



UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO DE JANEIRO
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FORMAÇÃO IDENTITÁRIA: OS DESAFIOS DE GABRIEL CONROY EM “OS
MORTOS”, DE JAMES JOYCE

Marcele Mendanha
Pereira

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RESUMO

O objetivo desta pesquisa é investigar os conflitos identitários vivenciados pelo personagem Gabriel Conroy no conto “Os Mortos”, de James Joyce. O protagonista e sua esposa Gretta, em uma festa de Natal, refletem sobre a efemeridade de suas próprias existências. O estudo considera, a partir de uma leitura crítica de excertos da obra (*close reading*), como os elementos culturais irlandeses são abraçados e/ou rejeitados por Gabriel, que vive uma crise de identidade nacional. É pressuposto que as dinâmicas sociais contribuem para a construção identitária fluida e/ou fixa, ao determinar comportamentos e visões de mundo particulares. Ao desviar-se das convenções sociais estabelecidas, Gabriel se destaca pelo forte contraste com os demais convidados, revelando sua desconexão com os outros e com as suas próprias raízes irlandesas.

Palavras-chave: James Joyce; literatura irlandesa; conto; Os Mortos; identidade.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to investigate the identity conflicts experienced by the character Gabriel Conroy in the short story “The Dead”, by James Joyce. The protagonist and his wife Gretta, at a Christmas party, reflect on the ephemerality of their own existences. The study considers, based on a critical reading of excerpts from the work (*close reading*), how Irish cultural elements are embraced and/or rejected by Gabriel, who is experiencing a crisis of national identity. It is assumed that social dynamics contribute to the fluid and/or fixed identity construction, by determining particular behaviours and worldviews. By deviating from established social conventions, Gabriel stands out for his strong contrast with the remaining guests, revealing his disconnection with others and with his own Irish roots.

Keywords: James Joyce; Irish literature; The Dead; short story; identity.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Dead” is a short story written by the renowned Irish writer James Joyce. This work of fiction takes part in a collection named *Dubliners*, which contains fourteen other short stories released in 1914. The plot takes place in the early 1900s Dublin and portrays the evening where Gabriel Conroy, a middle-aged man, attends a Christmas party at his aunts’ house with his wife Gretta. As the night progresses, Gabriel begins to reflect on his life and relationships, feeling a sense of dissatisfaction with his existence and an absence of connection with others.

For this study, we aim to understand how cultural elements such as historic context, traditions, language, music, dance and food are incorporated or rejected by the protagonist’s construction of identities. In this sense, this work approaches the lack of belonging suffered by the main character due to a national identity crisis.

Following this line of reasoning, we aspire to investigate Gabriel Conroy’s interactions with other attendees at the Christmas dinner-dance and how these social dynamics reflect upon the identity dilemma suffered by him. We acknowledge that identity is moulded upon a relation of difference (SILVA, 2000). In this sense, Gabriel’s non-identification with the Irish tradition will make room for his social disconnection and the idea of ‘non-belonging’.

It is also decisive to take the social environment into account, as Gabriel Conroy’s convictions led to his situation of social estrangement (CLAYTON, 2012). Certain environments and groupings demand certain behaviours and worldviews; not following this pattern eventually conducts you to a state of inadequacy. The roots of this problem are found in the concept of identity formation; according to Susan D. Clayton (2012), while some identity markers are simply imposed by destiny, such as your ethnicity, others are a matter of preference, such as beliefs and ideologies. When it comes to these chosen identity markers, Gabriel stands out for being completely polarised compared to the remaining guests.

An approach upon the concept of fixed and fluid identities (CLAYTON, 2012; HALL, 1996) helps us to investigate what makes Gabriel so distinguished from the others, besides comprehending the secondary characters’ identification with the national identity. Due to the previously mentioned facts, Conroy constantly struggles with his self-understanding which inevitably culminates in the disintegration of his sense of self by the end of the narrative.

This work is divided in four chapters: an introduction, chapter one, chapter two, chapter three and final thoughts.

INTRODUCTION: A brief overview of the work was already exposed above, in which it briefly introduces the short story's plotline and the theoretical resource of this study. It also outlines the scope and boundaries of the work, indicating what aspects will be covered in our literary analysis.

CHAPTER ONE: The first chapter of this work provides information about Joyce's upbringing, life experiences and cultural context in order to understand his motivations as a fictional writer. Joyce is an Irish author that had published all his books outside Ireland, however, all his narratives exclusively set place in Ireland. Comprehending why the writer left the island and what were his literary intentions are of great importance to the objective of this study. In **The Irish Resentment**, a general overview of the historical background of Ireland and its influence on Joyce's narrative are presented. Also, it approaches all the exploration and injustice the territory was submitted to by the United Kingdom over several centuries. In the section **Irish Resistance**, we draw attention to the Irish fuelled desire for self-determination and the struggle for political and cultural autonomy. Here, we aim to discuss how the oppressed took a stand against colonial power by preserving and promoting an awareness of national identity. The Gaelic Revival was linked to the valorisation of local literature and although Joyce was not explicitly affiliated with such patriotic acts, his works have strong traces of it.

CHAPTER TWO: By "close reading" some excerpts of the short story, we aim at addressing in the first part of this chapter Gabriel Conroy's physical appearance, context of upbringing and family relationships. These key aspects make room for the comprehension of the personal dilemmas the protagonist suffers when defining his identity/ies. The section **Gabriel X The Three Graces** explores Conroy's relationships with the hostesses of the party: his aunts, Kate and Julia, and his cousin, Mary Jane. Besides representing the family bond, The Three Graces also embody the essence of the Irish tradition.

CHAPTER THREE: The section **Gabriel X The Continent** provides an overview of Gabriel's Anglicism and his relation to the difference provided by others. As an outsider, we will see that Gabriel does not feel comfortable anymore by following the social conventions of his homeland. In the following section, **Gabriel X Gretta** delves into the final reflection upon the character's identity and who he authentically is. The analysis centres around Gabriel's inner conflicts and the social tensions when dealing with Gretta's past.

FINAL THOUGHTS: Finally, the objective of this section is to revisit the previously presented topics. With the intention of providing a concise summary of the key findings of this research, we synthesise main points and outcomes of the narrative. The concepts of fixed and fluid identity along with the remarking of differences that culminates in Conroy's social exclusion are once more highlighted to contribute to the overall comprehension of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1. About James Joyce

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce was born on February 2nd, 1882, in Tenure, Republic of Ireland. He lived until the age of 59 years-old and died in Zurich, Switzerland. Joyce left Ireland in 1904, in his early 20s; his spouse Nora Barnacle, originally from Galway County, accompanied him. Even though the writer had spent most of his lifetime outside Ireland, he wrote a collection of short stories entitled *Dubliners* in 1914, ten years after his exile. After leaving Ireland, he lived in Trieste, a city in the northeast of Italy, and lastly, Zurich, where he spent his last days.

Joyce is considered one of the most renowned writers of Irish literature and of all times, having published other remarkable pieces of work such as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Back at the time, Joyce started writing *Dubliners* while living in Italy with his spouse Nora. As a result of exiling from Ireland and making his living in a foreign country, some may assume Joyce was denying his roots. However, according to John McCourt (2003), this hypothesis of neglecting his national identity is not true; Ireland has always been the source of his literary texts. In McCourt's words:

Joyce did not dream of adventure in foreign lands, he had more than his fair share at home but he did need the distance of exile (sometimes suffering, sometimes sanctuary) to mould his material into fiction. [...] Ireland remained central to his imagination and indeed his being out of his country accentuated his being Irish especially in the early years. His Irish sources formed the core of everything he wrote, his imagination was, as he told Budgen "memory", his memory a process of continuous renegotiation of his selfhood in relation to his past. Joyce never had any illusions that in leaving Ireland he was escaping from its grasp or from his own personal and national inheritance (MCCOURT, 2003, p.60)

Even though James Joyce did not remain physically in Ireland, he has never left home. He had eternised his national identity and inheritance in all his publications. Each one of his books were written in different cities from Europe: Trieste, Zurich, Paris. Still, all his pieces of work had a common aspect: they all took place in Dublin, Ireland. In his art and his words, his roots had prevailed. As a matter of fact, Joyce's intention was to escape the chaotic scenario of the religious, political and social matters that had been taking place all over Ireland for quite some time.

Joyce's aim with his literary legacy was to perpetuate the national identity of Ireland as

it had been constantly threatened for centuries. Rosa Bosinelli and Harold F. Mosher Jr. (1998, p.2) wrote about “Joyce’s insistence that the stories accurately portray Dublin itself, not only the physical city but the political and cultural milieu in which the narratives are enacted”. According to the author’s own words in a personal letter to Grant Richards, his publisher, his intention “was to write a chapter in the moral history of [his] my country”. If he eliminated this information, Joyce asked “what becomes of the chapter of the moral history of [his] my country?”¹

The writer believed that if he wrote the chapter of moral history in the exact way he had, he would have taken “the first step towards the spiritual liberation of [his] my country”. In this sense, his writing was strongly connected to a faithful representation of what composed Ireland. It does not only encompass the routine and cultural elements of these people, but also the social stagnation and political resentments that had deeply affected the understanding of a nation’s identity.

1.2. The Irish Resentment

In order to understand Gabriel’s afflictions, it is relevant to situate the major struggles Ireland had gone through up to its Independence, in the year of 1922. The constant attacks and colonisation policies had brutally altered the conception of the Irish ethnicity. Considering that the environment shapes people’s identity, how can one develop a consistent understanding of self in a land that is being culturally oppressed by the most powerful Empire to ever exist? As articulated by Susan D. Clayton (2012, p.165), identities are gradually formed in the course of time and within a sociopolitical context. These contexts deeply affect how people perceive themselves in place and time; consequently, it reshapes the construction of one’s identity.

Therefore, it is not possible to isolate the geographical and historical correlation of a country such as Ireland to the United Kingdom while understanding what the Irish identity has become. The geographical setting is considered a substantial reason that motivated the expansionist strategies above-mentioned; Ireland’s geographical proximity to the United Kingdom, although being considered by the British as an inferior race, provided some kind of correlation between both nations. This eventually led to violent imperialist practices by the British that has cursed Ireland throughout centuries.

