
A “Distant Music”: Invoking Phantasmagoria in Joyce’s “The Dead”

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Abstract. This approach to Joyce’s “The Dead” casts a light on the mechanics of phantasmagoria working as a foundational deconstructive strategy at the core of this masterpiece. Marking the salience of the ineffable and the invisible, the revenant motif stands in this narrative as a disruptive agent of the repressed, rising and blending in with the immediately visible or overtly framed to assert a balanced prominence between notions of the foreground and the background. The ghost has a multiplication of forms in “The Dead”, both a denotative and a figurative rendition, either embodied in the ghostly setting, mood and atmosphere, together with the ethereal musings of the music, or in the crucial summoning of three spectral modes: the return of those already dead and gone; the evanescent living as dead and, closing the circle, both the former and the latter as a unified synonym of the suspended. Projected on this scenario, both interacting with or stemming from it, our approach will offer readings of Gabriel Conroy’s rite of passage and quest for assertiveness within the oneiric masquerade of a haunted Christmas in Dublin.

Key Words. Ghosts, deconstruction, assertiveness, snow, music, epiphany, repressed, disintegration.

Resumen. Nuestra aproximación a “The Dead” analiza la funcionalidad de los índices fantasmáticos como estrategia efectiva de deconstrucción dentro del imaginario de esta íclita obra. Ilustrando la tematización de lo inefable y lo invisible, lo reviniente opera en la narración como trasunto de lo ominoso, referente subversivo y emergente que se equipara al relieve textual de los índices de visibilidad inmediata y fundamentada a fin de legitimar una prominencia discursiva par entre elementales en primer plano y descriptores diferidos en escena. El fantasma multiplica en “The Dead” sus modalizaciones discursivas, tanto denotadas como figurativas, bien a través de la caracterización del marco de acción o la ambientación -incluyendo también la enunciación etérea de la música-, bien a partir de la sustanciación de tres axiomas específicos de espectralidad: la revitalización de los referentes ya finados; la consunción gradual de los vivos, como trasuntos de los propios muertos, y, como síntesis de ambos modos, la semantización categórica de lo suspendido. A partir de dicha exégesis, teorizamos también acerca del rito de iniciación y asertividad de Gabriel Conroy dentro del marco figurativo de una Navidad hechizada cuyo espacio escénico es Dublín.

Palabras clave. Fantasmas, deconstrucción, asertividad, nieve, música, epifanía, lo reprimido, consunción.

1. *Summoning Deadness and its Spectrality: The Story's Foundations*

Epitomizing notions of paralysis, exile or return to the origin, James Joyce's "The Dead" frames an unstable rendition of identities which transcends any categorization based on discriminative traits or fixed archetypes. The narrative resorts to an ambivalent and dynamic method or taxonomy both concealing the immediate and showing the invisible or delayed. In fact, this "novella"¹ about death, alienation and life renewal combines realist and antirealist segments which result in a discontinuous and disruptive flow yet bearing balance, cohesion and coherence. Joyce's text blurs reality, pressing against and beyond tangibility, displacing its livid scenes to covertness, while invoking phantasmagoria to erase the limits between the immediate signs of physicality and the supplement invisibility. The text destabilizes the normal automatized reading, involving fluctuations, "cross-overs, the blurring of boundaries, mergers and exchangers of position" (Riquelme 1994: 228). A close analysis of this narrative proves it is resourceful to view it in a poststructuralist sense, away from any reductionist reading, and, more concretely, adopting a deconstructive interpretation. The latter is specially pertinent in a story playing with contradiction and binary oppositions (*différance*), but ultimately illustrating the convergence of institutionalized or dominant centers of meaning and their corresponding devalued or subliminal margins.²

We can read "The Dead" as a marked semantic free play and inversion of roles between the aforementioned legitimized center – in this case, the living, who are made deferred – and those excluded or peripheral – the concealed dead, who float to the surface – to finally settle mutuality. In other words, deconstruction in this work does not bring a new hierarchy, reversing or destroying the previous

one – the average living Dubliners dominating over those already gone –, but dismantles the opposition between the living and the dead, the present and the past, creating a balance between the traditionally superior terms and the inferior ones (Murfin 1994: 208). "The Dead", consequently, stands as a ghost story – Joyce himself referred to it that way (Wheelan 2002) – in which the others, the immaterial legions of the deceased and those remnants of the past are summoned and endowed with presence, replacing the moribund living, though, in essence, what remains is an exchange of properties between both modes through balancing phantasmagoria. In a story where referentiality seems to be "subtle" and "atmospheric" (Kelleher 1965: 433), the substance of things is understood "from its shadow" (Benstock 1969: 150). This strategy dynamizes the center of meaning by legitimizing the validity of the ostensible opposites, not mutually exclusive as a result, and having both interacting in a palimpsest of undecidability and equivocity of identity (Riquelme 1994: 219). The same principle applies to the divergent interpretations the story is prone to, a manifest validation of the "perplexingly multiple" (*ibidem* 221) and irreconcilable meanings which frustrates the possibility of a single definitive closure, that univocity which limits our dialogue with the text, according to deconstructivist theories (Culler 1975: 244).

The present in "The Dead", its parameters and actants, plagued by numbness and the mist, seem to illustrate decomposition, decrepitude and deterioration, as if they were phantasmal signifiers and motifs. To be more precise, the spatial setting is formed by four sites projecting haunted images: **a house**, with its partygoers, in a fading out cadence, commemorating the memory of the dead; **a hotel's room**, as a non place or purgatory where the uncanny Michael Furey manifests by drawing energy from the perishing couple; **Dublin**, an effaced city in perpetual darkness, and **Ireland**, a territory under the endemic plague of snow.³ Its imagery and atmosphere

1. W. Y. Tindall (1995: 42) concludes this narrative is "of intermediate length, neither story nor novel".

2. As Derrida himself acknowledged, Joyce's literary modes epitomize deconstructivist principles: "Everytime I write and even in the most academic pieces of work, Joyce's ghost is always coming on board" (1993: 210).

