

A Probe into the Epiphany and Symbol in the Dead

Guo Jiejie *

Humanity Department, Lu'an Vocational and Technical College, Lu'an 237000, China

*Corresponding Author Email: 43609513@qq.com

ABSTRACT. *In The Dead, James Joyce employs epiphany and symbols to highlight the theme and uses multiple pairs of opposite-symbols such as snow and galoshes, the dead and alive, Ivos and Gabriel as well as the west and the east to develop the story and manifest its deep-seated theme. As epiphany, the technique is widely used in this story to depict the inner world of the characters. This article researches from the perspective of epiphany and symbol, and gives a clear analysis on plot symbols, language symbols, death symbols, and scene symbols.*

KEYWORDS: *The dead; Epiphany; Symbol*

1. Introduction

James Joyce is one of the most famous contemporary writers in Ireland. Much comment has centered on *The Dead*, a pivotal story in Joyce's *Dubliners*. Joyce began planning the dead in Rome, in July 1906 and began writing it in Trieste, in the spring of 1907.

The Dead occupies an important position in *Dubliners*. It is the last story of James Joyce's *Dubliners*. Unlike his later works, the early works does not employ the technique of "flow of conscious", but epiphany and symbol to reflect the theme.

The title of the story is usually read as an important ambiguity: both the living, who lead-as Thoreau put it-"lives of quiet desperation", and the actual dead who somehow dominate the lives.

Gabriel, also called "the prince of snow", moves across this plain, himself somehow identified with the snow, which lies "thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, and the barren thorns". This is a purgatorial journey he has to make in order to reach a new life.

Gabriel and Gretta is a happy couple in Ireland. They attend an annual Christmas party. The couple has been a shining point in the party. However, this night turn out to be a bad impression which made Gabriel disappointed. Three things take place one by one. At first, Lily uses the wrong words to amuse them. Then, the different ideas on politics result in a disharmony relationship between the dancer and Gabriel. The worst thing is that after listening to a song, Gretta can't control her feeling and indulge in the memory of the young lover. This love story not only brings the surprise to Gabriel but also unbalance. Such a common young boy takes a big part in Gretta's heart. Gretta's tears only made Gabriel firmly believe the long distance between them-not from space but from psychology. Gabriel feels "humiliated" and assailed by a "shameful consciousness of his own person", and he understands something from the life.

2. Epiphany

In this short story, Joyce uses the technique of epiphany to emphasize the topic. Epiphany means a sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something. It is a comprehension or perception of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization. For Joyce, the epiphany equaled moments in which things or people in the world revealed their true character or their essence."

Gabriel Conroy, in 'The Dead', following a self-conscious evening at his aunts' party and anticipating an amorous evening with his wife Gretta after entering their hotel, also chances to glimpse himself in a mirror, and afterward remembers the reflection negatively as that of a 'pitiable fatuous fellow'. Gabriel also desires to control Gretta, and 'longed to be master of her strange mood . . . to overmaster her'. Gabriel also believes he knows Gretta's thoughts. But then to his chagrin, 'in an outburst of tears' she reveals her young love affair with Michael Furey back in her hometown of Galway. Gabriel feels 'humiliated' and assailed by a 'shameful consciousness of his own person', soon after which he becomes aware of the start of the final snowfall 'upon all the living and the dead'.

Consider Joyce's description of Gretta being taken in by the singing of Mr. D'Arcy: Gabriel watched his wife who did not join in the conversation. She was standing right under the dust's fanlight and the flame of the gas lit up the rich bronze of her hair which he had seen her drying at the fire a few days before. She was in the same attitude and seemed unaware of the talk about her. At last she turned towards them and Gabriel saw there was color on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining. A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart.

The snowy context for Gabriel Conroy's more complexly shaded revelations at the end of 'The Dead'. At the end of James Joyce's Dubliners story 'The Dead', Gabriel Conroy's intermingled egotism and amorous expectations are dashed when, amid an intermittent (and emblematic) snowfall, his wife Gretta tearfully reveals a much cherished past love.

The last paragraph reveals deeply the author's epiphany towards his family, his life even the whole world.

"It had begun to snow again....the time had come for him to set out on his journey westward....snow was general all over Ireland. it was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. ."

3. Symbolism

Symbol is an arbitrary sign (written or printed) that has acquired a conventional significance it has an underline meaning between the lines.2. something visible that by association or convention represents something else that is invisible; as "the eagle is a symbol of the United States"

Deeply influenced by European traditional culture and modernism trend, Joyce adopts this unique means--symbolism to give the described characters, scenes, and things another meaning, which makes the readers analyze it from different perspectives.