¹ All the letters by James Joyce quoted along this research are extracted from the same source: GILBERT, Stuart. **Letters of James Joyce**: Volume one. London: Faber & Faber, 1957.

It dates back to the origins of the British Empire, in the early modern period, through its dissipation in the contemporary era. Due to its intimate association, the British Empire is believed to be one of the strongest influences of the actual Irish portrait as a nation, as Kevin Kenny (2005, p.1) states that “Modern Irish history unfolded in tandem with the rise, unprecedented expansion, and eventual decline of the Empire”. Taking historical elements into account, the first event to be registered between the two nations was the Norman invasion of Ireland, which occurred in the late 12th century. This imperial occupation could not be contained, being spanned throughout the Gaelic territory which eventually led to the British sovereignty of the island.

In 1171, the arrival of the King of England in Ireland expanded the Norman authority into the territory by solidifying the Norman influence. Four years later, in 1175, King Henry II returned to establish the *Treaty of Windsor*. Rory O'Connor, who was the king of an Irish province, Connacht, was acknowledged by King Henry II as the High King of Ireland. In return for O'Connor's recognition, he and other Irish kings and chieftains agreed to swear loyalty to King Henry II, acknowledging him as their overlord. The Treaty allowed the English to maintain semi-autonomy over certain parts of Ireland, particularly in the eastern regions.

In the analysis by Chris Kortright (2003, p.2), the author exposes that a common colonial-era oppression is “the sacking of cultural patterns; these cultural values are stripped, crushed and emptied. [...] There is a destruction of the cultural values and ways of life. Languages, dress, techniques are defined and constructed through the ideology and values of the colonialist.” It was the colonising mentality that, in 1366, enacted a series of thirty-five acts entitled the *Statutes of Kilkenny*.

The main purpose of the Statutes was to amplify Britain's dominance and to segregate the Irish descendants from the English colonists' descendants. It was demanded that “if any English or Irish living among the English, used the Irish language amongst themselves, contrary to this ordinance, and thereof be attainted, his lands and tenements, if he have any, shall be seized into the hands of the immediate lord [...]” (CROWLEY, 2000, p.15) Besides the discouragement of the Gaelic language, there was also the imposition of an anti-miscegenation law that required Irish citizens to adopt English surnames; if not, they would lose their property. Marriage between the English and the Irish was another prohibition included in the acts.

In the mid-14th century, one of the most devastating pandemics in human history also affected Ireland: *The Black Plague*, also known as *The Bubonic Plague*. It is believed to have reached the Irish population through contact with the Normans and it is also estimated that an overwhelming portion of the population had succumbed to the plague. Further on, an economic

disruption in the territory was unavoidable which provoked long-term consequences.

The 16th century was another marking point in Irish history. King Henry VIII decided to break with the Roman Catholic Church and initiated the English Reformation in the European continent, which totally neglected the prevalence of Catholicism in the Irish territory. By imposing the Irish citizens to adopt the Anglican Church and the unfair tax collection to enforce religious conformity, strong rivalry had been established between both nations as many Irish remained loyal to Catholicism.

During King Henry VIII's reign in 1537, a document entitled *Act for the English Order, Habit and Language* demanded that English should be the dominant language in the Irish territory and not Gaelic, as it had culturally prevailed. The attempt of banishment of the Irish language was an atrocious imposition that has impacted the Irish inheritance until the present moment.

In the following year, another British statute blamed the Irishmen's attachment towards the Gaelic language as the primary cause of their "certain savage and wild kind and manner of living". (CROWLEY, p.21, 2000). The following excerpt details this difficult relationship between the centre of power and the Irish periphery:

For five centuries a constant of British discourse on Gaelic has been the claim that speaking in Gaelic is a sign of disloyalty, and that loyal subjects should only speak English. The 1537 act portrayed the exclusive use of English as the only choice for "His Highness's true and faithful subjects." Gaelic speakers were by definition disloyal by virtue of their use of the Gaelic tongue: "whosoever shall... not... use... the English tongue, his Majestie will report them in his most noble heart as persons that esteem not his most dread laws and commandments..." Parents were ordered to speak only English with their children, and to not let them be around Gaelic speakers. This was not the first statute to imply that Gaelic speakers were a source of infection. Later statutes would be more explicit in this claim. (CAHILL, 2007, p.115-116)

Expanding our investigations towards the formation of the Irish legal system, the spread of the English common law was evidenced in the beginning of the 17th century. In 1603, the Proclamation of King James I imposed that Ireland should be governed according to the English law, which was distinct from the Brehon laws that governed Ireland prior to the Anglo-Norman invasion.

A major element that composes the history of a country is its language. The Gaelic dialect had been threatened to a large extent by the English colonisation; this issue is additionally investigated by Jana Pecnikova and Anna Slantinska (2019). The authors believe that the language spoken by ancestors, which was once widespread until the latter half of the 19th century, no longer aligns with their present-day needs and future aspirations as conveyed in the dominant language (English), considered today the primary mode of communication.

Despite a considerable desire to preserve the language, concerns regarding its future were undeniable, as stated by Pecnikova and Slantinska (2019): “They also purported that one of the reasons, which brought about the Irish speakers’ decrease, was the English policy of colonization”, (p. 50). Further on, they approach what became of the respectability of the Irish dialect.

The Irish lost its prestige because it was thought to be an inferior language of those backward, rural and ignorant members of society. One of the aims of the colonization typical for any colonization process was the elimination of ethnic pride. Even though the ethnic pride of the Irish people stayed intact as they are still proud of who they are, aware of their distinct language (Irish/Hiberno English) traditions, folklore, etc. and uniqueness of natural and historical artefacts of culture, the language lost its former status. (PECNIKOVA; SLANTINSKA, 2019, p. 50)

Another historical turning point in Irish history was the Irish Rebellion of 1798. All the political, social and religious tensions previously presented set a deep discontentment which culminated in the attempt of a revolution. Although having partially succeeded, the act was suppressed by the British authorities that executed and captured many participants. The rebellion, even though not successful enough to end British supremacy, became a pivotal event in the broader context of Irish nationalism, which inspired later generations in political movements towards freedom.

In 1801, a document entitled *Acts of Union* officially merged Ireland with Great Britain. It was seen by some as an attempt to prevent similar uprisings such as the Irish Rebellion of 1798. Although Ireland had a degree of autonomy in its taxation policies, it remained obliged to contribute to the overall taxation system of the United Kingdom. This dictated unification between Ireland and the United Kingdom did not bring any substantial improvements to Ireland, which resulted in a food crisis in the mid-19th century.

The Great Famine, also known as the *Irish Potato Famine*, was one of the most devastating food crises in world history. However, the collective lack of food was never the real problem, but the unequal distribution of it by Great Britain. Irish soils were fertile, which were exploited by the colonisers to produce beef. The natives were left with the task of planting potatoes, a versatile crop easily grown in what became a poor soil. Soon enough, it has become the primary food source of the Irish population.

At that time, a severe potato disease arrived in the continent and crop failures sprung up in several European countries, but the most affected one was Ireland. As the potato being the primary food source of the population, an alarming state of hunger rapidly dominated the territory. Potato was indeed not properly consumable, but it does not mean Ireland had a lack

of food, as during the entire period of the famine food was still being produced and exported from the country. In a complete act of inhumanity, the British government continued to exploit the Irish soil while letting the Irish starve.

These pivotal junctures in the history of Ireland explain the deep resentments the Irish held. By absolutely no means the Irish language, religion, culture and territory had been preserved or respected. An on-going threat by the United Kingdom to weaken Ireland's identity has been enacted throughout centuries and as a form of resistance, Irish nationalism was responsible for a crucial movement in the end of the 19th century.

1.3. The Irish Resistance

The Irish resistance is powerfully linked to decolonisation and it involves a process of regaining autonomy in political, cultural and economic matters. The essence of decolonisation lies in the revival of cultures that were disrupted during the colonialism era; the wisdom of colonised and traditional communities must resist with the aim of reestablishing these marks from the past.

In the light of the above, the Gaelic Revival was a successful attempt of disengagement from Great Britain by the valorisation of Irish literature, folklore, language and history. The Irish was a civilisation rising from the intersection of two very different nations and there came the need to fight over centuries of oppression. According to Mohammed Mehaddi (2015):

[...] the Irish Revival gave a full spiritual blow and an energetic boost to Irish literature. Through words Irish writers penned endless pieces of writing, investigating Irish identity, culture, questioning the Irish social values among Irish people and referring to a national stagnation in all the fields of life and yielding the birth of Irish literature. (MEHADDI, 2015, p.7)

During the time Joyce had published *Dubliners*, in the beginning of the 20th century, the Irish community was inspired by the nationalist movements from previous generations. James Joyce was not explicitly associated with the Gaelic Revival as his literary works were essentially in English. However, he lived during a period when such patriotic initiatives were prominent in Ireland, and some components of Irish culture exaltation may have indirectly guided his writings.

Several nationalist groups had emerged with the intention of fighting for Irish independence and a conflicting political tension was evident. However, Ireland only conquered its independence in 1922 during the Irish War of Independence. This was a military and

turbulent conflict that segregated the Irish territory in two: Republic of Ireland, the European country where Joyce was originally from; and Northern Ireland, which despite sharing borders with the Republic of Ireland, is considered a territory of the United Kingdom.

Figure 1: Border between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom ²



² Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland%E2%80%93United_Kingdom_border>
Accessed on May 7th, 2023.

Figure 2: Peace Walls in Belfast, Northern Ireland ³



As previously mentioned, for a long-lasting period, Ireland had fought towards its independence and autonomy. Consequently, the Irish citizens carried a sense of displacement; they were like foreigners in their own territory as their local identity had always been neglected. Although Joyce's specific political views towards British dominance had never been minutely stated, criticism can be sensed in between the lines of his texts. It is safe to affirm that the author had always tried to capture the core of his homeland and Ireland had always been a significant element of his work. McCourt (2003) explores this issue once more according to the following quotation:

Living his exile both as loss and possibility, writing for Joyce becomes both a surrogate home and an exercise in re-creation and in redemption of what he has left behind. All at a huge human price because Joyce's life is damaged one marked by constant displacement and not occasional upheaval. Home for Joyce was a moveable feast, his life marked by an interminable round of departures and arrivals, by nostalgia, by homesickness, by endless letters home, and, especially in the early years, by almost perpetual motion, travel – he lived in well over 60 different apartments in his 59 years-by farewells and rearrivals to and from Dublin, second city of the British Empire but increasingly a foreign city to Joyce (MCCOURT, 2003, p.66)

By publishing a collection of fifteen short stories that exclusively takes place in Dublin City and narrates the different aspects of life from its inhabitants, Joyce was indeed constructing and deconstructing the legacy of his hometown through his gift of writing. There are so many

³ Available at: <<https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/1254138>> Accessed on May 7th, 2023.

elements that can inspire an author to write and the perception of nostalgia and homesickness might significantly inspired Joyce; these feelings allow individuals to connect with their past experiences and emotions. It brings up feelings of warmth and familiarity. Most importantly, it helps people to build a notion of identity and belonging, a link between the past and the present.

