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*Brian Cosgrove*

# Male Sexuality and Female Rejection: Persistent Irony in Joyce's "The Dead"

Although there is no general critical agreement as to the "correct" interpretation of "The Dead", there is nonetheless a remarkable degree of consensus as to certain crucial emphases. So it is that most critics not only focus on Gabriel Conroy to the exclusion (or near-exclusion) of the other characters, but freely and uncritically invoke a naively moralistic vocabulary in order to "judge" Gabriel and assess his shortcomings. Our attention is repeatedly drawn to Gabriel's elitism, narcissism or egoism: at the end of the story he is suitably chastened, and, the argument runs, with this humbling of a proud self he is ready for initiation into "the common humanity that binds human beings together".[1] Such a recent summary merely reiterates Allen Tate's much earlier statement (first made in 1950) about "Gabriel's escape from his own ego into the larger world of humanity, including 'all the living and the dead' ".[2] True, of course, that not all critics have interpreted the ending in quite these positive terms. Edward Brandabur argued that Gabriel "must suffer annihilating agonies" and that he "finally gives in to the annihilation he has not only anticipated but invited"; while Phillip Herring, finding the conclusion "disturbingly ambiguous" (is Gabriel "dying or experiencing a spiritual regeneration"?), goes on to resolve the ambiguity in favour of a negative reading by suggesting finally that "as in the case of James Duffy" in "A Painful Case" there is "no guarantee" that Gabriel's bleak self-analysis will "produce a capacity for love that will ... make him whole".[3] In Vincent P. Pecora's summary, readers "disagree about whether Gabriel's new understanding of himself at the end of the story is a positive movement beyond his oppressive conditions or simply a resigned acceptance of the inevitability of his own death and

1. Daniel R. Schwarz, "Introduction: Biographical and Historical Contexts", in Schwarz, ed., *James Joyce: The Dead* (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism: Boston/New York: Bedford Books of St Martin's Press, 1994), p. 19. All subsequent citations from "The Dead" are from this edition, abbrev. as *Dead*.
2. Allen Tate, "Three Commentaries: Poe, James, and Joyce", *The Sewanee Review*, LVIII (1950), p. 15.
3. Brandabur, *A Scrupulous Meanness: a Study of James Joyce's Early Work* (Chicago; University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 126, 116; Herring, *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 75-6.

lecay": but as Pecora rightly adds, whether we perceive Gabriel's inal vision "as the promise of resurrection and new life or as the possibility of a more profound, more authentic relation with the world", we remain, in either case, "locked within a paradigm of self-knowledge as truth that transcends material existence through loss, sacrifice, annihilation".[4] In short, a remarkable degree of critical consensus remains: Gabriel as egoist is revealed to be morally inadequate; his ego must be broken; and whether this is a morally redemptive development or not, there is an implied inevitability about it all, as if some critics were invoking (without actually naming) Freud's reality-principle and the related idea of Necessity (Ananke).

Now it is precisely with this kind of reading, by now so pervasive as to be just about canonical and, apparently, beyond question, that I wish to take issue. One may, to begin with, be rightly suspicious of any attempt to apply moralistic evaluation to any text by the mature Joyce (the assumption here being that "The Dead" is the first work of Joyce's maturity). Joycean textuality, with its allusiveness, complexity, shifting ironies and general duplicity, is not to be reduced or "flattened" in that way. It seems foolhardy and ill-advised, therefore, to rush to moral judgement in the face of Gabriel's putative "egoism". If Gabriel needs to be rescued, it is *not*, primarily, from a supposed lack of generosity or any related moral failing (in fact the text is at pains to emphasise his well-meant intentions in that regard).[5] Gabriel's problem is not ego as understood in moral terms, but, in psychological or emotional terms, self-consciousness; what his education and temperament conspire to generate in him is not a sense of superiority, but, more radically, painful feelings of alienation. Throughout the evening, Gabriel is tossed between the *odi-et-amo* poles of his ambivalent feelings towards a cultural environment in which he cannot feel fully at home: from his explicit detestation of Ireland ("I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!"), to sincere and generous praise of "the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality" (*Dead*, pp. 32, 43). What Gabriel most desperately requires is an anchor which would hold him steady within this powerful fluctuation of feeling, and

