

Gabriel conroy characteristic



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In the short story, *The Dead* from the novel *Dubliners* by James Joyce, readers are led through a bustling, yet monotonous, dinner party by the protagonist Gabriel Conroy, an intelligent, impersonal, “cold-air” introvert who is constantly found present in his own thoughts, rather than mentally present in the majority of situations throughout the plot. In the critical essay, also titled *The Dead*, Eric Rapp explores the state of Gabriel’s “paralysis” stating “[t]hroughout most of the story it is clear the Gabriel is trapped in his own self-consciousness” (Rapp, 2002). Through Gabriel’s many blunders—specifically in regards to his encounters with antagonists and his mental responses to such conflict—readers are able to understand and observe Gabriel “faintly-falling” as well as the innate need for his upcoming epiphany that is to come, made possible only through James Joyce’s ingenious usage of these two literary devices.

The purpose of antagonists is to incite or bring about conflict within a plot line in order for the story to gain momentum. In doing so, antagonists hold the ability to reveal certain characteristics of the protagonist through creating conflict and the protagonist’s methods in coping with this conflict, which readers may otherwise not be able to see. In the case of Gabriel Conroy, the main protagonist in the book *Dubliners*, Mrs. Molly Ivors, an antagonist, creates conflict in order to reveal Gabriel’s over-thinking nature. In *Dubliners: The Dead*, Gabriel encounters Mrs. Ivors, an Irish nationalist and close colleague of Gabriel, at his aunts’ Christmas party where she playfully addresses her discovery of Gabriel’s writing for a newspaper with political-leanings which promote the ideals and nuances of British thinking. She states she is ashamed of him—he states he isn’t. Finally, the teasing drives

Gabriel to the point of loudly and publicly stating that he is tired of his homeland after she asks him why he would rather visit other countries than travel around Ireland:

“ O, to tell you the truth,’ retorted Gabriel suddenly, ‘ I’m sick of my own country, sick of it...’” (Joyce 129) Riddled with embarrassment and agitation, Gabriel is quiet when Molly asks for his reasons why, before playfully whispering in his ear, “ West Briton!”

Throughout the story afterward, he constantly ponders on what Molly had said: “ Was she sincere? Had she really any life of her own behind all her propagandism? There had never been any ill-feeling between them until that night. It unnerved him to think that she would be at the supper-table, looking up at him while he spoke with her critical quizzing eyes. Perhaps she would not be sorry to see him fail in his speech” (Joyce 131).

Molly’s playfulness is taken out of proportion to then drive Gabriel into assuming she might be condescendingly looking down on him. These thoughts continue to “ warm-flood” his mind throughout the remainder of the story, even after Molly leaves the dinner party. Through Gabriel’s excessive, recurring thoughts and worries stemming from his interaction with Molly, readers understand his nature of pondering and over-analyzing every situation, especially when the situation may not be in his favor.

Going hand-in-hand with the role of the antagonist is the omniscient narrator—specifically, third-person limited. With the presence of this omniscient narrator, readers are given the ability to further delve into the inner thoughts, motives, and characteristics of the story’s protagonist. In the case

of Gabriel Conroy, readers are able to observe his true thoughts and motives in order to properly understand his over-thinking, over-analyzing character. When faced with conflict, Gabriel often retreats into his mind: a coping mechanism in which he is able to hide, ponder situations, and analyze minute details in order to ascertain what outside characters may think of him, or rather, what outside characters are thinking altogether. In the scene following his Aunts' dinner party, Gabriel looks upon his wife, Gretta, as she stands at the top of the staircase, looking onwardly in a mysterious, captivating manner toward the direction in which she hears music playing. Struck with sudden infatuation of this "distant-music" image of his wife, he aims to seduce her into the same state of infatuation that she has unintentionally cast him in. When his attempts fail, he "burning-redly" questions himself on what it is that she appears to be preoccupied with: "He was trembling now with annoyance. Why did she seem so abstracted? He did not know how he could begin. Was she annoyed, too, about something? If she would only turn to him or come to him of her own accord! 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 148).

Rather than asking Gretta what it is that might be wrong, Gabriel retreats back into his mind in order to ask himself. Distraught, annoyed and upset that his message is not being received, he seeks answers only through analysis of details he observes: a prime example of Gabriel's over-analytical tendencies. Through the voice of the omniscient narrator following his train-of-thought when faced with this dilemma, readers are able to understand his over-thinking nature in a way that would otherwise be impossible.