However, Joyce also believed that the colonisation of Ireland by Great Britain “would turn Ireland not just into a country politically powerless, but would make the people of Ireland psychologically paralyzed as well” (SALVAGNO, 2013, p.27). Thereupon, his work also had a great sense of criticism towards the paralytic state of the Irish community. Joyce carried a perception of national duty while writing *Dubliners*, with the intention of a civilian awoken. In a letter to a friend, the author expresses his wishes “to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city” in his collection of short stories.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1. Gabriel Conroy

The central location of most of the events in the short story is the Misses Morkan's annual dance. Still, it seems that the whole narrative revolves around Gabriel as several expectations are upon this character. Firstly, he is anxiously expected by the hostesses of the event. Right in the beginning of the short story, two of the hostesses, Miss Kate and Miss Julia, are "walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask who had come" (p. 199). The guest they are precisely waiting for is Gabriel Conroy, who is not only their nephew, but their favourite nephew.

Gabriel arrives with his wife, but we do not know much about her at first. Instead, the narrator shows the interaction between Gabriel and Lily, the caretaker's daughter, the Morkan's housemaid. She has been on the family for a very long time, as "Gabriel had known her when she was a child and used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll" (JOYCE, 2012, p.201). In their interaction, Gabriel feels out-placed. Lily, as she occupies the position of a housemaid, comes from a very distinct social background compared to Gabriel.

The character, trying to socialise with the girl who folds his overcoat, makes some small talk asking her about her studies. She answers that she is done with schooling and Gabriel promptly assumes that Lily is getting married in the near future with a fine gentleman. She immediately protests by stating "with great bitterness, 'The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you'" (JOYCE, 2012, p.202). In this very moment, Gabriel feels very ashamed as he was not expecting such sincerity. Feeling uncomfortable with that unforeseen reaction, he tips the girl despite her objections and leaves the pantry. Mr. Conroy feels "discomposed by the girl's bitter and sudden resort" (JOYCE, 2012, p.203) and it seems as if the character is not able to perform the social conventions expected given the context.

Further details in the narrative strongly suggests that Gabriel has a sense of superiority not only compared to Lily, but also to the other attendees present in the annual event. This is evidenced when he refers to both Aunt Julia and Aunt Kate as 'two ignorant old women' (JOYCE, 2012, p. 219). It is mentioned that Gabriel does come from a superior background as he had studied in the Royal University. He is a well-educated gentleman and his higher degree makes him feel as if he is in a better position than the other guests, which somehow leads him to constant misunderstandings and inappropriateness.

Gabriel is expected to make a relevant speech that night, another element that reinforces the importance of his presence to the Morkan's annual dance. Still, Mr. Conroy is insecure that something uncomfortable might happen again as it had happened with Lily; that he will not be able to adequately connect with the others as he comes from a superior background:

The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his. He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. He had taken up a wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure. (JOYCE, 2012, p.203-204)

The annual dance is a significant and traditional event and it is crucial to the Morkan's that everything occurs exceptionally well. However, the arrival of a new character named Freddy Malins, an alcoholic, may threaten the pleasant atmosphere that has been established since the beginning of the story. Because he might misbehave due to his drinking habits, his presence might be harmful to the reputation of the evening; therefore, Gabriel is expected to take good care of the situation.

And then it was long after ten o'clock and yet there was no sign of Gabriel and his wife. Besides they were dreadfully afraid that Freddy Malins might turn up screwed. They would not wish for worlds that any of Mary Jane's pupils should see him under the influence; and when he was like that it was sometimes very hard to manage him. Freddy Malins always came late, but they wondered what could be keeping Gabriel: and that was what brought them every two minutes to the banisters to ask Lily had Gabriel or Freddy come. (JOYCE, 2012, p.200)

Freddy Malins had just arrived at the party. Due to the reasons previously mentioned, Julia and Kate insist that Gabriel checks on Freddy and makes sure he performs a good behaviour.

'Julia, who had gone half way down one flight, came back and announced blandly: 'Here's Freddy.' [...] Aunt Kate drew Gabriel aside hurriedly and whispered into his ear: "Slip down, Gabriel, like a good fellow and see if he's all right, and don't let him up if he's screwed. I'm sure he's screwed. I'm sure he is.'" (JOYCE, 2012, p.206-207)

Gabriel is seen by his aunts as a peacemaker, a mediator. With the arrival of an unpleasant guest, Aunt Kate vents that "'It's such a relief,' said Aunt Kate to Mrs. Conroy, 'that Gabriel is here. I always feel easier in my mind when he's here...'" (JOYCE, 2012, p.207). He has important duties that ensure the success of the evening, and he is greatly trusted by the hostesses, so in a certain way he carries a powerful role in such scenarios.

Gabriel's description is elucidated in an angelic manner. Firstly, he shares the same name of the Archangel Gabriel, the messenger from God according to the Bible. As regarded

in the Sacred Scriptures, he is known as the angel of revelation, he clears away confusion and brings wisdom; in fact, Archangel Gabriel was responsible for communicating Mary about Jesus' birth.⁴ Furthermore, his physical description portrays a pure and illuminated creature. It is unquestionable that Gabriel, in the short story, embodies the qualities and traits of a supreme figure, as the following example shows:

He was a stout, tallish young man. The high colour of his cheeks pushed upwards even to his forehead, where it scattered itself in a few formless patches of **pale red**; and on his hairless face there **scintillated** restlessly the **polished** lenses and the **bright gilt** rims of the glasses which screened his **delicate** and **restless** eyes. His **glossy** black hair was parted in the middle and brushed in a long curve behind his ears where it curled slightly beneath the groove left by his hat. (JOYCE, 2012, p.207)

The colour of his cheeks is pale, but still, not simply pale, "pale red". His face shines, as Joyces describes, "scintillated restlessly". The lenses of his glasses are properly "polished" and "its bright rims" are responsible to cover his "delicate and restless eyes". His hair was "glossy" and he seemed to have a very pleasing and satisfying appearance. Gabriel, the character, seems to have the duties of an angel, the illuminated figure of an angel and coincidentally or not, the name of an angel.

While Mr. Conroy is portrayed in such heavenly way, the descriptions of Freddy Malins are quite the opposite. The narrator describes his physical traits and behaviour grotesquely, as it is presented in the following literary example:

The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel's size and build, with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips. His heavy-lidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy. He was laughing heartily in a high key at a story which he had been telling Gabriel on the stairs and at the same time rubbing the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye. (JOYCE, 2012, p. 210)

The previous excerpt reinforces the idea of having dichotomous figures, Gabriel and Freddy. While Gabriel is a man of manners, a representation of a trustable and high-minded gentleman, Freddy Malins is a troublemaker who does not fit the social conventions. He does not know how to behave accordingly and needs to be supervised by Gabriel, the wiser.

The protagonist's etiquette was highly influenced by his mother. Ellen Conroy is an

⁴ ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus."
(BIBLE, LUKE 1:30-31)

astute lady, intelligent and respected. In fact, it is mentioned that she was the reason why Gabriel had gone to University and his brother, Constantine, became a priest. It is also stated that she strongly cared about the dignity of the family, which can be seen in the chosen names of her sons. Gabriel, as already discussed, carries the name of an angel. At this point we are introduced to Gabriel's brother, who goes by the name of the first Christian Roman Emperor. This historical figure was responsible for spreading Christianity in the Roman Empire, besides supporting church's activities.

Gabriel's mother is deceased, but her family legacy continues with his aunts along with his cousin. They are responsible to carry not only the Morkan's tradition, but the Irish tradition as a whole. Their importance to the narrative and to Gabriel himself can be noticed in the way they are called by the character: *The Three Graces*.

2.2. Gabriel X The Three Graces

The central location where most of the events occur in the short story is the Misses Morkan's annual dance. The three ladies and hosts of the annual affair were Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane. Kate and Julia are sisters and Mary Jane is their niece. The Morkan's are a middle-class family. Some elements from the text help us to confirm this assumption: firstly, their place is rented; they live on the upper floor and rent the area from a corn-factor, who lives right below them on the ground floor. Secondly, by their professional occupations, as the three of them are musicians.

Aunt Julia, the oldest of them, is a leading soprano singer. Aunt Kate, younger than Julia, gives piano lessons. While Mary Janes, who is probably around her thirties, plays the organ and teaches music to children. Lastly, the narrative states that "though their life was modest, they believed in eating well" (JOYCE, 2012, p. 200).

Even though not affirmed, we can make a connection between these three female characters and the Three Graces from Greek mythology, also known as Charities. As stated earlier, Gabriel is an intellectual, so it should come as no surprise that the protagonist was able to make such mythological references. These three mythical figures have inspired centuries of artists in diverse fields, such as in paintings, sculptures and operas. In the words of the British author Kathleen N. Daly (2009),

Goddesses of beauty and charm, they were themselves embodiments of both. The Graces are usually thought to be the daughters of the god Zeus and Eurynome. The poet Hesiod named them: Thalia (Flowering), Euphrosyne (Joy), and Aglaia

(Radiance). The Three Graces were the personification of joy and wellbeing. [...] The Three Graces are often depicted as mingling with nymphs in joyous dances celebrating the bounties of nature. (DALY, 2009, p.61)

It is not clear which family member references which goddess. Moreover, on the account of the personality and physical descriptions we have from the hostesses, this might be a distant reference, as the attributions of youthfulness do not correlate to Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia. Still, elements such as “the personification of joy and wellbeing” and being portrayed in “joyous dances” are definitions clearly identified in the narrative, as the atmosphere provided by these three women is mostly described as energetic, with the occurrence of several waltz by the sound of music.