4. Vincent P. Pecora, "'The Dead' and the Generosity of The Word", *PMLA*, 101.2 (March 1986), p. 233.
5. Gabriel's efforts to behave in a spirit of generosity are evident in the way he meets Lily's bitter and unprovoked retort with the gift of a coin, or in his spontaneous offer to leave the party on a cold night in order to see Miss Ivors (who has irritated him with her teasing) safely home; or, again, in his pointedly carving second helpings of the goose "as soon as he had finished the first round without helping himself" (*Dead*, pp. 24, 37, 39). One should proceed cautiously in any attempt to divine some reprehensible ulterior motive for these gestures on Gabriel's part: though there is a subtle argument to be made about Gabriel's need to think well of himself.





ground him in a substantial (Irish) reality outside himself. I would suggest further that it is above all (perhaps only) his sexual intimacy with Gretta that can provide this redemptive possibility: the spontaneity of the sexual act offering not just a saving contact with real substance ("*das Fleisch das stets bejaht*", as Joyce will later phrase it with reference to Molly Bloom),[6] but a precious release from the barren self-consciousness in which Gabriel will otherwise remain trapped. What this reading of course means is that Gabriel is very much on the right track when he responds with passionate spontaneity to the "touch" of Gretta's body, "musical and strange and perfumed" (*Dead*, p. 53); and what is further implicit in this reading, as I shall be obliged to argue, is that Gretta is quite perverse in her rejection of Gabriel's passion.

This is the point at which, unavoidably, the argument becomes controversial. In the first instance, we have been so conditioned by generations of moralistic critics that we tend, automatically, to dismiss Gabriel's feelings for Gretta in the final sequence as mere "lust". And with the advent of feminism, this knee-jerk denunciation of Gabriel as lustful male has been pushed to further extremes. A decade ago, as one of the contributors to "Feminist Revisions" in Joycean studies at a 1985 conference, Ruth Bauerle, in an essay replete with wild and unfounded surmise, not only sought to rescue Gretta from "Gabriel's unfeeling lust", but accused Gabriel of "contemplating mate rape". Moreover, Bauerle happily speculates that Gretta eventually "identifies herself with the Lass of Aughrim, a victim of date rate, and sees herself as having been, too often, a victim of unwanted and perhaps forced sexual attention — that is, of mate rape by her hypereducated, though shallow, husband".[7] Such remarks might be passed over in silence, were it not for the fact that quite recently no less a figure than Margot Norris has cited Bauerle's essay with obvious approval.[8]

Critics like Bauerle and Norris isolate from the text the references to Gabriel's desire "to crush" Gretta's body against his, "to overmaster" her, or to Gabriel's frustrated "lust" and consequent "anger": "A dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind and the dull fires of his lust began to glow angrily in his veins" (*Dead*, pp. 54, 55). But these feelings arise in Gabriel rather late in the sequence, and are in

6. Letter to Frank Budgen, 16 Aug. 1921, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. I, ed. Stuart Gilbert (1957; new ed., New York: The Viking Press/London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 169. The phrase may be translated as "the flesh which affirms". Joyce in fact wrote "der *Fleisch* der *stets bejaht*".
7. Ruth Bauerle, "Date Rape, Mate Rape: A Liturgical Interpretation of 'The Dead'", in Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *New Alliances in Joyce Studies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), p. 118.
8. See Margot Norris, "Not the Girl She Was at All: Women in 'The Dead'", in *Dead*, ed. Schwarz, p. 197.