3. Joyce himself confessed having been "unnecessarily harsh" (quoted in Potts 2000: 84) when depicting Ireland in this story.

emphasize a sense of vagueness and extinct life which, according to Roos (2002), might be derived from nineteenth-century author Bret Harte's opening to his three-volume novel *Gabriel Conroy* (also the name of the protagonist in "The Dead", which evinces the connection). Deadness and consumption exemplify "starvation (...) as Ireland's national trauma" in this work (*ibidem* 99) while, curious to point out, Joyce's story pivots around a feast to unearth and shape that same "buried history of the Famine embedded at its center" (Whalen 2002: 59). Parallel to Joyce's grand finale in "The Dead" and that overlaid estate of illegibility, Harte's lines – highly visual and musical, as engraver of sensations, showing his skill as a painter – describe a frozen picture of desolation and dehumanization, a nowhere landscape:

Snow. Everywhere. As far as the eye could reach – fifty miles, looking southward from the highest white peak, – filling ravines and gulches, and dropping from the walls of cañons in white shroud-like drifts, fashioning the dividing ridge into the likeness of a monstrous grave, hiding the bases of giant pines, and completely covering young trees and larches, rimming with porcelain the bowl-like edges of still, cold lakes, and undulating in motionless white billows to the edge of the distant horizon. Snow lying everywhere over the California Sierras on the 15th day of March 1848, and still falling.

It had been snowing for ten days: snowing in finely granulated powder, in damp, spongy flakes, in thin, feathery plumes, snowing from a leaden sky steadily, snowing fiercely, shaken out of purple-black clouds in white flocculent masses, or dropping in long level lines, like white lances from the tumbled and broken heavens. But always silently! (...) The silence was vast, measureless, complete! (Quoted in Gifford 1981: 113-4).

Apart from the setting, characters are also haunted and permeated by the unexpected in Joyce's short story since they are mediums of those already gone: Gabriel Conroy is a self-deluded actant (Riquelme 1994: 219), fissured and estranged by inadequacy and disaffection, unable to interact with his context in his determination to assert his identity away from the community of shades; Gretta is voluntarily possessed by Michael Furey and, in general, the

guests at the party revitalize and resurrect their predecessors through their words and allusions. As Vicki Mahaffey and Jill Shashaty suggest (2012: 21), the revenant motif in Joyce's story together with its title were probably inspired by a poem written by Thomas Moore and published in his *Irish Melodies* (1820):

Oh, ye Dead! oh, ye Dead! whom we know by
the light you give
From your cold gleaming eyes, though you move like
men who live.
Why leave you thus your graves,
In far off fields and waves,
Where the worm and the sea-bird only know your bed;
To haunt this spot where all
Those eyes that wept your fall,
And the hearts that wail'd you, like your own, lie
dead?
It is true, it is true, we are shadows cold and wan;
And the fair and the brave whom we lov'd on earth
are gone,
But still thus even in death
So sweet the living breath
Of the fields and the flow'rs in our youth we wander'd
o'er
That ere, condemn'd, we go
To freeze mid Hecla's snow,
We would taste it awhile, and think we live once
more! (1834: 182)

No wonder, the whole unfolding of "The Dead" is, in its literal terms, a burial procession⁴ apparently celebrating an elegiac homage to the departed, who resurrect, but latently and ultimately bring death or consumption to the living – inevitable infection represented by the paralyzing snow –, those performing the ritual. It all starts with a "wheezy door bell" (Joyce 2006: 2172),⁵ a sign of agony, and Lily – lilies are funeral flowers (Benstock 1969: 153) – bidding welcome to the

4. According to Richard Lehan (1998: 272), the funeral moment is a recurrent motif in modernist literature: "one's fate in the city often starts or ends with the grave".

5. The tolling and sinister bell having an echo throughout "The Dead" may connect this narrative with Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), one of the English writer's ghost stories. The spectral staves in this work include bells ringing before each ghost appears and, like Gabriel's therapeutic discernment, Scrooge faces the foreshadowing of his own death as a cautionary sign provoking his change.

dying generation in the Misses Morkan's annual dance and ends with the universal interment of corpses under the blanket of snow, after a systematic progression from salutation to impending departures. It is a rite of passage restoring consciousness and concern about the passing of time, with the macabre atonement or expiation of sins, inheriting the modes of the Victorian cult of death, the grave standing as a site of decomposition and resurgence (Wheeler 1990: 27). Patterns of echoes or repetitions enact tradition in this work, experiencing dying and burial as an inevitable burden, but also prone to unearth the entombed layers in a "memento mori", when the characters come into terms with the repressed truth lying at the core of epiphany: mortality.

Like the magic lantern – an early device which used pictures on glass sheets to project images –, the narrative method in "The Dead" handles oscillating eruptions of phantasmagoria by means of an expansive technique forming an "intricate tapestry" or "myriad of threads" (Monterrey 2011: 63). By juxtaposing and assembling minor and independent fragments, suddenly disappearing, Joyce remarks the visibility of peripheral thoughts and revelations, "instants of great intensity in the story" (*ibidem* 73).⁶ The projection of colliding atoms and polyphonic or heteroglossic imprint in this "many-voiced text" (Kelman 1999: 62) forms a gallery of suspended frames like ectoplasmatic modalizations of individuals and utterances from the past. This sequence flows in the form of interwoven dialogues and waltz scenes over that distant piano music which gradually takes form to bring to the fore the perplexing but enlightening meaning of "The Lass of Aughrim", the foundational piece.

Music is, after all, another global descriptor and specific mark of phantasmagoria in the narrative. Ostensibly, the melody and lyrics in question represent the evanescent physicality,

6. Annie Dillard claims:

The perfection of "The Dead" resides in the total disappearance of ideas into their materials. (...) They exhibit, by their perfect concealment of it, an absolutely controlled tension (1982: 161).

standing for the departing characters – as in Haydn's Symphony No. 45 in sharp minor, known as the "Farewell Symphony"⁷ – though, as "emotional catalyst" (Henigan 2007: 141), the composition triggers the repressed and has an overall impact which urges a quest for the lost sense and balance to fill the main gap of indeterminacy in the work. The result is a testament and ekphrasis revealed by a hoarse voice and restoring Michael Furey's ghost of perdition through Gretta's collapse and Gabriel's epiphanic coda. However, though finally embodied in the abstracted wife's resolute nostalgia and Furey's assertive ghost, music is usually an anonymous trace in the background of the story, related to dissipation, with no identified agent⁸ or emanating from a primitive and indistinct mass of sounds or noises, as the protagonist perceives it:

Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her Academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages (...). He liked music but the piece she was playing had no melody for him and he doubted whether it had any melody for the other listeners (Joyce 2006: 2178).