The Morkan’s cannot be considered an affluent family; however, to them, it seems of some importance to maintain the annual dance tradition and not spare any means to receive their visitors in the best hospitable and amiable way. According to Joyce’s narrative, the atmosphere was genuinely welcoming and the event was expected by all its attendees year after year, as a Christmas tradition:

It was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan's annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family, the members of Julia's choir, any of Kate's pupils that were grown up enough, and even some of Mary Jane's pupils too. Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style, as long as anyone could remember. (JOYCE, 2012, p.199)

Aunt Julia and Aunt Kate appear to be the main hostesses of the evening, as they are effervescently checking on visitors and attending them in the dressing room. Both Julia and Kate are “two small, plainly dressed old women. Aunt Julia was an inch or so the taller.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.204). Julia is described as out-of-placed, confused; moreover, her physical description with dark connotations reinforces the idea that she is an apathetic and lethargic old woman. It seems she is totally lost and cannot go through by herself:

Her hair, drawn low over the tops of her ears, was grey; and grey also, with darker shadows, was her large flaccid face. Though she was stout in build and stood erect, her slow eyes and parted lips gave her the appearance of a woman who did not know where she was or where she was going. (JOYCE, 2012, p.204)

Concerning Julia, she is completely opposite to her sister’s description and is portrayed as a high-spirited woman. Even though still described as an old lady, her face does not present dark shadows as Julia’s. Instead, it is compared to a “shrivelled red apple”; her skin tone is flushed, lively. When it comes down to her personality, she seems to be an effervescent presence:

Aunt Kate was more vivacious. Her face, healthier than her sister's, was all puckers and creases, like a shrivelled red apple, and her hair, braided in the same old-fashioned way, had not lost its ripe nut colour. (JOYCE, 2012, p.204)

Mary Jane is Julia and Kate's niece. Her physical description is not elucidated, but we do know from the narrative that she is considered "the main prop of the household" (JOYCE, 2012, p.199). Her father, named Pat, died when she was just a little girl, thirty years ago. That was when Julia and Kate took care of her up until the present day of the narrative. She plays a small but significant role as she is seen in important interactions throughout the narrative; even so, we do not know much about her physical appearance or ideological convictions.

Throughout the story, the narrator extensively exposes the importance of hospitality to Irish culture. This can be clearly identified in the Misses Morkan's annual dance: the atmosphere itself is a great representation of Irish hospitality. Primarily, it is crucial to dig deeper into the symbolism of music to the narrative and to the Irish heritage, as music is a constantly brought-up topic in the story.

As previously mentioned, *The Three Graces* – the hostesses Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane – are musicians. Therefore, music is a key element of the evening; right when Gabriel arrives at the house, the ceiling is "shaking with the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above" (JOYCE, 2012, p.202) as the guests are enthusiastically dancing to the sound of the piano. The hostesses are not the only musicians around, as further on in the narrative we are told that Miss Daly and Miss Power, two female guests, were the ones playing the waltz to which made the ceiling shake. We are also introduced to the character Mr. Bartel D'arcy, a tenor singer. He seems to be quite talented and admired by the hostesses: "I'll get him to sing later on. All Dublin is raving about him' / 'Lovely voice! Lovely voice!'" said Aunt Kate" (JOYCE, 2012, p.209).

Traditional Irish music was constantly playing for the whole of the evening. Lelia Ruckenstein and James O'Malley (2003, p.283) address that "Traditional music was carried in the tailspin of the Irish language Revival at the end of the nineteenth century. Traditional song was seen as a vehicle for language, and dance as a social bond." However, Gabriel seems to be constantly bothered with such excitement, as it is quoted that "The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his" (JOYCE, 2012, p.203). For Mr. Conroy, all that enthusiasm towards music was unrelatable to him and appeared to be an act of inferiority to get delighted by such thing.

Even though the protagonist does not show any real appreciation for Irish folk music, it is undeniable that it serves as a common thread in pivotal events. It can be evidenced when his

Aunt Julia sings a traditional song named *Arrayed for the Bridal*. In a heartfelt performance that arouses strong emotions in the present attendees, the scene is a strong reminder of the Gaelic traditions. Subsequently, when the waltz is being played, all the guests partner up to dance; due to this occurrence, Gabriel faces a very audacious lady named Molly Ivors. Due to this heated interaction, we are presented more clearly to the anti-nationalism sentiments of the character that sustains his social inadequacy. Ultimately, it is another Irish folk song that causes an immense impact to Gretta Conroy, the wife, and Gabriel Conroy itself. The song evokes Gretta's epiphany and the decisive moment of Gabriel's awareness of his wife's feelings towards her past life.

The dichotomy between Gabriel and the other guests' perception towards music can be linked to the nationalist sentiment that the protagonist lacks. Such a strong trace of Irish musical consciousness is simply an attempt to the valorisation of the Irish heritage, a form of resistance from the dissipation of a culture. Quoting a traditional Irish singer, who died in 2005, Frank Harte once said "Those in power write the history, while those who suffer write the songs."⁵

That is an additional element to understand the sense of disconnection between Gabriel and the whole atmosphere presented in the story. Even though he is an Irish citizen, the Irish culture does not represent him in the present moment and for that reason, the feeling of discomfort. Harry White (2008) relies on the premise that:

Gabriel fears the future and its threat of cultural chauvinism, and these are apprehensions which also loom large in Irish music, as the Gaelic League and the 'necessity for de-anglicising Ireland' threaten to eclipse what was in any case a modest presence for art music in Ireland. (WHITE, 2008, p.158)

Gabriel is not susceptible to the idea of a de-anglicised Ireland; in fact, the protagonist vehemently flirts with the British influence. He does not perceive it as a cultural endangerment to the Irish but as a cultural and prosperous gain. The protagonist believes people shall not linger to the past but show responsiveness to the new. It is expected that, in the context where he is immersed in, he is clearly a misrepresentation of the Irish tradition.

Besides music, food descriptions are often enlightened by the narrator in the short story. At a certain point in the narrative, one of the hostesses start to set the table:

The middle of the room was occupied by two square tables placed end to end, and on these Aunt Julia and the caretaker were straightening and smoothing a large cloth. On the sideboard were arrayed dishes and plates, and glasses and bundles of knives and

⁵ Available at: <<https://journalofmusic.com/focus/those-who-suffer-write-songs-remembering-frank-harte-1933-2005>> Accessed on October 24th, 2023.

forks and spoons. The top of the closed square piano served also as a sideboard for viands and sweets. (JOYCE, 2012, p.208)

While the tablecloth is getting in place, several kitchen utensils are mentioned along with some snacks; the visitors around are found drinking punch, lemonade and whiskey. Not only in this particular fragment but in a considerable part of the story, the characters are found drinking. At a certain point in time, Aunt Kate bursts out of the supper-room looking for her nephew: “‘Where on earth is Gabriel? There’s everyone waiting in there, stage to let, and nobody to carve the goose!’ / ‘Here I am, Aunt Kate!’ cried Gabriel, with sudden animation, ‘ready to carve a flock of geese, if necessary.’” (JOYCE, 2012, p.224)

At the following point, the narrator meticulously describes the components of the supper:

A fat brown goose lay at one end of the table and at the other end, on a bed of creased paper strewn with sprigs of parsley, lay **a great ham, stripped of its outer skin and peppered over with crust crumbs**, a neat paper frill round its shin and beside this was **a round of spiced beef**. Between these rival ends ran parallel lines of side-dishes: two little minsters of **jelly, red and yellow**; a shallow dish **full of blocks of blancmange and red jam**, a large green leaf-shaped dish with a stalk-shaped handle, on which lay **bunches of purple raisins and peeled almonds**, a companion dish on which lay **a solid rectangle of Smyrna figs**, a dish of **custard topped with grated nutmeg**, a small bowl **full of chocolates and sweets** wrapped in gold and silver papers and a glass vase in which stood **some tall celery stalks**. In the centre of the table there stood, as sentries to a fruit-stand which upheld **a pyramid of oranges and American apples, two squat old-fashioned decanters of cut glass, one containing port and the other dark sherry**. On the closed square piano **a pudding in a huge yellow dish** lay in waiting and behind it were **three squads of bottles of stout and ale and minerals**, drawn up according to the colours of their uniforms, the first two black, with brown and red labels, the third and smallest squad white, with transverse green sashes.

Gabriel took his seat boldly at the head of the table and, having looked to the edge of the carver, plunged his fork firmly into the goose. He felt quite at ease now for he was an expert carver and liked nothing better than to find himself at the head of a well-laden table. (page 224-225)

Despite carrying a feeling of discomfort due to the occurrence of some events, Gabriel finally finds himself at ease in face of a “well-laden table”; the act of carving the goose before the visitors seems to boost Gabriel’s confidence. It gives him the impression of some sort of authority as he believes to be “an expert carver”. Furthermore, as above-stated, the supper is abundantly arranged and there is an unquestionably diversity of home cooking and other edibles available: different types, sizes, colours, tastes, smells and wrappings.

It is of some great importance to the hostesses to make the evening as exceptional as it could be and they do not spare any means when it comes to it, even though they are a middle-class household. However, not only the music and the food play a major role in the evening, it

is also crucial to point out the hospitality. In fact, neither Gabriel nor the hostess settle down until all the visitors are found well-served. Along with his aunts, Gabriel also assumes a position of command.

There was a great deal of confusion and laughter and noise, the noise of orders and counter-orders, of knives and forks, of corks and glass-stoppers. Gabriel began to carve second helpings as soon as he had finished the first round without serving himself. Everyone protested loudly so that he compromised by taking a long draught of stout for he had found the carving hot work. Mary Jane settled down quietly to her supper but Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia were still toddling round the table, walking on each other's heels, getting in each other's way and giving each other unheeded orders. (JOYCE, 2012, p.225)

Throughout the supper, several subjects come up; with the participation of The Three Graces and with the appearance of secondary characters, they talk about the British and European acclaimed opera influence, the hospitality of the monks and a brief debate towards racism is introduced by Freddy Malins, but appeased by the hostess Mary Jane. The amiable atmosphere of the evening cannot be ruined and tensions must be avoided at all costs. Gabriel does not play an active role in these debates, he is just a listener.

