

Joyce the dead essay example

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



“ The Dead” is one of the short stories found in Dubliners, an anthology by James Joyce. The events narrated in this story are a snippet of Irish culture in Dublin, the capital city of Ireland, at the onset of the 20th Century. Joyce employs symbolism, anecdote and description to create a vivid portrayal of Irish culture which is affected by political pressure (Parrinder 67).

Joyce’s utilizes symbolism in “ The Dead” (Parrinder 67) to capture the stagnant condition of Irish culture. As he arrives at the party, Gabriel, the main character, is freezing from the snow outside. Snow covers everything in its wake and stifles growth and vitality during winter. It symbolizes the entire Irish culture which has stagnated by attempting to divorce from the rest of Europe. On the other hand, snow is a symbol of unity. It covers the entire Ireland and Europe and unites them in one fabric. The author therefore perceives Irish culture as an integral and inseparable component of European culture, which can only thrive within the latter.

Joyce also utilizes anecdote in “ The Dead” to paint a routine but unprogressive image of Irish culture (Parrinder 67). When Gabriel is delivering his speech he gives the anecdote of a horse which is so used to working at the mill that when it is released it moves in circles. This is a vivid portrayal of the life that many Irish people go through. They lead unexciting and routine lives and are unwilling to embrace other societies. In his conversation with Miss Ivors, the latter calls him a West Briton, which is a derogatory term for an Irishman who embraces British ways of life. Gabriel is at ideological loggerheads with young Irish people, like Miss Ivors, who are reluctant to adapt other cultures. To him, they are like a horse that is moving round but making no practical progress. The author appears to believe that

Irish culture must create avenues for interaction with other Europeans.

Joyce also utilizes description to represent the everyday practices of Irish people as well as underlying dogmatic disparities. For example, men dress in overcoats and galoshes are in vogue during winter as a way warding off the cold away. Older women concentrate on preparing food. The dancing and the music at the party are essentially Irish and create an atmosphere of merry-making as well as commonality (Parrinder 68). Conversely, the description of food on the table is presented in military language to create a sense of conflict and death. The various dishes are arranged on opposite ends like two armies which are ready to fight. This is an indication of the divisive rivalry in Irish culture of that time: those like Gabriel who would rather tour Europe and those like Miss Ivors who prefer to sample Irish destinations. In “The Dead” Joyce implies that unless the ideological disparities towards Europe are addressed, Ireland may witness conflicts and death.

In essence, Joyce’s use of symbolism, anecdote and description in “The Dead” reveals that Irish culture of the time is at a crossroads. Snow is a symbol of the paralysis of Irish culture as well as the inevitable interconnection between all cultures in Europe. The anecdote reveals that Irish people are stagnating because they keep revolving around their practices without embracing other people. Joyce uses description to reveal the cultural practices then but also the fact that the minority that contemplates and embraces change is up against a majority which believes in the status quo. As a reader, I feel that I understand, to a great extent, the people and the land described by Joyce in this short story.

Works Cited

Parrinder, Patrick. James Joyce. Cambridge: CUP, 1984. Print.