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The Inwardness of James Joyce's Story, "The Dead"

Keith Oatley, *University of Toronto,* ***Maja Djikic,*** *University of Toronto, and* ***Raymond Mar****, York University, Toronto*

James Joyce's most famous short story, "The Dead," works in layers. In one of these we identify with the story's protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, so that we ourselves become metaphorical: we remain ourselves but also become Gabriel. In another layer Joyce offers an extended metaphor in which we are prompted to wonder whether understandings of others whom we might meet at a party have a relation to being intimate with a spouse. Although our emotions are empathetically related to Gabriel's they are our own, as we take on his concerns and plans in the circumstances he enters. With Joyce's modernist story, we feel moved, and can start to know ourselves better while, at the same time, we may come to understand others and our predicament as human beings. "The Dead" brilliantly illustrates the potential of literary engagement to produce changes in conceptions of ourselves and others through metaphorical extension into, and identification with, the emotions and thoughts of a character about whom we read.

James Joyce's "The Dead" is the last story in Dubliners. It is regarded as one of the world's great short stories. It was published in 1914 and, with its exploration of inwardness, it was a significant part of the modernist movement in literature.

In 1846 Søren Kierkegaard wrote that inwardness is a special kind of truth, a truth of subjectivity that is not based on information, not based on explanation or persuasion, not based on being told what to do or think. It can be communicated only indirectly. One of the reasons "The Dead" is a great work of literature is because Joyce's story was among the first to be based fully on inwardness, to communicate it indirectly, and to invite us to change how we feel and think about ourselves and others.

The main character in "The Dead" is Gabriel Conroy. He and his wife, Gretta, attend a Christmas party given by his two elderly aunts and his cousin, who are music teachers in Dublin. The first and longest part of the story depicts the arrival of Gabriel at the house where the party is held, Gabriel's emotions and thoughts as he talks with people there, and his speech of thanks to his aunts and cousin. The story's middle section is a transition: as guests leave the house, Gabriel watches Gretta as she stands at the top of the stairs and listens to someone singing an Irish song, "The lass of Aughrim." Gabriel notices his wife's poise and thinks that if he were a painter he would paint her and call the picture "Distant music." He recalls moments of their secret intimacy. The last section of the story takes place in a hotel. Gretta has arranged for their children to be looked after and Gabriel has booked into the hotel for the night because the late journey home after the party would be difficult. In the hotel room, he wants to relive his intimacy with Gretta and make love with her. For a moment it seems as if this will happen, but she breaks away, throws herself on the bed, and hides her face.

Gretta tells Gabriel that the song, "The lass of Aughrim," was one that a delicate seventeen-year-old, Michael Furey, used to sing when she was young, in Galway in the west of Ireland. On the night before she was due to leave and come to Dublin, Michael threw gravel up at her window. He had been ill but he was there in the garden, shivering, in the pouring rain in the middle of winter. Gretta says she told him to go home or he would catch his death of cold. A week after she arrived in Dublin, she heard he had died. She thinks he died for her.

Gretta sobs, and falls asleep. Gabriel looks at his wife's clothes thrown on a chair, notices her petticoat. He lies on the bed beside her as she sleeps. He thinks about how, for so many years, she has kept in her heart the memory of Michael Furey. Gabriel realizes for the first time that he is not the only one she has loved. She has been occupied with her thoughts of this boy and herself when they were young: Gabriel is devastated at not being able to make love with her, and horribly jealous. He thinks that Michael Furey was capable of more love than he has been and that maybe it would be better to die, like the young boy, in a passion that completely occupied his being.

A layer of *ostranenie,* metaphor and metonymy

Around the time that Joyce published his story, Viktor Shklovsky was working on how artistic literature can make the ordinary strange, as if seen for the first time. He called this *ostranenie,* "defamiliarization:" the freeing of experience from deadening effects of habit to make it conscious. Many of us may have experienced jealousy. Perhaps it was a twinge, perhaps a wave of anxiety, perhaps anger, perhaps a long dull pain. But no-one—we think in Western literature, not Shakespeare in *Othello,* not Tolstoy in "The Kreutzer Sonata" —has depicted it, step-by-step, in its development in such an *ostranenie* way as Joyce does in this story. The arc of emotion is beautifully communicated through a progression of scenes: Gabriel's idealization of Gretta as she listens to a song; his thoughts of "moments of their life together that no one knew of or would ever know of;" her leaning on his arm in a way that sent "through him a keen pang of lust"; in the hotel room Gretta rising on her toes to kiss him but then throwing herself face-down on the bed, not thinking about making love with him; her story about Michael Furey; her saying "I was great with him at that time;" Gabriel's thought that "a man had died for her sake."

