

A Birth Announcement in “The Dead”

by C. Roland Wagner

. . . like some of those books he brings me the works of Master François Somebody supposed to be a priest about a child born out of her ear because her bungut fell out a nice word for any priest to write and her a—c as if any fool wouldn't know what that meant
... Molly Bloom (*U* 18. 487–91)

Joyce responded early to modernist proclamations about the death of traditional beliefs and the need to reconstitute the shattered picture of the world (Ellmann 142), but it was not until his own mother died that the death of god became a living experience for him. Richard Ellmann, in discussing the effect that the death of Joyce's mother (1903) had on his development, offers possibilities for understanding both Joyce's relationship with Nora Barnacle and the conscious and unconscious sources of his early work:

. . . Joyce longed to reconstitute, in his relation with [Nora], the filial bond which his mother's death had broken. Explicitly he longs to make their relationship that of child and mother, as if the relationship of lovers was too remote. He covets an even more intimate dependence: “O that I could nestle in your womb like a child born of your flesh and blood, be fed by your blood, sleep in the warm secret gloom of your body!” (293)

Appreciation of his strong pre-oedipal yearnings helps us to make sense of Joyce in his twenties and also provides us with an entry point for an expanded understanding of “The Dead,” especially an understanding of the character of Gabriel Conroy. Once we have entered the story and grasped its relation to Joyce's deepest needs at the time of its composition, another dimension of understanding emerges, one that has not been noticed by commentators since the time the story was published—its many ties, some apparent, others hidden, to the traditional theme—Christian and art-historical—of the Annunciation.

1

Gabriel is revealed to be both secure and insecure, the “generous” and responsible husband and father, and the somewhat cold, anxious and sexually uncertain lover. His insecurity is manifest in his self-absorbed, self-justifying and hypocritical feelings of superiority toward the guests, and especially toward his aunts (“What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old women?” [192]). His intellect is often employed as a defense against passion, even though he chose his lower class wife—in the face of his mother’s “sullen opposition”—because of her natural ease of manner and feeling. He has not yet been able to separate himself from his mother’s cultural pretensions. Her concept of the “dignity of family life,” her “serious and matronly” nature (186), are part—perhaps the chief part—of the dead hand of the past that still hangs over him and contributes to his problems with his wife, with liberated Miss Ivors, and even with Lily, the caretaker’s daughter. Finally, it contributes substantially to Gabriel’s inability to resolve his conflict between his civilized and his passionate self.

Gabriel idealizes his wife, Gretta, to a degree that distances him emotionally from her. He dreams of a oneness that he fears to experience as a dangerously actual intimacy, a dream that itself helps to guarantee his separation. Toward the end of the evening, having watched Gretta at the top of the stairs listening to Mr Bartell D’Arcy singing “The Lass of Aughrim,” Gabriel signally misinterprets his wife’s feelings. The song brings back to Gretta the memory of the young, delicate Michael Furey in Galway, who had sung the song to her, loved her passionately, and died of consumption. Before Gabriel discovers the personal elements connected with the song and how they affected his wife, he builds a fantasy of her renewed attachment to *him*, despite “the years of their dull existence together” (214), and allows his passion for her to develop in a multiplicity of ways—romantic, intimate, lustful, even angry—as he gradually realizes that she is not really thinking of him.

In their hotel room after the party, when Gretta reveals the existence of Michael Furey, for a moment he maintains his calm superiority, but that begins to crumble when Gretta fails to respond in kind to his ironic question about Michael’s social status (218–19). He realizes that Gretta’s feelings for Michael cannot be reduced to the conventional phrase he offers (“I suppose you were in love with this Michael Furey, Gretta”) when she majestically declares that she “was great with him at that time” (220). The implicit analogy with pregnancy suggests the total union of mother and child and complete exclusion of the outside world. It is uttered with what sounds like an Irish lilt and contains in the word “great” what is probably a Biblical echo (see below). It separates Gretta still further from Gabriel as he anxiously tries to hold on to her by caressing one of her hands, and prepares for the “terror”

that seizes him when she answers his next question as to what it was that Michael died of "so young." "I think he died for me," she declares (220).

