emphasis among the different approaches, versions of each often needing some puncturing of rhetorical pretension. It was a rare pleasure to read in John Kelleher's brilliant and groundbreaking study of "The Dead" the following qualification: "I consider almost nothing of what I have spoken of today as primary to the story. It is all atmospherics. . . ." In any description or interpretation, emphasis occurs in some context and for some purpose, and need not be construed to assert its own priority for all other contexts. Whether one theory is better than another depends in part on one's interpretive goals, which have not been, and probably cannot be, managed into a single universal goal.

Third, the different approaches, even taken as heuristics rather than universal theory, often mix with and depend on one another far more than I have indicated. The structuralist can quote documents from Joyce's biography, the Marxist may draw insights from psychoanalysis, the feminist could study the impact of incompleteness of meaning on the status of women. Moreover, in some contexts it seems futile to claim discovery of fundamental intentions or causes, not only because of individual, social, or artistic complexity, but because the very notion of "cause" is a relative and interpretive concept, an agency for construing recognizable situations in a manageable way, or perhaps for changing them. The same event may have many "causes," none intrinsically more fundamental than the others. It may not even be heuristically useful to modulate the various competing interpretations of "The Dead" into one consistent, umbrella interpretation, except to deflate the pretensions of the individual theories. For the interpretive competition is productive; even the logical inconsistencies found in a single theory, may help it to be suggestive and fruitful in construing art. It is a familiar notion that teaching students of literature to read and understand could well use all of the critical approaches we have glanced at, and more. The complexity of "The Dead" can help us appreciate why. Since my own view of the individual theoretical approaches to literature is pragmatic and skeptical, I am personally taken by Gretta's honest recognition of limitation in knowledge, regarding something as important in her life as Michael's illness: "He was in decline, they said, or something like that. I never knew rightly."

Source: Roland Garrett, "Six Theories in the Bedroom of 'The Dead'," in *Philosophy and Literature,* Vol. 16, No. 1, April, 1992, pp. 115-27.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Morrissey explores the conflict Joyce's characters experience when their "romantic inner perceptions" encounter "squalid outer reality."

In his short stories, Joyce's conspicuous symbols usually grow out of a disparity between a character's romantic inner perception and squalid outer reality. This disparity creates the strange sense of displacement common to so many characters in *Dubliners.* In some like "The Sister," "Counterparts," "Two Gallants," "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," "Clay," and "A Painful Case," the inner image is held only briefly. It may be no more than a nightmare glimpse of "some pleasant and vicious region" of the soul with its "long velvet curtains and a swinging lamp of antique fashion" as it is in "The Sisters." Or it may be no more than the romantic images of a song/poem, as it is in "Clay" ("I Dreamt that I Dwelt"), "Ivy Day. . ." ("The Death of Parnell") and "Two Gallants" ("Silent, O Moyle"). Even as corrupt a perceiver as Farrington, in "Counterparts," has a glimpse of the foreign, the romantically unattainable, as his "eyes wandered at every moment in the direction of one of the young women . . . [with her] immense scarf of peacock-blue muslin . . . wound round her hat . . . [her] bright yellow gloves, reaching to the elbow . . . [her] plump arm which she moved very often and with much grace . . . [and her] London accent." This image may be vulgar, but for Farrington, it is radically at odds with his squalid life of work, pub and home, and it helps create sympathy in the reader for this displaced man.

In at least two of his short stories, Joyce intensi-fies and extends this disparity. In "Araby," for instance, the romantic image of the girl, with "her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door.... Her dress sw[inging] as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair toss[ing] from side to side," is aggressively tested against Dublin reality. The boy tests her "image . . . in places the most hostile to romance," carrying it like a "chalice" "through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop boys who stood on guard by barrels of pigs cheeks." One "dark rainy evening" he tests the image in the squalid "back drawing-room in which the priest had died" and again on the Saturday night of the bazaar in "the high cold empty gloomy rooms" of "the upper part of the house." Through it all he sees "nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by [his] imagination." It isn't until he acts on *her* inner imagining ("She asked me was I going to *Araby.* . . . It would be a splendid bazaar, she said; she would love to go") rather than his own and goes to the squalid bazaar with its closed stalls and darkened hall, its money counters and flirtatious stall girl that his image of the girl fails him. Acting out her inadequate romantic imagining, which he has taken over ("The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me"), he loses his own inner image of the girl and can only "remember with difficulty why I had come." All his pseu-do-religious imagery surrounding the girl fails in this "silence like that which pervades a church after a service," and he sees himself "as a creature driven and derided by vanity."

By merging two disparate patterns of imagery, Joyce further intensifies this same disillusionment and loss of self in "The Dead." One set, those images of Gabriel's wife Gretta, are a complex version of the boy's image of the girl in "Araby"; the other those images of snow in the story. Each should be examined separately before seeing how they merge.