In essence, like many other dead and fluctuating indexes in the work, music changes, and evolves from ineffability into a state of spiritual distinctness, becoming an enabling tool for the creative deconstruction of opposites. The hum of undefined notes at the early stages illustrates the paralytic impossibility to communicate, also epitomized by Gabriel's

7. The simile is not a risky or far-fetched one considering how much Joyce's narrative depends on the constant flux, intermittent or assaulting, of the musical traces. Haydn's masterpiece's peculiarity stems from the gradual departure of the instruments (oboes, cellos, horns, orchestral violins, viola...), which leaves the stage to the first chair violinists and, finally, to a very soft "pianissimo", before vacuum and silence take form.

8. Notice the acousmatic stimulus suggesting a ghost player in:

—Who's playing up there? asked Gabriel.
 —Nobody. They're all gone.
 —O no, Aunt Kate, said Mary Jane. Bartell D'Arcy and Miss O'Callaghan aren't gone yet.
 —Someone is strumming at the piano, anyhow, said Gabriel (Joyce 2006: 2190).

trembling fingers beating on the pane, the unstable living at the borderline. However, this mechanical sound is also a cadence of return, like the sordid noise of the gravel being thrown at the window – a trauma-ridden symptom figuring Michael Furey's return –, together with that reconciling symphony of resignation at the end embodied by the snowfall tapping on the window, which offers the result of deconstruction itself in the story: life and death driven to the center, mutually encoded.

Thematized and pervasive all throughout "The Dead" as an enriching dimension (Hass 1992), Joyce's music is an enigma or impossible symphony calling for active interpretation, another ghost, a signifier of decay usually in the form of a fatal melody resulting in a capital, deep and abstracted revelation at the conclusion: the active presence of absence, the music of silence. Similarly, transcending the more visual to explore "more subtle modes" (Monterrey 2011: 63), the story itself implies "an aesthetic secularization of the concept of transubstantiation – the transformation of everyday experience into the permanent essence captured by art" (Pecora 1986: 234). In fact, "The Dead" defines identity through otherness or vagueness, defamiliarization and estrangement, a process based on ambivalence and duality. Characters are "constitutive absences" or "ghostly presences" (Rice 1992: 30-1), life delegating in death and absence being the primary illustration of presence (Harding 2003: 79), as if Joyce's discourse depended on a texture of gaps or a "rhetoric of silence" (Kenner 1977). As Riquelme underlines:

'The Dead' is and is not realistic. On the one hand, it creates the impression that it is a story about actual, ordinary experience rendered in a circumstantial, straightforward way by an anonymous narrator whose language presents a determinate slice of reality. On the other hand, the language is at times not determinate and not referential (...) It points to or evokes experiences or meanings that cannot be convincingly understood as actual, literal ones (1994: 221).

Eloquent enough, Joyce builds up his protagonist's textual prominence from an onset in which he is almost invisible, not seen yet but

expected, out of the scene, and gradually empowers his point of view as the unique filter or lens in the story, to eventually recover the authoritative voice and let him disappear into the dark through the indirect speech in the coda's outline. In between, Gabriel's rite of passage represents the decay and collapse of his present world and its citizens, a dying generation portrayed in the simulacrum of society interacting with echoes of the already gone and performing their final hours on the allegorical stage of the Misses Morkan's annual dance. While the living are lost in nonsensical and innuendo waltz tunes, while they are reduced to caricatures in their small talks, the "othered" past and its unexpected ghosts emerge, empowered. Beyond their time, beyond domestic windows, the excluded are embedded in the narrative frame as a deconstructive strategy. Like intruding effects which distort the immediate setting, the ghosts invade Gabriel's mind and finally introduce him to the illuminating course of the epiphany, after Michael Furey's assertive visitation and "possession" through his wife's remembrances.

As we will point out, and in contrast with the retrieval of isolated entities or pictures from the past suddenly erupting into the party, Furey's textual prominence is more elaborate, projected by Gretta's declarative and episodic memory. His ghost will stand out as the ultimate, most distinctive and assertive specter in the gallery of revenants. Remembered, he gradually emerges from those vignettes of the past, acting before the protagonists and having an echo – both literal and metaphorical – which assembles Gabriel, Gretta and the contextual deadness, embodying the final configuration of blended opposites.

Let us, for now, explain the three renditions of phantasmagoria in the narrative leading to that conclusion, the systematic deconstruction of life and death binary opposition which finally grants a conciliation between the conflicting notions at the center of meaning in the discourse.

2. *Ghosts of Contagion: a Mutable Projection*

Phantasmagoria articulates three main kinds of ghost renditions in "The Dead": retrospection, introspection and prospection, the three being

bound by causality. This premise basically alters the chronological order of events to substantiate the past, the ongoing stage and the future. Both analepsis and prolepsis work to dissipate the present and dissolve it into several hypodiegetic parentheses, all of them being modes of bodily metamorphosis. Firstly, the story envisions a retrospection of the already dead, the ones referred and commemorated in the party conversations, usually related to that distant, almost subliminal music in the story. Memory plays a paramount role in “The Dead”: these ghosts are like a work in progress, a flow of invisibility and covertness, names mentioned and invoked by the guests – with no physical materialization – or imagined beyond the windows, lying far close, but “very much in evidence” (Benstock 1969: 153):

-For me, said Aunt Kate, who had been picking a bone, there was only one tenor. To please me, I mean. But I suppose none of you ever heard of him.

-Who was he, Miss Morkan? Asked Mr. Bartell D’Arcy politely.

-His name, said Aunt Kate, was Parkinson. I heard him when he was in his prime and I think he had then the purest tenor voice that was ever put into man’s throat.

-Strange, said Mr. Bartell D’Arcy. I never heard of him (Joyce 2006: 2186).

These “specters” are haunting notions of the periphery which raise questions from within and disorient the legitimized living – suddenly uncertain, inactive, dead –, conquering space and also empowering their transgressive identities. Their resilience is not, however, a materialization of the absolute other intruding the comfort zone but the representation of the repressed familiarity and return of the “unheimlich”, conflicts not yet overcome as exposed by a retrieval of either Dublin’s or Ireland’s collective memory – post-famine identity crisis- as well as the individual’s inner self. As Whalen theorizes, in this work “the Irish language, love, a national community have all been consigned to the spectral” (2002: 66). Seamus Deane adds the somber or chiaroscuro scenarios, “the twilight, half-lit, street lit, candle-lit, gas-lit, fire-lit settings inhabited by shadows and silhouettes remind us both of the insubstantial nature of these lives and also of their latent and repressed possibilities” (2000: 21).