fact deviations from his initial loving response to his wife. Gabriel's desire for mastery emerges only after his "annoyance" at Gretta's "abstracted" state (54), and his anger and frustration only in response to the sudden and unexpected introduction of a rival lover from Gretta's past. Up to those points, the text is remarkably explicit about Gabriel's very positive feelings of personal joy, and of tenderness towards Gretta. Just before they leave the Morkans' house, in response to Gretta's heightened colour and "shining eyes", a "sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart" (50: a natural intensification of his earlier "admiring and happy" reaction to her "peal of laughter", 25). In this mood of "tender joy", he longs to "say something foolish and affectionate into her ear" (51). Gabriel is experiencing a rare sense of vitality and well-being which makes for spontaneous integration into the human and cultural world around him. It is in this mood that he can "gaily" salute the statue of Dan O'Connell (perhaps recognising in the figure of the Liberator a token of his own imminent, personal liberation), and respond "cordially" to the cab driver's good wishes for the New Year (52, 53). Although shortly afterwards Gabriel has to hold "the wild impulse of his body in check" (53), the deepest source of his passion is not physical, but has arisen, rather, from the emotionally-charged memory, recalled with Proustian intensity, of the moment when Gretta had first written to him: "A heliotrope envelope was lying beside his breakfast-cup and he was caressing it with his hands. Birds were twittering in the ivy and the sunny web of the curtain was shimmering along the floor: he could not eat for happiness" (51). This is later identified as "her first letter to him that spring morning", which, we are again reminded, Gabriel had "caressed" (57). What we are dealing with at this point, surely, is not a lustful brute contemplating mate rape, but a loving husband, inspired and sustained by tenderness and joy.[9]

There is, of course, nothing morally admirable in Gabriel's subsequent declension into anger and lust: but this acute reminder of human imperfection is not necessarily directed, moralistically, against Gabriel, but offered by the text for the reader's mature consideration (it being the case that if we do speak of human imperfection, then the reader recognises his/her own implication therein). Moreover, what we attend to in these pages is not the (moral) fact of Gabriel's liability to succumb to lust and anger, but rather the psychological reality of

9. In a letter to Stanislaus written about the time of the composition of "The Dead" (13 Nov. 1906), Joyce strikingly insists on the *generosity* of male sexual response: "A man ... side by side with his extraordinary cerebral sexualism and bodily fervour ... possesses a fund of genuine affection for the 'beloved' or 'once beloved' object": *Letters of James Joyce*, vols. II and III, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: The Viking Press/London: Faber and Faber, 1966), II, p. 192.





his inner conflict.[10] In any case, far from being guilty of mate rape, Gabriel acts — eventually — with admirable self-control: and even if he does not yield with good grace, he still retires with honour. To expect anything more heroic than that, Joyce might contend, would be to expect more than ordinary flesh and blood is capable of.

To insist, then, on Gabriel's "unfeeling lust" (Bauerle) is to simplify to the point of distortion. This kind of critical perspective, moreover, reveals a more general flaw in that, in choosing to concentrate on Gabriel, it appears to exclude (or at least marginalise) many of the other elements in the text. In particular, it fails to do justice either to Gretta's part in the final denouement (or debacle), or to the socio-cultural realities in which Gabriel is uneasily implicated. In focusing primarily on Gabriel, critics of the text have, in the first place, failed to devote any sustained analysis either to the terms in which Gretta evokes the hero-martyr figure of Michael Furey, or to her uncritical investment of value in that figure (in some measure a creature of her imagination). Gabriel may be persuaded to admire Gretta (taking his cue all too readily from her emotional outburst) for having had such "romance" in her life (58): but the alert reader of Joyce will understand that "romance" in a Joycean context is an ambiguous, not to say negative term (negative in that, like idealism or sentimentality, it prevents us from acknowledging an always exigent reality).

Vincent P. Pecora is one of the few critics to have placed adequate emphasis on Gretta's distortion of Michael Furey through her altogether too liberal imagination. Gretta, he rightly observes, "fabricates the 'legend' of Michael Furey", so that Furey — "once only a sickly, almost pathetic gasworker" — is "reborn, through the internalised, mythmaking machinery evident throughout Dublin, as a noble, tragic hero who sacrifices himself for the one he loves".[11] For the sad truth seems to be that Furey died not "for me" (as Gretta accepts, 57), but died rather because he was terminally ill. He imposes himself on Gretta's imagination by the futile romantic gesture of seeking "his death in the rain" (57). It is understandable that, in the highly-charged emotional atmosphere of their final exchange, Gabriel

10. One moment Gabriel is intensely angry, and the next full of tender solicitude for Gretta: "Gabriel, feeling now how vain it would be to try to lead her whither he had purposed, caressed one of her hands", responding "sadly" to her sadness (56). This vacillation may be said to duplicate the instability of feeling earlier noted with reference to Gabriel's mixed emotions about Irish culture.