Gabriel is not an innocent like the boy. Instead, from the beginning of the story, he feels alienated from his culture and insecure as a result of his alienation. That is, he feels superior because "the indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuf-fling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his." Yet he feels inadequate before them. "He would only make himself ridiculous.... He would fail with them. . . ." His inner image of his wife is comprised of a similar vacillation. He is delighted by her exterior image at the opening of the party; his "admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and her hair." Yet his attained ideal is corrupted by a nagging doubt, by a fear that, as his Mother said, she is only "country cute." When she gently mocks Gabriel's continental affectation about goloshes with her Irish phrasing—"Tonight even he wanted me to put them on," "Guttapercha things"—he reminds her of her "grade of culture": "Gabriel knitted his brows and said, as if he were slightly angered: It's nothing very wonderful but Gretta thinks it very funny because she says the word reminds her of Christy Minstrels." Put in her place, Gretta falls silent. His ideal woman will no longer break into vulgar "peal[s] of laughter."

Nearly the same pattern is repeated at the end of the party. First Gabriel sees Gretta as a romantic image from a painting. Distanced and silenced by Bartell D'Arcy's singing of "The Lass of Aughrim," she has been so self-effaced, so "unaware of the talk about her," that Aunt Julia nearly misses her when the good-nights are said: "O, good-night, Gretta, I didn't see you." Because she is so silent, Gabriel can continue his romantic revery despite the "murky air" of Dublin. He can nearly ignore that with "her shoes in a brown parcel tucked under one arm and her hands holding her skirt up from the slush [s]he had no longer any grace of attitude." Like the boy in "Araby" he can take his romantic image into the squalid Dublin night and yet keep the romance alive. By editing the "[m]oments of their secret life together [which] burst like stars upon his memory," he can "forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy." Again, like "Araby," this inner romantic image of the male is brought down by the inner yearning of a simple Irish female. In "The Dead" Gretta's romantic imagining —"a boy in the gasworks" "died for me"—may not be quite as inadequate as Mangan's sister's interest in the bazaar; but Gretta's sentimental Irish love story, the memory of which is appropriately triggered by the melodramatic "Lass of Aughrim," just as surely triumphs over her male's secret imaginings as the girl's does in "Araby." Once again, when the male takes over the romantic imaginings of the female ("he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree," he is left with squalid reality ("His eyes moved to the chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string dangled to the floor. . . .") and despair ("He had never felt like that himself towards any woman. . . .").

At the same time that Joyce is developing this pattern of disparate images around the woman in "The Dead," he is also developing another pattern of snow images. Like so

many of Joyce's symbols, snow begins as a naturalistic detail of setting. It simply seems to be there to establish the time of year, as do the overcoats of the guests and Gabriel and Gretta's goloshes. When Gabriel enters "scraping his feet vigorously . . . [with] a light fringe of snow lay[ing] like a cape on the shoulders of his overcoat and like toecaps on the toes of his goloshes," it is clearly winter. But Gabriel soon appropriates this outer reality as a romantic inner longing.

Gabriel has two reveries about snow while he is at the party. The first occurs after the first hiatus in the text and well into the party. Gabriel's general irritation with the vulgar dance has been exacerbated by Mary Jane's inappropriate "Academy piece," by his "rankl[ing] . . . memory" of his mother's disapproval of Gretta, by Miss Ivors' challenge to Gabriel's cosmopolitan affectation and her allusion to Gretta's country background, and by an irritating few minutes beside Freddy Malins' tiresome mother. As he hears the "clatter of plates and knives" from the other room, Gabriel "began to think again about his speech and about the quotation" from Robert Browning. He retreats to the "embrasure of the window" and begins nervously tapping the cold windowpane with "warm trembling fingers." "How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park! The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington Monument. How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper table!" He next thinks of the snow moments before his after-dinner speech. He has risen, "leaned his ten trembling fingers on the tablecloth and smiled nervously at the company." Unable to meet the eyes of the "upturned faces he raised his eyes to the chandelier" and drifts into another revery about snow. "People, perhaps, were standing in the snow on the quay outside, gazing up at the lighted windows and listening to the waltz music. The air was pure there. In the distance lay the park where the trees were weighted with snow. The Wellington Monument wore a gleaming cap of snow that flashed westward over the white field of Fifteen Acres."

Again Joyce sets up the inner/outer contrast simply by putting these reveries in the context of this genteel Dublin party where Freddy Malins' drunkenness, Miss Ivors' political discord, disagreements about music and religion, and Bartell D'Arcy's simple bad temper are covered over by euphemism, sentiment, and trivia. In addition to this contrast, Joyce establishes yet another. In the early morning after Gabriel's two reveries are over, and after some talk weather in the hallway ("we haven't had snow like it for thirty years"), we follow Gabriel and Gretta outside into the squalid reality of a Dublin snow. Rather than the "gleaming cap of snow," it is "slushy" "streaks and patches . . . on the roofs, on the parapets . . . and on the area railings." Rather than the "pure" air Gabriel imagines, we are told that "a dull yellow light brooded over the houses and the river," that "the sky seemed to be descending." The air is "murky" and "the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky." Even the horse is part of this brooding Dublin atmosphere as he "galloped along wearily under the murky morning sky, dragging his old rattling box after his heels."

Obviously, both of Gabriel's inner reveries about snow are in sharp contrast to the snow we see here. Once we experience the real Dublin scene of murk, slush, and menace, Gabriel's imagined scenes— "cool," "pleasant," "bright," "pure," "gleaming," full of snow

that "flashed westward"—seem excessively idealized. His cozy winter park scene which he twice imagines, and his image of a jolly Christmas party seen from without ("People, perhaps, were standing in the snow. . . ."), are like Christmas cards from Freddy Malins' shop.

