



Spiritual Paralysis and Epiphany in James Joyce's *The Dead*: A Critical Review

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The Dead is the last story of *Dubliners* by James Joyce, which is generally considered to be one of the most relevant works of the modernist short story. The story has received a lot of critical interest, especially concerning the issue of spiritual paralysis and epiphany that describe the Irish society depicted by Joyce. This review critically evaluates key scholarly interpretations of *The Dead* with a particular emphasis on the manner in which critics have interpreted the association between psychological paralysis of Gabriel Conroy and his ultimate revelation. The paper will examine the role of the elements of paralysis and epiphany as key themes to the modernist narrative style that Joyce employs through an evaluation of powerful readings of the story. The symbolic and cultural significance of the revelation made by Gabriel at the conclusion of the story is also addressed in the article as it relates to the Irish identity, memory and lack of emotion. Using such a critical perspective review, the paper shows that the awakening of Gabriel as described by Joyce remains a topic that can be interpreted differently by scholars of literature. In the end, *The Dead* turns out to be an ambiguous modernist work where the clash between stasis and revelation determines not only the level of self-awareness of the main character but also the overall thematic meaning of the work.

Keywords: James Joyce; *The Dead*; spiritual paralysis; epiphany; modernist fiction; *Dubliners*.

الشلل الروحي والتجلي في قصة "الموتى" لجيمس جويس: مراجعة نقدية

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تُعدّ قصة "الموتى" آخر قصص مجموعة دبلنيون (*Dubliners*) لجيمس جويس، واحدة من أبرز منجزات القصة القصيرة الحداثيّة. وقد حظيت هذه القصة باهتمام نقدي واسع، ولا سيّما فيما يتصل بالشلل الروحي والتجليّ الصفتين اللتين تصفان المجتمع الأيرلندي كما يصوّره جويس. تهدف هذه المراجعة إلى تقويم أبرز التّأويلات النقدية لقصة "الموتى" مع تركيز خاص على الكيفية التي فسّر بها النقاد العلاقة بين الشلل النفسي الذي يعانيه غابرييل كونروي وبين انكشافه النهائي. كما تبحث الدراسة في دور عنصري الشلل والتجليّ بوصفهما ثيمتين محوريّتين في الأسلوب السردي الحداثي الذي يوظفه جويس، وذلك من خلال تحليل قراءات مؤثرة للقصة. وتتوقف المقالة كذلك عند الدلالة الرمزية والثقافية للتجليّ الذي يعيشه غابرييل في خاتمة القصة، وعلاقته بالهوية الأيرلندية والذاكرة والجمود العاطفي. ومن خلال هذا المنظور النقدي، تبين الدراسة أن صحوة غابرييل كما يصوّرها جويس لا تزال موضوعاً مفتوحاً لتأويلات متعددة بين دارسي الأدب. وفي المحصلة، تتبدّى قصة "الموتى" عملاً حداثياً ملتبساً، يحدّد فيه الصراع بين السكون والتجليّ ليس فقط مستوى وعي الشخصية الرئيسيّة بذاتها، بل أيضاً المعنى الموضوعاتي العام للعمل.



الكلمات المفتاحية: جيمس جويس؛ "الموتى"؛ الشلل الروحي؛ التجلي؛ السرد الحداثي؛ دبلنيون.

Introduction

The Dead is the last story in *Dubliners*, and it is regarded as one of the most successful stories of the modernist short fiction by James Joyce. Published in 1914 as the final story of the series of Joyce, the story is the culmination of many of these themes which dominate *Dubliners* and especially the theme of paralysis which Joyce thought was what dominated the Irish society at the turn of the twentieth century. In the entire collection Joyce depicts characters whose emotions are stagnant, whose culture is frustrated, and their inability to take direct action in their social and moral realms. These themes are given their most advanced expression in *The Dead* in the process of the psychological growth of the main character Gabriel Conroy.

The critics have often pointed out that *The Dead* takes a special place among *Dubliners* since it transcends the normal social realism of the previous stories and reaches a point of self-realization. Joyce himself referred to the collections of *Dubliners* as investigations of what he referred to as paralysis both the state of individuals and the social backdrop of the wider Dublin life. To this end, the events that unfold at Gabriel in the annual dinner party with the Morkan sisters depict a feeling of emotional and intellectual alienation which is subtle and omnipresent in his relations with the rest of the world. His communication with the guests especially with Miss Ivors reveals his ambiguity regarding his cultural identity and his uncomfortable role in the Irish society.