11. Pecora, art. cit., p. 241. It requires only a slight lateral shift to transpose this description of Furey into political terms, whereby he would become another romantic hero-martyr for old Ireland. What Joycean irony in full spate could make of such nationalist mythologising is evident in the episode of the "hero boy who went to his death with a song on his lips" in "Cyclops": see *Ulysses* (The 1992 Text), ed. with introd. by Jeri Johnson (Oxford, etc.: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 293-97.

should also accept Gretta's high, romantic evaluation of Furey ("a man had died for her sake": 58); less pardonable is the fact that so many critics have allowed themselves to be led by the nose by Gretta's romantic extravagance. For this text, no less than James's *The Turn of the Screw*, clearly offers itself as "a trap for the unwary". Indeed, it practically signals its own aporetic nature in, for example, Gabriel's reflection that perhaps Gretta "had not told him all the story" (58). The reader ought thereby to be alerted to the possibility that much has been left unsaid in Gretta's one-sided account, or that she is not a fully reliable witness.

What this suggests, among other things, is that Gretta's perspective in no sense provides a yardstick by which we are to take the measure of Michael Furey or, for that matter, of Gabriel. Gretta is a victim, not of Gabriel's "lust", but, as Pecora suggests, of Dublin/Ireland's widespread capacity for "mythmaking", whereby the insistent realities of the immediate present are devalued in favour of a glamorised (and distorted) version of the past. No less than the other characters in the story, Gretta is in thrall to "the dead": that is to say, she valorises the dead over the living, preferring, perversely, the romantic memory of the deceased Michael Furey to the "warm, fullblooded life" of her man-alive husband.[12]

The results of Gretta's rejection are devastating both for Gabriel and for their marital relationship. The "vague terror" that seizes Gabriel (57) when he hears from Gretta that Furey "died for me" threatens him with an annihilation which, though at that point resisted, seems to triumph over Gabriel at the end. Even more poignant in its casual revelation of the destruction of a marital relationship is the late reference to Gabriel watching Gretta as she slept "as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife" (58). That one sentence should be sufficient to put an end to the arguments of those who would have us believe that Gabriel's final condition is to be positively interpreted as offering "redemptive" possibilities.

There is, however, more to Gretta's rejection of Gabriel than the matter of their own interpersonal or domestic relations. For it becomes

12. The quotation here is from Bloom's reaction to the thought of the permanent annihilation of death in "Hades" (*Ulysses*, p. 110): "Warm beds: warm full-blooded life". It is a useful intertextual exercise to juxtapose this episode in *Ulysses* with "The Dead", not least because in "Hades" the preoccupation with death and annihilation culminates in this affirmation of Eros (as, arguably, *Ulysses* in its entirety does). We should note further that the final abstention on Gretta's part from sexual passion is perhaps emblematically anticipated in the otherwise puzzling epiphanic anecdote (relayed through Gretta's memory) of Gretta standing with Gabriel in the cold "looking in through a grated window at a man making bottles in a roaring furnace", calling out, in her detachment, "Is the fire hot, sir?" Luckily, we are told, the man does not hear her, for he "might have answered rudely" (51).