Eventually, there comes the time for Conroy's speech, the one he has been preparing for all night, the assigned task by his aunts. After each guest had been properly fed, all the loud interactions come to silence: something outstanding is bound to happen. Even though greatly encouraged by the guests, Gabriel smiles and trembles nervously. All faces are turned to him, but he cannot make eye contact; thereupon, he raises his sight towards the chandelier. To emphasise the immaculate atmosphere of the moment, the narrator remarks that "The air was pure there. In the distance lay the park where the trees were weighted with snow. The Wellington Monument wore a gleaming cap of snow that flashed westward over the white field of Fifteen Acres." (JOYCE, 2012, p.230)

On such occasion, Gabriel delivers his after-dinner speech, by saying that he is going "to perform a very pleasing task but a task for which [he is] I am afraid [his] my poor powers as a speaker are all too inadequate." (JOYCE, 2012, p.231) Although the sense of not being adequate is emphasized by the speaker, he adds that his words are based on his feelings. In the beginning of his speech, he gets closer to his audience when he calls everyone as "the victims of the hospitality of certain good ladies". By doing that, he reinforces the goodness he sees in Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane. He goes on "more boldly" and says:

'I feel more strongly with every recurring year that our country has no tradition which does it so much honour and which it should guard so jealously as that of its hospitality. It is a tradition that is unique as far as my experience goes (and I have visited not a few places abroad) among the modern nations. Some would say, perhaps, that with us

it is rather a failing than anything to be boasted of. But granted even that, it is, to my mind, a princely failing, and one that I trust will long be cultivated among us. Of one thing, at least, I am sure. As long as this one roof shelters the good ladies aforesaid – and I wish from my heart it may do so for many and many a long year to come – the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality, which our forefathers have handed down to us and which we in turn must hand down to our descendants, is still alive among us’ (JOYCE, 2012, p.231-232)

In the previous words, Gabriel truly cherishes the Morkan’s annual tradition and verbalises what a unique and blissful event he believes it to be. Even though being a well-travelled gentleman, he finds Irish hospitality unparalleled to other cultures; it holds much honour and should be greatly protected. That seems to be the first aspect of the Irish heritage that Gabriel expresses genuine appreciation.

The act of being hostable is not an intellectual particularity, but a social virtue and that is something that can finally bond Mr. Conroy to the “uneducated” others. He is glad that such honourable tradition was bequeathed to them and feels the need to pass it on to future generations, so it continues to thrive within their community. As Nicholas Muhlestein (2010, p.1) remarks in his thesis, the narrative shows “how, despite the natural alienations inherent in any society, Dublin remains a community filled with genuine social connections.”

In his speech, Gabriel also addresses the growing of a new generation, “a generation actuated by new ideas and new principles”, “the thought-tormented age” is “educated or hypereducated” and “will lack those qualities of humanity, of hospitality, of kindly humour which belonged to an older day”. So, the old days are lost and gone but the Irish people should keep alive “the memory of those dead and gone great ones whose fame the world will not willingly let die.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.232)

Further on, his speech reinforces “this sadder thoughts” of the past by many “sad memories” of “absent faces”; the feelings of nostalgia and melancholy should be overcome as Gabriel firmly states “[he] I will not linger on the past”; one must look towards the future and “find the heart to go on bravely with [their] our work among the living.” After that, he concludes by emphasising the welcoming and good-hearted nature of the greatly gifted “Three Graces of the Dublin musical world.” The hostesses promote such a hospitable atmosphere by gathering representative elements of Irish culture such as music, food and dance “in the spirit of good-fellowship”. (JOYCE, 2012, p.233) Finally, he invites everyone to toast them by saying:

‘Let us drink to their health, wealth, long life, happiness and prosperity and may they long continue to hold the proud and self-won position which they hold in their profession and the position of honour and affection which they hold in our hearts.’

(JOYCE, 2012, p.234)

While Mr. Conroy shows he does appreciate “the memory of those dead and gone great ones” (JOYCE, 2012, p.232), he believes they must move further anyhow because cherishing the past means lingering to old ideologies from a time gone by. Samir Ferhi (2010, p.107) points out that “This image of rural, western Ireland permeates in the story, and becomes eventually a crossroad of the living and the dead as well as it represents the heart of the ancient homeland.” Paradoxically, while *the dead* may fill nationalist purposes and pride to some, to others, such as Gabriel, it may greatly compromise the future due to stagnation. What Gabriel truly fears is that his people were allured by *a social paralysis*.

The characters’ attachment to the past makes room for their state of paralysis. As Ferhi (2010, p.129) puts it, “James Joyce saw the domination of Irish Catholicism and the British imperial system and its hegemonic attitude over Ireland as the ultimate source behind the paralysis and stagnation of the Irish people.” Joyce’s intention extended beyond merely depicting Dublin or portraying it as a city affected by paralysis, as he also sought to awaken Dubliners from their state of inertia. In letter to his publisher Richard Grant, Joyce declined any revisions to his draft by stating the following: “I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.” The Irish writer makes sure that his work carries subtle criticism to Dublin society. By presenting morally ambiguous narratives and characters, Joyce challenges readers to confront ethical and social dilemmas.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1. Gabriel Conroy X The Continent

The ideas emphasised in Gabriel's speech of embracing the new influences are also seen through the character's choices. When Gabriel and his wife, Gretta, arrive at the event, they have a conversation with both hostesses about their way to the party, how the weather is rough and Gabriel's careful manners towards his wife and children. Then, Gretta mentions Gabriel's tendency of wearing galoshes.⁶

‘Goloshes!’ said Mrs. Conroy. That's the latest. Whenever it's wet underfoot I must put on my goloshes. Tonight even, he wanted me to put them on, but I wouldn't. The next thing he'll buy me will be a diving suit.

Gabriel laughed nervously and patted his tie reassuringly, while Aunt Kate nearly doubled herself, so heartily did she enjoy the joke. The smile soon faded from Aunt Julia's face and her mirthless eyes were directed towards her nephew's face. After a pause she asked:

‘And what are goloshes, Gabriel?’

‘Goloshes, Julia!’ exclaimed her sister ‘Goodness me, don't you know what goloshes are? You wear them over your... over your boots, Gretta, isn't it?’

‘Yes, said Mrs. Conroy. ‘Gutta-percha things. We both have a pair now. Gabriel says everyone wears them on the Continent.

‘O, on the Continent,’ murmured Aunt Julia, nodding her head slowly.’”
(JOYCE, p. 205-206)

In the previous example, the reader is introduced to Gretta's appearance and to Gabriel's choice concerning the galoshes; wearing these shoes is a fact of estrangement between his wife and relatives. Galoshes are waterproof overshoes that are considered a very uncommon piece of clothing in Ireland, but popular “on the Continent”; they are worn to protect shoes from water, dirt and mud. The fact that he is wearing waterproof shoes is an additional evidence of Gabriel's protective manners, but it also shows his detachment from the social conventions of the Irish dress code. Different territories mean different habits and cultures.

As the fashion editor R. Turner Wilcox (1948) pointed out, the origin of the galoshes can be traced back to the second century B.C, in Rome. At that point, these shoes were made of wood, not rubber, and were worn exclusively by women. It was named *gallica*, a Latin name for a Gaulish shoe and it also imitated a Gaulish shoe.

The use of this piece of clothing continued in the course of history, as stated by Margo

⁶ There is a divergence in the spelling of the word *galoshes/goloshes* because, although current English dictionaries indicate that the correct form is galoshes, James Joyce uses *goloshes* in his writings. The citations were kept as in the original text, even though they differ from current orthography standards.

DeMello (2009, p.147) that “known as *galochas*, galoshes date to Medieval Europe and were originally a form of pattern, made of carved wood, with a simple upper strap, and later, a fully formed but open-backed upper made of fabric or leather.” It continued to be worn by the 13th and 14th century between women and men from the European elites.

In the 19th century, these boots had another occurrence in European fashion, but this time named as Hessian boots; they were made of leather and were once more very popular in the European nobility. However, DeMello’s (2009) research upon the history of footwear reached the point where galoshes started to become famous in Great Britain. In the 1840s, the Duke of Wellington, an Anglo-Irish statesman that served as a British prime minister twice, asked for his shoemaker to develop a comfortable adaptation of the European Hessian boots. The creation made of a soft leather material was exceedingly successful in the British army during that century.

What turned out to be the rubber galoshes, worn by Gabriel and Gretta, were named as Wellington boots or simply Wellies. These shoes were only made possible due to the invention of the vulcanisation process by Charles Goodyear. The American engineer discovered that the combination between rubber and sulphur was able to create a flexible and mouldable rubber that could resist climate changes and would perfectly fit the shoe industry. As stated once more by DeMello (2009, p.334), “The British Rubber Company, founded in 1856, was the first company to start producing rubber boots in England.”

As above-mentioned, the invention of these overshoes is predominantly European; however, by the time the plot took place, its latest popular occurrence was due to the English fashion industry. With that being declared, when it is pointed out that Gabriel is wearing a piece of clothing that became popular “on the Continent”, we can infer it is related to the United Kingdom. Due to a great dominance over Ireland, it eventually culminated in the promotion of the English fashion trends.

