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AN ECOFEMINISM ANALYSIS OF THE DEAD BY JAMES JOYCE

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ABSTRACT

James Joyce, the celebrated and influential Irish writer, paints a picture of the life of the Irish people in the early twentieth century in *Dubliners* with precise details and vivid expression, reflecting the paralysed mental state of the people and a social landscape in conflict. "The Dead" is the last in this collection of stories about a spiritual epiphany on a snowy night. Ecofeminism is a theoretical framework that examines the connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural environment. From the perspective of ecofeminism, this paper focuses on how patriarchal and anthropocentric systems have contributed to the degradation of both women and the natural environment in "The Dead". It also discusses how Joyce portrays the interaction between men and women and the environment in "The Dead" and demonstrates how this can be read as a critique of these systems of power and a call for a more sustainable and equitable future.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, nature, women, degradation

1. Introduction

"The Dead", the final installment of James Joyce's masterpiece *Dubliners*, represents the author's many societal theories, among which his perspective on women is one that merits analysis.

1.1 Introduction of "The Dead"

The concluding tale in Irish author James Joyce's collection of short stories, *Dubliners*, is titled "The Dead". Set in Dublin, the author shows the dysfunction of Irish society in this significant example of his literary development. The novel's primary plot is as follows. The hero, Gabriel, and his wife, Gretta, are invited by their aunt to a Christmas ball. At the ball, Gabriel and Miss Ivors have a disagreement, in which Miss Ivors refers to Gabriel as someone who does not want to secede from the Commonwealth, at which point Gabriel is very unhappy. The evening culminates in a stirring speech by Gabriel. In this gay mood, Gabriel's heart is stirred with tenderness, and he is reminded of the good times he has with his wife, and feels a strong desire to speak to her and not to notice her distraction. Back at the hotel, his wife, Gretta, reveals to him a secret she has kept buried for years. As a young girl, Gretta had been in love with a young man named Michael Furey, but he had contracted pneumonia, and had confessed his love for Gretta while she was away in the country, but his illness had been aggravated by the rain, and he died. At this point, Gabriel, full of jealousy, anger, angst and other emotions, stands alone at the window, looking out at the snowflakes, lost in deep contemplation of death. The author does

not directly narrate the current state of Irish society, but rather shows the spiritual state of the Irish people through a party and the characters involved. In this work, Joyce shows his sympathy for the plight and frustration of women in general, and criticizes the oppression of women in society at the time, exposing the misfortunes and injustices suffered by women in a patriarchal society.

1.2 Introduction of James Joyce

The first women's movement in the West was in full swing when Joyce published his collection of short stories, *Dubliners*. Many of his stories include female protagonists at the center, and these heroines become aware of female resistance. As they were unwilling to suffer only from being subordinate to their families, they took the initiative to fight for their own freedom and authority. Regardless of how the story turns out, it takes strength to stand up to a patriarchal society and pursue one's own happiness. According to Joyce, women had already made a qualitative leap in consciousness, though not in action.

James Joyce drew inspiration from the circumstances of his own life. He lived in a patriarchal environment where males were in charge of women's status and women were largely influenced by male viewpoints. The majority of women were victims of the historical social setting since they were internalised by this life. However, Joyce questioned and criticised all of this. He detested the male dominance of family life as a man. Joyce believed that his mother's death was inextricably linked to this social system, and that she was a more typical female victim of a patriarchal society. Women were deprived of independence under the patriarchal society. The memoirs of Joyce's brother Stanislaus reveal that his mother served as a vent for his father's life, and that he exercised supreme control over the family. Their father frequently beat and mistreated their mother, and he vented his emotions on his young daughters after their mother passed away, and that the two brothers were uncomfortable with their father's unjustified abuse of women. The brothers' disgust with this social structure is also evident in Stanislaus' memoirs. It is clear that women living in the contemporary context were too powerless to resist the oppression they were subjected to by the social system.

2. The Objectification of Women and Nature by Men

Human domination of nature is based on a patriarchal worldview that establishes the legitimacy of female domination. Under the patriarchal oppression of women and nature, women are not seen as fully human individuals and nature is merely an object at the service of man under Logocentrism.