In fact, domesticity in “The Dead” is not as harmonious or prosperous as it may seem since the assumed joy of the festivity is undermined by continuous back answers and other disrupting repressed forces echoing in our ears (Norris 2003: 216). In this way, referring to the carnivalesque elements in the “novella”, Peter Fjagesund considers it “contains a substructure which inverts or travesties the apparent pleasure and comfort of the bourgeois Dublin life” (1997: 139). Possessed and dominated by the dead, the party pays a homage to the past and welcomes it (them). It is a peculiar hospitality, ironically latent in Gabriel’s speech, an attempt to avoid the transfer of power, a colonization on the part of the deceased, but reassuring the need to face and exorcise the predecessors:

–But yet, continued Gabriel, his voice falling into a softer inflection, there are always in gatherings such as this sadder thoughts that will recur to our minds: thoughts of the past, of youth, of changes, of absent faces that we miss here tonight. Our path through life is strewn with many such sad memories: and were we to brood upon them always we could not find the heart to go on bravely with our work among the living. We have all of us living duties and living affections which claim, and rightly claim, our strenuous endeavours.

–Therefore, I will not linger on the past. I will not let any gloomy moralising intrude upon us here to-night. Here we are gathered together for a brief moment from the bustle and rush of our everyday routine (Joyce 2006: 2188).

As we will see, more than rivals or antagonists, these presences from the past will prove to be facilitators of being in the story. Once again, the dismantling of the binary opposition through phantasmagoria works. Boysen states:

The living are haunted by history, tradition, all the dead generations and the predecessors, who constitute this nightmare from which the living in vain, by means of a certain conjuration of the dead (...) are trying to awake. Every present action is partly a reaction to a past unceasingly haunting the presence of the living. In order to attain one’s life, in order to add to life more life, it is necessary to answer for the dead, to live among spectres (2005: 162).

Consequently, by remembering and revisiting the past – “encroachment of the dead upon the

living city” (Ellmann 1969: 375) –, the living fall victims to a physical and mental collapse and alienation. This is expressed by the aesthetics of loss and wandering, delusive and deceptive imagery, so predominant in the story, an inertia which, once again in deconstructivist terms, is to grant a reshaping of the categories of life and death, balancing their prominence in ambiguity. The living recognize themselves in the portraits of the dead and, therefore, retrospection becomes introspection, another mode of phantasmagoria in the story. In this sense, Gabriel’s piercing analysis – that of an alienist – of tradition and fossilization visualizes the liminal automata affected by a “death-like state of cultural paralysis” (Harding 2003: 80), a group defined by Benstock as “those who remain alive, but fail to live; the disillusioned, the self-destructive, the blighted and wasted lives” (1969: 153). Gretta is also deconstructed on this cosmology, both exhausted and abstracted by her inner conflicts and regret, as well as immortalized by his husband’s acuteness of the senses. Driven by an insightful need to master what is his own, Gabriel turns her into a ghost at the staircase, “a symbol of something” (Joyce 2006: 2192), a thing, an object to grasp the elusive identity and meaning of her spectralization, minimized and immobilized as a picture he blatantly paints and entitles to interpret and monopolize at will. Gabriel even changes the colours – “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” (Joyce 2006: 2192).⁹ As Monterrey puts it:

He tries to come to terms with the awesome sight by rendering the scene into a painting in order to read it symbolically. This is one of several instances in “The Dead” where an image is shown to the reader as if it were within a frame (2011: 62).

9. Another similarity with some other illustrious nineteenth-century writers, such as Wilde or Poe, can be stated here. The act of painting as a rapture of aesthetic domination – not merely reproduction of that which is palpable and material but an ideation of insidious possession – is thematized as a murdering act of libation in “The Oval Portrait” (1842) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

Gabriel disaffectionately and automatically witnesses and leads the stages of the ritual – being an anchorite, probably a ghost as well for the others – but, essentially, participates in it following his “continuous strivings for self-affirmation” (Boysen 2007: 401). He unveils all these materializations of phantasmagoria which emulate Ibsen’s visualization of the unseen reality through symbols and verbal images (Álvarez Pérez 2011: 31) to be finally “brought into the narration, out of the cold where these statues of the famous dead remain, only to be reburied together with them at its close” (Kelman 1999: 66). Supporting this view, the protagonist adopts the “ cliché-ridden, dead” (*ibidem* 70) language in his speech, conforming to formulaic assertions, expressing feelings by quoting the dead, Robert Browning’s lines, for instance. More an anecdote than a materialization of identity, moving in circles or in a loop as if in a “mesmerized paralysis” (Benstock 1969: 154), like Johnny, the horse, spiralling eternally around the statue of William III, all the decaying actants of the present – Gabriel included – dig into the whirlpool of introspection and resort to the feasting carnival at Miss Morkan’s as a last attempt to survive and transcend mortality (Peake 1977: 47). It is by exploring the ruins of the present, “symbolic of a vibrant, passionate life which has vanished” (Whalen 2002: 70) that Gabriel strengthens the “inextricable connection” (Boysen 2007: 409) between retrospection and introspection, dismantling the bifurcation of the living dead and the dead living. This balanced state of contraries is also illustrated in the curious mixture of deadness and colourful sensations represented by the dead goose and beef to be carved and served at the feast. In this descriptive pause, the vivid tangibility and synaesthetic architecture of prompts for the senses exists side by side with the signs of predation and consumption:

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 (Joyce 2006: 2184).

Colours of degradation and erosion reinforce the dynamics of transubstantiation in the story, yellowish and pale renditions leading to that final and ghastly darkness at the hotel room where Gretta's and Gabriel's deranged souls welcome both death and the glimmering white snow of release after confession and acknowledgement. Similarly, Kate and Julia Morkan, retired piano teacher and leading soprano respectively, fuse with the ineffable and distant music illustrating the gradual dismemberment and diffusion of the present, as symbols of the eloquent and glorious past persisting into the future, that other projection of ghosts in the narration, as we will point out.

