

The Symbolism of Windows in *the Dead* 1914

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In literature, windows in general symbolize the relief and escape from the pressures of life. If someone looks through a window, he or she is definitely imprisoned with worries, fear or frustration. Standing by the window would make him/her feel peaceful and calm. Windows literally are the visual connection between inside and outside. Some critics believe that windows can symbolize both light and darkness. According to this believe, standing by the window would mean anticipating something bad to happen. In this paper, I will try to explain how windows symbolize the source of light and the bridge to calm and peaceful moments for Gabriel in the short story "The Dead" by James Joyce.

In "The Dead", the image of window is mentioned over and over in different places. In Gabriel's example, the window is the relief from the pressure and confusion he experiences in his life. In general, when a person has some pressures resulting from a particular situation, he will try to separate himself from the surrounding where he is having that kind of pressure. In this story, Gabriel experienced many situations that disturb him and make his mind busy and uncomfortable. Furthermore, he is worried about the speech he is about to present in that gathering. All these circumstances make Gabriel wish internally to be alone somewhere other than the place where he is, however, the window would be the best place to fulfil that wish.

If we have a look over the situations which make Gabriel uncomfortable that night, we find that all of them are series of shocks which finally resulted into his desire to be isolated. Right from the beginning, Gabriel is shocked by Lily's response when he asks her if she will get married soon. He feels like being socially disengaged from people like Lily. "The protagonist's interaction with Lily suggests that, while well meaning, he is somewhat disengaged from the lives around him" (Coleman 104). He did not expect to start that night with such a disturbed beginning.

Gabriel is hiding a feeling of worries and confusion about the speech. when he is waiting outside the drawing - room door, he glanced at the heading of the speech he prepared. It seems that Gabriel prepared himself for the party and drew the picture for how things should happen. He is worried and not behaving naturally. What happened with Lily makes the situation worse.

The conversation Gabriel had with Miss Ivers shocked him and made things more complicated. Gabriel and Miss Ivers have known each other for a long time. He does not put into consideration discussing any issues related to work or whatever would makes him nervous. Gabriel feels that the party is not the best time to talk about what Miss Ivers mentioned. In the picture he drew in his mind for the party, he did not expect such a situation with such a friend whom he had never had any ill - feeling till that night. This particular situation added insult to injury.

At that point, While Gabriel is shocked and disturbed by Miss Ivers's conversation, he would prefer to separate himself from the place where he is sitting. Gabriel believes that there is something wrong in the way he treat people and isolation is the natural solution for that feeling. "The literature portrays social isolation as a typically accompanied by feelings related to loss of marginality" (Biordi and Nicholson 85). He needs to refresh his mind and being separated might help banishing all memory of the unpleasant incident with Miss Ivers. Gabriel went away to a remote corner of the room. Once he touches the cold pane of the window, he can feel the difference between the room where he is imprisoned with his confusion and the outer world. The coldness of the pane and the warmth of his hand represent the gap between the Gabriel's feeling at that point and the cold, happy, beautiful nature he sees outside. "The cool outdoor world of calm snowfall offers oblivion and an alternative to the anxieties of the party and the speech" (Coleman 109). The window is the nearest connection to the outside. It is the only bridge that could carry Gabriel's imagination to a different place which is definitely a better place. He describes what he sees from the window and compares that with sitting at the supper - table. Gabriel can feel how pleasant it would be to walk out alone on the river then in the park. He describes the beauty of the snow lying on the branches of the trees. This description explain in depth how bad Gabriel feels being in that room and how much he prefers to be alone separated from the people where he is. It is crystal clear that Gabriel is hiding a feeling of frustration and confusion that results in making Gabriel thinks this way. He could not release these hidden feelings and emotions to anyone in the room. The window is the only place where he can recover from the shocks he had during that party.

At the end of the story, we find that Gretta is bothered by something Gabriel does not expect. They have been married for many years and the last thing Gabriel could think about is someone else in Gretta's life. The story of Michael Furey culminates the series of shocks Gabriel has had during this night. At that difficult moment of sorrow, a few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. Back to what connects him to the world he likes, a world which he engineers based on his own wishes where he sees everything calm and peaceful. He turned his face to the window where he can express the facts of their life. All around the story, windows represents the shelter to which Gabriel isolate himself from his surroundings. Theoretically, walking out alone in the snow is not the best place in which a person may forget his bad memories. In Gabriel's example, frustration has reached its highest level and being anywhere away from the sources of frustration is a beautiful place even if it is out in a snowy cold windy day.

Some critics believe that the view from the window is a narrow view for the outer world. If someone looks through a window, that person will only receive a narrow view of the

outside world. That view will only go as far as the person can see out the window. Everything to the left and right or above and below the window will be out of view. That view does not offer full image for the whole complexity of life but a small sample of the difficulties people face in their real life. "What I discovered by removing those curtains becomes a microcosm of life. Much the same sort of thing that happens when one focuses attention on a small tidal pool" (Shuler 419). This could be true to some extent but not for Gabriel. If we look at the way Gabriel describes the beauty and peaceful life outside, we can feel how he feel that the window opens to a spacious world full of joy and happiness "How pleasant it must be to walk alone, first along by the river and then through the park" (Joyce 208). Despite the shocks Gabriel has and the loss of self - esteem, he still feel that there is hope somewhere in this life. He is not completely desperate as it may look, though he has had some complex situations at that night.

Some critics believe that windows can be a source for both lights and darkness, good and bad, happiness and sadness. According to this believe, looking from the window would mean anticipating something bad to happen.

"When a window opens, it will be a consolation.
But the windows cannot be found, or I cannot find them.
And maybe it is best that I do not find them.
Maybe the light will be a new tyranny.
Who knows what new things it will reveal?"

In the poem by Cavaffy above, windows provide welcome light but also pose a threat by virtue of what the light might expose" (Crensh and Green 6). In *The dead*, Joyce makes a good use of windows as the only sources of light. "The porter pointed to the tap of the electric - light and began a muttered apology but Gabriel cut him short.

-we don't want any light. We have light enough from the street" (Joyce 45). That makes it clear how Gabriel believes in windows as a source of light and escape from darkness.

Generally in literature, the window is the escape for frustration and confusion as it carries one from his immediate surroundings to a beautiful world away from his real life. Gabriel knows that there is something wrong in the way he treats people and that makes him suffer the pain of being among others. The window reflects his inner feeling and desire to be alone enjoying this bridge to the calm and beautiful life he is thinking about away from others.

References

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