2.1 Male Oppression of Women

In patriarchal societies, men are often seen as the subjects or agents, while women are seen as the objects or passive recipients of male actions and desires. This can lead to women being viewed primarily in terms of their physical appearance or sexual desirability, rather than as individuals with their own agency and aspirations.

In this story, Joyce exposes the social objectification of women, as shown by Lily and Gretta, while also presenting women as courageous and sensible. Lily is a domestic helper whose role in the narrative is to serve other people. Gabriel becomes gay and figures she must be getting married soon when he learns she is done schooling. Gabriel makes assumptions about Lily's future and her potential marriage prospects based on her current circumstances as a servant. This can be seen as a form of objectification, as he is reducing her to a societal role or expectation rather than seeing her as an individual with her own agency and aspirations. It reflects the societal norms and expectations of the time period in which the story is set, where women were often limited in their options and opportunities by their social status and gender. Gabriel is uncomfortable with being contradicted by a woman, who is expected to be submissive, in a patriarchal social model, so after being rejected, he tries to ease his awkwardness by giving her some tips. By doing this, he attempts to maintain his power as a man and win back his sense of social superiority. He doesn't really value and respect Lily's ideas and doesn't continue to ask questions, just trying to do his best to maintain the existing power system from collapsing. While Gabriel's behavior towards Lily may not be overtly oppressive or objectifying in the story, it is still influenced by societal power dynamics and serves to highlight the ways in which these dynamics can shape social interactions and attitudes towards others.

Gretta's experiences also serve to highlight the ways in which women's voices and perspectives are often silenced or ignored. If marriage is what women are expected to do, what about married women? Gretta is a good wife in the eyes of Gabriel, the hero. She accepts her husband's discipline in terms of dress, smiles at his ironically nasty remarks, and satisfies him in terms of physical and sexual appeal. Gabriel wants to have control over his wife in every way, including the way she dresses and even her thoughts and emotions. "No, he must see some ardour in her eyes first. He longed to be master of her strange mood." (Joyce, 353) But he rarely really pays attention to her inner world. When she reveals the story of her past love for Michael Furey, Gabriel is unable to fully understand or empathize with her, and his attempts to console her are ultimately inadequate. While she is preoccupied, Gabriel's feelings and thoughts about her are entirely concerned with his personal physical desires. "Perhaps she had felt the impetuous desire that was in him, and then the yielding mood had come upon her. Now that she had fallen to him so easily, he wondered why he had been so diffident." (Joyce, 354) As a husband, he only loves his idealised version of his wife. He doesn't want her to be anything other than what he expects her to be, and he won't concede that what she thinks is irrelevant to him. Eventually she falls asleep, drowning in her own inner world. This can be seen as a reflection of the broader societal attitudes towards women, where their experiences and perspectives are often marginalized or dismissed.

What's more, throughout the story, Gretta is shown to be somewhat distant and preoccupied, and it is eventually revealed that this is because she is still mourning the loss of a former love, Michael Furey. This reveals the limitations and expectations placed on women in patriarchal societies, where women are often expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers over their own desires and aspirations. For men, women's personal aspirations and self-worth are insignificant. Gabriel might not have felt shocked or threatened if it had been her unfulfilled life ambitions or female friends that were weighing on Gretta's mind. For men, it is only men who are equally powerful and worthy of respect, so it is only when Gretta's mind is wholly occupied by another man that Gabriel feels devastated by the partial occupation of all that he has.

2.2 Male Degradation of Nature

From an ecological perspective, the image of horses in "The Dead" can be seen as a commentary on the degradation of the natural world by human society. The horses in the story are forced to work in harsh conditions, pulling heavy loads through the snow, which reflects a larger attitude of human society towards nature as a resource to be exploited for human gain. "The horse galloped along wearily under the murky morning sky, dragging his old rattling box after his heels, and Gabriel was again in a cab with her, galloping to catch the boat, galloping to their honeymoon." (Joyce, 350) The appearance of the tired horse in the role of a tool does not detract in any way from Gabriel's sweet memories. Humans have become accustomed to using the tame horse as a tool and take this for granted. This attitude is rooted in the idea that humans are separate from nature and can use it as they please, without regard for the needs and desires of other living beings. This mentality has led to the exploitation of natural resources, the destruction of ecosystems, and the extinction of countless species. The objectification of the horses in the story serves as a metaphor for the larger exploitation of the natural world by human society. The horses are seen as mere tools, their own needs and desires ignored, as they are pushed beyond their limits to serve human purposes. This reflects the larger attitude of society towards nature, where nature is viewed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