At the same time, Joyce generates further *ostranenie* by using metaphor and metonymy. As Roman Jakobson pointed out, these literary figures are not just figures. They are fundamental ways in which the mind works and they are also parts of what can enable the experience of reading to come alive.

Although Lakoff and Johnson have argued that metaphor is an intrinsic part of all of our thinking, it is usually regarded as literary. An example occurs when Hamlet says: "Denmark's a prison" (Shakespeare, 1600, Act II, Scene ii, line 243). For him a "this," Denmark, is a "that," a prison. He's in a situation from which he cannot escape. According to Steven Mithen, minds can work in a metaphorical way not only in literature; rather, metaphor is the basis of all art. The earliest known cave painting is only 31,000 years old (see Chauvet et al.'s book). In the painting, marks on a rock (a "this") become a rhinoceros (a "that"). To be able to produce and understand art based on imagination, in this kind of metaphorical transformation, is among our most recently acquired mental capacities.

Literary metaphors can be written in a phrase such as "Denmark's a prison," compacted, ready to burst on a reader or listener. In "The Dead," Joyce tends to avoid compacted metaphors. In fact, he makes fun of them in the story's first sentence, when he says that Lily, the caretaker's daughter who is taking the coats of guests, "was literally run off her feet." But Joyce's story can be thought of as an extended metaphor. By arranging that the story opens at his aunts' house, then moves to its final phase in the hotel room, he invites us to project a "this," the togetherness of a family party, onto a "that," the togetherness of a couple's marriage. Are the difficulties of interacting, at a party, with other people whose minds we don't know, to be compared with those of achieving intimacy with a spouse whose mind we might also not know?

Whereas in metaphor a "this" is a "that," in metonymy, Jakobson said, a "this" is juxtaposed with a "that" or is part of a "that." In *The Modes of Modern Writing,* David Lodge has argued that whereas metaphor has been the usual mode for poetry and plays, metonymy is a predominant structure of modern print fiction and film. In "Metonymy and Intimacy," Rebecca Wells-Jopling and Keith Oatley have shown that with a metonym the writer hopes that an association in his or her mind, signaled by a juxtaposition, will prompt a comparable association in the reader. When this happens, it makes for a sense of mental intimacy between reader and writer.

The best-known kind of metonymy is synecdoche, in which a part stands for a whole, or a small part for a larger part. For instance, a close-up of a face in a film can stand in for the person. In "The Dead," it occurs when Gabriel is introduced on the story's fourth page as looking "stout … with gilt rimmed glasses." These are indicative parts of the man as a whole.

Like metaphor, metonymy is not just a figure. It, too, shows something important about how the mind works. In the hands of an artistic writer it can work in a way that is profound, and Joyce accomplishes this in "The Dead." The glimpse of Gabriel as stout with gilt-rimmed glasses may prompt reservations about him. When the couple reaches the hotel there is another metonymic synecdoche when Gabriel, as he longs to make love with Gretta, catches sight of himself in a mirror: not a romantic figure. There's an association between this partial glimpse of Gabriel as he looks compared with the larger way in which he likes to think of himself. This can resonate with associations in readers, who may be prompted to think about how they look in the mirror of their social world and how they like to see themselves.

A layer of identification

Metaphor offers part of the explanation of how we become involved in a story by entering, Alice-like, through a looking glass. As we enter a story, it is common for readers to identify with a character.

This means that we take on a protagonist's aspirations and concerns. (Keith Oatley: *Such stuff as dreams*). The mental processes we employ include those by which we make plans to organize our daily lives but, instead of using these planning processes for our own purposes, we allow them to be taken up by the purposes and aspirations of a story character. When we pick up a book and start engaging with plans of the protagonist, we put our own issues on one side rather as someone who, before beginning a session of meditation, puts aside current preoccupations.

