



***READING AND WRITING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS OF  
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: MODERNISM AND MODERNITY***

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### 4.3. James Joyce, “The Dead” (composed 1907, published in *Dubliners*, 1914)

#### Reading Skills

I

1. What sort of tone does the title of the story set and how does it relate to the story which follows?
2. What is the working world of the sisters and their niece concerned with, which makes them characteristically Irish?
3. We are told that “the only thing” that the sisters and their niece would not tolerate was “back answers”. What does this tell us about the sisters and their niece?
4. There is concern on the part of the sisters and their niece that Freddy Malins might turn up “screwed”. What other adjective might be supplied to describe the same state?
5. What does Lily mean when she declares that now men are “only all palaver”?
6. Gabriel has chosen some “lines from Robert Browning” for the speech he’ll deliver at dinner. Identify Robert Browning.
7. Aunt Kate declares that Freddy Malins’s mother made him “take the pledge” on New Year’s Eve. Explain what Freddy’s mother obliged him to do and why she might do so.
8. Gabriel took a degree “in the Royal University”. Identify the institution.
9. Explain Gabriel’s mother’s assessment of Gretta as “country cute”. What does the opinion reveal about Gabriel’s mother?
10. Miss Ivors qualifies Gabriel as a “West Briton”. What does she mean?
11. Why would Miss Ivors be keen to go to the Aran Isles?
12. Gabriel declares: “Irish is not my language.” Why is Irish not Gabriel’s language?
13. What upsets Gabriel about Miss Ivors’ assessment of him as a West Briton?
14. Gretta enquires of Gabriel what “words [he] had with Molly Ivors”? What does she mean?
15. Aunt Kate expresses the opinion that “it’s not at all honourable for the pope to turn the women out of the choirs ...”. What is she referring to?
16. Gabriel alludes to a statue of King Billy. Which king is being referred to and what is his particular significance in relation to Ireland?
17. In giving the cabman directions, Mr. Browne refers to Trinity College. Identify the institution.
18. Mr. Bartell D’Arcy sings from a ballad called “The Lass of Aughrim”. What is the significance of the ballad for the story as a whole?
19. Who does the statue which Gabriel sees as “a white man” in the snow represent? Comment on his significance within Irish history.
20. The opening of the final paragraph of the story makes reference to the snow beginning to fall again and it being watched by Gabriel. Explain the significance of the sentence which follows: “The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward.”

## II

1. How may the statement that “the major character ... of “The Dead” is the city of Dublin” be justified?
2. How may Joyce’s concept of epiphany be related to “The Dead”?
3. The American New Critic Allen Tate saw “The Dead” as an example of a fictional text that used showing rather than telling. Show how his claim can be borne out by reference to the story overall.
4. In 1906, Joyce spoke of writing a chapter of the moral history of his country and referred to Dublin as “the centre of paralysis”. Comment on his qualification with reference to “The Dead”.
5. How might Gretta be appraised through a feminist lens?

### Writing Skills

1. It has been claimed that in “The Dead”: “the major antagonists are the British presence in Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church in which Joyce was educated”. Show by close reference to the story how the British presence in Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church are represented.
2. The falling snow in the story has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Record these ways and comment on them.
3. “The narration of “The Dead” is not innocent, objective, or sympathetic toward the women it represents, and must be heard with acute scepticism”. Would you agree with the above claim, or not? Argue your case.
4. “The Dead” is one of the fifteen stories which make up *Dubliners*. Choose another of the stories and comment on it in terms of comparison and contrast to “The Dead”.
5. “*Dubliners* ... is ... both a group of short stories and a novel, the separate histories of its protagonists composing one essential history, that of the soul of a people which has confused and weakened its relation to the source of spiritual life and cannot restore it.” (Brewster Ghiselin, “The Unities of Joyce’s *Dubliners*”. *Accent* 16 (1956)). Discuss the above claim, taking into consideration the fifteen stories contained in *Dubliners*.