What's more, Patrick Morkan has a horse called Johnny whose job is to pull the mill round and round every day until they go to a military review in the park. "... And everything went on beautifully until Johnny came in sight of King Billay's statue: and whether he fell in love with the horse King Billy sits on or whether he thought he was back again in the mill, anyhow he began to walk round the statue." (Joyce, 341) Patrick Morkan, who is always pompous, is very angry at the horses that suddenly get out of hand. It can be assumed that Gabriel represents Patrick Morkan, Gretta represents Johnny, and the likeness of Michael Furey represents the horse in the equestrian monument. Gretta is captivated by the ghost of Michael Furey, just as Johnny is by the horse King Billy is sitting on. The portrayal of women and animals as being oppressed and objectified serves as a critique of the larger social and economic systems of the time, which perpetuated inequality and exploitation. It suggests that the mistreatment of women and animals is interconnected and reflects a larger system of oppression that extends beyond any one individual or group.

3. The Balance and Redemption of Women and Nature over Men

In *Dubliners*, the male protagonists are frequently afflicted by feelings of loneliness and self-doubt, and they need a mirror to demonstrate their subjectivity and superiority. The "other" in the novel often acts as such a mirror. But instead of adding to their self-confidence, as the male protagonists of the story would have wished, this mirror triggers an epiphany, advancing the process of breaking down the unhealthy dichotomy and combating logocentrism.

3.1 The Female Challenge to Male Authority and Power

Three strong, independent women in "The Dead" gradually disrupt the male protagonist's perception of them. Even in a patriarchal culture, in Joyce's opinion, women should not be ignorant, stupid and subordinate to men, but rather free-thinking individuals who dare to refuse to submit. The protagonist, Gabriel, is highly educated, teaches at a university and has a certain social status. He is accustomed to taking the lead and being respected and esteemed. He has a beautiful and elegant wife and a happy family, all of which have built up his strong sense of superiority and authority and made him live in a world of self-imagined illusions. His awakening of self-consciousness, however, does not come as an episodic feeling but rather through three blows, concluding his spiritual journey from self-deception to self-liberation to self-enlightenment, as external challenges and stimuli are tearing apart his self-esteem and unravelling the true nature of his life.

He is first contradicted by Lily, the maid who helps to look after the guests, and then by Miss Ivors, who ridicules him as a West Briton for writing for *The Daily Express*. Gabriel's social class-conscious preconceptions are attacked by Lily's retort, and Miss Ivors' rebuttal has a very conflicted internal effect on his sense of own ethnic identity. Gabriel appears to be running away from Miss Ivors' sarcasm, but he is really running away from uncertainty about who he is. He longs for the cultures of other European nations when he realises how limited his own culture is. Gabriel, regrettably, is unable to strike a compromise between the two. At the end of the evening, an Irish folk song suddenly brings back the memories and nostalgia that Greta has always held in her heart for her first love. At this point, Gabriel no longer sees his wife as a person with emotional needs but rather as a static symbol that tickles his fancy. His wife is imprisoned in his mind as a still, romantic image, and he even imagines himself as a painter. Her emotions and desires have been entirely erased. He misinterpreted her body language in a completely wishful manner. He was utterly unaware of the emotional storm roaring inside of her. While he described his wife's graceful form as she listened to the song with the utmost calmness of an art appreciator, Greta was nostalgic for past emotions and memories. When Gabriel rushes to express his love to his wife in the hotel with the passion that the artwork brings him, Greta's heart is filled with the first love, Michael Furey, who died for her. He won Greta's heart at the cost of his life. It is not until this moment that Gabriel realizes the shallowness and the pallor of his feelings. It is Greta's deep remembrance that brings the past back to life, thus giving Gabriel an epiphany about life and himself. The purpose of Joyce's work is to demonstrate that women should not be servants, subordinates, or submissives to males, but rather independent and free. Men need to reconsider how they view and treat women because women also have their own dignity and aspirations and should work to find happiness for themselves.