3.1 Language Symbol

The caretaker's daughter's name is Lily. Lily, which is a kind of flower, comes from Latin. In religion and art the lily symbolizes purity, and as the flower of the Resurrection and of the Virgin it is widely used at Easter. The lily of the Bible (Cant. 2.1) has been variously identified with the scarlet anemone, Madonna lily, and other plants; the "lilies of the field" (Mat. 6.28) probably means any wildflowers, perhaps the iris. And lily is used when people attend the funeral. This name is in accordance with the image of the mistress. "She was a slim, growing girl, pale in complexion and with hay-colored hair. The gas in the pantry made her look still paler."(P163). So in this respect, she symbolizes the death.

Gabriel is the archangel who was the messenger of God. It symbolizes fire prince and death angel. In a famous film The City of Angel, the actor's name is Gabriel. It was a romantic love story between human being and angel. Suffering his thousands of years' life, the angel is willing to be a common people, thus he can enjoy the happiness, suffering the sadness, have joy and tears, just the same as Maggie. But when he becomes a real human, Maggie suffered a car accident and lost her life. Gabriel in The Dead is a man suffering a lot, struggling in the world.

3.2 Person Symbol

In "The Dead", James Joyce employs the women's stereotypes of "mother, lady and floozy" in western literature to imply the Irish corrupt customs.[1] In this way Joyce criticizes the radical narrow-minded nationalists, and also makes clear his attitude to "the conflict between two civilizations" as well as his sensationalistic literary stand.s.

3.3 Death Symbol

In the story, Joyce uses Brown to symbolize paralysis and corruption. Goose is served as a main course in Christmas party, the color of which has the meaning of death and corruption. The host of the party let Gabriel serve the goose, and enjoy it among the guests. It seems that People share the goose together, but actually it symbolizes they enter into a state of paralysis.[2]

The Dead includes three kinds of people. The first is who lost life such as Gretta's first lover--Michael Furey,

Published by Francis Academic Press, UK

Gabriel's parents and grandfather and the descended excellent singers. The second kind is those who will lose life in the near future, involving the physically -old aunts and mentally -dead people such as the two aunts live in the new society, but cannot accept new things. The last kind is Mentally-dead people such as Gretta; she has a happy family, own a well-educated husband and two lively children, but indulge herself in past memory with her young lover, cannot help crying at the song and forget everything in reality. Mary, a 30-year-old lady, still single, live on playing the piano. After hearing the love story between Gretta and Furey, Gabriel feels excited: for he has never had such a feeling with any women. In fact, he is a dead.

3.4 Snow-the Image of the City

Snow, The well-known snow framing 'The Dead', of course, has also engaged numerous critics with its evident symbolism. Snow is an outstanding symbol. Through the subtle interpretation, analyzing the meaning of snow can help us understand the theme of the story better, an comprehend the author's complex feeling towards Ireland. It appears as many as twenty-five times. The image of the snow first appears when Gabriel appears. Then the scope of snow enlarges gradually.

At last, it extends to the whole Ireland. Snow symbolize a lot of things such as cold interpersonal relationship, boredom life style, negative life attitude, collapsed spiritual world and Snow melt into water, which is the origin of life. So, it also is the symbol of revived life. Lily and Gabriel's conversation at the beginning of the story indicate the cold interpersonal relationship. Although they know each other, lily does not express her enthusiasm towards the guests, not to say the greeting as: "welcome". She only gives the routine greeting on the weather. Look at the conversation between them:

"still snow"

"yes"

So, Gabriel has no common point with lily, it is in fact an unpleasant talk. What is worse, the conversation makes Gabriel sadder. He thinks about his life and experience epiphany at the end.[3]

4. Conclusion

In The Dead, James Joyce employs epiphany and symbols to highlight the theme and uses multiple pairs of opposite-symbols such as snow and galoshes, the dead and alive, Ivos and Gabriel as well as the west and the east to develop the story and manifest its deep-seated theme. At the end of 'The Dead', Gabriel Conroy's intermingled egotism and amorous expectations are dashed when, amid an intermittent (and emblematic) snowfall, his wife Gretta tearfully reveals a much cherished past love.

Acknowledgement

Anhui Provincial Quality Engineering Teaching Project: Research and implementation of PBL teaching mode and hybrid platform in Higher Vocational English course in under the background of Belt and Road strategy(2018jyxm0689); Humanities and social sciences research projects in universities of Anhui Province: A study on the translation of Xi Jinping's Socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the new era from the perspective of cultural identity (SK2019A0915); A study of the evolution of Chinese American literature--An analysis of Amy Tan's works (XJKY201901), The mixed teaching reform project "Clothing English" (2018CHHJG64).

Note

- 1) Robert Scholes and a Walton Litz, Eds., *Dubliners* (New York: Penguin, 1979) 500
- 2) Robert Scholes and a Walton Litz, Eds., *Dubliners* (New York: Penguin, 1979) 253

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