The Living and The Dead

by

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MA Thesis – Dr.Garrett R FitzGerald

Dedicated to my wife, Trudy, to our children

and their children, and to all of our people,

living and dead.

MA Thesis – Garrett R FitzGerald

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Mossy, Kevin, Francie, Dermot and the lads.

ABOVE ALL – “ALL MY PEEPILS”

Table of Contents

MA Thesis – Garrett R FitzGerald

Notes

The Short Story, “She Must Know Something” has been published in “Southword” (2007).

The Short Story, “The Yank” has been published in “Medicine Weekly” (2008).

All of the Short Humorous Essays have been published in “Medicine Weekly” (2006-2008).

My novel, “Navajo Gene” was begun in May of 2007 and is now in the final stages of revision.

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SHORT STORIES

She Must Know Something

Zabrinski was beside the bed. The vase the sour nurse gave him wouldn't stay upright. Water spilled over the edge and wet the bedside table. The vase leant sideways no matter how he arranged the flowers. They should have cut the stems shorter, he thought; all they wanted was his twenty dollars. In the end, he leaned the heads of the flowers and the side of the vase against the wall. Most of the water was gone. If they died, they died, he thought. He liked to keep busy in the room. Otherwise he'd have to talk to her. The messy business with the flowers was the easy bit.

His wife started up, "They only talked about money and hunting rifles and vacations. They didn't care about my pain. They didn't give a damn."

This again. He didn't look at her. He moved across the room and took in the view at the window, nothing much except brick walls. He watched the raindrops on the panes following tracks made by other raindrops. They avoided the islands that came from years of crud. He could smell the Mekong and heard the blades of the choppers in the distance. She brought him back.

"You're not listening to me, Jack. You're just like them," she said. "Griffin isn't listening, I just know it. The nurses aren't neither. None of 'em believe me. That's the worst thing."

He came back to the bedside but still did not look at her. He looked at the drip tube which went into her arm and at the plastic bottle at the top. He got blood from one of those drips years ago. He didn't remember much about it, except those slope doctors. He read the bottle. There was a strip that said KCL.

"They're giving you something called KCL," he said.

"What's that for?" she asked.

He still looked at the stuff. "It's probably something to get rid of the nightmares," he said, "some kinda tranquilliser, maybe." He sensed what was coming.

"I'm sick of telling you. I haven't got nightmares, not then, not now. I don't need tranquilisers. Why don't you listen? You're all the same."

Funny; the pain in his leg only comes bad when she's like this. It told him she was getting ready for the 'buried alive' story again. She should have been where he'd been and she'd know about 'buried alive'. She comes in for some kinda biopsy, she makes it into World War Three. There was less whining when the *Titanic* sank.

She pushed herself further down the bedclothes and looked at the ceiling. It was white like everything else. She closed her eyes as if he wasn't there.

Zabrinski sat in the chair near the window. He counted twelve electric outlets beside the bed, none of them in use. If she was as bad as she says, there would be lots of machines plugged in. They don't, he supposed, have all these outlets in psychiatric hospitals. Maybe they have just one for electric shock treatment. Her mother had twenty shocks that time in Portland. Didn't make much difference, went to the grave complaining. Complaining about men mostly. Now here we go again. She started up again.

"I told Griffin I heard everything they said. I coulda been talking to the wall. You know what he said? He said 'now now, you'll do real fine'. I thought he was gonna pat my head and say 'there's a good doggie'. He almost did. You know what else he said? He said the head would clear in a couple of days and

I'd be real fine. He's the worst kind of doctor, thinks that people have no brains. I'd like to give him hunting rifles, and shooting elk in Wyoming, and stocks and shares."

The husband rubbed his bad leg just above the knee. It took three months to fix before they shipped him home, then half a year in the Veterans. Then they gave him a medal and the door. He knew that whatever he said would make no difference with all this head stuff. The bit about there's a good doggie sounded just about right. They should maybe give Dr. Griffin a medal too. Good thing the HMO was coughing up for all this. At least she won't get to go to the State Hospital two hours drive away. Olsen would fire him from the sawmill if he took any more time off. Olsen would love to fire him, period. He watched the drops come down from the bottle into a plastic chamber. His leg felt like she was ready to start again. She talked to the ceiling,

"I even told him that I knew about his arrangement to meet Loren what's-her-name, the anesthesiologist. How could I know that? You tell me that!" She trumpeted her nose into a *Kleenex. "*Like she should learn how to do her job! Six-thirty Friday for cocktails in Shiki's in Eugene and a Japanese dinner. How could I know that if I hadn't heard it all? Shoulda told him I'd tell his wife, how'd he like them eggs? She's going to a high-school reunion in Seattle, leaving Friday noon. Very cosy."