Joyce has also begun a wonderful overlapping of his two image patterns during this walk and ride through the Dublin streets to "the Gresham." Rather than recognize the disparity between his inner imaginings about the snow and the reality of the snow when confronted by it, Gabriel plunges into his sensual romantic revery about his "secret life" with Gretta ("A heliotrope envelope," "the warm palm of her glove," "[h]er face, fragrant in the cold air"). The reader is made acutely aware of the way Gabriel escapes squalid reality through revery in this passage. Not only is the imagined snow very different from the real snow, but we also hear Gabriel consciously modifying the outer truth about the cold night and Gretta ("She had no longer any grace of attitude"; "He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together") with images of fire borrowed from romantic poetry ("Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory," "Like the tender fires of stars moments of their life together"; "all their souls' tender fire"). Throughout this scene the text juxtaposes the reality of Gretta amidst slush with Gabriel's poetically imagined wife amidst fire.

Even more clearly than in "Araby," this image disparity sets out the central problem in the story and in *Dubliners.* How can one have an imaginative inner life when one's imaginative "vocabulary" is limited? The boy's is limited by the church and by nineteenth-century notions of chivalric romance. Gabriel's imaginings about snow are the limited Christmas card reveries of an urban man. His prettily snow-covered trees and river are those of Dublin. The limit of his imagined escape is a walk in the park. It is also significant that in both of these reveries the "West Briton," Gabriel, will think of the monument to the Irishman who had become an English hero, Wellington. Monuments of Anglo-Irish heroes are very much on Gabriel's mind this night. He will tell a comic story at the expense of his grandfather Patrick Morkan and his horse Johnny, who went "round and round . . . King Billy's statue." The reader is surely to connect Gabriel's mimed "pac[ing] in a circle round" King Billy—a hero to Orangemen and villain to Catholics—with Gabriel's return in revery to Wellington's monument. In the same way, his reveries about his wife, while more poetically intense, are limited. When Gabriel sees Gretta descending the stairs, he sees that she is "a symbol of something." Here Gabriel is the active, if unsuccessful, symbol searcher; he perceives his very flesh and blood wife as an aesthetic object. Although he asks what she is a symbol of, we know that he doesn't know the answer; he doesn't really know what spiritual quality is embodied in her attitude of "grace and mystery." Specifically, he is blind to the love flooding her at that moment. All he can do when he glimpses Gretta on the stairs is see her as a sentimental romantic painter would and find an intriguing literal title for his picture (she is listening to distant music), which is unwittingly ironic. Once again Gabriel reduces experience to a conventional image that suggests to him comforting but unspecified symbolic meanings, as have his Christmas card images of Dublin. Finally, his perceptions are those of a husband "happy that she was his, proud of her grace and wifely carriage." Even when his poetic "fires of stars" have "kindl[ed] again . . . a keen pang of lust," he is too conventionally genteel to reach out to Gretta as the simple boy

from the gasworks has. As he later realizes, his gentility has not been a yearning for some unattainable ideal; he has only been "idealising his own clownish lusts."

Gabriel's third, and final, revery about snow closes the story. As Gabriel leans and then lies on the bed beside Gretta, and before this final revery, we know that he has again been searching, consciously and then half-consciously, for a conventional means of embodying the deeply-felt experience of Gretta's revelation. Now the symbol he finds appropriate is that of sentimental death. He thinks of Aunt Julia dying, that is, of her euphemistically becoming a "shade," the material for a comic after-dinner story like "the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse." He "imagine[s]" Michael Furey, "the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree." Struggling for an appropriate yet comfortable image to enclose all of these "shades," he has made a surprising euphemistic leap for a Catholic. Alive he has a soul: "pity for her entered his soul"; "his soul had approached. . . ." Once he is dead he will be a "shade": "One by one they were all becoming shades." Clearly, Gabriel's eschatology is an odd combination of Christian language ("soul") and nineteenth-century euphemism ("shade"). Although Gabriel's brother is a "senior curate," Gabriel's own image of death is tinged with non-Christian, nineteenth-century, heroic romanticism ("Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion . . ."). For him, the afterlife is Byronically vague: "that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead"; "[h]is own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world." Finally, there are the conventional sentimental tears, as much a part of Irish life as drink. Gabriel's are "generous," but not so different from Little Chandler's "tears of remorse" at the end of "A Little Cloud" or Joe's comic tears at the end of "Clay."

As he is about to drift into sleep, comforted by his tears and his romantic eschatology ("the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling"), the two patterns of images merge for the final time. He is snapped into half wakefulness by a "few light taps upon the pane [which] made him turn to the window." He watches the flakes fall against the lamplight. This snow has both the beautiful qualities of Gabriel's earlier reveries and the forbidding qualities of the real snow in the Dublin streets; "the flakes" are both "silver and dark." But the snow in Gabriel's last revery is no more real than in his first two. This is not the streaky and patchy slush that has fallen on Ireland this night; it is an imagined heavy blanket, falling, annihilating and thickly drifting over everything. Although the snow is not real, Gabriel does sense the ambivalent nature of real snow, and this is appropriate to his imaginative sweep across Ireland. Thus the mood in the revery is partly that of the murky Dublin streets. The central plain is "dark," the hills "treeless," the waves "dark mutinous," and finally we end in a "lonely churchyard."