At this point Gabriel feels that he has been pushed out into the cold, out of his fantasized union with the ideal wife-mother;¹ the bond between husband and wife appears to have been broken. The moment of terror surely touches the depths of Gabriel's unconscious, not only oedipal memories of jealous rage and fears of impotence, but images from the pre-oedipal borderland when memories first begin to be laid down, during the symbiotic phase and just after, when the child believes that he alone occupies the "warm secret gloom" of the mother's body—and finds out otherwise. In Gabriel's terrified imagination, Michael Furey, like a new baby in the family, has replaced him inside her body. Or, more logically, Gabriel may fear that Michael is the first baby and that he is the intruder. The potency of Michael's passion makes him the strong lover, the baby defeating the grownup, the latter merely an adult-sized baby. Joyce reinforces the paradox by emphasizing Michael's physical powerlessness and vulnerability: not only is he the victim of consumption, but his very being is "delicate" and "gentle" (219), merely a boy "who was going to study singing only for his health," standing "shivering" in the rain (221). The song he likes to sing, "The Lass of Aughrim," enhances the picture of weakness: the rejected peasant girl with her baby in the rain vainly pleads for attention from the powerful seducer, Lord Gregory (only alluded to in the story).

If Michael is the weak and cold baby of the song, then Gabriel is for a moment the cold seducer, who, despite his generosity, seems insensitive to his wife's deepest needs. Has he not failed her in essential ways? And is he not, externally, the productive man of the world, the very opposite of the doom-haunted, romantic Michael Furey (who reminds us of the youthful, doomed poet, Thomas Chatterton)? Yet more profoundly, and not just abstractly, Joyce links the objective condition of the "delicate" Michael with the interior reality of Gabriel. In a brilliant, tiny brushstroke early in the story, Gabriel's eyes are described as "delicate and restless" behind "the polished lenses and the bright gilt rims of the glass which screened" them (178). They are "irritated by the floor, which glittered with beeswax" (186); and Gretta remarks on his anxious need to protect the eyes of his son Tom at night with "green shades" (180). Thus both Michael and Gabriel are *delicate* in the sense of "frail" and even "sickly," but Michael is openly delicate while Gabriel hides his weakness—the baby within himself—and manages to appear competent and successful to the world.

¹Craig Hansen Werner (66) summarizes the "image patterns" in *Dubliners* that appear in "The Dead": "Among the most important are the symbolic oppositions of movement-enclosure, darkness-light, and warmth-cold."

Joyce broadens and deepens the analysis of Gabriel's nature by suggesting another meaning of *delicate* (a meaning that may also be implied in Gretta's description of Michael) as "refined" or "sensitive" when he describes Gabriel's negative response to "the indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles," which "reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his" (179). In this sense his refinement—as reflected in the pure "distant music" with which he idealizes his wife—is used as a defense against the passionate side of his nature, producing the "thought-tormented" quality of mind that he found in Browning's poetry. A third meaning of *delicate*, "sensitivity to the needs of others," is a central component of Gabriel's nature, although this quality has hitherto been limited by his failure to empathize with his wife's needs.²

So Gabriel's delicacy can be seen in three ways: as a generous and concerned quality of mind; as a defense against what he is contemptuous of as vulgar and low (a defense against indelicacy); and, finally, as a vulnerability to an implacable environment. All of these are important in the story. Here I want to emphasize that Gabriel, like Michael, may be described as the frail "babe" who "lies cold" in the mother's arms.

Joyce's own life sheds some light on Gabriel's feelings of weakness. He, too, over a more extended period, had to struggle with feelings of abandonment with which his mother's death left him. If it is true, as Ellmann writes, that Joyce tried to make his relationship with Nora "that of child and mother," as Gabriel also does, then the same feelings of rivalry would be expected toward competitors. Ellmann recounts Joyce's jealousy of Michael Bodkin, an early lover of Nora, and of other men with whom she had relationships, as one source of "The Dead":³ "[Joyce] was disconcerted by the fact that young men before him had interested her" (243). It is also noteworthy that Joyce wrote "The Dead" during and just after Nora's pregnancy and confinement with Lucia (1907), and only two years after the birth of Giorgio (1905). Although Joyce was not particularly conscious of jealousy toward his children, his behavior, particularly with respect to Giorgio, implies the deep-seated anguish of a jilted lover. His eye wandered more than usually to other women, his feelings of persecution intensified and, within a few months, he even began to think of leaving Nora.⁴ The crisis had

²My discussion of *delicate* was stimulated in part by a reading of Charles Rosen's review of William Empson's critical writings ("The Miraculous Mandarin").

³Brenda Maddox (17) plausibly suggests that Joyce fused two of Nora's adolescent lovers, Michael Feeney and Michael Bodkin, both of whom died young, presumably of tuberculosis, and both of whom were buried in Ragoon cemetery.