She looked over at her husband, still at the leg. He looked at the white wall.

The vase nurse came in and made like the room was empty. She looked at the drip and yawned and wrote on the clipboard at the end of the bed. She

started for the door. She turned around half-ways and said to nobody in particular, leastwise nobody she was looking at.

"You're getting along real fine, honey. Doctor says you get to go home soon as the marbles clear up." She took a chocolate from the box on the bed table. She went out.

"There it is again. She's just like everybody else. You heard her."

"Maybe you should listen to what she says," he said. "Sure talks like a nurse although she don't behave like one. She must know something."

"Maybe she should listen to what I say, and you too and Griffin and the rest. You're all the same. I can't take much more of this."

He knew the feeling alright, Olsen at the mill and the V.A. and now this. The whole package didn't amount to much. He looked at her head, white in the white bedclothes, could have been a stranger.

"This leg is acting up again. I gotta go loosen up and get some supper."

"Go ahead. You're all the same, anyways. And take them damn flowers with you, they're not worth a damn the way you have 'em," she said. She looked up at the white ceiling. He got out the door. He paced the corridor. In a while, he went to the nurses' desk where there was a regular nurse.

"Can you tell me, please?" he asked. "This doctor, Griffin, is he a good doc?"

"Never seen better and I've seen 'em all," she said. "Sure wouldn't mind he did a job on me." She laughed.

He turned to leave. He crashed into a moving gurney that carried a gigantic yellow woman. He felt the shot of pain up through his leg. He felt dizzy for a moment, thought he would pass out. The big woman raged at him but he

didn’t hear what she said. He reached for his bayonet. It wasn’t there. He stumbled into the elevator. The elevator was almost full. He pushed at all the buttons till the door closed. When it did, it took the heads off the flowers.

In the bar down the street, he drank whisky. There was a football game on TV. There were no customers to look at it. He looked at the mirror under the bottles. The old guy in there used to be me, he thought.

Zabrinski swallowed more whisky for his leg and whatever.

Midges

The Latvian girl set the second bottle of *Chablis* in the ice bucket and took the empty one into the house. The woman waved her hands wildly to scatter the midges. They had been swarming since nine o'clock. It was still bright.

"You'll have to do something about those trees," she said. "The midges are breeding in them. Soon, we won't be able to sit out at all. What's the point of having a big garden if you can't sit out in it?"

"Didn't I bring you those insect-repellent torches lately?" he asked. "Why don't you light them and keep the bugs away? Where are they anyway?"

"What's the point? When they're used up we'll still have billions of midges in the trees. You'll just have to do something about the trees. You're always saying it yourself – treat the cause. I don't think I can stick much more of it." She sipped on the wine. He waited.

"That woman's not coming here - no way. It's me or her. No way."

"It'd only be for a few weeks until she's able to look after herself again," he said. "Sofija will look after her."

"Sofija has enough to do," the wife said. "That woman would drive bats out of a barn. I don't want Sofija walking out on us, not after I've just finished breaking her in. As well as that, you know well that any of the others would grab Sofija as soon as she came on the market. Where would that leave me? I'd be a prisoner in my own house."

He poured some more wine. Sofija came through the patio door and stood nearby until she was noticed. The husband looked up to her.

“The man of the truck in the road wishes to make the keys for the red car,” she said.

“I’ll be back in a minute, love,” he said to his wife.

He went into the house and out through the front door. The van was the biggest he had ever seen. Two big men in jeans and t-shirts were taking long planks from the back. They placed one on either side. The older man approached him.

“Just the keys, sir, please,” he said. “Everything nice and handy, like. We’ve had a long drive. No need now for guards nor nothing like that. We’re only doing our job. No trouble now, okay?”

The husband nodded. The younger man drove the big red car up along the planks and into the van. The older one pushed the planks in after it. The automatic door came down finally behind the car like a big curtain. The husband sensed the eyes of the woman in the house opposite. Soon there’d be new neighbours. The big van drove away. He winked at Sofija. She went back inside.

His wife was still shooing midges.

“What was that about the car?” she asked.

“It’s gone in for a diagnostic,” he lied. “There’s a noise coming from somewhere in the engine.”

“I hope you don’t think you’re going to take mine,” she said. “Anyway, I was thinking of getting the new model, like Julie Heffernan has. I have the brochures upstairs.”