Obviously, Gabriel's imagination has been forced beyond the bounds of urban Dublin. Now he flashes "westward" over all of Ireland, not simply over the "Fifteen Acres" of Phoenix Park. The park had imaginatively reassured him, with its pretty, snow-capped monument and its trees "weighted with snow"; this last revery, however, gives him no easy escape from Gretta's revelation. Even the comic pedantry of remembered details from the party ("Yes, the newspapers were right, . . .") cannot bring back Gabriel's reveries of comforting snow; the monument his imagination conjures up this time is not a gesture of Anglo-Irish urban patriotism. Instead, it is the simple grave of Michael

Furey, whom he would rather forget. This monument to a West of Ireland hero who died for love is an accidental conglomeration of the iconography of a Christian hero ("crooked crosses," "spears," "barren thorns") rather than the planned iconography of English nationalism. At least imaginatively, Ga-briel has left the safety of his urban, Anglo-Irish setting with its riverside quay, booksellers, and park, and he has taken the trip Miss Ivors challenged him to take: "The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward." The trip has become symbolic and nightmarish for Gabriel.

The snow drifts down, covering the Irish landscape, thickly drifting over the lonely graveyard. In this modern day *Night Thoughts,* the images of snow and death coalesce in the churchyard where Michael Furey lies buried. With these images in place, the narrator intervenes again, and begins to report Gabriel's sensations. Gabriel's drifting mind near sleep plays with the word pairs "falling faintly," "faintly falling," intensifying the oppressiveness of the snow in the repeated "falling" (repeated 7 times in 147 words) and reintroducing its delicacy in "faintly." He feels his soul swoon; he actually hears the inaudible snow falling "through the universe"; then in a simile ("like the descent . . .") he compares the snow with the fall of the last judgement. Although sentimental and melodramatic, Ga-briel's final reported sensations give the reader a strong sense of ending, not of the ending of sleep but of death (to "go west" has been an English euphemism for death since the 16th century). Snow has thus undergone a symbolic change in Gabriel's mind, from a way of representing his desire for escape into an idealized urban landscape to a representation of the ultimate escape of death. Although by the end of the story he is at one with the dead, it is a oneness of limited terror because of his restricted imaginative "vocabulary."

All of Gabriel's reveries about Gretta and snow, even this final one, reveal that he is a conventional Dubliner. After Gretta's revelation he recognizes some of his emotional limits, just as he senses the ambivalent nature of snow. But even in his leap "westward," he cannot escape the limits of his confining "vocabulary." He is unaware of how completely his urban, Anglo-Irish culture has altered his religion, his perception of heroism and his private passion by restricting his imagination.

The strength of this story comes from the way these patterns of disparate images merge and reinforce each other in order to symbolically define and limit the reader's sympathy for Gabriel. Here is a sensitive and intelligent Irishman who is part of the conventionality, the petty squalor, the paralysis and death of Dublin. Both cliché-ridden and "hypereducated," he embodies the deadness of that culture, with its sentimentality, its third-rate opera singers and its musical evenings. Caught between European and Gaelic culture, like Miss Ivors, he can embrace neither, except timidly on summer holidays. We can have sympathy with such a displaced man who has so little sense of self but not with "that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city" that created him.

Source: L. J. Morrissey, "Inner and Outer Perceptions in Joyce's 'The Dead'," in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. 25, No. 1, Winter, 1988, pp. 21-29.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Billigheimer discusses Joyce's use of contrasting images, such as cold and warmth; blindness and perception; and society and the individual experience.

In his short story "The Dead," James Joyce symbolically presents his critical view of Dublin society. The theme of the story is that of a spiritual paralysis which has seized a lifeless or "dead" society and of the vital effect in paradoxical contrast that the dead may have upon the living in urging them to a fuller self-awareness. In this juxtaposition of the symbolically living and the symbolically dead, the author works with the contrasting images of darkness and light, blindness and perception, cold and warmth, society at large and the individual experience, upper middle-class sterility and the fullness of a peasant's passion, and motion and stillness, all of which are united through the overall image of snow—the snow that falls upon the living and the dead.

The story opens when Gabriel enters a party given by his rich aunts in Dublin and comes in with his galoshes covered with snow. The guests participate in a musicale and in dancing. After some minor frustrations Gabriel longs to be outside with the refreshing snow. The guests gather round a plentifully laden dinner table. There is no meaningful communication or action until Gabriel delivers a speech honouring the noteworthy achievements of the deceased. The applause of the table guests is followed by laughter and singing. The guests leave, and their merry chatter in the hallway is silenced while the piano is heard accompanying the singing of Bartell D'Arcy. Gabriel sees his wife Gretta standing at the top of the stairs in the shadows listening to the music, and she appears to him like a picture which he would name *Distant Music.* As they drive westwards in their cab towards their hotel room, Gabriel becomes increasingly overwhelmed by his desire for Gretta. He discovers that since Bartell's singing, Gretta has been preoccupied. She reveals to Gabriel that Bartell's singing of "The Lass of Aughrim" recalled to her memory a former lover, Michael Furey, who used to sing that song. All her married years Gretta had held secret from Gabriel her love for Michael Furey, the tubercular lad who worked at the gasworks and died at seventeen burning with passion for her after he struggled through the rain to visit her. Gabriel stands motionless and silent in the dimly lit room as he comes to the realization of the dead boy's triumph over him in Gretta's love. He looks out of the window into the darkness, westwards onto the churchyard with the snow falling on Michael Furey's grave—the snow that falls upon the living and dead alike.