⁴See also Maddox (65–66), who writes that Joyce's "fear of betrayal by Nora may in fact date from Giorgio's birth" (65). She also cites the ending of "A Little Cloud" as evidence of Joyce's feelings of exclusion from the circle of mother and child (66). The only "rival whom he could not vanquish was his own son" (81).

not completely passed by 1909, though, in a love letter to Nora, Joyce may be attempting to make himself believe that it had never really occurred:

Our children (much as I love them) *must not* come between us. If they are good and noble-natured it is because of *us* dear. We met and joined our bodies and souls freely and nobly and our children are the fruit of our bodies. (242)

It is possible that Joyce overcame—or at least made progress toward overcoming—his ambivalent feelings toward rivals from the womb in the same way that Gabriel does and that each can help us understand the other. Or it may be that Gabriel's progress represents a wish fulfillment of Joyce's. Although in the story the speed of the transformation is not convincing, the manner of it certainly is: Gabriel overcomes his resentment at Gretta's revelations by learning to accept his wife as a separate self.⁵ The key image here is Gabriel's release of his wife's hand. He had clung to it as he experienced the terror of rejection and abandonment (220). Now, as his defenses begin to dissolve, he can let go—let it go and let *her* go—and find a better way to unite with her (221–22). If he can abandon, or reduce in intensity, the fantasy of oneness upon which his intellectual defenses are built, real intimacy may become possible.

The process shows itself in his sudden appreciation of the masquerade he has been performing, and in his painful self-judgments on the contents of his "well-filled shirt-front" that he glimpses in the mirror of the hotel room (218, 220). His self-pity is modified by a maturer pity for his wife's suffering. He empathizes with Gretta as a victim of time and loss, as he himself is. Gabriel extends his pity to other people, including Michael Furey, until his vision embraces all the living and the dead of Dublin and then the world. Aunt Julia is of particular importance in this widening movement of his mind. She represents the farthest point of the aging of his wife—whose "face was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death"—for Aunt Julia, "too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard look upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*" (222). He could then wishfully nourish himself on the youthful sound of "the voice, without looking at the singer's face," and "feel and share the excitement of swift and secure flight" (193). Now, Aunt Julia helps Gabriel accept his wife as an aging woman, contradicting the ideal, the eternally youthful Mother of his unconscious fantasy with whom he wishes to be united. Again the maturation is too rapid, but it does represent an essential truth.

⁵Cf. Tilly Eggers, who writes that "Joyce shows that the possibility of a love relationship depends on separation, not on possession or subordination of one to another" (392).

Yet this is not quite enough to explain Gabriel's movement toward reality—not even his first step toward resolution of pre-oedipal (and oedipal) yearnings. We need at least one more motive, one that gives Gabriel the emotional courage, the temporary cushioning that helps him move from beneficent illusion to harsh reality. We may more easily find this motive in Gabriel if we look for it first in Joyce himself, in Joyce's own nature, in his identification with his mother and his wish to be the mother of his own children. Ellmann writes that Joyce was vitally involved in "all aspects of the bond of mother and child" (293), and he describes how Joyce developed biological metaphors of the creative process in *Stephen Hero*, more fully in *A Portrait of the Artist*, and most elaborately in *Ulysses* (293–99).

This creator is not only male but female; Joyce goes on to borrow an image of Flaubert by calling him a 'god,' but he is also a goddess. Within his womb creatures come to life. Gabriel the seraph comes to the Virgin's chamber and, as Stephen says, "In the virgin womb of the imagination the word is made flesh." (296)

Thus the Gabriel of "The Dead," who we have already seen is the child inside Gretta's body, can also be seen as the mother of that child. The later, major works develop artistically and intellectually what is embodied intuitively in "The Dead." We get a hint of Gabriel's maternal side when we learn that his extreme "solicitude" for their children and for Gretta "was a standing joke with" his aunts. "The next thing he'll buy me [after the galoshes]," Gretta jokes, "will be a diving suit" (180). There is another, different sort of hint at the end as Gabriel draws together the various strands of his life. The softly falling snow, and the water it becomes, deepens into a symbol of purity and primal unity (223–24). Pushed outside of Gretta's womb, Gabriel transforms the universe itself into an object of love. Reality, in effect, emerges as the Great Mother or the offspring of the Mother. The cold, cruel world can now be accepted in its divine indifference. His separation is a step toward a new kind of oneness. If Gabriel to a degree transcends his narcissism through his "enlarging identification with the whole mortal life of man,"⁶ it is partly because the roots of that narcissism are there to serve his newfound but modest capacity for love.