Apart from these instances of retrospective and introspective spectrality, some other crucial ghost sightings impelled to overtness through nostalgia, regret, pain or tradition, abide in the story. Here we enumerate some of the most salient referents of those flickering ghosts exemplifying the merging of the present and the past, the living and the dead, as resumed in the discourse:

- Gabriel's mother, a sign of fracture, a perpetuated conflict from the past, framed as deadness and command suddenly revitalized through envisioning and remembrance. She also projects a shadow on the present, which passes "over his [Gabriel's] face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage"

(Joyce 2006: 2178). This ghost is revitalized by a looming picture in focus:

Her photograph stood before the pier glass. She held an open book on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constantine who, dressed in a man-o'-war suit, lay at her feet. It was she who had chosen the names for her sons for she was very sensible of the dignity of family life (2178).

- Patrick Morkan, Julia's and Kate's dead brother, and, obviously, his horse's farce, already mentioned, inserted as a phantasmal narrative or recollection ("flashback"), illustrating the stagnant living:

Out from the mansion of his forefathers, continued Gabriel, he drove with Johnny. And everything went on beautifully until Johnny came in sight of King Billy's statue: and whether he fell in love with the horse King Billy sits on or whether he thought he was back again in the mill, anyhow he began to walk round the statue (2191).

- Kate Morkan and Freddy Malins and, above all, the fleeting and passing Julia Morkan, are related to traits of lethargy, decadence, decomposition, minimized vigor and delayed or obsolete presence of the agonizing generation (our emphasis):¹⁰

Old as they were, her aunts also did their share. Julia, though *she was quite grey*, was still the leading soprano in Adam and Eve's, and Kate, *being too feeble* to go about much, gave music lessons to beginners on the *old square piano in the back room* (2172).

His aunts were *two small plainly dressed old women*. Aunt Julia was an inch or so the taller. *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*. 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 (2174).

10. In fact, Margot Norris asserts the Morkan Sisters are seen as "ignorant, so marginalized moribund old maids" (2003: 226-7).

In fact right behind her Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. 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 (2177).

In contrast, different from the vanishing characters at the party, Gabriel's appeal seems to be characterized by an almost radiant and vivid physicality, nothing but a mask, however, hiding what is finally revealed, a fragile and calamitous inside, as well as his ultimate meeting with the doleful fate he seems to foretell (our emphasis):

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 (2173-4).

- Freddy Malins' mother is also part of this gathering of mummified and withered characters made resilient (our emphasis):

When the lancers were over Gabriel went away to a remote corner of the room where Freddy Malins' mother was sitting. She was a stout feeble old woman with white hair (2180).

- Even Lily, a girl who is not in her blooming days but, instead, stands as a manifestation of dried essence and regression, very much like the rag doll he is identified with (our emphasis):

She was a slim, growing girl, pale in complexion and with hay-coloured hair. The gas in the pantry made her look still paler. Gabriel had known her when she was a child and used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll (2173).

- The hypothetical presences outside the window, assumed and inferred in the cold, representing Gabriel's desires, his yearning for escape from the warm but stiffened inside, "a counter-image to Gabriel's nervousness" (Boysen 2007: 410) and a "contemplative refuge"

(*ibidem* 410) for the spectator. These specters within the temporary daydreaming state could also parallel the culminating image of the phantasm in the story, that of "Michael Furey in the rain and darkness of the Galway night" (Ellmann 1969: 384):

Gabriel's warm trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window. How cool it must be outside! How pleasurable it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park! The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington Monument. How much pleasurable it would be there than at the supper-table! (Joyce 2006: 2182).

Windows and mirrors are, in fact, essential in the projection and elicitation of phantasmagoria in "The Dead". Both framed materializations also exemplify the major dynamics dismantling the binary opposition dead/living to bring their convergence and embedding. Mirrors show the spectral image which replicates Gabriel's essence – repetition as fossilization, like the representation of dead habit and tradition – and dynamizes his introspection to forge his assertive individuality and life. Windows, on the other hand, legitimate transparency to transcend the dead past and present – the focalizer's own life – so as to invoke the contemplated ghosts of life renewal. Both dimensions meet through looks from within and from without:

The piano was playing a waltz tune and he could hear the skirts sweeping against the drawing-room door. People, perhaps, were standing in the snow on the quay outside, gazing up at the lighted windows and listening to the waltz music. 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 steward over the white field of Fifteen Acres (2187).

- Once outside, the cabman who drives Gabriel and Gretta to their final stage, stands as a messenger of death welcoming them to the other side, connecting both dimensions. He exhibits a depersonalized, almost synthetic speech, repetitive and dead to its core, like Mr. Browne's, showing the approaching communion of the living and the dead:

—Do you know Trinity College?
—Yes, sir, said the cabman.

—Well, drive bang up against Trinity College gates, said Mr Browne, and then we'll tell you where to go. You understand now?

—Yes, sir, said the cabman.

—Make like a bird for Trinity College.

—Right, sir, cried the cabman (2191).

- Gabriel's vision in O'Connell Bridge, connecting a white form suddenly crossing the scene with the inanimate statues spreading all over the city's landscape, a paramount symbol of paralysis and the inability to progress. The snow and its colour advance the picture of mutuality at the end of the story:

As the cab drove across O'Connell Bridge Miss O'Callaghan said:

—They say you never cross O'Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse.

—I see a white man this time, said Gabriel.

—Where? asked Mr Bartell D'Arcy.

Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it and waved his hand (2194).

- The porter at Gresham Hotel, a dormant metaphor of decay, an initiator who holds the torch as a bleeding symbol of "unstable" life leaking through the never:

An old man was dozing in a great hooded chair in the hall. He lit a candle in the office and went before them to the stairs. They followed him in silence, their feet falling in soft thuds on the thickly carpeted stairs. (...) The porter halted on the stairs to settle his guttering candle. They halted too on the steps below him. In the silence Gabriel could hear the falling of the molten wax into the tray and the thumping of his own heart against his ribs. (...) The porter led them along a corridor and opened a door (2195).

Gabriel rejects the "ghost candle" (Bauerle 1988: 122) in his determination to face darkness on his own. He means to interpellate the repressed and hike into the secrets behind the ballad "The Lass of Aughrim" – the silence of meditation and illumination – so as to restore a natural light to his past, consequently opting for the prospect of a second chance.