In this kind of way, in "The Dead," a change can occur: we ourselves become metaphorical. We remain ourselves (the "this"), and empathetically we can also become Gabriel Conroy (the "that"). Here is the extraordinary part: the emotions we then feel as we read are not really those of Gabriel (an imagined being). They are our own.

An important study on how this works was by Tom Trabasso and Jennifer Chung. They found that when we enter a story and things go well for a protagonist whom we come to like, we feel empathy for that character and experience positive emotions: happiness, satisfaction, relief and so on. When things go badly for the protagonist, or well for an antagonist in a story, we tend to feel negative emotions: sadness, anxiety, frustration, and so forth. There has not been much research on this so far (though see Jonathan Cohen, "Defining identification," Maria Kotovych et al. "Textual determinants," and Emy Koopman, "Empathetic reactions after reading") but the implication is that identification is empathy, or that it involves empathy.

This, you may say, is not too different from watching sports. When your team is winning you feel good. When the other side is winning you feel bad. That's right. It isn't too different. This is because a football match or an Olympic competition offers a basic kind of plan-based story; we can jump aboard and enjoy it. We can experience the emotions of success or failure, but without the events making a difference to whether we can pay the rent, or to whether someone we love might be seriously ill. A football match and a hundred-metre race are, of course, different from "The Dead," but they have something in common. They offer us an aspiration, an idea of overcoming vicissitudes, in which we take part in imagination (Keith Oatley, "Worlds of the Possible"). The plots of sports events are not very various, but they can be engaging: we win, we lose, we would have won if we hadn't made that mistake or if it hadn't been for the bias of the referee. In literature, the stories in which we can engage are more various.

The characters we can become in fiction are many more than we can be in sports events, many more than we could ever be, or ever meet, in ordinary life. By entering some of the novels and short stories that have been written, and the movies that have been made, we can live many lives; the plans we can adopt and the predicaments we can experience are innumerable.

A layer of character

Most stories have a narrative arc: an initiating event that introduces a protagonist who has a goal and a plan that encounters a vicissitude. There is a rising action, a climax, and a denouement. Joyce's story has some of these properties, but its arc is psychological. Virginia Woolf wrote that: "in or about December, 1910, human character changed" (p. 320). She was referring to the coming of modernism, which we can think of as the art of inwardness. With this story of 1914, Joyce was an early contributor. We are introduced to a character, Gabriel, in an inward way by his thoughts about himself and his experience being gradually revealed to us until we reach a psychological climax, one

that opens him to us, to show both the complexity and limitations of his person and, by the generalization of a metonymic figure, of all of us.

A psychological question for any story is how it invites a reader into its world. Joyce does it by dropping hints and by inviting the reader to think. When the story begins we hear of Miss Kate and Miss Julia, but we have no idea how to imagine them. Are they young, old, sisters, friends? Joyce keeps us wondering for a while. How can we construct the scene with which we are presented, with guests arriving, and with Miss Kate and Miss Julia at the top of a staircase? At the beginning of his story, Joyce refers to characters who are only later positioned in relation to the others. Someone called Gabriel is mentioned in the third paragraph. Only later do we find out who he is and what he looks like. Although sometimes thinking can be arduous, with a good writer of fiction, it is a delight, in part because the writer offers materials that enable the thinking to occur in a satisfying way. Maria Kotovych and her colleagues showed that in a short story by Alice Munro, when the reader was invited to make inferences about a character in the way we make them in conversation (as Munro depicts), the understanding and identification with the character was deeper than when phrases that explicitly named emotions and character traits such as "she was embarrassed" were substituted for Munro's words.