He sat down. The midges formed a cloud above his head.

“She’ll have to go to a nursing home for a while,” she said. “You can visit

all you want, just don't ask me to come with you. I only married *you*, not the half of Carrick-on-Suir."

"If we cut them down," he said, "we'll have no privacy. The Cuniffe's will be gawking in at us day and night. I don't think you'd like that."

"You can get fully grown trees these days, you know, and then plant them again. There must be lots of nice trees that midges don't breed in. We can't go on like this forever."

She stared, uncomprehending, at the wall of *Cupressus Leylandii.* From the side, he thought, she looks just like her uncle Eddie when he's slipping greyhounds.

"I was thinking about the nursing home thing," he said. "You wouldn't have thanked me if I had put *you* in a nursing home after your trouble. It's at times like that that you need your own people, love."

"Keep your voice down. Sofija might hear you. She's learning English too fast for her own good. I don't want the world and its mother to know my business. Isn't that why I went to Cardiff? You'd never know who you'd run into in London. Anyway, it's different – *I'm* not her own people. *You* might be, but *I'm* not. Why can't your sister take her, or is *she* not her own people?"

"Marie has a small flat in Sligo, love," he said. "It's two hundred miles away and, besides, she has only one bedroom. We've got seven, love, just for the two of us – and Sofija of course."

"I'd love to kick off my shoes, but these bloody midges would eat the croobs off me. When are you going to do something about those awful trees, or will I have to go to Paddy Maguire's myself?" she asked. He poured her some more wine. She reached for her glass, dislocating an eyelash. "And don't think

I'm going to bloody cook for twenty people on Saturday week. I'm getting caterers in."

"I'm not sure we can rise to that at the moment, love," he said. "McCarthy's charge one-hundred euro a head. Just a big tub of *spaghetti bolognaise*, garlic bread and some salad will do fine. I can bring some plonk from the supermarket. Sofija could do most of it. They're not important people."

"Is that right now? Aren't you very generous altogether with my *au pair*?" she said. "And you'd like to give free board and lodgings to that ould bibe as well. I'd sooner have the midges any day." She tried to fix her eye. "And who do you think would have to wipe her arse for her?" she asked. "Did you think of that? For your information, mister, the O'Donoghue girls don't wipe arses. Do you hear that? No fucking way."

She stood up and rocked a little on her feet. Her sunglasses lapsed forward on to her nose. She looked down on her husband.

"I'm very tired now," she said. "I'm going to *my* room."

The Yank

He was the only passenger to get off at the Junction. He carried no baggage. He watched the Cork train slink away from the station and disappear silently into the black night. He stood awhile on the platform, and allowed the east wind to search him until the station lights dimmed. A distant car backfired loudly and he hurried towards the exit.

A solitary hackney car refreshed itself in the parking lot. Inside its misted windows, a young man pulsed his head violently. The man tapped on the driver's door. The youth opened enough window to fill the railway station and the county beyond with hard music. Eyebrows up, he looked at the man.

"Are you available?" the man asked twice; first quiet, then loud. The youth jumped out to open a rear door. Man and car vibrated together until the youth sat back in and turned off the CD player.

"Where to?" he asked, turning around to examine his passenger. All he saw was a man.

"Can you bring me to the place where Dinny Lacey was shot?" the man asked.

"And where would that be?" the youth asked, in charge of the world. He was never surprised at what a Yank might ask.

"I don't know exactly. I would have thought that a local cab driver would know. If you don't know where it is, why don't you ask around?"

The young fellow told him to hold on for a while and he'd see what he could do. He was back in no time.

“The woman at the house doesn’t know, but she says that Neddie Dwyer would be up on that class of thing, that he’s pure stone mad for the internet. We can stop at his place if you want; ‘tis only down the road.”

After the stop, the youth brought information and advice.

“He says what you’re looking for is somewhere up near Ballydavid, back in the Glen of Aherlow, but we’ve no hope of finding it in the dark. The father’ll bring you out in the morning if you’re staying the night in Tipp.”

He had given his decision.

“We’ll go now,” the man said. “Just bring me to the Glen. I’ll know when we get there.”

They met no traffic on the coach road up towards Slievenamuck or down into the glen. They stopped at the t-junction at Mrs. Burke’s. The youth asked,

“Where now?”

The man told him to make a left turn. The car went on awhile into the black countryside and the black night. It seemed to be going nowhere.

“Go left here, and go right at the next,” the man ordered. The road got smaller.