2

As we begin to appreciate Joyce's youthful conscious and unconscious intentions, a much more hidden element in "The Dead" now becomes visible, shedding more light on those intentions and further serving to clarify Joyce's feelings of identification with mother and child (and father as well). It will also deepen our understanding of Gabriel and his need to idealize and

⁶See Beck 354.

cover up the "western" half of his mind. Standing behind the story throughout—but most spectacularly at the moment when Gabriel looks up to the top of the Morkan stairs and sees his wife listening to Mr D'Arcy singing "The Lass of Aughrim"—is a model for a painting of the Annunciation (209–10). In a limited way Joyce was trying to do what the Dutch and Flemish painters were doing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The method Joyce uses is known in art history as "disguised symbolism," which reflects precisely his purposes in the story and anticipates the method of *Ulysses*. Only the method is far from fully realized here, for it does not really illuminate most of the details of "The Dead." What it does illuminate is the last third of the story, especially at several highly significant moments.

H. W. Janson offers Robert Campin's *The Merode Annunciation* as an example of "disguised symbolism," for it helped to bring about a revolution in art from medieval abstraction and fairy tale to modern realism. For the Master of Flémalle, medieval Christian symbolism remains complete but it is "so immersed in the world of everyday appearances that we are often left to doubt whether a given detail demands symbolic interpretation" (163–64).⁷ Joyce too disguises his Christian symbolism—at least certain portions of it—within an insistently realistic context, but, because Joyce's realism occurs at a different point in history, we call it modernism. And Joyce adds an everyday psychology that is more detailed than anything in the Renaissance: he suggests a psychology of the unconscious beyond Campin's. Moreover—and most important—he is not a Christian believer: in fact he desecrates the sacred Christian idea. Thus Joyce's interpretation of the Annunciation deepens and extends its meaning in a way consistent with a realistic understanding of the story, reinforces the idealizing needs inherent in Christianity, and simultaneously subverts that tradition in conscious and unconscious ways that are difficult to distinguish from each other. Joyce is able to accomplish all this without openly revealing what he is doing because he is working within a specific tradition of art history and Christianity. Although quite well known to students of art history and Christian doctrine, that tradition is no longer a vital part of the imagination of the modern mind. Joyce resurrected from the dead or dying Christian tradition—an example of the broader theme of "The Dead" of how the dead past can still affect the living—what Ernest Jones describes as "the legend of the Madonna's Conception through the ear" (2: 268).⁸ By the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, the standard view of the Conception, which had been held by many of the Church Fathers well before that time (e.g., by St. Augustine), was that God impregnated the Virgin, usually with an emanation from his

⁷See also Panofsky 1: 131–48, esp. 143.

⁸This essay is the classic in the field. It was originally published the same year as *Dubliners* in the *Jahrbuch der Psychoanalyse*, 1914, Band VI.

mouth into her ear, through the Holy Spirit, embodied in the image of the Dove. The “fertilizing breath” or utterance of God and/or the Dove—how the Word did in fact become flesh—is sometimes pictured as “a ray of light that issues from the mouth of the Dove”; and sometimes, in an heretical variation, “the infant is seen descending along a ray of light” and “aiming at the Virgin’s right ear” (2: 268–71).⁹ (See illustration, page 455).

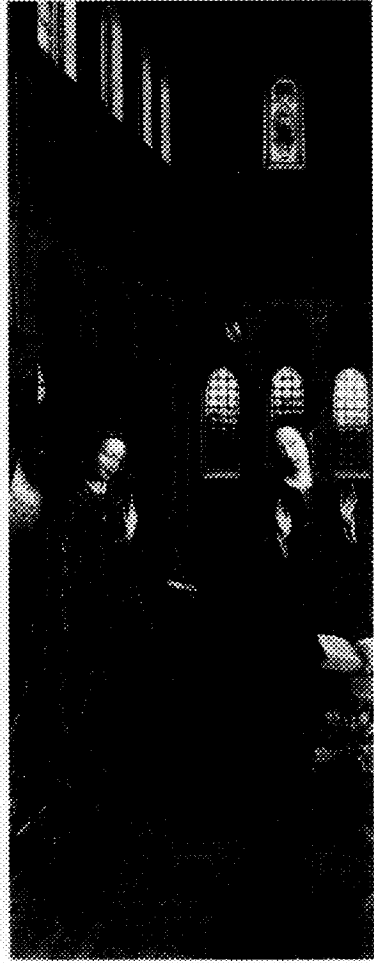
As Gabriel gazes “up the staircase” listening to the song, the hidden Annunciation—actually a poetic parody of it—is alluded to in the “grace and mystery in Gretta’s attitude as if she were a symbol of something” that Gabriel cannot grasp (210). The traditional Archangel Gabriel is also separated from the Virgin, but not in the fundamental way in which Gabriel Conroy is separated from Gretta. The Christian Gabriel shares the mystery—he is God’s messenger—whereas Gretta herself delivers the unsettling message to her husband that she was in union with Michael Furey. Everything in the three paragraphs depicting Gabriel’s vision of Gretta is an implicit comment on the traditional archetypal painting of the Conception, on Gabriel’s distance from it, and on his present marital situation, which he only dimly understands.