Within the constrained roles set forth by a patriarchal society, the women in "The Dead" fight to get their voices heard in a variety of ways. The rising of women's self-awareness and their yearning to be free from men's manipulation are reflected in kinds of conflicts, which expose the degrading traits of the males, including hypocrisy, cowardice, and pretentiousness. Their battles are like bullets shooting around, striking the strongholds of patriarchy and awakening men who have been rendered unconscious physically and mentally.

3.2 Building a World in True Harmony Like Women and Nature

Snow is frequently used in the novel of the dead as a common natural imagery, enhancing the description of the scene, driving the development of the story and witnessing the ups and downs of the psychological journey of the characters in the story. According to some studies, the use of snow as a literary device helps to express the concept of mortality and death. The snow is described as covering everything, including the dead leaves and the living, and it creates a sense of stillness and silence that is often associated with death. However,

snow is a metaphor for restoration and even rebirth. According to physics, snow is a solid form of water, which melts into water when it is heated, and water is the source of life. The snow starts to melt as spring approaches and the temperature rises, reviving everything. Snow is what enables life on earth to develop and grow. Snow is white, and white stands for regeneration and purity. Since snow is frequently used, the reader can also benefit from the atmosphere's cleansing and rejuvenating effects. The way the characters react to the snow in the book is significantly different. Bartell D'Arcy has a cold and needs to wrap himself up tightly because his singing voice and disposition are suffering. The females, on the other hand, respond considerably differently. "I love the look of snow," said Aunt Julia sadly. 'So do I,' said Miss O'Callaghan 'But poor Mr. D'Arcy doesn't like the snow,' said Aunt Kate, smiling." (Joyce, 346) The attitudes of men and women towards snow in this episode are different. The women's appreciation for the snow can be seen as an expression of their connection to nature and the cycles of life and death. The snow is a natural occurrence that transforms the landscape, covering everything in a blanket of white. This transformation can be seen as a metaphor for the transformative power of nature, which has the ability to renew and rejuvenate even in the face of death and decay. The women's appreciation for the snow in "The Dead" can be seen as a way of embracing the transformative power of nature and finding meaning and beauty in the impermanence of life. The snow is a powerful symbol of rebirth and renewal, and the women in the story are able to connect with this symbolic meaning in a way that the men are not. This difference in perspective reflects broader cultural and gender norms, as well as the characters' different perspectives on life and mortality. Actually, one can only truly comprehend and understand life when one truly comprehends and understands death. The fear of death enables one to bounce back, to gain the impetus to live, to assume one's destiny and to forge one's own path in life. That is to say, in the analysis of death as an extreme state of life, what is revealed is precisely the freedom of man, the freedom of choice or the autonomy of existence. In addition, the snow covers everything while blurring the landscape. "The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington Monument. How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper-table!" (Joyce, 321) When the two women confront and contradict Gabriel's preconceived notions, he immediately thinks of the snow scene and longs for it. This shows that Gabriel is going through a cognitive change that he is not aware of and that he has not fully grasped. The arrival of the heavy snow can be seen as a disruption of the characters' daily routines and expectations. This disruption can create a sense of disorientation and uncertainty, which can lead to a reevaluation of existing beliefs and values. This can be seen as a departure from traditional logocentrism, which emphasizes rationality and order, and can lead to a more harmonious and holistic view of the world.

4. Conclusion

"The Dead", a crucial piece in the interpretation of Joyce's perspective on women, depicts not only the courageous attempts and breakthroughs of the female characters but also the reflection and growth of the male characters, as well as the thought-provoking role that nature plays in the story. It can be seen how women and nature are isomorphic from the analysis above. Humans and nature have an intimate relationship. An environment of harmony between nature and humans is promoted by ecofeminism. The result of combining environmental conservation and women's independence is the lovely scene of man and nature coexisting in harmony. However, patriarchal and anthropocentric ideas have been around for a long time and have become deeply ingrained in society at large, as has mankind's treatment of nature as a resource rather than a partner, and these logocentric ideas are so much a part of many people's perceptions that it is not easy to change them. From the beginning of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first, some progress has been made, but the situation is still not ideal. Humans continue to degrade the environment for personal gain, and women continue to battle for equality and rights. Only by eliminating the Logocentrism can mankind create a truly harmonious and beautiful world.

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