Paralysis in *Dubliners* has thus evolved to be the most talked of theme in the Joycean criticism. Several critics believe that Joyce does not describe paralysis as the lack of physical movement but as a mental and spiritual state. The characters are frequently caught in the middle of the urge and the action that they cannot fit in between the inner needs and the reality of the social surrounding. The character of Gabriel is a perfect example of such a condition as he constantly fails to hold on to the intellectual superiority, displaying his insecurity and emotional loneliness at the same time.

The other idea that underlines the interpretations of *The Dead* is the application of literary element of epiphany by Joyce. Joyce applied this term to the moments of unexpected spiritual revelation when one of the characters obtains a deeper sense of reality. In most of his works, Joyce explores the concept of epiphany which acts as a pivot in the situations where commonplace occurrences result into a significant discovery of the essence of being. The last thought Gabriel has at the end of the story is commonly considered to have been one of the most known epiphanic in the contemporary literature. When Gabriel reflects on the memory of Michael Furey, the



gulf between him and his wife Gretta, the process brings him to change, which realigns his perception of life, love, and mortality.

The thematic correlation between paralysis and revelation is supported by Joyce through a symbolic story of the falling snow in the last scene. The narrator notes that snow was falling weakly through the universe, on all the living and the dead (Joyce, 2000). This picture has garnered many critical commentaries since it proposes the endlessness of human mortality as well as emotional awakening. To most critics, the snow is a representation of the thin-line between life and death, memory and forgetfulness, emotional indifference and spiritual recognition.

Due to these thematic issues, *The Dead* has produced numerous critical interpretations. The story has been interpreted in a variety of ways by scholars, such as through modernist aesthetics, the Irish cultural identity, in representation of symbols and its psychological interpretation. In spite of all these methods, spiritual paralysis and epiphany are of primary concern in the majority of arguments about the story. The ultimate realization of Gabriel poses a valuable question, which has long been the source of Joycean criticism, and that is: whether the epiphany marks a real escape out of paralysis, or does it simply mark the extent of the emotional isolation of Gabriel?

This paper answers this question by critically reviewing the significant scholarly interpretations of *The Dead*. Through the analysis of the impactful readings of the story, the study will delve into the way critics have identified the connection between paralysis and epiphany in the psychological development of Gabriel. This review aims to show how the article by Joyce remains controversial regarding the definition of self-awareness, memory and spiritual awakening in the modernist literature.

2. Spiritual Paralysis in Dubliners

The major attribute of *Dubliners* that is most unique is the theme of spiritual paralysis that was used repeatedly throughout the book and that Joyce had argued dominated individual consciousness and the overall social context of early twentieth-century Dublin. The characters in the collection are also emotionally stagnant, morally hesitant, and psychologically restricted in different ways, which do not enable them to make any meaningful change in their lives. Instead of putting forth dramatic external struggles, Joyce often prefers more mundane scenes of interior discovery that show the boundaries of the social and emotional worlds of his characters.

Even Joyce himself considered paralysis as one of the main aspects in describing the Irish life. The characters of *Dubliners* are seen to be frequently caught between desire and acts, which could not get out of the trap of the family, the religious authorities, and the tradition. The fact that Joyce treats paralysis not merely as physical inactivity



alone has often been noted by critics as an extension of the problem into intellectual indecision and even repression of feelings. In this regard, paralysis is metaphorized to represent a larger cultural state prevailing with individual identity as well as national consciousness.

In this context, the characters of *Dubliners* are often facing situations where they realize they are limited by something but have no power to change the realization into clear action. This conflict between identification and stasis is more pronounced in the tales like *Eveline* where the main character understands that he could get out but ends up bound by fear and duty. These motifs are repeated in the rest of the collection, which further contributes to the image of Dublin as a city of indecisiveness and lack of feelings, as portrayed by Joyce.

The motif of paralysis culminates in the most sophisticated manifestation of the same in *The Dead*, in which the main character Gabriel Conroy represents most of the psychological and cultural conflicts in the collection. Gabriel first comes out as a person who is self-assured and intellectually confident, who is an observer of things in the world around him, and who is a cultured and logical person. But as the story progresses, he becomes increasingly shown through his relationships with other characters to be vulnerable to this self-image. His meeting with Miss Ivors, e.g., reveals his questionness regarding his cultural self and his awkward connection with the Irish nationalism.