From the perspective we share with Gabriel, when he “strained his ear to listen also” Mr D’Arcy’s song is at first nothing more than a “few notes of a man’s voice singing” (209). But from the point of view of the Annunciation parody, it is an image of the mysterious, bodiless voice of God the father. Gabriel tries to give a name to his fragmentary experience: “If he were a painter, he would paint her” in a “blue felt hat” with “bronze” hair (echoes of Mary’s colors?) and call the painting “*Distant Music*” (210). The song, “The Lass of Aughrim,” picks up the theme of impregnation and alludes to the godlike—and more openly seducing—figure of Lord Gregory (Ellmann 248), who arbitrarily refuses to allow the seduced and abandoned lass in from the rain (210). Gretta withdraws further into herself (she “seemed unaware of the talk about her. . . . her eyes were shining” [212]) as one might sometimes expect even in an ordinary pregnancy. In the street Gretta’s “grace of attitude” is gone but she still remains separate from her husband, who “longed to say something foolish and affectionate into her ear” (213). But that orifice is closed to him. His vital memories of “their secret life together”—the sexualized intimacy of his “placing a ticket inside the warm

⁹Jones offers a number of quotations from the Church Fathers and others, the example from St. Augustine (*Sermo de Tempore*, XXII) being perhaps the most noteworthy: *Deus per angelum loquebatur et Virgo per aurem impraegnebatur* (269). Jones also cites several non-Christian sources for the idea of procreation through the ear, e.g. the legend of Chigemouni, the Mongolian Saviour, “who chose the most perfect virgin on earth, Mahaenna or Maya, and impregnated her by penetrating into her right ear during sleep” (2: 272–73).

palm of her glove" (213)—contrast with her present unrecognized separation from him.

It seems appropriate to identify the D'Arcy impregnation of sound with the new "burden" that Gretta appears to carry up the stairs of the hotel—a twin of the Morkan stairs—"her head bowed in the ascent" (215), the "long shaft" of "ghostly light"—a reminder of impregnation by the Holy Spirit¹⁰—shining from the street lamp into the window of their room to the door (216). Gabriel, somewhat over-confidently, informs the porter that they "have enough light from the street" (216), for he is unaware yet of his exclusion from the divine illumination. He still confuses his own fantasy with reality as Gretta walks "along the shaft of light towards him" (216), for the two sides of his nature remain far apart. Finally, impregnated with sound and light, her new inward "burden" becomes Michael Furey, who "used to sing that song" (219). Michael, of course, is more like the son than the impregnating father; yet the Son is finally one with the Father, the embodiment of the Eternal Word.¹¹ Perhaps all this is an unconscious fantasy in Gabriel's



Jan Van Eyck: The Annunciation. A. W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. See pages 453-54 above, and note 10, below.

¹⁰Light passing through a glass window, penetrating but not breaking the glass, was a well-known symbolic image during the medieval period for the immaculate impregnation of the Virgin. It was enthusiastically adopted by the leading Flemish painters of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. See Meiss 176.

¹¹In *Ulysses* Stephen looks for possible support from the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son as a means of reassurance that he exists separately and independently, even eternally, as a son, apart from the temporal coupling of his mother and father. But there is no Anus to debate with, to question his conjecture that he, Stephen, is one with God, is in fact God (3.45-57).

mind joined with the conscious, collective fantasy of Christian believers: “. . . behold, thou shalt conceive in they womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest . . .” (Luke 1: 31–32).

3

In general we can see that Gabriel is struggling with an unconscious perception of his wife as a sexualized mother figure and an opposing need to idealize her as a pure Madonna. This conflict between the sexualized and the desexualized mother is more openly expressed by Joyce himself in a letter to Nora during this period: “One moment I see you like a virgin or madonna the next moment I see you shameless, insolent, half-naked and obscene! . . . Are you disgusted with me?” (2: 243). Gabriel shares Joyce’s need to idealize and to desecrate, but the latter is hidden within the story in the subversive view it takes of the Annunciation. The psychoanalytic approach can, however, go further than this: it can illuminate more of the darkness of “The Dead” by eliciting, perhaps, the deepest layer of the defenses that Gabriel (and perhaps Joyce) find necessary. Here, however, the evidence in the story is somewhat limited. Its fragmentary character must be supplemented by speculations that go beyond Joyce’s own life. Indeed, how far Joyce himself went in this direction, how far he understood, consciously or unconsciously, what the story can suggest to the responsive reader is impossible to say.