Although all the critics agree that the snow vision plays a significant role, they differ in their final interpretation. To some it is seen as the symbol of death. Others see the snow as symbolizing Gabri-el's escape from his own ego to a vision of all humanity. To Kenneth Burke and Allen Tate the snow symbolizes rebirth through inner perception. In others again the snow has ambivalent connotations of life and death. While all these interpretations help to create a deeper insight into the story, we agree with Florence L. Walzl that a central theme in James Joyce is a preoccupation with the spiritually paralyzed—the spiritually dead—who will ultimately achieve spiritual rebirth.

This reversal of meaning in the main symbol of the story, snow, is typical of the dual or ambivalent aspects of the other major symbols in "The Dead," all of which relate to the living, the dead, the symbolically living, and the symbolically dead. The author begins with the symbolic setting of an upper middle-class party in the city of Dublin in the early 1900s. Amidst the frippery of the dancing, the display of fine clothes, elegant manners, affectation of speech, and an elaborately laden dinner table with food of the best quality, we have a lively spectacle of physical movement in contrast to the stultifying atmosphere. The constant bustle of action is frivolous and trifling. After the party Gabriel and Gretta drive eastward to their hotel room, where, at the end of the story, we have in contrast Gabriel now feeling himself completely isolated in the dimly lit bedroom, stricken with immobility in the swoon of his epiphany, and he is brought to ultimate self-awareness and the realization that the true life of the spirit is the life of self-sacrifice. This the story moves from a fast-moving but diffuse picture into one narrowed to a keen but silent-and-still concentration of focus. This intense moment of Gabriel's discovery is precipitated by Gretta saying to him, "I think he died for me." Gabriel recalls the reflection he had had of himself in the mirror—which symbolically reveals to him reality through illusion—and discovers himself as "a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror." The meaning of the mirror image progresses from illusion to reality and to inner vision. After achieving this vision of reality of himself, Gabriel then looks out of the window onto the outside world with the snow and thus beholds a cosmic vision of communion between the living and the dead.

Gabriel's physical journey, from the house situated in the west of the city eastwards to the hotel in the center of the city, associates him symbolically in terms of space and direction with the doom of the inhabitants of Dublin. Conversely, his spiritual movement westward in his moment of illumination symbolizes his transcendence of human inertia by recognizing and accepting the truth of himself. His spiritual journey westward is realized as he looks westward out of the window onto the snowfall—the waters that have frozen to stillness.

Symbolic blindness in perception is another ambivalent facet of the symbolism of paralysis. The party guests are blind to their own condition. Although the older people have suffered, they lack insight and are insensitive. Eyes, eyesight, mirrors, and windows appear in ambivalent meaning, depending upon their context. At the party Gabriel's eyes are restless. On his first appearance he is introduced to the reader as a tall, stout, reddish-complexioned man: "On his hairless face there scintillated restlessly the polished lenses and the bright gilt rims of the glasses which screened his delicate and restless eyes." Again we see him: "Gabriel's eyes, irritated by the floor, which glittered with beeswax under the heavy chandelier, wandered to the wall above the piano." Later in the evening before he delivers his speech his eyes are nervously raised to the chandelier. His moving to look out of the windows into the darkness indicates his psychological uncertainty of himself. In turn, people outside, united by a common fate, are imagined as gazing into the little world inside.

Images of darkness associated with cold and of light associated with warmth are also met in juxtaposition and develop a paradoxical meaning at the end of the story. On entering the house, Gabriel finds his galoshes covered with snow, symbolizing his protection from the outside world. His destination is the party with its light, warmth, people, and luxurious entertainment. The party, in the physical environment of light and warmth, is conversely dark and cold in its spiritual sterility. In the dazzling light of the chandelier we observe the trifling actions of laughter, singing, and drinking of those who are dead. Gabriel, in his psychological isolation, looks out of the window and longs for the peace and solitude in the cold and dark outside. At the end of the party, after numerous biddings of "good-night," which suggest the transition into another life or perhaps the approach of death, the scenery outside, alternately light and dark, is pictured as ominous. The mist suggests the limited vision or "death" of the Dublin city dwellers.

This journey, symbolical of death, anticipates the scene in the hotel room in which the images are closely associated with death—the corridor, the darkness, the small room, Gabriel's demand that the candle be removed in favour of the "ghostly light" from the street lamp outside, which shines into the room through the window, and Gretta falling asleep on the bed after recalling with sobs the memory of her dead lover. In his final epiphany, Gabriel, whose eyes are now filled with tears, turns to the light coming through the window. He imagines the eyes of the dead lover at the moment when he tells Gretta that he does not want to live. In the partial darkness he achieves spiritual illumination.

The snow falling and melting is pictured as silvery flakes flickering under the lighted lamp in the dark. Snow in warm air turns to water, and water exposed to cold turns to ice. While water is the archetypal symbol of life, ice symbolizes death. Thus snow, ever subject to the influences of light and warmth, cold and dark, unites as a symbol of both the living and the dead.