Several academics have construed the character of Gabriel to represent the intellectual paralysis that had been inflicted on the Irish middle classes at this time. Even though Gabriel is educated and socially broadminded, he seems to be in most cases largely unfeeling towards the people surrounding him. His well-established identity relies on keeping up his intellectual superiority but this pose falls apart over and over again when he is faced with the actual emotional experience. Consequently, the conflict within Gabriel can be viewed as a wider opposition between the realization of oneself and emotional detachment that determines the major themes of the story.

Joyce strengthens this emotional stagnation by use of the symbolic structure of the story. As the dinner party progresses, Gabriel is watching the social life of the people with a certain degree of interest and being indifferent at the same time. Although he tries to keep the situation under control, his responses often demonstrate his feeling of insecurity and uneasiness. His speech, which he thought out, is, just to mention an example, the key to his acceptance of intellectual authority and at the same time his denial of cultural space of the Dublin society.



The idea of paralysis is even more crucial when Gabriel has to face the emotional intensity of the memories of his wife. The reminder of Michael Furey by Gretta, brings into force a strong contrast between the emotional life of Gabriel that was controlled and the strength of a love that previously had not been a part of his life. Gabriel as she tells him the story slowly comes to understand that maybe his own view of love and devotion is shallow, in comparison to the fervor commitment that Michael Furey once showed. This understanding is the first step in the transformation of Gabriel, and sets forth the narrative, to the epiphanic moment which eventually brings the story to a close.

The falling snow described by Joyce in the last scene has thus been one of the most often discussed images of contemporary literary criticism. The narrator notes that the snow was falling adverbially through the universe on everything living and dead (Joyce, 2000). This image also indicates a symbolical relationship between death, memory, and spiritual enlightenment, supporting the fact that the realization of his own limitations by Gabriel cannot be discussed outside of a more general consideration of the human condition.

Due to its multidimensional symbolic and psychological character, the issue of spiritual paralysis in *The Dead* received a great deal of scholarly interest. The concept has been studied by critics in diverse ways that include the cultural identity, emotion prohibition and modernist technique of narrations. Although these approaches are different, it is almost unanimously held that the experience of Gabriel is an important moment in the way Joyce seeks to explore the theme of self-knowledge and change that is possible even within the society that is characterized by inertia.

3. Critical Interpretations of Paralysis in *The Dead*

The portrayal of paralysis in *The Dead* by James Joyce has received much critical discourse since the inception of the Joycean scholarship. It has been known to critics that the idea of paralysis in *Dubliners* is not only a descriptive aspect of social life but a key structural principle that determines the actions of the psychological aspects of the characters of Joyce. This theme takes its own most advanced manifestation in *The Dead* as the emotional restrictions of Gabriel Conroy are gradually revealed and he finally encounters the realization of his own existence on a new level.

Early Joycean critics often took the character of Gabriel as a symbol of intellectual stalemate that Joyce saw as the condition of the Irish middle-class society. An example assertion of this is made by Hugh Kenner who states that Joyce in many cases places his characters in an ironic disengagement with the social world they exist in. Kenner would argue that the intellectual identity that Gabriel has developed enables him to view the surrounding world as superior and at the same time the same



alienation does not enable him to attain any emotional interest in people (Kenner, 1987). This state is manifested in the way Gabriel behaves carefully in the society as he presents himself at the dinner party of the Morkan sisters: he does the job of the learned and well-spoken gentleman, but inside he is confused about his cultural and emotional background.

Similar stresses are made by Richard Ellmann who points at the psychological complexity of the character of Gabriel. Ellmann opines that the experiences that Gabriel undergoes during the evening show a progressive loss of confidence especially when he finds himself faced by circumstances that make him lose his intellectual mastery. Examples of this include his awkward interaction with Miss Ivors, which compels him to deal with the instability of his relationship with the Irish culture and nationalism. According to Ellmann, this response by Gabriel shows the insecurity that lies behind his exterior calmness so that his intellectual persona is in some way a shield against his emotional insecurity (Ellmann, 1982).

The other stream of criticism has been the cultural implication of paralysis in the description of the Irish society by Joyce. Vincent Cheng views Dubliners also in the context of the colonial discourse and Irish cultural identity. Cheng states that Joyce describes the stagnation in the psychological lives of his characters as the result of the colonial status of Ireland that resulted in the creation of a society with no clear-cut views, cultural dislocation, and divided loyalties (Cheng, 1995). The conflict with Irish nationalism is more general and revealed in the ambivalent attitude of Gabriel in *The Dead*. His choice of the culture of continental Europe to the Irish traditions shows how the cultural aspiration and the national identity are closely interconnected in the way Joyce depicts the Dublin society.