Jones distinguishes between the underlying reality of the Annunciation’s meaning, which he roots in an “infantile theory of procreation,” the child’s attempt to understand adult sexuality, and the fantasy or legend that Christianity has created to disguise and come to terms with that reality. (Whether this is the only possible infantile theory seems doubtful to me, but Jones’s view fits surprisingly well with the story’s imagery.) The fantasy grows out of the theory in the same reactive way that so much of mental life does. The particular theory is one that is “the crudest and grossest idea obtainable,” for this serves best to generate its polar opposite, “the purest and least sensual form of procreation that can be imagined.” It takes the form, writes Jones, of a “Father incestuously impregnating his daughter” (or, more deeply, a son his mother) “by expelling intestinal gas, with the help of the genital organ,” into the anal orifice, “through which her child is then born.”¹² In the Christian “legend,” the “site of exit is completely omitted,” and that of ingress becomes the ear, the least sensual orifice in the whole body, and “the receptive organ of music” (2: 354–55).

¹²My own grandson independently developed a theory akin to this: at the age of four, responding to a new baby’s arrival, described the baby as coming through a little door located at the mother’s rear end. He was silent, however, about the point of entry.

Jones is positively lyrical in his celebration of the unconscious inventiveness of the human mind, its ability to unite elements from the pre-genital stages—sadism and anal-eroticism—with the phallic sense of power in the fantasy of a “flatus-expelling organ,” and then to repress and transform it all to suit the Christian ideal. “What more innocent symbol exists,” he exults, “than that gentle messenger of hope and love, the dove?”

And [Jones continues] in the tender breath of the dove, reinforced by the solemn words of the Archangel, who would recognize the repulsive material thus symbolized, with its odour replaced by the fragrance of lilies [see below], its moisture and warmth by the aureole of light and fire, and its sound by the gentle cooing—“the echo on earth of the very Word of God.” (2: 355–56)

“The Dead” keeps both the legend and the reality out of sight, both the traditional collective fantasy and the “repulsive material” that it symbolizes. There is little doubt that Joyce was aware of the Christian fantasy, for so much in the story bears it out. But did he recognize the repulsive material, at least a portion of it? This is much more difficult, perhaps impossible, to estimate. Although the few clues available may be due to sheer coincidence, they may also be due to Joyce’s enormous intuitive powers. One provocative instance, however, already noted, surely goes beyond coincidence, the use of Mr Bartell D’Arcy as a stand-in for God the father, speaker of the “word.” Mr D’Arcy is more like a tribal divinity, possibly a temporarily weakened Zeus or Wotan, than the Christian God, but both pagan and Christian divinities are just barely and comically implied by his arbitrary and inconsistent behavior in the abrupt ending of his singing, his “rude speech” about his “dreadful cold” (211), his earlier refusal to satisfy the desires of the guests who are intrigued by the fact that “all Dublin is raving about him” (184), and, finally, even his “repentant tone” as he tells them the history of his cold, to which they responded with “great pity and urged him to be very careful of his throat” (211). Most fascinating is Joyce’s development of his character in *Ulysses* when Molly declares that Mr D’Arcy “commenced kissing me on the choir stairs after I sang Gounod’s *Ave Maria* . . . he was pretty hot for all his tinny voice too . . .” Molly inherits Gretta’s mantle as another sort of model of the Virgin on the “stairs” (18.274–76).

But the most “repulsive”—and, perhaps, the most important—element in the infantile theory of procreation that may be symbolized in “The Dead” is the “intestinal gas” that is expelled, “with the help of the genital organ,” into the anal orifice. And this is the element that is most difficult to connect with

Joyce's conscious or even unconscious intentions.¹³ Nevertheless if we think of the story as a whole as a reflection or projection of Gabriel's (and to some extent, Joyce's) two-sided nature—his pretentious intellectuality played off against his repressed sexuality, his anxious concern to maintain his high “grade of culture” against his finally awakened sense of his “clownish lusts,” his coldness against “the dull fires” of his passion and anger—we find that at least one (and perhaps a second) minor character sheds light on that repulsive infantile element and one on Gabriel's need to deny it.