Gabriel discovers that his marriage has been a life of paralysis. Through lust and shallow pleasures he had missed a marriage of close communion and self-sacrifice based on a deep love. On the way home he had anticipated the joy of being alone with his wife in the hotel room. In the pursuit of pleasure his children had been left overnight to be cared for by others. Gretta's life had also been moving towards death. Immersed in the memory of the past all these years, she had distanced herself from Gabriel. Each had moved away from the other towards a deadening of the spirit, the prevalent disease of Dublin middle-class society.

The continuous round of daily activities of a stultifying life of seeking pleasure and selfish gain is symbolized by Gabriel's pacing in a circle round the hall and jokingly mimicking Johnny, the horse continually circling round the statue of King William as if it were a mill. Ironically he misses the application to himself. Just as a person does not achieve anything in meaningless activity, the horse endlessly turning around the same circle is in effect static in its perpetual circling. Again, just as the horse galloping uses much energy aimlessly, the party guests going home all shout directions, cross-directions, and contradictory instructions to the cab driver. In the cab there is much

laughter, confused discussion, and commotion. Gabriel is symbolized both by the horse galloping blindly in the mist and by the statue covered with the snow, which represents death in life.

The symbolism of the horse steadily and ceaselessly operating the treadmill would have applied to Joyce himself, whose own writing career was beset with difficulties of poverty, semiblindedness, and public misunderstanding. Thus, apart from the meaning of psychic paralysis attributed to the "dead," the image of the horse circling the treadmill may also signify inurement to life's difficulties without achieving progressive movement. However, in Ga-briel's final vision the circle of life achieves a new stage, the stage of rebirth. In this transcendent stage all trivialities are seen as fitting into a scheme of cosmic events. Thus the conclusion of "The Dead" no longer takes place in a hotel room in the center of Dublin but in a general location in the universe. In achieving inner vision the fragments of experience are seen as parts of a comprehensive order.

As an example we may take Mr. D'Arcy's singing of the song "The Lass of Aughrim." While Gretta listens to the singing and Gabriel studies her standing "under the dusty fanlight and the flame of gas" which lights up the rich bronze of her hair," the flush of her cheeks, and the radiance of her eyes, he wonders, "[w]hat is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of.... *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter." Mr. D'Arcy's singing, which Gretta connects to the memory of her dead lover, is the initial instrument of Gabriel's epiphany. It is from the moment that Gabriel sees Gretta as a symbol of distant music that his whole situation assumes a reverse pattern. Gabriel is not aware of the significance of this moment, and ironically enough, he does not suspect how distant Gretta really is from him. He is preoccupied with her physical beauty, but there is no meaningful communion with her. At the moment of his most intense desire for her, she reveals to him that Bartell D'Arcy's singing recalled to her the secret memory of Michael Furey. Under the crushing impact of this revelation, Gabriel is led to his vision of reality, after which there is a complete reversal in the ambivalent aspects of the symbolism.

From the moment Gretta hears the song, she becomes an object of grace, beauty, and mystery to Gabriel, whose passion becomes more and more aroused as he watches her and joyfully anticipates the ecstatic fulfillment of his honeymoon night. When the precise moment arrives, Gretta discloses her preoccupation with Michael, who used to sing that song. Gabriel is filled with humiliation and shame, and this is necessary for his own self-discovery. Ironically Joyce shows the overwhelming power of the spirit, which is stronger than death, when Gretta says that Michael died for her. Now Gabriel's concern moves towards Gretta. It is thus through the spirit of the dead boy that Gabriel transcends his own situation and reaches towards a true communion with Gretta. He disciplines himself to relinquish his claims upon her as specifically his, and through this act of will he transcends the world of conditions. When he had approached her in his passionate desire, she had kissed him and called him a generous person. Now "generous tears" are in his eyes. These different levels of meaning show how he has transcended his condition into that of an impalpable world.

The music of the past pervades the atmosphere of the evening. The guests refer to past singers in conversation. Gabriel refers to his aunts as "The Three Graces of the Dublin musical world." In his speech Gabriel pays tribute to the singers of bygone days. Ironically it is after this that Mr. D'Arcy sings the old Irish song "The Lass of Aughrim" in the key turning point of the story. In Joyce, Brewster Ghiselin states, "music symbolizes the motion of the soul toward life or the call of life to the soul." As soon as he pictures his wife as a symbol of music, Gabriel recalls the joyful moments of their past. Music recalls the memories of the past and urges communion with the dead. The distant, remembered singing of Michael Furey, recalling a love of self-sacrifice, is a powerful summons to communion.

Through the device of music Gabriel has a deeper communion with Gretta. He transcends his own condition and achieves the cosmic vision of all humanity, the communion of the living with the dead. In his epiphany the image of Michael Furey becomes transformed into a Christ-like figure, "the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree." Michael Furey lay buried under the falling snow which drifted "on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns."

The characters Michael and Gabriel may be seen on three levels of meaning. At first they are rivals for Gretta's love. At the climax of the snow vision they rise to mythic figures and archetypes. On a third level their significance may be related to their angelic names. Gabriel moves from a condition of psychic blindness to illumination after Gretta tells him that Michael visited her in the rain when he was ill, sacrificing his life to be with her. He then realizes that he has never lived with such intense depth of feeling and understands why Michael's love for Gretta has triumphed over his. Ironically it is Michael who is alive to Gretta and Gabriel who is dead.