Once Joyce has invited us to become engaged, he eases us into the process of coming to understand Gabriel. Edward Royzman and Paul Rozin found that when you don't know someone very well, it is easier to empathize with them if they are in difficulties. To be pleased about their success, you need to know them quite well, and to like them. At the beginning of the story, we don't know Gabriel. The first significant event occurs as Lily takes his coat when he arrives at the house. Gabriel has known Lily since she was a child. He speaks to her pleasantly. He asks whether she might soon be getting married. She replies bitterly that men are interested in her only for what they can get. So, with Lily, he's in difficulties immediately. He colors. He feels he has made a mistake. He flicks at his shoes with his muffler. He leaves Lily a coin, then dashes up the stairs. We readers are invited to think not about the event, but about Gabriel's reaction to it, to ponder why he should polish his shoes with a muffler. We empathize with him and enter his mind. Joyce goes along with us as we puzzle. He says that Gabriel feels he has failed with Lily. He says Gabriel adjusts his clothing: we infer this is to help dispel his anxiety. Joyce also offers a generalization. Gabriel worries that he will fail in the speech he must give in thanks to his aunts and cousin, just as he has failed with Lily.

Several elements in the story make sense because they help the reader to understand Gabriel. There is, for example, a mention of Gabriel's mother and how she sullenly opposed his marriage to Gretta. In the same way we read about his love for the physicality of books. These details seem not to relate to the plot of story, but they contribute to our understanding of Gabriel.

Gabriel is patterned on James Joyce himself. Richard Ellmann devotes a chapter of his biography of Joyce to the background for "The Dead." He shows how Joyce shared with Gabriel not just attendance at Christmas parties given by his aunts who lived in a house on a quay beside the River Liffey (in Joyce's case they were great-aunts), but other aspects such as a wife who had come from Galway, intense sexuality, and ready jealousy. The reader engages with realities that Joyce knew within himself and had thought about deeply.

Character remains, perhaps, more important than anything else in fiction. If you are not engaged with at least one character in a story, you tend not to continue. The psychological origin is deep and has only recently become clearer. It used to be thought that the reason we humans had larger brains than other animals was because we were very clever, because we could make tools, or were cunning at hunting. But the real reason is more likely to be that we are the most social of all the animals. As Robin Dunbar has proposed, we need large brains because we know a large number of people in our social world, up to about 150 or so, in sufficient detail that we can describe something of the character of each of them. We make mental models of them, for instance: "Fred is amiable, but I wish he wouldn't grumble all the time." The maximum size of social group in which our closest animal relatives, the chimpanzees, live is 50. That is to say 50 individuals whom each member of the group knows as individuals, as friends, allies, enemies. The fossil record and DNA studies show that the line that led to chimpanzees split off from the line that led to us about six million years ago. The human brain is exceptionally large because it has to house mental models for three times as many individuals as can be held by the brain of a chimpanzee.

As well as requiring larger brain capacity to house more mental models, our models can be highly detailed. The people we know well, we know sufficiently not just to have an idea of the person's character and not just to recall interactions we have had with that person, but also something of his or her biography. Our models include ideas about interactions of each person with others. Dunbar has found that about 70 percent of human conversations are about plans and doings of ourselves and those we know. We talk and exchange anecdotes and gossip about others. From these we make inferences about the people we talk about, and with these we supplement our mental models of each other: "Hetty was badly treated, you can imagine what she thinks of him now." It is likely that this proclivity to converse about ourselves and others is one of the origins of our engagement in fiction (see Keith Oatley, "From the emotions of conversation …")

There is a further contributor to brain size. It's that we entertain what psychologists call theories of mind: theories of what other people might know that is different from what we know. Heinz Wimmer and Josef Perner discovered that it is not until the age of about four that children start to experience themselves as having thoughts that are separate from those of others. The researchers read pre-school children a story in which a little boy, Maxi, has some chocolate and puts it in a blue cupboard. Maxi goes out to play and, while he is out, his mother uses some of the chocolate for a cake and then puts the rest of the chocolate in a different place: in a green cupboard. The children in the experiment were asked: "When Maxi comes back from the playground, he would like some of his chocolate. Where will he look for it?" Children under four typically said: "In the green cupboard." That's where they knew the chocolate to be and that's where they thought Maxi would look. But children aged four and over tended to say, "In the blue cupboard." They knew that this is where Maxi had left his chocolate, and because he did not know that his mother had moved it, this is where he would look. By age four children understand that other people can know things that are different from what they themselves know.