These are all figurations of the usurping past and the haunted present which anticipate, as we have suggested, Michael Furey's rising, the nuclear ghost in the story reconciling both temporal dimensions and modes, that communion of the living and the dead finally resting together, after fallibility and the

transience of life have been assumed. Once the foundational song and invocational lyrics are unleashed, the distant music turns into an explicit and personalized wording and a sequence of proleptic signs immediately marks the scene, precognizing the end:

It's the weather, said Aunt Julia, after a pause.

-Yes, everybody has colds, said Aunt Kate readily, everybody.

-They say, said Mary Jane, we haven't had snow like it for thirty years; and I read this morning in the newspapers that the snow is general all over Ireland.

-I love the look of snow, said Aunt Julia sadly (Joyce 2006: 2193).

In fact, D'Arcy's wailing chant – "O, the rain falls on my heavy locks/And the dew wets my skin/My babe lies cold" (2192) – deciphers and interprets the pattern of transitivity, the vertical agents – rain and snow- acting on the horizontal ones, modelling the two conflicting layers into a unique mold, the convergence of life and death as a horizontal scenery of mutuality in the coda. A static and coarse spot at the beginning – "the snow-stiffened frieze" (2173) –, the snow is activated as a fluent trail of falling flakes, infecting the dysfunctional generation. In this way, the orchestration of natural elements such as the snow, the rain and the wind, illustrates an inertia impossible to deviate from, a general wide spreading of the disease and, consequently, a fate the characters cannot escape, as it is already clear from the onset of the narrative:

—Is it snowing again, Mr Conroy? asked Lily. She had preceded him into the pantry to help him off with his overcoat. (...)

—Yes, Lily, he answered, and I think we're in for a night of it (2173).

Gabriel's awakening to lust takes place before the final act and his discourse becomes more fragmented, more immediate, more "staccato" – like, when he focuses his attention on Gretta's movements – suddenly revitalized and dynamic, assertive beyond the enshrined model – through the darkened city. Driven from introspection towards **prospection**, after facing the ghosts of the past and the present, his mind is actively splattered with guessing at what may happen, assaulted by jealousy since he faces the possibility of losing control of her

wife, projecting imagined and so phantasmal scenes of restored love. This contemplated existence – also merging with the past – is built upon quicksand like the breaking and condescending light of dawn against the last sigh of darkness:

The morning was still dark. A dull yellow light brooded over the houses and the river; and the sky seemed to be descending. It was slushy underfoot; and only streaks and patches of snow lay on the roofs, on the parapets of the quay and on the area railings. The lamps were still burning redly in the murky air and, across the river, the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky.

She was walking on before him with Mr Bartell D'Arcy, her shoes in a brown parcel tucked under one arm and her hands holding her skirt up from the slush. (...)

She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear. She seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her. Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory (2193-4).

This is desire at work turning the retrospective and introspective inertia into revitalizing prospecting and will, a logical step forward to make up for the state of paralysis. Emerging from that spectral and distant music gradually taking form during the hotel séance, Michael Furey's ghost becomes the totemic reminder of the ultimate fall and possible resurrection, the point of entry of the shades and shadows to be, a unique identity for both the memories of the dead and the abducted dead living. The lethal projection of the snow enters the death chamber, both as "a ghostly light from the street lamp" (2195) and, as a breath of cessation, this precipitating a phantasmatic transfiguration, the *tabula rasa* on which to materialize the confluence:

The air of the room chilled his shoulders. He stretched himself cautiously along under the sheets and lay down beside his wife. One by one they were all becoming shades (2199).

It is the fatal draft which had already shattered and ruined physicality as the announcement of decomposition and disfigurement at the very beginning of the story, standing

as "a cold fragrant air from out- of-doors"; that which "escaped from crevices and folds" (2173) and, as a "piercing" menace, that which had also led Aunt Kate to warn about death attempting to invade the location under siege: "Close the door, somebody. Mrs Malins will get her death of cold" (2190). Phantasmagoria, then, flows like contagion from the past into the present and into the future, the latter emulating back the past – a circular and nihilistic configuration that mimetizes the narrative inertia in *Dubliners*, a "symbol for Dublin paralysis and entrapment" (Wright 2006: 258), though, in "The Dead", the deconstruction of dichotomies will grant a way out since "the dead reconcile the living... to life itself" (Beck 1969: 357). Michael Furey and the music attached become a round and recoverable image of yesterday to be later reduced to invisibility and silence, where the dead and the living merge. Significantly characterized by descriptors of compulsion – his fixable though doomed eyes and expression –, Furey's lamenting figure infects the present, as imagined by Gabriel – "in the partial darkness (...) the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree" (Joyce 2006: 2199) – after Gretta regrets "I can see his eyes as well as well! (...) standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree" (2198). A motif of endurance himself, Furey's ghost brings awareness to persist and transcend the evanescent state and embrace redemption, this being another exemplary assertion of life and death conciliation. In fact, as Benstock (1969: 168) affirms, the two angels, Gabriel –the angel of annunciation (Werner 1988: 68) – and Michael –the angel of death – "were never intended to be antagonists but in harmony with each other" (our emphasis):

A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, *some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world. But he shook himself free of it with an effort of reason and continued to caress her hand.* He did not question her again for he felt that she would tell him of herself. Her hand was warm and moist: it did not respond to his touch but he continued to caress it just as he had caressed her first letter to him that spring morning (Joyce 2006: 2198).

Joyce's intention is to make the reader focus now on **the prospective** phantasmagoria, the dead and ghosts resulting from retrospection and introspection. Not a gallery like the panoramic presentation at the party, this stands as a close up of two characters in chiaroscuro, representing the conflicting binary opposition to dismantle effectively and definitely into only one term, two contested but conjoined entities, "looking through the same frame" (Ryan 2012: 167). Defamiliarized for each other, Gabriel's and Gretta's marriage epitomizes paralysis, although his swooning away and her breakdown in reveries of regret embody the models of the potential deceased illustrating the combination of the past and the present. In fact, the dying process towards transubstantiation cancels the opposition dead versus living assuming both traits as compatible to assert the final configuration of the ghost in the story. Dissolution of physicality must precede. In a desperate attempt to redirect their energy, both Gabriel and Gretta partially undress – deprivation of visibility to deepen into spiritual magma – and look for the light of their new identity under phantasmal influence:

Gabriel threw his overcoat and hat on a couch and crossed the room towards the window. He looked down into the street in order that his emotion might calm a little. Then he turned and leaned against a chest of drawers with his back to the light. She had taken off her hat and cloak and was standing before a large swinging mirror, unhooking her waist. Gabriel paused for a few moments, watching her, and then said:

– Gretta!