The emotional aspect of paralysis in the character of Gabriel is discussed by other researchers. Margot Norris claims that Joyce tends to create the moments of emotional discovery by showing the constraints of the self-concept of his heroes. Norris believes that Gabriel is not as mature emotionally than he appears to be intellectually, as they are revealed only when he is facing the circumstances beyond his control (Norris, 2003). His response to the tale of Gretta concerning Michael Furey depicts this change. As Gabriel hearkens to what his wife has remembered about her love at young age, full of sacrifice and passion, he starts to come to understand how his own life has been marked by the detachment of emotions.

The opposition of Gabriel and Michael Furey has thus become one of the focus points of the critical interpretations of the story. Whereas Gabriel embodies human reason and social decency, Michael Furey represents a kind of emotional outburst that Gabriel has never known. This resistance is often read by critics as the figurative picture of the opposition of lived and intellectual abstraction. The fact that Gabriel



finds out that Gretta has loved another man with the love he cannot match makes him rethink his beliefs about love, self, and personal meaning.

Derek Attridge underlines the significance of this episode in the larger strategy of narration used by Joyce. According to Attridge, Joyce often creates epiphanic experiences in his works where the mundane experiences are suddenly enlightened by the new revelations of human life (Attridge, 2004). In *The Dead*, Gabriel realizes that this is the case when he ponders on what Gretta is remembering and what the sacrifice by Michael Furey meant. The ending scene of the story thus is more of a personal revelation rather than a wider reflection of mortality and the human vulnerability.

Joyce emphasizes the meaning of Gabriel awakening with the symbolic nature of a snow, which this story ends with. According to the narrator, Gabriel perceives the snow that is falling lightly through the universe on everyone who is alive or dead (Joyce, 2000). This picture has received a lot of guesses as to be on unity and isolation. On the one hand, the snow falling can indicate such a general state of affairs that all the human beings are united by their mortality. Meanwhile, though, it also highlights the stark silence that the emotional terrain of the story is dominated by, and the theme of paralysis that permeates Dubliners.

Critics have also seen the last reflection of Gabriel as a liberated state of his character which previously was characterized by emotional constraints. Based on this reading, Gabriel acknowledging his vulnerability helps him to become more aware of the human experience. Yet, still, according to others, the epiphany is not necessarily a solution to the state of paralysis but only an indication of its severity. In terms of this, the recognition by Gabriel is not an alteration but recognition of the emotional distance, which still remains in shaping his relationship with the world.

Although these interpretations vary, a majority of the critics concur that the character of Gabriel Conroy as developed by Joyce is one of the subtlest psychological analysis in the modernist literature. The narrative form of *The Dead* slowly reveals the constraints of the self-perception of Gabriel as it leads him to a point of self-awareness that alters his view of life and death. This intricate interplay of paralysis and revelation is what enables Joyce to produce the story that, even a hundred years after publication, remains the subject of critical discussion.

4. Epiphany and Gabriel's Transformation

Although the motif of spiritual paralysis is the structural basis of *The Dead*, Joyce eventually guides the narrative to an encounter of deep psychological awareness more often referred to in Joycean criticism as epiphany. The literary theory and method of narration of Joyce is centered on the idea of epiphany. Joyce himself



described the term epiphany as an act of spiritual revelation, a sudden moment where the nature or even the nature of a character or a situation is brought out through a common occurrence. This revelation in many of the works by Joyce is a moment when the main character changes his or her understanding of realism and, consequently, enables the character to see the new dimensions of personal identity and human experience that were not evident before.

The epiphany of Gabriel Conroy in *The Dead* is a slow process that comes to him as he considers the emotional significance of the story of Michael Furey told by Gretta. At the beginning of the story, Gabriel views himself as a mature and intellectual spectator of the social surrounding. His education, exposure to the European culture and his capacity to express sophisticated views on literature and society give him intellectual self-confidence. However, this superiority is immediately shattered several times throughout the events of the evening, which implies that the identity that Gabriel has been building up harbors greater insecurities.

The discovery that ultimately changes Gabriel is when Gretta tells her tale about Michael Furey, a young man who passionately loved her when she was young and died soon after standing outside her window in the rain. This tale brings about a touch of emotionalism that is so opposite to the cool and intellectualized attitude that Gabriel has towards life. When Gabriel reads the memories that Gretta has, he starts to realize that the extent of emotion that is attached to Michael Furey is some kind of devotion which he himself had never felt.

