

The protagonist of *The Dead*, Gabriel Conroy, is introduced to the readers as he attends a party on the day of Epiphany. After the dinner he delivers a speech, as he does every year. Sometime later Gabriel's wife, Gretta, is captivated by a ballad sung by Bartell D'Arcy at the party. Her husband experiences a sudden feeling of passion for Gretta and as the two return to their hotel room, the woman reveals that she was actually reminiscing about her former lover while listening to the song. This, obviously, comes to Gabriel as a great surprise, but as soon as his anger subsides, he experiences a peculiar moment of revelation, "a moment of sublime understanding" (Triggs 1998: 1). This is a briefly summarized plot of *The Dead*, yet the lack of dynamic action does not mean that nothing is happening. On the contrary, there is a lot going on inside Gabriel, as the moment of epiphany breaks his tedious life that he has led as if paralyzed.

The much-revealing title of the story directly relates to the main protagonist. Kenner (1956: 62) even called this story a "definition of the living death." There is indeed no doubt that Gabriel Conroy is one of "the dead," that is to say, those "who remain alive, but fail to live; the disillusioned, the self-destructive, the blighted and wasted lives" (Benstock 1985: 149).

Gabriel is first introduced as "Mr. Conroy," which shows that he is a respected figure. When he enters with his wife, Gretta, they appear as a typical bourgeois couple who lead monotonous and boring lives; they do not seem extraordinary. However, the differences between the spouses soon transpire, and as Gretta appears natural and hence likeable, her husband is more self-conscious, acting in a somewhat artificial way, thus not being fully himself. As Nenyeyi (2002: 103) puts it, Mr. Conroy's behavior frequently shows that he wants to "express something else, something different, but it is never defined and characterized." A fragment about Gabriel's galoshes also proves that he is also, to some extent, conceited. The protagonist often wore galoshes, although they were rather considered extravagant, thus his wife makes fun of this at the party. Aunt Julia's reaction, revealing that she does not know what galoshes are, and Gretta's response that "Gabriel says everyone wears them on the Continent" (139), show that Gabriel may be a bit pretentious, desiring to appear more cosmopolitan than other Irish people (Triggs 1998: 6). It can be stated that he has "an unpleasant sense of cultural superiority," which is, however, "more a burden to him than a source of satisfaction" (Eagleton 2005: n.p.).

Deeply concerned with how people see him, Gabriel nevertheless "sees himself as set apart from the society he inhabits" (Fagnoli and Gillespie 2006: 75). He is a respected figure

in his family circles, participating in their celebrations regularly and fulfilling roles imposed on him, but he is emotionally distant from what he does. He lives in a different world, and although perhaps he is not an obvious and declared outcast, he appears to be entirely different from the world that he lives in. Gabriel feels also far removed from Irish lifestyle and traditions, but he is rather much more connected to the Continental fashions and ways of living.

This is particularly evident in his conversation with Molly Ivors, who claims to be ashamed of Gabriel because he writes for the Daily Express. Afterwards, the woman suggests that he should go with them on a trip to the Aran Isles, but Conroy says that he has already planned a cycling tour abroad. Miss Ivors is surprised to hear that, asking him: "And why do you go to France and Belgium instead of visiting your own land?" (146), accusing him that he has no knowledge of his own country and fellow Irishmen. Gabriel responds in a blunt manner: "I'm sick of my own country, sick of it." Asked by Miss Ivors about the reasons for such negative feelings, he does not reply; outraged woman calls him West Briton. Gabriel cannot identify the motivations for his lack of patriotism, but his discomfort can be felt nevertheless. Some time later, he looks through the window, thinking: "How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along the river and then through the park! (...) How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper-table!" (148). His dissociation from his immediate surrounding and a desire to go out for a walk is therefore a symbol of his general discomfort with the environment he lives in and a desire to escape it (Sperber 2010: 67).