clear that this rejection of Gabriel is only the most dramatic instance of a female repudiation of the male (and of sexuality) which appears to be endemic in Irish culture. Leaving aside for the moment Lily's never-explained bitterness towards Gabriel (23), there is, shortly afterwards, the brief but telling episode where Mr Browne is rebuffed by two young ladies: leaning forward "a little too confidentially" and assuming "a very low Dublin accent", Mr Browne is received "in silence" and subsequently "ignored" by Miss Furlong and Miss Daly (27-8). Like almost every other female character in the story, Furlong and Daly are unmarried: so too are Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia (the "Misses" Morkan: 21), Mary Jane, Miss Ivors and Lily. With regard to Miss Ivors, we should in addition take due note of Conor Cruise O'Brien's reminder of the strict sexual *mores* of the Irish Irelander: "He or she — especially she — is rigidly chaste, in accordance with the norms of chastity laid down by the Catholic Church".[13] It may or may not be an accident that Aunt Julia's choice of song, "Arrayed for the Bridal" — in itself ironic — is moreover set to music from Bellini's *I Puritani* ("the puritans": 35n.): but it is impossible to miss the ironic intent in the deliberate alteration of the real-life locale of Nora Barnacle's grandmother's house, so that the fictional Gretta's grandmother's house is now set in that part of Galway city known as "Nuns' Island" (57).[14] For the whole of Ireland seems to be a veritable Nuns' Island, where women, young and old, have devoted themselves to an unspecified ideal of celibacy. This, too, it would seem, is the norm that Gretta grew up with prior to marriage: when she tells Gabriel that she and Michael Furey "used to go out together, walking ... like the way they do in the country" (57), she is surely recalling a very chaste kind of courtship of the handholding kind (markedly different from that early encounter of Nora and Joyce, when they apparently "touched each other's bodies").[15] It is not surprising that it is the celibate women, Aunt Kate and Mary Jane, who volunteer the

13. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1994), p. 33. Terence Brown makes a similar point about the "notably puritanical" attitudes of Irish Irelanders with reference to Miss Ivors' modest evening wear in his annotation to "The Dead" in *Dubliners*, ed. Brown (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 309.

14. Nora's grandmother's house in Galway "was on Whitehall, a dead-end extension of St. Augustine Street, near the docks"; in "The Dead", Joyce "placed Gretta's grandmother's house on Nuns' Island, a part of central Galway surrounded by the river and the canal": see Brenda Maddox, *Nora: A Biography of Nora Joyce* (1988; London: Minerva, 1989), pp. 21, 28.

15. This is Richard Ellmann's belief, as stated in *The Consciousness of Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 23. Brenda Maddox is more explicit about the part played, in particular, by Nora: "The attraction between them was immediate ... To Joyce's grateful astonishment, she unbuttoned his trousers, slipped in her hand, and, acting with some skill ... made him a man" (Maddox, *Nora*, ed. cit., p. 42).

information regarding the deathly asceticism of the monks who sleep in their coffins (actually, according to Terence Brown, a "popular misconception": see *Dubliners*, pp. 313-14): nor that it is Mrs Malins who, married or not, makes explicit the female endorsement of such asceticism ("They are very good men, the monks": 42). Gabriel is seeking to escape with Gretta from the familial pressures that are often inimical to marital intimacy (possibly with Gretta's complicity: see their exchange with Aunt Kate, 26): but the cultural bias of the society he lives in pretty inevitably means that his attempt to leave behind his home in the all-too-aptly named "Monkstown" (25), and enter on a second "honeymoon" at the Gresham Hotel (52), is doomed to failure.

What is further suggested in the early episode between Gabriel and Lily (to come back to that) is that the rejection of the male by the female may arise from a covert resentment. Significantly, Gabriel is shown on at least two occasions as transcending his own resentment. First, he allows the "resentment" against his mother's opposition to his marriage to die down in his heart (30); and then, climactically, contemplates his sleeping wife "unresentfully" (58). It seems, however, that this transcendence of resentment is something the female characters find difficult if not impossible, and many of the women appear to subscribe to their own version of Harold Bloom's "School of Resentment".[16] Such resentment is vividly present in Aunt Kate when, turning "fiercely" on her niece, she passionately denounces Pope Pius X for excluding women from church choirs. Aunt Kate's indignation is, of course, morally justified, but the point is that she cannot carry her righteous anger to any proper resolution, but instead swiftly capitulates (at least in terms of lip-service) to male authority ("O, I don't question the pope's being right": 36-7). She is still subject therefore to resentment, which we might characterise as a psychological condition in which strong feelings of aggression are never fully acknowledged and carried to their logical outcome, so that they remain uneasily unresolved.[17]

16. Part of Harold Bloom's intention is to defend the literary Canon against "the academic-journalistic network I have dubbed the School of Resentment", which includes "Feminists", as well as "Afrocentrists, Marxists, Foucault-inspired New Historicists", and "Deconstructors". The expansion of the Canon, he argues, undertaken in the interest of various ideologies, has meant in effect "the destruction of the Canon, since what is being taught includes by no means the best writers who happen to be women, African, Hispanic, or Asian, but rather the writers who offer little but the resentment they have developed as part of their sense of identity". See *The Western Canon: The Books and School of The Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), pp. 4, 7, 10, 20.