“Stop here where you are and let me out!” the man said, suddenly.

They were nowhere. Headlights lit up a ridge of grass in the middle of the little road. The driver didn’t know what to make of the man he had.

“Are you sure?” he said. “There’s nothing at all out here only fields, and ‘tis pitch shaggin’ dark. You’ll have no chance of a seat back to town ‘til tomorrow morning. Sure you’ll freeze the tangos off yourself.”

The man got out and dropped a twenty note in through the window.

“Do you mind me asking you who in the jays is Dinny Lacey?” the youth asked, searching for change.

“I do,” the man said. Then he was gone.

He made the Ryan place in no time. Sporadic shots sounded in the distance. In time, the gunfire, rifles mostly, came nearer and from several sides. Suddenly, bullets raked the kitchen. He crouched under a window.

“Stay back, Dinny, stay back! Paddy……Bill……stay back!” he shouted. He peered out urgently over the land. Free State uniforms swarmed in the ditches all around, maybe twenty or thirty, and more coming from the road. The sun picked out a machine-gun in a meadow below, four brother soldiers dragging it uphill.

“Ah, God, Dinny, come back, you’ll be killed, come back for God’s sake,” he cried to himself.

There was shouting, Dinny’s voice amongst others, more shots. Alone in the sanctuary of the scullery, the man whispered a prayer and wept awhile.

He struck out for Galteemore. He’d be fine there.

Bonsai

The leaves of the bonsai dripped with mist from the sprayer.

"That's enough, Tom," Rosie shouted, "You'll kill the fucking thing."

Tom stopped spraying. He set the clear plastic container, surprisingly three-quarters full, on the conservatory window-sill. He could have sworn that it was only half-full the previous day. Whichever, he was hardly going to finish the planet with the small amount he had used. He wiped the moisture from the nozzle and the part that said *Rose Plus.* He wondered how in hell she could come to the conclusion that the spray would kill the plant. It was getting bigger and more luxuriant by the day. If it kept on like this, it would grow out the window. Before he had started spraying some weeks back, the blooming thing had been on its last legs. The spray had been the kiss of life for it. He knew well that bonsai or was it bonsais are supposed to be small, but they are not supposed to be dead. What did she know about it anyway? Wouldn't know a bonsai from a hole in the ground. She appeared at his elbow and, grabbing the container, looked at the amount of liquid remaining.

"Jesus Christ, do you want to poison us all with goddamn chemicals? Open the bloody window." She went back to the kitchen with the sprayer. She locked it in a cupboard.

She didn't always swear like this. Lately, she'd make a sailor blush. He had been putting it down to 'women's trouble.' This stuff about not being able to sleep was part of it. She should maybe go see a doctor, but no way was he going to be the man to suggest it. Their oldest boy Mattie might be the man to do it, apple of the maternal eye and all, though Mattie didn't look like he'd

volunteer. Tom had noticed that the boys were sending excuses not to come by for dinner or even just drop in to say *hello*. Couldn't blame them, with her accusing them of using her as a free meal service. She had told her youngest, Watty, that *the days of the white slavers were over and if you don't fucking like it you should go to Sierra Leone or somewhere where the women count for nothing.* Watty hadn't been by since.

During the night, Tom had dreamt about her. They are sitting at the captain's table on a liner somewhere on the Atlantic. They have had just one martini each before dinner. She's doing her recent thing, holding court and asking the captain about his philosophy of life and then exploding without warning, saying that he was a fucking philistine and should get a life for himself and has he ever read a fucking book other than penny dreadfuls. In this scene, Tom is saying *now, now, Rosie, don't be like that, love* and she turns on him and says that he is the biggest pseudo of the lot and she can't figure out why she married him and he's fuck all good in bed shooting off in seconds like a schoolboy with a dirty picture and what use is that to any woman, she'd like one decent ride in her lifetime before she'd die, but it wouldn't be him that would give it to her, or, for that matter, that fruit of a captain and his poncey beard who probably has to sit down to piss. She screams then, for the benefit of all the hundreds of diners present, *just one time I'd like a man that's hung right just one fucking time is that too much to ask.* She asks a Mrs Astor, whose husband owns half of the world, if she would kindly take the superior look off her face or she would break it for her. Tom has his head bent in shame looking at his dinner plate which says *Titanic.*

He had woken up before finding out if they made it to the lifeboats. He felt guilty that he had been hoping that she would go down with the ship, or, in the event of her being saved, that he would go down himself. He had gotten out of bed to go to the bathroom when he noticed that Rosie still hadn't come to bed. Four o'clock in the morning and she was still downstairs. He could hear faintly from the sitting-room below a duet between herself and Edith Piaf - *non, je ne regrette rien.* Sure beats, he thought, the German lessons of the night before, the man on the teach yourself CD slowly saying *ein, zwei, drei, fier* - and herself shouting back at him *get on with the fucking thing you goosestepping half-wit.*

His brother Pat hadn't put a tooth in it when asked for his opinion; 'deranged' was his diagnosis, no hesitation, and weren't all of her family cracked anyway, what did he expect? He had advised Tom to 'abandon ship'.