This is an instance that has been interpreted by many critics to be the start of the psychological awakening of Gabriel. Michael Furey is a story which, according to Ellmann, makes Gabriel face the deficiencies of his own emotional life, and this is how one can see that intellectual awareness of the self is not the same as real human passion (Ellmann, 1982). The fact that Gabriel is aware that Gretta loved another man with a depth that he is unable to achieve, undermines his feeling of superiority and makes the individual rethink his concept of love and personality.

The realization is further enhanced by the increasing mortality that Gabriel is getting. Gabriel starts to think about the bigger meaning of life, memory and human shortness as he examines the death of Michael Furey. The story gradually transforms into the direct emotional circumstance and a more intellectual cogitation over the essence of being. Joyce is successful in this metamorphosis through the barely noticeable changes in the narrative point of view which gives the inner thoughts of Gabriel a possibility to blend with the symbolic imagery that defines the end point of the narrative.



The imagery of snow, as used by Joyce, is rather significant in building up the epiphanic design of the story. The falling snow across Ireland in the last few pages of the story has been extensively understood to be an emblem of universality as well as emotional desensitization. As Gabriel looks out of the window and cogitates about the memories of Gretta, the snow falling down takes a new significance in the form of the metaphor of the human condition which connects the living and the dead. The narrator explains how Gabriel envisions the snow falling gently through the universe on all the living and the dead (Joyce, 2000).

This image of the hand holding a stone has brought a lot of critical interpretation since it brings out a paradox in the epiphany of Gabriel. On the one hand, the picture creates the feeling of spiritual awakening when Gabriel notices the frailty of human existence and the profundity of emotional experience that he has been overlooking before. The snow seems to melt down the borders that isolate the lives of individuals, indicating a general relationship of the past and the present, memory and reality, life and death.

Nonetheless, other critics state that the epiphany experienced by Gabriel does not always eliminate the state of paralysis that defines his previous experiences. Rather the revelation can just be a revelation of how far he was isolated emotionally. Attridge argues that epiphanic moments tend to be disheartening but enlightening and epiphanic moments in the works by Joyce also allow the characters to gain a better insight into their own shortcomings (Attridge, 2004). Here the last look of Gabriel symbolizes not a glorious escape of the paralysis but a silent acceptance of the emotional detachment that still characterizes his life.

This uncertainty has helped retain the sustained critical concern about the ending of the story. Other scholars highlight the change aspect of the realization of Gabriel saying that the epiphany enables him to overcome intellectual arrogance that once characterized his personality. Although he realizes how delicate the emotional background of Gretta can be, by realizing the value of the sacrifice that Michael Furey made, Gabriel starts to feel the shortcoming of his self-centered worldview. Such an identification brings about the hope of a kinder and thoughtful approach to human relationships.

Other critics take a more sceptical approach to the epiphany, focusing on the fact that Gabriel is paralyzed in both the preceding scene and in the last moment of contemplation. In this point of view, the epiphanic moment is not something that creates actual change but contributes to the reflective passivity, which Gabriel exhibits throughout the story. The revelation does not lead to any decisive action, but is isolated in the inner thoughts of Gabriel and the conditions in the outside world of his life do not change.



Despite these varying interpretations, there is a general consensus among the scholars that the way in which Joyce has portrayed the epiphany in *The Dead* is one of the most elaborate studies of psychological realism in the modernist fiction. The story takes pain to build a series of events that gradually destroys the intellectual understanding of himself in Gabriel and leads him to a philosophical realization. This procedure shows what Joyce is more interested in through a general approach of digging into the nuances of how everyday experiences in human life may tell more about human identity and emotional life.

Finally, the epiphany in *The Dead* serves as the story parallel of the theme of spiritual paralysis that prevails in *Dubliners*. Although paralysis is also a manifestation of the state of emotional and social stagnation in which the lives of the characters are formed, epiphany opens the prospect of self-realization and introspection. The ultimate realization of Gabriel thus represents the conflict between the two forces and how the realization of being limited can in itself be a spiritual awakening.

5. Critical Debates and Conclusion

Even though a lot of scholarly research has been dedicated to *The Dead*, various interpretations are still debated by the critics as to the exact sense in the end realization of Gabriel Conroy. The openness of the end of the story has been one of the main factors that have made it remain a subject of critical attention. Although most people view the epiphany of Gabriel as an emotional awakening, some scholars also say that the revelation ends up serving the same purpose of spiritual paralysis that suffuses *Dubliners*. This is a crucial tension that mirrors the intricacy of the narrative technique by Joyce that does not want to give one absolute account of the transformation of Gabriel.

