

# T81 Gabriel's epiphany

James Joyce  
*Dubliners* (1914)  
*The Dead*

6.5



## WARM-UP

**1 DISCUSS.** Has a particular memory from the past ever changed or affected your relationship with people in the present?



1. Anjelica Huston as Gretta Conroy in the film *The Dead* (1987) directed by John Huston.

## WORDS IN CONTEXT

**2 WRITE** the words and phrases from the text in the Venn diagram. There are three words or phrases that go in the middle.

fast asleep • deep-drawn breath • be a shade • dressed in black • lay down • pass into that other world • fade • darkness • dissolve • churchyard • lay buried • headstone



*Gabriel Conroy takes his wife Gretta to his aunts' annual Christmas party. Back at the hotel, Gretta remembers a young man, Michael Furey, who died for his love to her when she was seventeen. She then falls asleep and Gabriel watches her with affectionate pity.*

She was fast asleep.

Gabriel, leaning on his elbow<sup>1</sup>, looked for a few moments unresentfully on her tangled<sup>2</sup> hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep-drawn breath<sup>3</sup>. So she had had that romance<sup>4</sup> in her life: a man had died for her sake. It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life. He watched her while she slept as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife. His curious eyes rested long upon her face and on her hair: and, as he thought of what she must have been then, in that time of her first girlish beauty, a strange friendly pity for her entered his soul. He did not like to say even to himself that her face was no longer beautiful but he knew that it was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved<sup>5</sup> death.

Perhaps she had not told him all the story. His eyes moved to the chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string dangled<sup>6</sup> to the floor. One boot stood upright, its limp<sup>7</sup> upper fallen down: the fellow of it lay upon its side. He wondered at his riot<sup>8</sup> of emotions of an hour before. From what had it proceeded? From his aunt's supper, from his own foolish speech, from the wine and dancing, the merry-making<sup>9</sup> when saying good-night in the hall, the pleasure of the walk along the river in the snow. Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard<sup>10</sup> look upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*. Soon, perhaps, he would be sitting in the same drawing-room, dressed in black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down<sup>11</sup> and Aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him how Julia had died. He would cast about<sup>12</sup> in his mind for some words that might console her, and would find only lame<sup>13</sup> and useless ones. Yes, yes: that would happen very soon.

- 1 Who was Gabriel thinking about as he watched his wife sleeping?
- 2 What did he realise?
- 3 Why did he feel pity for her?
- 4 What confusion did the untidy clothes represent?
- 5 What did Gabriel remember?
- 6 Why did he think 'Poor Aunt Julia'?
- 7 What did he mean by 'lame and useless'?

1 elbow. Gomito.

2 tangled. Scarmigliati.

3 deep-drawn breath. Respiro profondo.

4 romance. Avventura.

5 braved. Sfidato.

6 A petticoat string dangled. Il laccio di una sottogonna penzolava.

7 limp. Afflosciata.

8 riot. Tumulto.

9 merry-making. Lett.: festa; qui: gli invitati.

10 haggard. Stanco.

11 The blinds ... down. Gli scuri sarebbero stati abbassati.

12 cast about. Cercato.

13 lame. Inefficaci, inadeguate.

25 The air of the room chilled<sup>14</sup> his shoulders. He stretched himself cautiously along under the sheets and lay down beside his wife. One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither

8 What did he realise?

30 Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping<sup>16</sup> tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell<sup>17</sup> the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their

9 How did he feel?

10 What did he imagine?

35 wayward and flickering<sup>18</sup> existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared<sup>19</sup> and lived in was dissolving and dwindling<sup>20</sup>.

11 What attracted his attention?

40 A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on<sup>21</sup> his journey westward. 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<sup>22</sup> and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon<sup>23</sup> 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

12 What were his projects for the future?

13 What was the snow covering?

45 crooked crosses and headstones<sup>24</sup>, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns<sup>25</sup>. His soul swooned<sup>26</sup> 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.

- 14 chilled. Gelò.
- 15 wither **dismally**. Avvizzire in modo terribile, tristemente.
- 16 dripping. Grondante di pioggia.
- 17 dwell. Dimorano.

- 18 wayward and flickering. Misteriosa e vacillante.
- 19 reared. Procreato.
- 20 dwindling. Svaniva.
- 21 to set out on. Di intraprendere.

- 22 Bog of Allen. Zona paludosa al centro dell'Irlanda.
- 23 Shannon. Il principale fiume irlandese.
- 24 crooked crosses and headstones. Croci piegate e lapidi.

- 25 thorns. Spine.
- 26 swooned. Venne meno.

## QUICK READ

3 READ the text quickly and say who the characters are and where they are.

## CLOSE READ

4 READ the text again and answer the questions next to it.

## ANALYSIS

5 DO the following activities.

- 1 Mark the lines where there is a passage from outer stimuli to inner reality.
- 2 Underline realistic descriptions in the text.
- 3 Identify the tenses used in the passage.
- 4 Why does the whole scene seem to lose a precise temporal connotation?
- 5 What conflicts can be found in Gabriel's thoughts?
- 6 Where is the epiphany in the text?
- 7 What does Gabriel become aware of at the end? How does he perceive himself?

8 What are the most important symbols?

9 What is the main antithesis?

10 Find examples of alliteration, repetition and chiasmus (the reversal of grammatical structures in successive phrases or clauses) in the last paragraph. What is their effect?

## COMMUNICATION

6 DISCUSS this sentence from the text: 'Better pass boldly into that other world ... than fade and wither **dismally** with age'. What does it mean? Do you agree?

## LINK TO TODAY

7 WRITE a 300-word opinion essay about the following topic.

'Sometimes a small seemingly insignificant incident can lead us to reflect on the meaning of life and death. Choose an incident from your own life, which might be dramatic like the loss of a family member or small like an unexpected kind gesture, and explain its importance.'