

THE DEAD

Written when Joyce was in Trieste. The story takes place at Christmas time. The characters are involved in a Christmas celebration.

Plot

A professor and part-time book reviewer named Gabriel Conroy attends a Christmastime party thrown by his aunts (Kate and Julia Morkin, grand dames in the world of Dublin music) at which he dances with a fellow teacher and delivers a brief speech. As the party is breaking up, Gabriel witnesses his wife, Gretta, listening to a song sung by the renowned tenor Bartell D'Arcy, and the intensity of her focus on the music causes him to feel both sentimental and lustful. In a hotel room later, Gabriel is devastated to discover that he has misunderstood Gretta's feelings; she has been moved by the memory of a young lover named Michael Furey who preceded Gabriel, and who died for the love of Gretta. Gabriel realizes that she has never felt similarly passionate about their marriage. He feels alone and profoundly mortal, but spiritually connected for the first time with others.

Characters

There are 2 sets of characters:

Set 1

- **Gabriel:** protagonist. His life is dominated by the idea of failure – as a husband, as a man – in relation to Lily – and as an Irish man. He is defined as a “West Brit” by a lady
- **Gretta Conroy:** Gabriel's wife

Set 2

- The Morkan sisters: the sisters who always organize this Christmas celebration)
- The guests

Other important characters:

- Lily: young lady who helps in the house. Central role (though it is secondary): she means something special in the life of Gabriel. When he offers her some money and she refuses it, he feels refused as a man, too, also because she is so young and belongs to a lower social class.
- Michael Furey: this character appears at the end (he is dead, so he does not appear physically, he is only mentioned). He was Gretta's boyfriend when she was younger. Something happened to him and she remembers it by listening to a piece of music at the party. This is an example of epiphany (revelation)

Themes

Role of music: always important (both Eveline and the Dead)