Michael as a symbol of sacrificial love is seen both as a hero and as a god. Gabriel, the middle-class Dubliner, is incapable of such action. If we see Michael as representing the soil of Ireland, the country which Gabriel spurns, we may see the symbolic implication that it is the Dubliner that betrays Ireland.

In their representation of contrasting archangels, Michael as an angel surpasses Gabriel in the hierarchy, just as again in Gretta's mind Michael occupies a stronger position than Gabriel. In Jewish and Christian occult tradition, the archangel Mi-chael symbolizes water. He is called "the prince of snow" and is associated with silver. Snow is the primordial substance of which the earth was created. Gabriel symbolizes the heavenly element fire. He is called "the prince of fire" and is associated with gold. All these symbolic aspects are suggested in the story.

In line with the New Testament, there is the polarity between Michael as the angel of the Last Judgment and of Gabriel as the angel of the Annunciation. This dimension is clearly pertinent to the snow vision, where Gabriel is brought to a judgment of himself by Michael. Michael can be seen as bringing Gabriel the realization that he is dead or conversely bringing him illumination at the point of spiritual death. Michael, the angel of water and snow, is associated with rain and cold. Gretta remembers him as her lover, who died for her from rain and cold as she recalls the picture of how he stood shivering

under a tree. Finally, in Gabriel's epiphany, a vision appears of Michael as a Christ figure, having died under a tree dripping with snow. Water and snow are ambivalent symbols of life and death. To Gretta, Michael is associated with rain, symbolizing life and love. This association shifts from an individual to a cosmic dimension when Michael appears in Gabriel's final vision. To Gabri-el, Michael is associated with snow, which is associated with death.

In Gabriel's symbolic association with the angel of fire, his love for Gretta is described as "the tender fires of stars" representing "moments of their life together" which broke upon and "illumined his memory." Thus his love also has an element of life-giving fire apart from the deadening fire of lust. In Dante's *Paradiso* the lustful are purged in fire while fire as light symbolizes God's love. Joyce's "fires of stars" are suggestive of Dante's vision of the planetary heavens as circles of light and the angelic choirs as circles of fire. These ambivalent aspects of life and death in fire are constituent parts of Gabriel's character.

In distinction to the austerity of Michael as the angel of the Last Judgment in the Old Testament, Gabriel is God's messenger sent to Daniel to interpret the Messianic prophecy. In the New Testament it is the archangel Gabriel who brings the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary. Similarly, the angel Gabriel appears in a vision to Zacharias, whose wife Elizabeth is advanced in years, bringing the prophecy of a new life in the birth of John the Baptist. If we view Gabriel's vision in the light of these biblical references, we may see it as a symbol of his rebirth. Perhaps, on the other hand, it formulates the sudden realization of his moribund state and his powerlessness as a human being to transcend it. These ambiguities create a wide perspective for Joyce's symbolic structure throughout the story.

The ambivalence of the facets of snow and fire, light and dark, warmth and cold, motion and stasis, and blindness and perception, which are reversed in their implications at the conclusion of the story, constantly permeates the paradoxical theme of death-in-life and life-in-death. Both the ambivalences and the ambiguities in meaning which culminate in the snow vision as death and rebirth illustrate the author's ironic perception of the frustrations of the living dead. The perpetual treadmill of the human condition can only be transcended by the sound of "distant music," which is generated by a psychological crisis, represented as death and rebirth.

While Gabriel represents everyman, Michael, through his death of self-sacrifice, is a god-like hero. Only when Gabriel achieves his full maturation, ending in death and rebirth, can he in his spiritual illumination perceive the Angel of Judgment. He now sees that the snow which falls on "barren thorns" falls on an insensible humanity. Realizing his condition of death, Gabriel symbolically annunciates the new life through the salvation of Michael:

His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

Source: Rachel V. Billigheimer, "The Living in Joyce's 'The Dead'," in *CLA Journal,* Vol. XXXI, No. 4, June, 1988, pp. 472-83.

Adaptations

The Dead is a 1987 film version of Joyce's story directed by John Huston. It stars Anjelica Huston as Gretta Conroy and Donald McCann as Gabriel Conroy.

The Dead and Other Stories (1993) is an audiocassette published by Penguin. It is read by the actor Gerard McSorley.

"The Dead" and Other Stories from Dubliners (1989) is an audiocassette by The Audio Partners. It is performed by Danny Huston and Kate Mulgrew.

Topics for Further Study

Do some research about contemporary Ireland, particularly the conflict in Northern Ireland. How does the political climate compare to the Ireland in Joyce's time?

What does Joyce mean by paralysis? Do you find any examples of paralysis in American society?

Readers disagree about the result of Gabriel's epiphany. Do you think he will change as a result of it, or will he remain as he was?

How do you think women are portrayed in "The Dead." How would you compare their social status to women today?

British Rule vs. Irish Nationalism

For much of its history, Ireland has been dominated by British rule, and the debate between independence and allegiance to Britain appears in "The Dead." For instance, Molly Ivors confronts Gabriel about writing reviews for the *Daily Express,* a newspaper that supports British rule. Generally, those who supported Irish independence were Catholic, while those who allied themselves with the British were Protestant. Gabriel's family is Catholic. Some critics conclude that Mr. Browne, a Protestant, symbolizes British rule because most people dislike him and his nature is overbearing. Aunt Kate says of him, "Browne is everywhere," just as the oppressive rule of England is everywhere in Ireland.