Later in the narrative, Gabriel is partnered up with Molly Ivors. During their dance, Mr Conroy’s ideologies are more clearly elucidated when he is confronted by this lady. Miss Ivors is described as a “frank-mannered talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.213). She also carried a brooch on her clothing as a symbolism of her Irish nationalist ideologies. Ivors approaches Gabriel by saying: “I have a crow to pluck with you” (JOYCE, 2012, p.213). She is bothered by the fact that the protagonist writes to a British newspaper, entitled *The Daily Express*. She believes he should be ashamed of such thing given all the resentments between the Irish and the British, as the following example demonstrates:

‘Who is G. C.?’ answered Miss Ivors, turning her eyes upon him.
 Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows, as if he did not understand, when she said bluntly:
 ‘O, innocent Amy! I have found out that you write for The Daily Express. Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?’
 ‘Why should I be ashamed of myself?’ asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and trying to smile.
 ‘Well, I'm ashamed of you,’ said Miss Ivors frankly. ‘To say you'd write for a paper like that. I didn't think you were a West Briton.’ (JOYCE, 2012, p.214)

Gabriel is surprisingly confronted about his anti-nationalist behaviour; he is not ashamed of writing for this paper, but the problem here seems to be how this represents him as a person and as a citizen; the way he sees his place of origin, his roots. Is he a part of the community or is he an infiltrator? After this confrontation, the third person narrator describes the “look of perplexity [that] appeared on Gabriel’s face” (JOYCE, 2012, p.214):

It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in The Daily Express, for which he was paid fifteen shillings. But that did not make him a West Briton surely. [...] He did not know how to meet her charge. He wanted to say that literature was above politics. But they were friends of many years' standing and their careers had been parallel, first at the University and then as teachers: he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her. He continued blinking his eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books. (JOYCE, 2012, p.214)

A *West Briton* is a depreciative term used to refer to an Irish person who is perceived to be highly influenced by the British. Such interaction makes Gabriel totally disconnected with the social environment he is inserted in. He is not able to bond with these people because he does not share the same views on political, social and even linguistic matters. His lack of interest for his territory is also clearly perceived after a certain invitation by Molly Ivors:

‘O, Mr. Conroy, will you come for an excursion to the Aran Isles this summer? We're going to stay there a whole month. It will be splendid out in the Atlantic. You ought to come. Mr. Clancy is coming, and Mr. Kilkelly and Kathleen Kearney. It would be splendid for Gretta too if she'd come. She's from Connacht, isn't she?’
 ‘Her people are,’ said Gabriel shortly.
 ‘But you will come, won't you?’ said Miss Ivors, laying her warm hand eagerly on his arm. ‘The fact is,’ said Gabriel, ‘I have just arranged to go –’
 ‘Go where?’ asked Miss Ivors.
 ‘Well, you know, every year I go for a cycling tour with some fellows and so –’
 ‘But where?’ asked Miss Ivors.
 ‘Well, we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany,’ said Gabriel awkwardly.
 ‘And why do you go to France and Belgium,’ said Miss Ivors, ‘instead of visiting your own land?’
 ‘Well,’ said Gabriel, ‘it's partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.’

‘And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with – Irish?’ asked Miss Ivors.

‘Well,’ said Gabriel, ‘if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.’ (JOYCE, 2012, p.215-216)

In this fragment, Gabriel is uninterested in spending his holidays in Ireland, he wants to visit other countries from Europe; he is fond of the idea of getting to know different cultures and learning new languages. Then, Molly questions Gabriel why he does not feel captivated about his own land and language. At this moment, the interaction catches the attention of other attendees who are around, which makes Gabriel even more anxious. The young lady feels intrigued by his lack of nationalism and starts to be incisive in her questions, demanding to know why Gabriel is not engaged to his roots.

When Molly Ivors mentions that Gretta is from a province in the countryside, Gabriel, in a very fast response, says that “her people are”. The distinction between Gretta and her people has been established. This dichotomy has to do with what Tomas Tadeu Silva (2000) wrote about the affirmation of identity. According to him:

The affirmation of identity and the marking of difference always imply the operations of including and excluding [...] saying "what we are" also means saying "what we are not". Identity and difference are thus translated into statements about who belongs and who does not, about who is included and who is excluded. Affirming identity means demarcating borders, it means making distinctions between what is inside and what is outside. Identity is always tied to a strong separation between "us" and "them". This demarcation of borders, this separation and distinction, presupposes and, at the same time, affirms and reaffirms power relations. (SILVA, 2000, p.82, our translation)

Gretta’s exclusion from her group underlies the discriminative behaviour of the character towards what he conceives from the Irish heritage – a retrograde portrayal of Ireland. In the words of Clayton (2012, p.166), “Identities describe not only personal attributes, but also connections and groupings; who we are like and unlike, and who we are tied to.” For that reason, it is vital for Gabriel to separate Gretta’s roots from her family’s; he is prejudiced against Gretta's relatives, just as his mother was against his beloved.

Ellen Conroy was a religious woman who greatly minded for the respectability of the Conroy’s. Even though she did not share the same musical talent from her sisters, was considered by them a brilliant woman. Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia still kept her photograph in the pier glass and per the narration, they “used to call her the brains carrier of the Morkan family”. (JOYCE, 2012, p.212). However, it seems as if Gretta was seen as a threat to her family’s dignity. Ellen Conroy did not support Gabriel and Gretta’s union, as she believed that Gretta was a “country cute” (JOYCE, 2012, p. 213). She looked down on Gretta as if she was

not on the same intellectual and social level as Gabriel. Still, Gretta was the one who took great care of her until her last living days.

When Gabriel affirms he does not consider Irish his language, he makes a substantial movement of disassociation and exclusion from an environment of cultural resistance. The social environment is held responsible for “making certain attributes more salient and giving them specific significance. Cultures vary in the way they highlight specific attributes” (CLAYTON, 2012, p.165). The weakening of the Gaelic language is closely linked to colonialism and cultural oppression; thereupon, in the Irish political setting, Conroy’s denial in recognising the Gaelic weakens his sense of belonging and national identity that is so determinant to the harmony of the evening.

The protagonist subtly embraces British supremacy towards the territory. The language someone speaks can reflect their ethnic background, cultural heritage and traditions. Because Conroy does not feel identification concerning his roots, there is no reason for the character to value or preserve it. As a result, he is seen in a depreciative way as he does not follow the social conventions expected from an Irish person; his attitude was conniving with British society and a threat to the Irish resistance.

‘And haven't you your own land to visit,’ continued Miss Ivors, ‘that you know nothing of, your own people, and your own country?’

‘O, to tell you the truth,’ retorted Gabriel suddenly, ‘I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!’

‘Why?’ asked Miss Ivors.

Gabriel did not answer for his retort had heated him. ‘Why?’ repeated Miss Ivors.

They had to go visiting together and, as he had not answered her, Miss Ivors said warmly:

‘Of course, you've no answer.’

Gabriel tried to cover his agitation by taking part in the dance with great energy. He avoided her eyes for he had seen a sour expression on her face. But when they met in the long chain he was surprised to feel his hand firmly pressed. She looked at him from under her brows for a moment quizzically until he smiled. Then, just as the chain was about to start again, she stood on tiptoe and whispered into his ear:

‘West Briton!’ (JOYCE, 2012, p.215-216)

Mr. Conroy feels profoundly offended and ashamed with the episode as the narrator states “she had no right to call him a West Briton before people, even in joke. She had tried to make him ridiculous before people, heckling him and staring at him with her rabbit's eyes.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.217).

The fact that the character esteems the English language over the Irish strongly reinforces how his identity expression differs from the others presented in the story. According to Pecnikova and Slatinska (2019), this matter underpins how the character presents himself as

an outsider, a foreigner in his own land:

Language is not only about communication — there is much more to it. Language carries content. Through language, we can manifest our identity. Language and culture are intrinsically linked together. [...] We are also aware of our place in a particular community thanks to the language we use. It allows us to define our borders and identify with our roots. [...] Language gives us a feeling of togetherness, belonging to a larger group or community. Language in general is an important element of cultural and national identity expression and cultural distinctiveness. (PECNIKOVA; SLANTINSKA, 2019, p. 40)

After the strong accusation of Mr. Conroy being a West Briton in an event where Irish heritage is being celebrated, the character's embarrassment and uneasiness is unavoidable. According to his beliefs, he is a high-educated man and considers himself superior to others; after such occurrences, Gabriel has his integrity belittled, thus affecting his confidence and perception of belonging. He is not seen as the wiser or the trustable in such context; in fact, Gabriel is a failure, he is seen as a betrayer of his own nation.

At a later moment, Molly Ivors decides to abruptly leave the party. Mary Jane tries to convince her to stay, but Molly reinforces her wishes to leave. Gabriel, after hesitating briefly, tells Miss Ivors he would be willing to accompany her home. However, Miss Ivors pulls away from the offer and finally departs by saying “Beannacht libh” (JOYCE, 2012, p.223), which is “goodbye” in Gaelic. The scene leaves Mary Jane with a puzzled expression and Gabriel ponders if he had caused her unexpected exit.

The latter episodes evidence he is not a member of the same community and Ireland is not his home anymore. In the words of Avtar Brah (1996), a Ugandan-British sociologist, *home* cannot be limited simply to a geographical space; there is more to it. It also encompasses social experiences and sense of identification.

Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. It sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day... all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of relations. [...]

When does a location *become* home? What is the difference between ‘feeling at home’ and staking claim to a place as one’s own? It is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet, the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home (BRAH, 1996, p.189-190)

Even though physically remaining in Ireland, the constant perception of displacement does not provide Gabriel a feeling of inhabitancy in his own land. While home as the idea of “the lived experience of a locality” does lead to Ireland, we are completely aware that the

protagonist is not emotionally settled and inserted in the physical place he finds himself in. If home can be associated with one's cultural and social identity, the constant “experience of social exclusion” that Conroy undergoes undoubtedly sustains the argument that the character is a complete foreigner in his own land.

The private dilemmas endured by Gabriel contribute to discussions on the complexities of identity formation. The character's roots carry the elements that compose his homeland, his ancestry and, consequently, his primary source of identity. Alternatively, it can be evidenced that historical occurrences such as colonisation and globalisation have shaped Gabriel's mindset into taking a foreigner route, thereupon, an identity reshaping. The roots/routes dichotomy (GILROY, 1995) is a substantial argument that demonstrates Mr Conroy's continuous absence of belonging.

While some still linger to what has been lost, Gabriel shows a welcoming and accepting behaviour towards what is new. The Irish language has lost its prestige over time and though some people might fight against its dissipation, like Miss Ivors, Gabriel takes a totally opposite side; it becomes clear that Conroy has already been deeply seduced and altered by other cultural forms. There is no longer a strong bond with his origin, thus a lack of sense of belonging.

At this point, we may infer that his attraction to foreign routes makes him a cosmopolitan character, as his identity is not fixed to one place. Lawrence Grossberg (1996, p.89) claims that there are two models of identities. According to him, the first model “is defined by either a common origin or a common structure of experience or both”. This perspective is related to the way Gabriel sees his roots, as a crystallised and paralysed Ireland.

This is also applied to the symbolism of The Three Graces, who represent traditional Ireland. The event hosted by them is a faithful symbol of the fixed and universal conception of the country; elements such as the Irish hospitality, traditional food, music and dance are identity marks that had been proudly thrived through generations. These female characters are perpetuating the “authentic and original content” (GROSSBERG, 1996, p.89) of their ancestry.