One interpretive tradition is the one that focuses on the redemptive aspect of the epiphany of Gabriel. Gabriel realizing his emotional limitations, according to this view, is a very important breakthrough to the self. Gabriel tries to preserve his intellectual power and social status several times in the story earlier. The identity that he has built up helps him to dissociate himself with the emotional aspects of life in which other people exist. Nevertheless, the memory of Michael Furey by Gretta helps to break this illusion of the control by putting forward a strong example of love that is characterized by sacrifice and vulnerability.

The those who critique this interpretation cite that what Gabriel reflects on in his last words suggests that a more profound perception of human experience is on the verge of being attained. Through realizing how deep Gretta has been in her past and how much Michael Furey loves her, Gabriel realizes that he has limitations that have defined his own emotional life. In this regard, the epiphany is a humble experience



where Gabriel realizes how his previous belief on love, identity, and personal relevance was not enough.

However, other scholars have doubts about the fact whether the realization of Gabriel is a real transformative moment. In this respect, the epiphany can indicate the extent of the emotional paralysis of Gabriel instead of providing the way to the liberation. Like Gabriel does reach a higher level of consciousness of his own weaknesses, such consciousness does not always result in any appreciable change. The discovery is still powerful within the inner thoughts of his mind and the social and psychological frameworks defining his life are still intact.

This reading is what attracts the thematic trend towards which *Dubliners* as a whole is inclined: recognition can frequently lead to no significant action. As the collection progresses, it is possible to see all the characters recognizing their situations but still failing to leave the circumstances that they are bound to. Here, the epiphany experience of Gabriel can serve as yet another manifestation of what the critics term Joyce in his quest of paralysis as a nagging state of existence in the contemporary times.

The uncertainty of the transformation of Gabriel is further enforced by the symbolic imagery of snow in the last passage of the story. On the one hand, the snow seems to bring together all human beings in the common experience of mortality. Through the visualization of the snow falling all over Ireland on the living and the dead, Gabriel understands the universality of human life and the thin thresholds between life and memories. Conversely, the silentness of the falling snow also creates the impression of a suspension and stagnation which indicates, that the power of paralysis is still firmly rooted in the social and emotional environment of the story.

Due to this vagueness, critics hold that the strength of *The Dead* has been its denial of the tension between paralysis and epiphany. Joyce builds a story which opens the door to both emotional and philosophical ambiguity. The ultimate thought made by Gabriel does not offer a definite answer to the problems that define his life but rather allows reflection regarding the essence of human consciousness, memories and mortality.

Modernist critics have tended to indicate that this uncertainty has been the larger artistic ambitions of Joyce. Instead of moral lessons or the clear plot of the story, Joyce aimed to evoke the multiplicity of human perception and the delicate mechanisms with the help of which people can realize their own shortcomings. An example of this approach is shown in the experience of Gabriel, who shows that any of the most mundane events, a conversation, a memory, a moment of still thought, can show more about the identity and emotional life of personal identity.



The Dead thus takes a unique place in the greater context of the modernist literature as a fictional piece that balances the psychological realism with the symbolic richness. The character Gabriel Conroy written by Joyce presents a subtle examination of the connection between the intellectual self-awareness and emotional weakness. According to the story, real understanding can be gained not by dramatic action but by instances of self-examination which demonstrate the wavering basis of individual identity.

This paper has discussed the key negative interpretations of *The Dead* so as to make clear how the scholarly community has understood the interaction of spiritual paralysis and epiphany in the story by Joyce. Through an overview of the influential views in Joycean criticism, the paper has shown that the ultimate realization made by Gabriel still creates multiple readings in literary studies. Critics see the epiphany as a transformative disclosure where Gabriel realizes the emotional richness of the human existence and others see the moment as an unconscious realization of the constraints that still characterize his life.

In conclusion, what makes *The Dead* everlasting is that it perpetuates these conflicting interpretations. The story by Joyce makes the audience think about the complicated nature of the relationships between memory and identity, as well as mortality, and, at the same time, to rethink the limits between emotional understanding and spiritual stagnation. *The Dead* is a masterpiece in the exploration of human consciousness that has happened in modernist media due to its delicate balance between its paralysis and revelation.

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