With theory-of-mind we not only make mental models of others, but also mental models of others' mental models (see Johnson-Laird, Mental models). Dunbar showed that we humans can maintain several layers of models: of what philosophers call "intentional states" for other people. An intentional state is a mental state that is about something: seeing something, believing something,

wanting something, feeling something. Dunbar has enumerated the layers of intentional states required for certain kinds of literature. Thus, he writes (p. 162), that in *Othello,* Shakespeare:

> *intended [1] that his audience realise [2] that the eponymous moor believed [3] that his servant Iago was being honest when he claimed to know [4] that his beloved Desdemona loved [5] Cassio.*

When James Joyce invites us into his story, he invites us to engage our theory-of-mind. One of the people at the party is a Miss Ivors, with whom Gabriel was at university. She asks if he is not G.C. whose book reviews she has read in the *Daily Express.* Gabriel says he is. The *Daily Express* is a British oriented paper, whereas Miss Ivors is committed to Irish independence. Other people are listening, and she says she is disappointed to find that Gabriel is a West Briton (meaning that he thinks Ireland should remain politically part of Britain). He thinks that writing book reviews has nothing to do with politics, and wonders how to defend himself. Later, as they dance The Lancers, he feels Miss Ivors squeeze his hand, then he sees her look at him quizzically, until he smiles. Then she stands on tip-toe and whispers into his ear: "West Briton." If we use Dunbar's notation we can say that Joyce *intends* [1] the reader to *consider* [2] what Gabriel *thinks* [3] Miss Ivors *wants* [4] Gabriel to *feel* [5] when she looks quizzically at him and whispers in his ear.

Joyce writes that Gabriel feels attacked, because he thinks Miss Ivors wants to make him look ridiculous in front of other people. But we readers may wonder whether she feels envious of his writing of book reviews for a newspaper, or whether she is teasing him affectionately. Our abilities to think about what others may think and feel are close to the heart of being human in our intensely social world. If we enjoy being able to make mental models, and models of models, of fictional characters, it is because—in a deep way—this is what our human brains are for (see Johnson-Laird, *Mental models,* Dunbar, *The human story*). In *Why We Read Fiction,* Lisa Zunshine has said we are at good theory-of-mind, and we enjoy doing what we are good at.

Gregory Currie has written: "when we engage with great literature we do not come away with more knowledge, clarified emotions, or deeper human sympathies" (p. 15). When effects of reading literature have been investigated in actual readers the conclusion is very different. It's been found that the more fiction people read, the better they are at empathy and theory-of-mind (see Raymond Mar et al. "Bookworms Versus Nerds;" Keith Oatley, "In the minds of others"). In studies by David Kidd and Emanuele Castano, and by Jessica Black and Jennifer Barnes, the effect has been confirmed experimentally: reading a piece of artistic fiction, as compared with a piece of non-fiction, improved empathy and theory-of-mind. In studies that used functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), moreover, Raymond Mar found that several parts of the brain that are used to comprehend stories are the same as some of the parts used for theory-of-mind, the process of understanding others. Although the word "fiction" means "something made," this doesn't mean it's just made up and has no relation to reality, as Currie's opinion would have it. Its effects in enabling improvement of people's empathy and theory-of-mind, mean it is about something: something fundamental to our humanity.

A deeper layer: the anguish of knowing

Usually we believe that knowing others will bring us closer to them. If your friend, or lover, or even the greengrocer, is sad, or angry, or happy, would not understanding how this person feels bring you

closer, help construct a bridge to that person? We would think so. Yet in Joyce's story, as we follow Gabriel through his evening, with every additional instance of his coming to know someone better, or having someone know him, he slips further away from the very people with whom he wants to make links.

Gabriel speaks pleasantly to Lily, and wants her to see him as gentlemanly. Instead she sees him as a typical man who thinks only about sex. This embarrasses him enough to make him blush, and insist on tipping her. He wants Miss Ivors to admire him for writing book reviews in a newspaper. Instead she sees him as being on the wrong political side. As he prepares his speech he thinks about his listeners, and wants to be careful so that they think well of him. When he gives the speech, they may not do so. When Gabriel leaves the party full of tender and passionate feelings for Gretta, it is hard for the reader not to hope that here, finally, in the intimate space between the two of them, a deep understanding, a sharing of a secret life, will yield closeness. Yet here too, instead of mutuality, Gabriel finds Gretta in a different world, in which a seventeen-year-old boy has—as she supposes—died for her. He needs his wife to have loved him only. It is not so. Readers may wonder whether it might have been better for Gabriel not to know, to have held on to an illusion of intimacy.