Gabriel denies this authentic identity. The second model of identity takes shape into the construction of Gabriel's selfhood; it highlights the impossibility of entirely formed identities in a “universally shared origin or experience”, according to Grossberg (1996) once more:

Identities are always relational and incomplete, in process. Any identity depends upon its difference from, its negation of, some other term, even as the identity of the latter term depends upon its difference from, its negation of, the former. [...] Identity is always a temporary and unstable effect of relations which define identities by marking differences. Thus the emphasis here is on the multiplicity of identities and differences rather than on a singular identity and on the connections or articulations between the

fragments or differences. (GROSSBERG, 1996, p.89)

Gabriel Conroy's construction of identity is not fully constituted by a fixed representation. The protagonist builds his individuality from difference; he refuses the idea that identity is essentialist and crystallised because he sees the fixed identity of his people as an issue of backwardness and inertia. Conroy's identity is not exclusively formed by his roots but by several cultural aspects to which he has been in contact throughout his life. When Gabriel embraces the changes, he embraces the fragmentation of his being, and his identity is modulated by this crisis.

Clayton (2012, p.165) continues to outline the impact of social context in identity formation: a fluid identity is flexible and "this flexibility makes identity more responsive to political events, and more reflective of personal preferences, blurring the line between personal and social." She also highlights that "although some identities, such as ethnicity and gender, are still imposed, people are strongly defined by identities they choose, such as those based in political affiliation and occupation." (CLAYTON, 2012, p.165-166) Gabriel did not have the opportunity to choose where he came from, but he constantly reinforces where he wants to go. He does not want to establish his identity according to his ancestry and geographical place of birth, but to his personal preferences: a physical and spiritual place far from Ireland.

Although he has constantly denied his origins, his identity cannot be built without this relation of difference. The awareness of his distinction is what makes possible the construction of his fluid identity.

3.2. Gabriel Conroy X Gretta

Gabriel does not follow the social conventions from Irish society, but from the Continent. When he arrives at the annual party, the reader is introduced to a new character, Mrs Conroy. At that moment, the female character is only known as Gabriel's wife and, by occupying that position, she must behave according to her husband's expectations. Further on, we find out her actual name: Gretta. She is seen as a reckless character who needs the protection of her husband.

Gabriel mentions that they have rented a hotel room in the city centre so they can rest after the party. That is because in the previous year Gretta caught a dreadful cold on their way back to Monkstown, which is quite a ride from his aunts' place. Gretta does not seem to mind at all, "she'd walk in the snow if she were let", says Gabriel (JOYCE, 2012, p.205). As for

Gretta, she seems to believe that Gabriel is overexaggerating in his protective attitude.

During the unpleasant interaction between Gabriel Conroy and Molly Ivors, Gabriel confirms that Gretta's family does come from the countryside of Ireland. When Gabriel mentions to Gretta that Miss Ivors was trying to convince him to travel to the west of Ireland and he refused the idea, Gretta appears to be thrilled with the thought of it: "O, do go, Gabriel," she cried, "'I'd love to see Galway again'". Gretta seems to be homesick; she wishes to get in contact with her roots again. Gabriel does not change his mind and replies in a sharp tone that she can join Molly Ivors if she likes. Appearing to be disappointed with his lack of willingness, she replies "There's a good husband for you, Mrs Malins" (JOYCE, 2012, p.218) to Freddy Malins' mother, who had been enthusiastically chattering about her life in Glasgow.

Gretta is not actively participating in most interactions narrated. However, by the end of the evening when the visitors are leaving the house, Mrs. Conroy participates in an episode that completely captures the protagonist's attention. At a certain point, Gabriel, the hostesses and the attendees left are chatting about Patrick Morkan, Gabriel's deceased uncle; an atmosphere of nostalgia and wistfulness rises as they reminisce a comical story of the man and his horse named Johnny.

A few moments after that, Gabriel, who had appeared to be indifferent towards his wife for most of the night, finds Gretta at the top of the stairs, listening attentively to Mr. Darcy sing; that is one of the guests and a prestigious tenor singer. At first sight, the protagonist does not even recognise who the woman is; when he finally does, the scene is described in a graceful and mystique manner.

There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter. (JOYCE, 2012, p.240)

By the closing of the hall door, when the attendees finally left and the hush settled over the surroundings, Gabriel asked for silence. Music could be heard clearly now and Conroy, feeling hypnotised, pointed at Gretta so the Morkan's could admire it too. When the song ceases and all the guests are downstairs chatting about the weather, Gretta does not join the conversation as she is profoundly moved by the song and demands to know the name of it. "'It's called 'The Lass of Aughrim', said Mr. D'Arcy'" (JOYCE, 2012, p. 242).

After this episode, Gabriel feels a sudden appreciation towards his beloved; it almost seems as if she has become a totally different person before his very eyes. Seeing Gretta Conroy

in such a state of emotion “with colour on her cheeks” and how “her eyes were shining” brought him “a sudden tide of joy [that] went leaping out of his heart.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.242)

They finally leave the party and try to find a cab along with Mr. Darcy. It is dirty under foot due to melted snow, so watching her walk “had no longer any grace of attitude, but Gabriel’s eyes were still bright with happiness. The blood went bounding along his veins; and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.243) As she glided ahead, her graceful and confident posture stirred a desire within him to pursue silently, gently take hold of her shoulders and whisper something tender in her ear. She appeared so delicate that he felt an urge to protect her from any harm and he deeply desired for a moment of intimacy with her.

This overwhelming feeling of excitement and passion triggered deep nostalgic memories in Gabriel and he urged to reminisce the euphoric old days with his spouse, an escape from monotony, as the following excerpt shows:

A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries. Like the tender fire of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illumined his memory. He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy. For the years, he felt, had not quenched his soul or hers. Their children, his writing, her household cares had not quenched all their souls’ tender fire. (JOYCE, 2012, p.244)

The protagonist’s affectionate thoughts would not stop on their way to the hotel as “he had felt proud and happy then, happy that she was his, proud of her grace and wifely carriage. But now, after the kindling again of so many memories, the first touch of her body, musical and strange and perfumed, sent through him a keen pang of lust.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.246) As they stood at the Gresham Hotel door, Gabriel had fantasised the whole scene as an act of escape; he felt the weight of their old lives and duties slip away, leaving behind their homes and friends. They were embarking on an exhilarating escapade together, with hearts filled with excitement and joy.

Once inside the room, while both were undressing, her expression worried Gabriel. He asked if she felt ill or weak, as she replied it was just tiredness. “To take her as she was would be brutal. No, he must see some ardour in her eyes first. He longed to be master of her strange mood.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.248) As he waited for the right time to move forward, he filled the silence by chatting about some money he lent to Malins and got paid back. In the grip of both fury and longing, he could not notice her arrival. Standing before him, she observed him intently

for a moment. Then, she lifted herself on tiptoes, gently placing her hands on his shoulders and kissed Gabriel. To finish matters, she compliments his generosity.

Gretta finally made an affectionate move towards him and there came the right moment for the protagonist to approach: “Gabriel, trembling with delight at her sudden kiss and at the quaintness of her phrase, put his hands on her hair and began smoothing it back, scarcely touching it with his fingers. The washing had made it fine and brilliant. His heart was brimming over with happiness.” (JOYCE, 2012, p.249) Maybe she might have experienced the same impetuous desire that he felt and he couldn't help but wonder why he had been so hesitant before.

Conroy asked what she was thinking, in the hope of hearing back that she also desired him. Her response didn't come immediately. Eventually, she spoke amidst a burst of tears: she was thinking about the piece sung by Mr. Darcy, “The Lass of Aughrim”. After that, she broke free from his grasp and sprinted towards the bed. With arms thrown across the bedrail, she concealed her face. Gabriel stood motionless for a moment, taken aback by the sight, and then went after her.

‘What about the song? Why does that make you cry?’
 She raised her head from her arms and dried her eyes with the back of her hand like a child. A kinder note than he had intended went into his voice.
 ‘Why, Gretta?’ he asked.
 ‘I am thinking about a person long ago who used to sing that song.’
 ‘And who was the person long ago?’ asked Gabriel, smiling.
 ‘It was a person I used to know in Galway when I was living with my grandmother,’ she said.
 The smile passed away from Gabriel’s face. 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.
 ‘Someone you were in love with?’ he asked ironically.
 ‘It was a young boy I used to know,’ she answered, ‘named Michael Furey. He used to sing that song, The Lass of Aughrim. He was very delicate.’
 Gabriel was silent. He did not wish her to think that he was interested in this delicate boy.
 ‘I can see him so plainly,’ she said, after a moment. ‘Such eyes as he had: big, dark eyes! And such an expression in them – an expression!’
 ‘O, then, you are in love with him?’ said Gabriel.
 ‘I used to go out walking with him,’ she said, ‘when I was in Galway.’
 (JOYCE, 2012, p. 250)

The Lass of Aughrim is a traditional Irish folk ballad that plays the role of an emotional catalyst to the unfolding of the story. The word *Lass* stands for “girl” and *Aughrim* is a small village not far from Galway, where Gretta is originally from. To Allie J. Kapus (2017, p.1), the song “is central to the development of Gretta Conroy as a character, to an understanding of the complexity of Gabriel and Gretta’s marriage”.

A sudden realisation dawned on Gabriel: maybe that's why Gretta had the desire to go to Galway with Miss Ivors, to see him. Gretta's announcement came forth, revealing that Michael Furey died at the tender age of seventeen. When Gabriel asks the cause of his death, Gretta replies "I think he died for me." (JOYCE, 2012, p.252) Gabriel was overcome with a vague terror upon hearing this response. Michael Furey's self-sacrificing love for Gretta was so consuming that led him to death and that is not something Gabriel could compete with. However, he managed to shake off these unsettling thoughts and proceeded to gently caress her hand, even though she did not seem to correspond.

Gretta continued to reveal these past events: during the winter, she was about to depart from her grandmother's place and move to a convent in the capital. At that time, Furey was extremely ill and confined to his place in Galway, not permitted to leave. "He was very fond of me and he was such a gentle boy. We used to go out together, walking, you know, Gabriel, like the way they do in the country. [...] He had a very good voice, poor Michael Furey." (JOYCE, 2012, p.252) She recounted that, when the time came for her to leave Galway, his health deteriorated significantly and she was not allowed to visit him. In response, she wrote him a letter revealing her departure to Dublin and promising to return in the summer, with the hope that he would be well by then.