Death and the Dead

Dead people play an important role in "The Dead." Gabriel honors them in his after-dinner speech, and several dead characters are mentioned during the story: Ellen (Gabriel's mother), Pat Morkan (his uncle), Patrick Morkan (his grandfather), and Michael Furey. Michael Furey particularly inspires Gabriel to a fuller self-awareness. Gabri-el realizes after Gretta tells him of Michael's love for her that inevitably he and everyone he knows is going to die. Hence it is better to live life fully rather

than passively. Another reminder of death comes in the dinnertime discussion of a monastery whose monks sleep in coffins. The "dead" of the title are both those who are literally deceased and those who are merely going through the motions of living but who are spiritually dead.

Provincial Culture vs. European Culture

The setting of "The Dead" coincides with a period of revival of Irish culture. People wanted to revive Irish music, art, and language. The representative of this in "The Dead" is Molly Ivors. She wears an Irish brooch and advocates learning the Irish language.

The guests discuss the talents of tenors past and present, but they also note whether they are Irish or European. Gabriel values traveling to Europe and learning the European languages. Joyce himself favored absorbing European culture and rejected the purely provincial beliefs of many of his contemporaries. Gabriel says to Molly that Irish is not after all his language—many people of that time indeed did not know or speak Irish fluently, but rather used English.

Self-Realization

Through most of "The Dead," Gabriel is a self-absorbed person who mostly cares about how he comes across to others. He doesn't care about the feelings of others so much as he cares about how he looks. For instance, when Lily angrily tells him that all young men are "palaver and what they can get out of you," Gabriel feels that he made a mistake with her. Instead of apologizing, however, he condescendingly and impersonally gives her money—calling it a Christmas present. Later in the story, after Gretta tells him about Michael Furey, Gabriel is able to suddenly step back and look at himself and his relationship to his wife and others.

Compare and Contrast

1900s: In 1905 Arthur Griffith formed the Sinn Fein movement. The name stands for "we ourselves" or "ourselves alone." The organization's goals were to practice civil disobedience and passive resistance to British rule.

1990s: Since aligning itself with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) with the advent of the civil war in the 1920s, Sinn Fein has acted as the IRA's political wing and plays a significant role in negotiating peace settlements in Northern Ireland.

1900s: There was a revival of Irish culture and language in the early 1900s, led in part by the Gaelic League. Artists collected Irish music and stories, and it was popular to wear Celtic symbols.

1990s: An Irish revival is happening again through the popularity of Irish stage shows such as "Riverdance." For the first time, numbers of Protestants are taking up Irish dancing, formerly practiced primarily by Catholics.

1900s: In 1907 Britain granted dominion status to New Zealand, a former colony. This gave New Zealand the right to govern itself, even though the British monarch was still considered the head of state. Britain maintained rule over Ireland, however.

1990s: British occupation of Hong Kong ended in 1998. Although a cease-fire exists in Northern Ireland, it is still under British rule.

1900s: At the turn of the century, Protestants tended to favor British rule while Catholics supported independence or home rule. A small but influential minority of Catholics advocated radical nationalism.

1990s: Protestant and Catholic loyalties essentially remain the same, particularly in Northern Ireland, where relations between the two groups are volatile. Militant organizations representing both groups have committed numerous acts of violence.

What Do I Read Next?

Dubliners (1914) by James Joyce. The short story collection in which "The Dead" appears provides context for a better understanding of the story as part of a unified whole, with themes and characters interwoven throughout.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916) by James Joyce. Joyce's autobiographical novel features Joyce's alter-ego Stephen Dedalus. Although technically a work of fiction, this work gives insight to Joyce's character and his aesthetic theories.

In Our Time (1914) by Ernest Hemingway. This is Hemingway's first collection of short stories. He writes in a style similar to Joyce's, presenting the action with little or no comment.

The Stranger (1942) by Albert Camus. Originally published in French as *L'entranger,* this novel's main character, Mersault, is much like the people in "The Dead." Charged with the crime of murder, Mersault has an epiphany as he sits awaiting his death by guillotine.

Existentialism (1974) edited by Robert C. Solo-mon. This book is an anthology of works by writers who are considered part of the philosophical movement of the title. The writers include Soren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, and Friedrich Nietzsche, among others.

Further Study

Anderson, Chester G. *James Joyce,* London: Thames and Hudson, 1967.

An easy-to-read and comprehensive biography of Joyce, with many illustrations of Joyce, his family, friends, and Dublin.

Burgess, Anthony. *Here Comes Everybody: An Introduction to James Joyce for the Ordinary Reader,* London: Faber and Faber, 1965.

A helpful introduction to Joyce designed for those who, as Burgess says, have been scared off by the professors.

Garret, Peter K., editor. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "Dubliners,"* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1968.

A good collection of informative, accessible essays useful for gaining a better understanding of Joyce and *Dubliners.*

Gifford, Don. *Joyce Annotated,* University of California Press, 1982.

A comprehensive annotation of *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* This is a useful reference for understanding the cultural context of both works. Gifford has an introduction giving a history of Ireland, and the book explains many obscure allusions.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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