Mr Browne is the character most representative of an insistent and pervasive vulgarity. If anyone embodies indelicacy, the “wizen-faced” Browne, with his “stiff grizzled moustache” and “swarthy skin” surely does. When we first meet him, his behavior and his remarks to the young ladies are grossly suggestive and anticipate the side of Gabriel that I have described as the seducer in the image of Lord Gregory, but without the latter's aristocratic indifference and more closely allied with the “clownish lusts” that Gabriel later claims to find within himself. After a suggestively incomplete explanation to Aunt Kate concerning his power with the ladies—“You know, Miss Morkan, the reason they are so fond of me is—” —he “escorts three young ladies into the back room” (182), inviting “them all, in jest, to some ladies' punch, hot, strong and sweet” (183). He entertains them so well that they “laughed in musical echo to his pleasantry, swaying their bodies to and fro, with nervous jerks of their shoulders.” Sipping his whiskey, he imitates

the famous Mrs Cassidy, who is reported to have said: *Now Mary Grimes, if I don't take it, make me take it, for I feel I want it.*

His hot face had leaned forward a little too confidently and he had assumed a very low Dublin accent so that the young ladies, with one instinct, received his speech in silence. (183)

¹³That Joyce was quite capable of expressing vulgar thoughts about expelling intestinal gas in the midst of high culture is clear from his letter to Stanislaus of 3 December 1906 from Rome:

This city, I confess, beats me. If anyone asks you how I like [it] . . . tell them I think it is the stupidest old whore of a town ever I was in. This country irks me beyond measure . . . Of course, your prosy old friend H. J. and other respectables like to write about Italy and Italians and subtle Romans. I have seen a lot of Romans now and . . . so far as I can see their chief preoccupation in life is the condition (to judge from their speech) broken, swollen, etc. of their *coglioni* and their chief pastime and joke the breaking of wind rereward. This kind of mechanical obscenity is damnably tiresome. However, it is an expletive which I am reserving for the day when I leave the eternal city as my farewell and adieu to it (2: 198).

As Browne drinks more heavily he loses even the minimum of wit that he displays at first and communicates little more than a ponderous conviviality and lumpish materialism. He responds to Aunt Julia's complaint that her pudding "was not quite brown enough" with the hope that he is "brown enough" for her because he is "all brown" (200). His failure to grasp the significance of the ascetic life of the monks at Mount Melleray does not merely result from his being a Protestant outsider (201) but from his own special insensitivity.

At the end of Gabriel's speech, Mr Browne leads the guests in the singing toast to the three Morkan ladies (205), his very name comically suggesting a musical substitute for the Browning lines that Gabriel was undecided about. The shift from Browning's "thought-tormented music" (192) to the vaporous (gaseous) utterances of Browne (and the others) is surely intended as parody. The anal reference, perhaps to both Browning and Browne, is unmistakable. The shift from high to low also reflects Gabriel's confused mixture of motives in delivering his speech (pointed up by the singing toast: "Unless he tells a lie" [205]), which he later sees as "orating to vulgarians" and "acting as a pennyboy for his aunts" (220). Thus both Browning and Browne, both "thought-tormented music" and "ludicrous" mouthings, destructive idealism and compulsive behavior, reveal the deeper bass notes of Gabriel's complex being. Finally, at the end of the party, Aunt Kate ironically notes that "Browne is everywhere" and describes him as "laid on here like the gas" (206).

Does the universal (the "general") snow at the end of the story finally defeat Browne by purifying everything without denying anything? In the abstract, perhaps, but concretely and specifically, in Gabriel's mind, not sufficiently. Gabriel comes to some terms with the alien elements of his character—his "western" side—but he is far from truly accepting the repellent Browne elements, which he still looks down upon as vulgar and "clownish," despite the fact that he now sees them as part of himself.

A second character who may shed some light on Gabriel's repressions, if not precisely the repulsive elements described above, is Freddy Malins. Freddy is gross and coarse too and more truly "clownish" than Mr Browne; but, as Gabriel tell his wife in the hotel room, "[H]e's a decent sort of chap . . . It's a pity he wouldn't keep away from that Browne, because he's not a bad fellow at heart" (217). Of course Gabriel is trying to impress Gretta with his generosity and fails to mention his contempt for the "sottish Malins" whose "coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips" (184), represent a nineteenth century stereotype of early evolutionary development that fits well with Gabriel's response to the "indelicate clacking . . . and the shuffling of the men's shoes" (179). The fact that Joyce describes Freddy as having "Gabriel's size and build" (184) may be a hint to the reader to consider possible similarities in these extreme

opposites. Perhaps Freddy's dependence (at the age of 40) on his mother, as well as his alcohol dependence, is an external representation of Gabriel's invisible attachment to his mother and to his wife-mother. Ironically, Gabriel's aunts believe that he alone is capable of handling the drunken problem-child at the party.