She paused for a moment to get her voice under control, and then went on:
 'Then the night before I left, I was in my grandmother's house in Nuns' Island, packing up, and I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn't see, so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering.'

'And did you not tell him to go back?' asked Gabriel.

'I implored of him to go home at once and told him he would get his death in the rain. But he said he did not want to live. I can see his eyes as well as well! He was standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree.'

'And did he go home?' asked Gabriel.

'Yes, he went home. And when I was only a week in the convent he died and he was buried in Oughterard, where his people came from. O, the day I heard that, that he was dead!'

She stopped, choking with sobs, and, overcome by emotion, flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt. Gabriel held her hand for a moment longer, irresolutely, and then, shy of intruding on her grief, let it fall gently and walked quietly to the window. (JOYCE, 2012, p.253)

The lyrics of the Irish ballad that triggered these memories tell the story of a peasant that, while holding her baby, asks for shelter in the castle as she is under the rain. The young woman begs for permission to Lord Gregory, her former lover; however, her entrance is not allowed. Insistently, the woman keeps the effort of triggering his memory about her existence:

The Lass of Aughrim ⁷

[...]

Oh Gregory, don't you remember
 One night on the hill,
 When we swapped rings off each other's hands,
 Sorely against my will?
 Mine was beaten gold
 Yours was but black tin.

Oh if you be the lass of Aughrim,
 As I suppose you not to be,
 Come tell me the last token
 Between you and me.

[...]

Oh Gregory, don't you remember,
 In my father's hall.
 When you had your will of me?
 And that was the worst of all.

Refrain

The rain falls on my yellow locks
 And the dew it wets my skin;
 My baby lies cold within my arms;
 Lord Gregory let me in. (NORRIS, 247-248)

The above-mentioned verse describes an encounter between the two lovers on a “lean hill”. The woman conveys a deep semblance of sorrow regarding this meeting, implying that it might have played a pivotal role in her present condition. The lyrics are infused with a prevailing feeling of nostalgia, yearning and remorse. This narrative resembles the way Gretta feels towards her last moments with Michael, when a devastating tragedy motivated by love is experienced under the pouring rain. Something kept hidden in Gretta's heart is awakened, maybe the thought of a lost love or maybe the fear that a current love is not quite fulfilled.

Michael Furey is a representation in Gretta's journey on how powerful the dead can be upon the living. While incessantly weeping after these triggering revelations, Gretta felt asleep. The complete scenario leads Gabriel to realise that Michael, a man from her past, was able to establish a deep connection with his wife in a way he never did. While he was contemplating her figure at the top of the stairs passionately, back in his aunts' house, she was immersed in tender memories of this former lover.

⁷ Extracted from: NORRIS, Margot. **Dubliners**: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

These last events evoked the final act towards the disintegration of Gabriel Conroy's confidence: he was not an element of his wife's devotion. The protagonist "felt humiliated by the failure of his irony and by the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy in the gasworks." (JOYCE, 2012, p.251) He was a man totally detached from his social and geographical surroundings; unable to nurture a perception of acceptance and adequacy with the place he lived in, with the people he lived with and more importantly, with the woman he was married to, the mother of his children. He had failed in several aspects.

Subsequently, Conroy starts to reflect upon death and the first person that crossed his thoughts is Aunt Julia, the oldest of the Morkan's. He recalls the point of the evening when she was gracefully singing the Irish ballad called *Arrayed for the Bridal*. While the guests applauded vivaciously, Gabriel could notice a fatigued expression on her face. Aunt Julia "too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse." (JOYCE, 2012, p.254) Gabriel could even picture the morbid atmosphere of her funeral, with Aunt Kate right by his side inconsolable. These contemplations related to death were lingering in the protagonist's mind:

His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling. (JOYCE, 2012, p.255)

After these inner and outer conflicts, Gabriel also suffers from a figurative death, as he experiences a growing self-awareness; his concept of identity is in a status of revaluation as crucial ideals and beliefs of his were challenged by the social tensions that had occurred. In a world contrasted by the living and the deceased, the legacy of the dead hung all over Ireland. On the one hand, this legacy manifests through the melancholic recollections of those who have passed, as we could notice when Ellen Conroy, Patrick Morkan and Michael Furey were mentioned.

On the other hand, it also depicts the impact of ancestry and tradition among the living as cited earlier in Conroy's speech. "Those were the days, he said, when there was something like singing to be heard in Dublin" (JOYCE, 2012, p.227) is an observation made by one of the guests Mr. Browne at the supper table, while the attendees are reminiscing about former opera singers, showing appreciation towards what has been gone. As the author Seamus Deane (2000) points out, this divergence between the real and the symbolic form of death is the crucial element of understanding Ireland.

Dublin faces a West which is past and future, undergoing two revivals, one involving Michael Furey, the other Molly Ivors and Irish native culture. Two versions of the dead, locked away for years, now give promise of a rebirth. But there are other deaths – actual, impending, symbolic. The great opera singers of the past have gone, the grace and hospitality of the old generation is going [...] Every item in the story accentuates the contrast between a deep past and a shallow present. (DEANE, 2000, p.34)

As it begins to snow again, Conroy turns to the window. In a state of lethargy, he watches the falling of the flakes and comes to an epiphanic conclusion:

The time had come for him to set out on his journey west-ward. Yes, the newspapers were right: 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. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and head-stones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. (JOYCE, 2012, p.256)

The epiphany provided by the snow leads Gabriel Conroy to the decision of revisiting Western Ireland, his roots; that implies the recognition of his heritage and his ancestry, cultural elements to which the character insistently rejected for so long. Conroy is undergoing a symbolic disintegration of his identity, so there comes the need to get in contact with his roots, to reevaluate and restructure his perception of what *home* is, and consequently, what he is and where he belongs. His willingness to set journey westward is a striking act of self-redemption since “throughout the whole story we learned that Gabriel denies his ancestry, which is exemplified by his superiority complex towards those he encounters, especially Lily, his aunts, and, more importantly, Gretta, his wife.” (FERHI, 2010, p.106)

This resolution is “in some way a source of healing, or at the very least a turning over of a new page, one as white and virginal as the pure snow that falls symbolically all over Ireland in the story’s famous final paragraphs”, as Stanley van der Ziel (2018, p.4) points out. The condition of the snow that falls simultaneously upon the living and the dead could be associated with both the deceased resting in their graves and with the survivors who find themselves physically and psychologically immobilised within the city, incapable of moving and responding.

This snow that had “frozen” the living and the dead will eventually melt, turning into water; this can be interpreted as the character’s rebirth, the life after. Water is powerfully linked to the idea of purification and when the snow finally dissolves, it brings a perception of regeneration and metamorphosis “not only of Gabriel Conroy’s new found identity with the world, and of the breakdown of his egotism but also about all Dubliners’ new found identities

by overcoming their paralytic state.” (FERHI, 2010, p. 113)

In light of what we observed, Gretta acts as a catalyst for Gabriel’s self-evaluation and personal growth. Her presence reminds him of a time when they were younger and in love, evoking feelings of nostalgia. Her revelation also awakens in the protagonist a deep reflection that leads him to question his identity and priorities. Her experience with the death of an ex-lover causes Gabriel to confront his own mortality. Therefore, Gretta Conroy plays a pivotal role in the emotional transformation of Gabriel Conroy's identity.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As highlighted in this study, identities can consist of either a fluid or a fixed construction (SILVA, 2000). The idea of a fluid identity is mainly carried by our protagonist, Gabriel, who embraces external cultural expressions and deviates from the crystallised Irish standards. In his physical and psychological journey, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, Conroy distinguishes himself from the social environment by remarking differences. By doing that, he also projects his own social exclusion. Subtle acts, such as following an international shoe trend, or his incisive words when he says that he is sick of his country and that Irish is not his language are examples of detachment from his roots.

Gabriel flirts with the possibility of self-reinvention, the quality of flexibility of a fluid identity. By denying the Irish conventions in an atmosphere where tradition is being honoured, he polarises himself from others. That is because the symbols of identification with his place of origin and the agreement of social conventions are questioned by him.

While the Irish tradition vividly sings and dances to traditional songs, Gabriel feels uncomfortable with them. While the Irish tradition reinforces the need to maintain contact with the oppressed national dialect, Gabriel fearlessly rejects it. While the Irish tradition wants to venture into national lands, Gabriel wants to leave the country. While the Irish tradition tries to disassociate from oppressive influences, Gabriel works for them and follows their trends. While the others interact fluidly, Gabriel experiences social estrangement. And, when Gabriel is finally thrown out of his egocentrism after so many conflicts of difference, he discovers that he lives like a foreigner not only in his community, but also in his marriage.

Gabriel's non-identification with national identity markers is seen through the fixed elements represented by his aunts. The Three Graces proudly symbolise the Irish tradition by highlighting the importance of great hospitality, well-served tables, beverages and music. The crystallised identity is also evidenced in Molly Ivors, a guest who constantly reinforces her national pride by valuing the Irish ancient language and territory. Gretta is also a powerful example of strong identification with her roots, as she is homesick for Galway.

These fixed identities represented by The Three Graces, Molly Ivors and Gretta, reinforce the idea that one's roots can have a powerful influence on one's sense of belonging to a community. In a totally different way, Gabriel does not assign his identity to a specific group;

however, he shows his disconnection with his ancestry. The protagonist and the secondary characters' personal dilemmas shed light on the complexities of identity formation, the tension between tradition and nonconformity and the threatening solidification of the past in the living days. Through Gabriel Conroy's identity conflict that perdures an evening, we navigate throughout the ghosts of several pasts that embody symbolic and figurative deaths. The ephemerality of life provokes a powerful epiphany that leads him to the rediscovery and reevaluation of his identity.

The complexities in self-understanding, the necessity of community engagement in order to fuel one's need of social inclusion, the human psychological need of bonding, fitting and belonging are depicted in different ways by the characters of the short story "The Dead". By inviting readers to access civil hardships from Dublin through the lenses of ordinary lives, Joyce's civilian duty in portraying the hemiplegic Ireland has reached its success. This magnificent work of literature approaches the unconventionalities of identity formation in an unconventional time.

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