

Jacob Chee

Professor Stubbs

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Essay #2

In the book, “The Dead” by James Joyce, we are introduced to a story that speaks directly to the question: *What is love? And what is the foundation of love?* With these conundrums being displayed, we are able to see how the story develops this topic and begins to associate itself with the ideas behind what relationships stand for as well as touching upon the idea that there can be beauty in relationships when done in a correct manner.

The topic of love is first introduced when a small conversation occurs between Gabriel and Lily. During this conversation, Gabriel asks Lily whether she is still attending school, to which she replies that she would not be attending school any longer. The reason isn't clearly stated, however, Gabriel “gaily” said, “I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?” This causes Lily to look at Gabriel with bitterness and respond with an acrimonious tone, “The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you.” Gabriel gets embarrassed by this comment which can spark some interest in the reader as to why Gabriel would feel embarrassed as if “he had made a mistake” when this comment was stated. Was it because he was able to slightly identify as the “palaver” men that were around? Or was there something else that Gabriel thought or felt about when Lily made this statement. However, when looking at this point of view that arose from Lily one can state that the idea of love and affection that was being displayed within this reading was one that stated that love isn't something that is shallow and only exists because of traditions that exist within

life. Rather, love is something that should be considered as more than just what can be “gained” from another individual. When looking at Lily’s approach to the topic of love, we can see how instead of seeing joy and genuinity within love, she came to realize the “lustful” type of love that men were expressing whenever they were seeing Lily and that made her hostile towards the topic of being “married” off to some young men.

This topic reappears later on in the story with Gabriel towards his own wife when they were heading back to their rest place. During this time, Gabriel was reminded of “the first touch of her body, musical and strange and perfumed, sent him a keen pang of lust.” During this endeavor, we continue on to see Gabriel’s attitude towards Gretta where he didn’t want to appear as the lustful one rather he wanted her to “turn to him or come to him of her own accord! . . . see some ardour in her eyes first. He longed to be master of her strange mood.” The idea of this lustful type of love and the desire for “control” on Gabriel’s end is expressed through this. Which begins to beg the question: *Does Gabriel have real love for Gretta?*

This question continues to be explored when Gretta begins to confess that the reason she was distracted was because she was thinking of a song that reminded her of her first lover who died trying to be in her presence even though he was madly sick. After this a bunch of dialogue ensues and may leads the reader in answering this question with this approaches: Gabriel’s love started off as lustful, however, in the end began take a step towards transformation and understanding that more “sacrifice” rather than “control” is something that allows a relationship to be more genuine and true.

When we look at the progression of the story, we can see clearly that Gabriel’s love illustrated a deep sense of lust and control rather than sacrifice. However, the turning point, and some might say the growth in character for Gabriel, began when Gabriel began to have a self-

reflection about how “he had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love.” In this instance, we see Gabriel begin to realize that even though he may have done a lot for Gretta that his attitude towards Gretta and his desires for Gretta was blocking him from really experiencing genuine love which is freely given, not controlled. The idea that Michael Furey’s love abounded so far and wide that he was willing to sacrifice his own life for the sake of trying to be with Gretta gave Gabriel a sense of inferiority to his role of being a husband for Gretta. Gabriel in his time of self-reflection began to understand that the biggest obstacle for him in being able to recognize the true foundation of love, which is genuine sacrifice, was being suffocated by his pride. The pride which encouraged him to want to “control” Gretta. The pride that led him to believe that Gretta has to “come to him” rather than him taking the initiative to go to her instead “in the rain.” This was what was preventing him from being able to have a genuine type of love and what prevented him from really having that same feeling of true love and selflessness that Michael Furey displayed.

In the same way, we can take into consideration the idea of Gretta and her approach to Gabriel. Even though she wasn’t of high standing and was looked down upon, she made the sacrifice of being with Gabriel and endured the hardship that she faced because of Gabriel’s mother who didn’t approve of her. It was also Gretta who nursed Gabriel’s mother when she was ill “in their house at Monkstown.” So we can acknowledge that Gretta has definitely played a part in expressing her proper love for Gabriel.

However, some individuals may approach this question by stating that Gabriel did provide that proper sacrifice by being the breadwinner of the house and providing Gretta with her current social status, and also by keeping her well fed and taken care of physically. This form of argument, it used quite a lot unfortunately, and can be mistaken as expression of love and

care. But, one thing that every individual must remember is that providing for physical needs isn't the only thing that is required for human beings. Within our broken world there are so many cases of parents who "provide for the physical needs of their children or loved ones." However, they neglect the emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of the loved ones. There are even times where physical needs are met for them, however, domestic abuse is still expressed by that provider of the family. But, the excuse that surrounds those who neglect the needs of the loved ones is that they are still "providing" something and therefore providing is showing love to the family.

It is this excuse that causes individuals to become confused as to what the foundation of love is. The foundation of love isn't something that is as shallow as providing the physical needs of individuals. In fact, the foundation of love requires more than just physical sacrifice, it requires the sacrifice of the whole being. In the Bible, when it touches upon the idea of marriage it speaks of the idea that two flesh become one. That means that just as one takes care of themselves they should also aim to take care of the spouse. The family dynamic that's run by pride and selfishness is one that will only lead to chaos, disappointment, and a sense of betrayal. All of which is not healthy and can lead to individuals not feeling satisfied, tired of their relationship, and also possibly breaking up their relationship with their spouse which can negatively affect the children.

Gabriel realizes this and begins to have tears form in his eyes because he sees how shallow his love was for Gretta. The fact that love can be more is something that allows the beauty of relationships to thrive and grow. Of course having realistic expectations and also not expecting the fulfillment of "perfection" but when effort is given to try to fulfill the emotional,

mental, and spiritual needs of the family. It can allow the family members to have a good family dynamic as they feel cared for even though there may be some moments of disappointment.

Bearing all of these things in mind, we can have a greater appreciation towards James Joyce for their efforts in providing this lesson to us with a story that can instruct the reader to ask questions that need to be answered. So many people have a misunderstanding of what love is and as we can see in modern times, has led to a devastating and alarming increase in divorce rates. With these divorce rates, the consequences can lead to a domino effect in which the children have a misunderstanding towards the concept of love as well. However, with this understanding towards what the foundation of love is, hopefully, it can lead individuals to have a form and desire to change just as Gabriel expressed with his tears at the end of the story.