She turned away from the mirror slowly and walked along the shaft of light towards him (Joyce 2006: 2195).

Death as a revelation shows Gabriel and Gretta they have evolved independently, like the opposite concepts of life and termination, legitimized center and ancillary term according to convention, about to be combined now, in fusion. Paralleling the deconstructive process at work, this transitory awakening has the moribund strangers approaching and touching their senses in consumption. Gretta is exorcised and purged in tears to assert lucidity at the same time her textuality fades away while Gabriel faces his own truth through a

cathartic and self-loathing reflection, losing physicality at this moment, entrusting form and delimitation to the mirror:

While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a penny boy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. Instinctively he turned his back more to the light lest she might see the shame that burned upon his forehead (2197).

In phantasmal and grotesque abstractions Gabriel also comes into terms with assertiveness. In fact, this projection is more sophisticated, more precise and distilled than his first ghastly and puzzling ideation on the mirror:

As he passed in the way of the cheval-glass he caught sight of himself in full length, his broad, well-filled shirt-front, the face whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it in a mirror and his glimmering gilt-rimmed eyeglasses (2196).

After restlessness and desire, shame and self-degradation follows. Meeting the monster within by means of "extimacy" (Lacan 1978: 71) implies retrospectively and introspectively unleashing the other to assert the new essence. The confirmation of these last departures or rehearsals of death closes the circle and puts an end to the global and universal burial in progress from the very beginning of the story. This is explicitly materialized in another example of contemplated and prospective death, Gabriel's sinister foreshadowing of Julia Morkan's passing away. The scene – the presentation of her deathbed mourning – is dramatically embellished and deprives the immediate reality of its validity through a displacement of the figured dominions of mental phantasmagoria:

Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard look upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*. Soon, perhaps, he would be sitting in that same drawing-room, dressed in

black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and Aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him how Julia had died. He would cast about in his mind for some words that might console her, and would find only lame and useless ones. Yes, yes: that would happen very soon (Joyce 2006: 2199).

In conclusion, three mediums focus and expel the resonant signs of phantasmagoria in the story. Two of them are more invisible, Gretta, shattered into a mystified icon, possessed by Michael Furey's remembrance – in fact, he may be no more than just a “memory” (Kelleher 1965: 424) –, as well as the omniscient narrator, who controls the scene from the very first moment, when Lily welcomes the guests and recovers prominence when, phantasmatically, Gabriel leaves the stage (in that parenthesis during which he manages to help Freddy, as well as at the very end). The most arresting medium, however, is Gabriel himself. He paraphrases phantasmagoria and delirium through the paralyzed actants, performing an act of fossilized resilience through language, until he enters the dimension of the real, “those regions of the mind that escape language and, therefore, can never be verbalized” (Monterrey 2011: 73). It is then when he lapses into nothingness, becoming a sign of absence, following the inertia of everything deriving into dissipation. Expected at the party onset – “it was long after ten o'clock and yet there was no sign of Gabriel and his wife” (Joyce 2006: 2172-3) – and momentarily missing at given moments, the protagonist, the legitimized point of view within the story, is deprived of agency once the authoritative voice of the narrator recovers prominence and prompts alienation so as to frame the deadened and animistic stage. Possessed and exposed to the limit, Gabriel loses his wording power and immediacy to fall into the hypodiegetic and delayed level, his weakening thoughts and sensations being an epitaph in free indirect speech, an ambiguity of voices which “prevents the reader from readily deciding who speaks the final phrase” (Riquelme 1994: 222) and so resulting in another index of phantasmagoria: the phantasmal narrator. Deprived of name and vision – distorted by tears and decay –, the

focalized entities – the past and the present – similarly stand unidentified as the final convergence in transubstantiation approaches:

Other forms were near. 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 2006: 2199).

After the automatized dynamics of dialogues and Gabriel's monolithic speech at the annual dance, after Gretta is screwed and exorcised in intimacy, at the sound and eliciting tempo of that melody within, words are silenced, the lyrics of truth fade away, and another kind of phantasmagoria arises, a “calculated verbal music (...) highly rhetorical” (Peake 1977: 50), a “plaintive music” (*ibidem* 54) which emulates the falling snow embodying Gabriel's impalpable sensations and feelings at the throes of dissolution and possible rise. The whole construct resumes a ghost which mimetizes collapse and besieges light, “falling obliquely against the lamplight” (Joyce 2006: 2199), within and through, in a transcendental ritual marked by a trail of mirroring and resonant sounds, a machinery of alliterations, repetitions and parallelisms aligned to hypnotize and lead both the protagonist and the reader to an “inorganic, falling state” (Riquelme 1994: 226) disturbing “the realistic illusion” (*ibidem* 221). The vertical and dynamic agent, the burying and oppressive action –“falling” is echoed seven times, in an elegant variation sequence –, finally lapses into that permanent state of the snow laying “thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns” (2199). This shroud of pessimism over erect sinister silhouettes and remnants – somehow irregular –, symbols possibly suggesting a connection with Christ's crucifixion, connotes an antidote against perennial death-sleep and validates a potential resurrection. As Ghiselin theorizes, the falling snow at the denouement of “The Dead” represents an “enlargement and liberation”, as well as “an achievement of true beauty” (1969: 60).

Phantasmagoria is, then, materialized through a vision *backwards*, the dead fighting their way back through the annual dance's commemoration and celebration, as well as through Gabriel's and Gretta's mind or "subconscious" (Gibbons 2015: 124), a framing *within* and *without* (the partygoers, the silhouettes and mannequins dancing around but departing from the present, into the snow, into the dark). Wandering the moribund city, Gabriel and Gretta's transient fading into the dimly-lit hotel room implies an exile *beyond*, an anticipation, a musing *forward* to finally fall deeper *within* (awareness in the hotel room and realization of the self). Evidently, Gabriel's gaze toward the West, his epiphany and revelation, is also a contemplation and evocation of the dissolving and renewal *without*, a definite and universal illumination which cancels the conflict between life and death at the climax (Attridge & Howes 2000: 36).