17. To complete the picture, one would have to acknowledge, in all justice, that if women in Joyce's depiction of Irish society have difficulty in articulating their anger, then the fault lies with a (patriarchal) culture that seeks to deny their self-assertion, and induce complaisance.





It is one of the unwelcome ironies of some recent feminist criticism that such resentment as is found in the fictional characters of Lily and Aunt Kate is further compounded by biased critical readings that might themselves appear to be motivated by obscure and unacknowledged feelings of antipathy.[18] Even a critic as intelligent as Margot Norris is betrayed into special pleading when she quite unjustifiably infers that in the early exchange between Gabriel and Lily Gabriel is making a "suggestive advance", proceeding thereafter to speculate, well beyond any hint in the text, that "Gabriel has a predatory reputation that has put Lily on her guard." It would seem that it is not only women in fiction who are prepared to place the worst interpretation on male intentions: though Norris, to do her justice, does eventually come to a more valid assessment when she admits that in this episode Lily "is spilling her bitterness onto Gabriel by mere association".[19] If we allow ourselves to follow through the logic of that remark, then we may begin to come closer to the truth: namely, that Gabriel here is the victim of a female resentment that he personally has done nothing to deserve. Gabriel in his after-dinner speech jocosely suggests that he may be among "the victims" of "the hospitality of certain good ladies" (*Dead*, p. 43): he is also possibly the victim of "certain good ladies" in a more serious and more troubling sense.

It is in this wider context of the rejection of the male by the female, and the potential resentment of the female towards the male, that we should situate (though not wholly explicate) Gretta's perverse refusal of an impassioned and loving husband. In Gretta's case, though, resentment is more accurately understood as *ressentiment*, a re-living of past to the exclusion of present feelings, ultimately a preference for the "romance" of the imaginary over the exigencies of the real. Like certain Irish nationalists, Gretta prefers her dead martyr-hero from the past to the more challenging actuality of the present. And if Furey is indeed to be seen as this kind of (false) embodiment of the heroic, then we should allow due weight to Joyce's impassioned denunciation of the whole idea of the heroic in the letter of 7 February 1905 to Stanislaus: "I am sure however that the whole structure of heroism is, and always was, a damned lie and that there cannot be any substitute for the individual passion as the motive power of everything — art and philosophy included" (*Letters* II, 81). The "individual passion" that is evident in Gabriel is erotic in nature: and in sexual matters also the Joyce who wrote "The Dead" was equally emphatic about the

18. So, in a special pleading designed to show Gabriel as domineering and Lily as victimised in the episode where Gabriel (in my view, generously) meets Lily's bitterness by making her a present of a coin, Bauerle (pp. 115-16) insists that this gesture by Gabriel entails a kind of "rape" whereby the male imposes his will upon the female.

19. Norris, in *Dead*, ed. Schwarz, pp. 200-01.

priority of such passion over any more abstract substitute. In the letter to Stanislaus of 13 November 1906 (cited earlier), the young Joyce expresses his impatience with all the "lying drivel about pure men and pure women and spiritual love ... blatant lying in the face of truth.... Perhaps my view of life is too cynical but it seems to me that a lot of this talk about love is nonsense" (*Letters* II, 191-92).

Gretta, allowing herself to be drawn back — partly through the insidiously sentimental lure of music — to the dead past, refuses the vital possibilities of the immediate moment and of "individual passion". Her body, "musical and strange and perfumed" (*Dead*, p. 53) — "musical" in a much more vital and immediate sense than anything sung or played that evening — is denied by her and denied also to her eager husband. That key phrase describing Gretta's body is significantly applied by Joyce to Nora in a letter he wrote to her on 22 August 1909, where, in addition, part of his request is that she should adorn her body for him and "be full of cravings" (*Letters* II, 239). It is precisely the lack of such (mutual) cravings in Gretta that troubles Gabriel, and sets him on the way to melancholy self-abasement. If critics still persist in dismissing Gabriel's sexual feelings as "lust", then they are obliged to explain how it is that Joyce can invite the reader to condemn in Gabriel what he accepts in himself (and, further, how the text can endorse the lack of sexual desire in Gretta when the author of the text so keenly requires such desire in Nora).