In the same way that Browne and Freddy can represent the repulsive, repressed material in Gabriel, Lily can represent the defense against that material, serving as a more specific purifying principle than the snow—but only in the latent, not the manifest content of the story. In the traditional paintings of the Annunciation, one symbol mentioned by Jones (see above) is especially useful as a barrier to infantile grossness, the symbol of the lily. The campanulas that stand near Gabriel and the Virgin are usually lilies (2: 356). In Joyce's story, Lily recalls the ideal of virginal femininity through the association of her name with the Easter lily, the Virgin's flower.¹⁴ But her angry response to Gabriel's innocent question about the imminence of her wedding (178) suggests how far she is from accepting the role that Gabriel requires her to play and the difficulty that he has in recognizing women as whole human beings. He views them rather as sets of oppositional part-objects, the mere sources of reaction formations.¹⁵ Aunt Kate reinforces Gabriel's confusion by complaining that Lily is no longer a reliable servant. "I'm sure I don't know what has come over her lately. She's not the girl she was at all" (181). In other words, the real Lily, the actual person, refuses to be categorized as the Easter virgin or as the trustworthy household servant, and threatens the fixed order Gabriel and Kate wish to maintain.

In the traditional painting, Jones writes, the lily contributes to the transformation of the repulsive infantile objects into a vision suitable to the ideal fantasy. Better than other flowers "the lily can serve as no other flower can to express the acme of purity that is necessary to conceal the exactly opposite original idea [of grossness]." Jones observes that in the *Annunciation* of Simone Martini, for example, "the artist makes the words of Gabriel, which are the counterpart of the Breath of God, pass through the lilies as if to purify the fertilizing principle of the last trace of early uncleanness, to cleanse it of any possible remaining dross" (2: 357).

4

Joyce, like Gabriel, needed that purification process, the defense against forbidden wishes, just as he needed to expose and mock it—but not openly, at least in this story. He shared the Christian need to displace female sexuality upward to the innocent—the musical?—ear even as he needed to undermine it by driving it downward into the dirt. Certainly by the time he was writing

¹⁴See Eggers 383. See also Panofsky 142.

¹⁵Cf. Eggers passim.

Ulysses, if not before, Joyce was acutely aware of the purity and perversity of his own sexual feelings. That he was still stirred by the theme of aural impregnation of the Virgin is revealed by several seriocomic allusions to the idea. Molly Bloom remembers the story by the "priest," Master François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, in which the giant baby is blocked from being born in the normal way because a "horrible astringent" was given to his mother Gargamelle to help her when "her bottom" fell out "as a result of the tripe she had eaten," which "obstructed and constricted" her "membranes," and eventually led to the baby's "leaping up," climbing through the "hollow vein" and coming "out by the left ear" (68–69). (This revises what Jones describes as the child's theory of procreation, which begins and ends with the "bumgut." It also revises the Christian fantasy that favors the right ear, and as entry rather than exit point.) Several cross-references by Joyce make it clear that the divine impregnation is also being hinted at in the allusion to Gargantua's birth: in "Sirens" Mr Dedalus announces to Ben Dollard that his voice would "burst the tympanum of her ear . . . with an organ like yours"; Father Cowley adds: "Not to mention another membrane" (11.536–37). And in "Circe" Ben Dollard appears after Virag's allusion to the story that Mary's child was begotten by "Panther, the Roman centurion," who "polluted her with his genitories . . . Messiah! He burst her tympanum." Ben "stands forth, his loins and genitals tightened into a pair of black bathing bagslops" (15.2599–2607).

By the time of *Ulysses*, the idea of the Madonna's impregnation through the ear, now embodied in the surface of the text—not only, as in "The Dead," in the subtext—had metamorphosed into a more open, perhaps more conscious awareness on Joyce's part of what are various comic fusions of the Christian legend with the underlying sexual theory of birth.

In "The Dead" Joyce projects a dynamics of primal wishes and defenses in such a way that at least a partial resolution of tensions seems to be reached. If Gabriel may plausibly be thought of as representing a more repressed version of Joyce himself, who was more at home with gross and vulgar thoughts than his "delicate" hero, we find that he grows significantly as he modifies his need to purify and debase the image of his wife. Reducing his own inward divisions also reduces his need to see Gretta as a set of pure and impure part-objects suitable mainly for aesthetic contemplation and vulgar (even violent) fantasizing—a chiaroscuro of good and evil. Gabriel's final fantasy of the falling snow to some extent moves away from the failed fantasies of the past and out into the world of death and life where he has a limited—but authentic—capacity for love and his wife is a real person in a real world who one day, like Aunt Julia, will die. The "softly falling" snow, "falling faintly through the universe" (233–34), intimates an achieved oneness without any diminishment of true multiplicity and true separation.

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