3. *Suspended Over and Under Solid Ground: Conclusion.*

Bound to a sequence of ephemeral acts and scenes, piercingly descriptive but oneiric and ineffable to the limit, Joyce's "The Dead" undermines the decipherable and automatized visibility to encode the unearthing of the repressed and excluded. In this way, the narrative creates a common ground for the living and the dead, the present and the past, cancelling this nuclear dichotomy of existence. Paralleling a countdown to extinction, Joyce's "novella" constantly recollects, states and foretells death to embed it with life through spectral renditions, in the same way it illustrates Gabriel Conroy's process of self-discovery through detachment, elusiveness and ultimate awareness of collapse to assert a renewal of prospects. The three axes of phantasmagoria mingle at dawn, the moment of revelation: **the ghosts of retrospection** – Michael Furey, back in his grave at Oughterard, together with the past generation –; **introspection** – the dying guests of the present, already extinct, after the sequence of departures into the cold¹⁰ –and **prospection** –

10. Joyce's stylistic choice on portraying this moment, a scene instead of a summary, clearly ·/·

every contemplated dead now confirmed as such, losing tangibility and presence –, the duality of the living and the dead being finally reduced to mutuality:

Under its canopy, all human beings, whatever their degrees of intensity, fall into union. The mutuality is that all men feel and lose feeling, all interact, all warrant the sympathy that Gabriel now extends to Furey, to Gretta, to himself, even to old Aunt Julia (Ellmann 1969: 385).

In his climactic reverberation, Joyce offers a closer approach to the snow, a more specific portrait and touch of this polysemic or cumulative concept at the center of the discourse. The flakes are "silver and dark" (Joyce 2006: 2199), bright and macabre, so implying the duality and unity of contraries. The amalgam is also explicit in terms of style, as exemplified in that inversion "falling softly"/"softly falling" dynamizing a parallelistic pattern or "chiasmus" (Riquelme 1994: 227) which equals and unifies both modes in only one essence, a never ending cycle of death and renewal, of renewal and death:

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 (Joyce 2006: 2199).

Our vicarious and cautionary reading of the protagonist's intimation with the dead, through the dilating projection of phantasmagoria and the summoning of the distant music, allows us to redeem our fallibility and accept life as mortality. In doing so, we enter the symbolic

·/· denotes his intention to lay emphasis on the representation of demise:

- Good-night, Gabriel. Good-night, Gretta!
- Good-night, Aunt Kate, and thanks ever so much. Good-night, Aunt Julia.
- O, good-night, Gretta, I didn't see you.
- Good-night, Mr D'Arcy. Good-night, Miss O'Callaghan.
- Good-night, Miss Morkan.
- Good-night, again.
- Good-night, all. Safe home.
- Good-night. Good-night (Joyce 2006: 2193).

and dismantle the opposition, once we have confronted death and otherness as the fundamental condition of life (Boysen 2007: 412). Being a necessary “process of self maturation” (Monterrey 2001: 72) and emancipation, exile in “The Dead” is an imperative, alienation and unconsciousness validating Gabriel’s path towards identity and realization (Ghiselin 1969: 57), “from insularity and egotism to humanitarianism and love” (Walzl 1966: 21). Among the different interpretations of this rite of passage and spectralization, there are those considering Gabriel’s confrontation with the gallery of ghosts grants a life-affirming renewal or “a transcendental reshaping of his own self-hood” (Balsamo 2005: 46). According to this view, his journey westward derives into a mere sleep trance (Peake 1977: 51) and denotes a resurrection through sacrifice, a “rebirth through inner perception” (Billigheimer 1988: 472), legitimized a hibernating “capacity for greater life, which may be exercised when he, a dead man, shall have risen from among the dead” (Spoo 1993: 102). In contrast, others read Gabriel’s end as a capitulation in a “self-pitying fantasy” (Pecora 1986: 242) and, consequently, “a concession, a relinquishment (...), a kind of death (...), a self-abandonment” (Ellmann 1966: 381), an irretrievable and resigned fate (Kenner 1955: 55-6). Finally, and opting for the balance of both readings, as we try to justify in these lines, there are those claiming for an “alternating” or “trembling” meaning (Ryan 2012: 172) as the best interpretation for the narrative’s potential, an ambiguity which cancels the opposition of death paralysis and liberation, this resulting in the symbolic crossover of the living and the dead in the west, a site of life “where passion takes place and boys die for love” (Burgess, quoted in Beck 1969: 357). It was surely Joyce’s intention to haunt the “novella” on the basis of phantasmal undecidability and the preservation of conflicting interpretations at the core of the story, as he also did in *Ulysses*, urging an orchestration of challenges for the reader. In his own words:

I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality (Quoted in Ellmann 1982: 521).

It seems clear that, activating a dialogism – and ultimate combination – between the latent ethereal or invisible dimension of the unconscious – past – and the dysfunctional configuration of reality – present –, “The Dead” invokes a peculiar ghost story of defacement in which a whole country, Ireland and its traditions, its present and its past, represent the haunted victims, passiveness, metaphorical starvation or apathy being the victimizers. Gabriel is the last to leave and dissolve in a magmatic stream of consciousness, after predating and extinguishing both Gretta and even Michael Furey, together with his surroundings. What remains? Nothing but the window – no indoor space, neither the Morkan’s nor the hotel’s room –, an abyss with no physical limits and the snow coming to the fore. The gallery of paralysis is finally spread out and confirms the collapse of every living signifier, sharing a common ground of suspension with the dead, as an access to a new mode of life, a spiritual improvement and escape (Ludwig 1969: 159; Trilling 1969: 156). In the end, the center of meaning is not, consequently, a bifurcation or conflict empowering either the living *or* the dead anymore, but a mystified and ghostly mutuality legitimizing *both* the living *and* the dead in that “etherealized” state (Deane 2000: 33) achieved through assimilation to epiphany and the “elegiac mode” (Spurr 2000: 29), a sublimation which integrates and contains the polarized concepts in question.

“The Dead” marked a hallmark in Joyce’s corpus, a determination to resort to opaque, more complex, absorbed and phantasmal ideations that would have an improved echo and spell in his oneiric *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The everlasting debate pivoting around the cryptic writings and craftsmanship in this story, an inscrutable void, turns the text itself into that relentless ghost of indeterminacy haunting us after decades.

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