Denying Gabriel's "individual passion", Gretta also denies Gabriel: and recoiling from his own (authentic) passion in self-disgust, Gabriel yields to a self-laceration almost masochistic in its fervour. Once he is deprived of the great boon of spontaneous self-realisation, Gabriel reverts to the cripplingly narcissistic self-consciousness from which he might otherwise have been liberated: "As he passed in the way of the cheval-glass he caught sight of himself in full length.... A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure" (55-6). Subsequently, the only escape from such intolerable self-consciousness is oblivion, which is, one might argue, sentimentally disguised as "oceanic" identification with all humanity. However we envisage those "vast hosts of the dead" into which Gabriel feels himself subsumed, there is no doubting their abstract and insubstantial nature: their existence is "flickering", their world "impalpable" (a word that is to become ironically charged in the *Portrait*), and it is in that world that Gabriel attains oblivion as his soul swoons slowly towards dissolution (59). Equally abstract is Gabriel's misplaced confidence at the end that he now "knows" what love is: "He had *never felt* like that himself towards any woman but he *knew* that such a feeling *must* be love" (59: emphases added). One cannot "know" feelings, only experience them in passional depth: as Gabriel





had earlier been doing in his joy and tenderness, feelings he has now become far too ready to disown.

The obvious term for the general process here is "sublimation": a transformation which, as Vincent Pecora correctly suggests, "should elicit not our own accepting admiration but our most profound anxiety and suspicion".[20] Yet, as Pecora adds, what prevents us from interrogating "generous" self-sacrifice and apparent self-transcendence as critically as we ought is the sheer weight of broad cultural endorsement which lies behind these: for the principal (and pervasive) model for "this linkage of true being, self-sacrifice, and spiritual transcendence in the West is, of course, Christ" (Pecora, p. 243n.). Part of the significance of Pecora's contribution is that he is one of the few critics to resist that cultural appeal: Gabriel, he suggests, with a glance at Joyce's comments on heroism in the letter of 7 February 1905 to Stanislaus, "might be one of the bloodiest imposters of all, caught within the whole structure of a heroism that 'is, and always was, a damned lie' — the heroism derived from the life of Christ" (Pecora, p. 237). This kind of evaluation surely consorts much more readily with what we know of Joyce's express attitudes than the unfounded (and curiously ascetic, i.e., un-Joycean) conclusion of Ruth Bauerle: "The snow and cold suggest a state of purity to which Gabriel may come" (Bauerle, p. 123: the final verb is unfortunate). The snow and the cold should be taken in conjunction with the images of Calvary ("crosses", "spears", "thorns": *Dead*, p. 59), and, even if we do not attend to Pecora's suggestions regarding the possible critique of Christ-like self-sacrifice, we should at least register the fact that the thorns are specifically described as "barren".

Right up to its closing sentences, "The Dead" requires that we remain alert in our reading, and ready to respond to its ongoing and challenging ironies. We are denied the sentimental comfort of a passive surrender, like Gabriel's, to the emotive appeal of the "heroic" self-sacrificing gesture: such a gesture, even as it proclaims, with the full validation of the Christian tradition, its positive virtue, should be rightly evaluated as self-negating and self-deluding. Once Gabriel's "individual passion" has been denied by Gretta, negative consequences are inevitable: what Joyce's text requires is that we should be alert enough to see the negative, in spite of sentimental disguise, for what it is. What "The Dead" may appear to do is celebrate the triumph of Ananke: what in fact it may more correctly be said to do is lament the death of Eros.

20. Pecora, p. 234. Pecora also draws attention to the process of sublimation: part of his analysis is devoted to the means whereby Gabriel's "thwarted sexual desires" and "illusions" are "sublimated in the new and supposedly truer image of himself that he constructs as the story ends" (p. 237).