It makes one anxious to feel with Gabriel in these instances, trying to connect through knowing, but each time becoming more isolated. It makes us anxious in part because of what it implies about trying to connect. The self-improver in all of us would like to believe that if we reach out to others, learning about them will achieve closeness. Experiences of the kind Gabriel has—which we recognize and feel in ourselves—imply this may not be so.

Raymond Nickerson has studied what happens when people try to imagine what someone else knows or thinks. His research has taken the problem of theory-of-mind from childhood into adulthood. He has found that to understand another person we tend to project our knowledge of ourselves onto that person, whilst correcting for certain differences such as age, gender, and education. Projection-plus-correction works fairly well but, as Nickerson shows, usually we project too much and correct too little. We tend to believe that others are more like ourselves then they are. It is not just a matter of a person's beliefs, but of their emotions. When someone smiles, we presume an experience like our own when we smile. The assumption helps the cogs of everyday life to turn smoothly. We would like to believe that when we say to a partner "I love you" and when the partner says to us "I love you" that we mean the same thing. What does this imply, for Gabriel and for the rest of us? It implies that knowing others needs us to understand that their experiences can be starkly different from our own. Gabriel discovers how distant his experiences can be from those of others, including the person to whom he feels closest. This discovery pushes Gabriel to that edge at which he feels that the only commonality among human beings is that of the final outcome, a fading towards death.

Yet to conclude that trying to get closer drives us further apart may not be right. The pivot around which misunderstanding turns in Joyce's story is Gabriel's need for others to see him as he sees himself. Gabriel is not alone in this. It is an aspect of our human lot that our vision of ourselves, and the ways in which we present ourselves to others, are constructed in part to show how we would like to be. We do manage to live up to some aspects of our self-image, but we conceal some of the dirtier corners. The result for Gabriel is that what he knows of others and what others know of him are

drawn into the gravitational field of his need to see himself in a certain way. There, inevitably, differences can become threatening: where self-idealization and others' perceptions fail to match.

If literature helps us metaphorically to embody other characters within ourselves, and feel and think differently than we would otherwise, does it change us? Maja Djikic and colleagues asked people to read either Anton Chekhov's most famous short story, "The lady with the toy dog," or a control version of the story written in a non-fictional format that had exactly the same information, that readers liked just as well but judged to be less artistic. As compared with those in the control group, those who read Chekhov's story reported having slightly different personality traits than they reported before reading the story. Interestingly, rather than everyone changing in some particular way, as happens with persuasion, each person reported their personality was different in an idiosyncratic way. The effect has been replicated in a study in which people were asked to read either a literary short story or a literary essay (see for instance Keith Oatley & Maja Djikic, "How reading transforms us"). The studies point to the fact that reading fiction can prompt a temporary fluctuation in the way people experience themselves. This fluctuation is the kind of dysregulation that scientists report precedes a significant change in a stable system, such as personality (see Bak & Chen; Hayes et al.; Linley & Joseph). Not everyone who reads fiction is changed by it, but it seems that the experience can produce a condition for dysregulation, which, in turn can prompt personality change.

By identifying with the character of Gabriel, we readers may recognize needs in ourselves, for others to see us as we would like. To overcome all needs of this kind would be more than is possible for a mere human being. Moreover, to imagine one could correct all the problems would be exactly the kind of wishful thinking we are talking about. But to change a bit, and overcome some of the needs, or one, or to overcome one on one occasion, might be possible.

In "The Dead," Joyce may be inviting us to wonder whether, when we see another person only in relation to our own needs, we are diminished in ourselves, especially when we do not recognize our needs. But another possibility remains: that experiencing a difference between oneself and another can be a fact of some importance, rather than simply a threat. It's for us to judge.

In *Ars Poetica,* Horace proposed that poetry (and literature more generally) aims at "both instruction and pleasure" (p. 447). Was he right? In our studies of effects of reading artistic literature, we found that people weren't instructed by literary art; that is to say they did not learn in some particular way. With literary art they were, instead, enabled to change, and they did so in their own ways. Joyce's "The dead," does not instruct. With the anguish the story may prompt, moreover, the story may not even seem pleasurable. It communicates indirectly, inwardly. It means something different to each person, who may or may not change in a way he or she wants, in a way he or she is able.

Feeling moved

The Passionate Muse (by Keith Oatley) is a novella together with, for each of its seven parts, commentary on the emotions we might feel as we read these parts. Let us now offer a comparable commentary on the ending of Joyce's story.

Even when one has read the story five or six times, it's final pages are able to move one to tears. The emotions one experiences are not those of any of the story characters, they are one's own inward emotions.

One of the most moving parts of the story, for us the authors, is the last paragraph of the penultimate section. Gretta is on the bed:

> *sobbing in the quilt. Gabriel held her hand a moment longer, irresolutely, and then, shy of intruding on her grief, let it fall gently and walked quietly to the window.*

In the story's final section, at the beginning the second paragraph before the last of the whole story, Joyce writes: "Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes." Again, at these moment, they may fill ours, too. Our emotions are signals to us that we are being touched about something important.

Then comes the story's last paragraph, which can be extraordinarily moving as, with a metonymic shift, a "this," the particularity of one individual, Gabriel, with his self-involvement, quirks and shortcomings, widens into a "that," a sense of all humanity, in which we feel each of us as having our limitations, and in which we know that we all experience longings, and that we all experience losses perhaps of the kind that occurred for Gabriel, or perhaps of a different kind.

Gabriel hears the snow tapping lightly on the window. He sees the snowflakes. The newspapers say: "snow was general all over Ireland." It falls in Dublin, and towards the west in the little churchyard in Galway where Michael Furey lies buried. Gabriel, the individual, thinks of the snow covering the whole country, thinks of all the country's people, the living and the dead.

Knowing others, knowing oneself

Although understanding others and understanding ourselves are among the things we human beings do best, we are not as good at it as we might be. It's not really our fault. The problem lies in the fact that another person's eyes are not windows into that person's soul. Nor do we have mirrors that let us see ourselves as others see us.

Not far into the first book (*Du Côté de Chez Swann)* of his novel, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu,* Marcel Proust put it like this (the first three excerpts below are from page 87, translated by Keith Oatley):

> *A real human being, however profoundly we sympathize with him, is perceived largely by our senses. This means that he remains opaque to us, and offers a dead weight that our perceptions cannot lift. If a misfortune should strike him, it is only in a small part of the total understanding we have of him that we can be moved by this.*

And lest we think that looking into one's own soul is substantially easier, Proust says this:

> *Even more, it is only in a part of the total understanding he has of himself that he can be moved by himself.*

This is not a shortcoming of any individual. It is the human condition. We need assistance. Part of this assistance, Proust continues, is literature.

> *The discovery of the writer of fiction is the idea of replacing those parts that are impenetrable to the mind by an equal quantity of immaterial parts, that is to say parts that our minds can assimilate.*

Proust goes on to suggest, and to demonstrate in his novel, that one of the functions of literature is to enable us to know other people more intimately than we can generally know them in ordinary life. From this literary knowing, we can become better able to understand people in the ordinary world.

At the same time, in *Le Temps Retrouvé,* which is the last part of his novel, Proust offers us this (from page 276, translated by Keith Oatley):

> *In reality, when he reads, each reader is actually the reader of his own self. The work of the writer is nothing more than a kind of optical instrument that the writer offers. It allows the reader to discern that which, without the book, he might not have been able to see in himself.*

As one of that company of modernist writers who would come to include Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust, James Joyce was able, in "The Dead," not only to frame the problem of how we come to understand human minds, but to suggest some of the solution. In the experience of reading this story, we develop an understanding. As we travel down through its layers, we come to know something of another person, Gabriel. That this other person happens to be fictional is an advantage, because we can come to know him from the inside. The experience is, at the same time, of coming to know something of ourselves, because metaphorically we have become that character, and the final sections of the story imply that we all of us may have something of the Gabriel in us. We are members of a very curious species. We spend much of our time with other people and—even when we're not actually with them—we plan and think and feel in relation to these others, and to ourselves.

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