Tom was in little doubt that Rosie's strange mental state was steadily worsening over the past year and some. Yet, there were some weeks when she could be her old self, as near to sane as made no difference. He particularly recalled Lent last year, when she said she was off sugar, and she was great until St.Patrick's Day, almost back to her old self. Just like in that movie about King George of England; the guy was off the walls most of the time, but other times he turned up bright as a button with a new pink wig and put manners on the members of the House of Commons, all of them rotting from syphilis. Tom tried to remember the name of the king's disease but couldn't, something like *polyfilla.* It was a family thing too, which could explain the problem of the crazy O'Flanagans that he got himself married into. The worsening of her problem at night fit the story in the movie, the king going especially nutty during the time of

the full moon. What an amazing disease, he thought. Rosie would be the last person you'd expect to get something like that, after all those years of being stable and placid. Thirty years of peace, and now her shagging brains were short-circuiting. Maybe she should get that electric shock treatment and fuse the whole lot.

The thing had started slowly enough, just one or two nights a week. In time, it was four, and now, almost all the time. Concerts late at night and headaches all day. He was becoming grumpy himself, the colleagues giving him a wide berth in the office. He felt guilty a lot of the time, as if he were the cause of it all. Life was going down the tubes, and enough was enough. Pat was probably right; he should get out of the house and start up again somewhere else. He should maybe sit her down and tell her that things weren't working out anymore. But he could not because he was a coward, and because he'd go too far if he started and tell her that he hated her more than anything else in creation.

He had explained to Pat why he was now thinking of her as 'the cannibal'; every time he opened his mouth, she would eat him. Back a few months, when the subject was touched upon one morning, she told him that if he didn't like what she did with her own life, he could pack up his things and *get the fuck outa my sight and take your damned jackboots with you and you'll be doing everybody a big favour.*

Saturdays and Sundays were the worst. Time was when he could have a few of the friends over for bridge or poker and a couple of beers. Now, his friends were always too busy. Denis Murphy would probably never speak to him

again; not since the night that Rosie burst in on the game and told him he was a *fucking eunuch* and that his wife had probably *healed over from lack of use*.

She called from the kitchen, “Can’t you turn that fucking radio off and go out and do something useful, for fuck’s sake. Like do the shopping or anything useful at all. I need some quiet in the house. The migraine is back all morning. It’s blowing the head offa me.” She was now in front of him, no stopping her. “It wouldn’t surprise me one bloody bit if it’s from the chemicals you’re squirting all over the place. Or do you even give a shit what happens to me? But of course you never did, so why should I be surprised? I have to get some sleep. It’s the only thing that fixes it. How in the jaysus do you think I can get to sleep with you prowling around?”

Outside, he started the car. He drove to the parking lot of the shopping centre, setting the car into a poorly shaded area under a tree that was all but dead – possibly, he thought, from the fumes from so many cars. At the same time last year, it had been covered in a gaudy coat of pink cherry blossoms. Now, there were a few scrawny pink bits here and there. He wondered what the sprayer might do for it, other than give it migraine.

It took probably less than half an hour to come to the final decision. He had been over all the arguments in his head during the past few months. Only the need for a decision had remained, and now it was made; he was getting the hell out. He felt better than he had in a long time. The details of his move fell into place by themselves. Confident in himself, he eased out of the lot and headed back for what would no longer be his home.

Rosie was asleep in ‘her’ room, snoring like a hibernating grizzly bear, the windows wide open. He could smell the *Rose Plus* smell, even upstairs in the

bedroom. Time was when they shared a bedroom happily together, but that was now only a distant memory. Be easier share a bed with the quare one in *The Exorcist,* the head going round and round and green puke everywhere and the bed floating around in the air and her growling like a pit-bull. Christ, he thought, she has nothing on my one.

After he had quietly packed his stuff into suitcases, he went downstairs to the sitting-room and set the letter on the coffee table. The envelope read *Rosie – Personal*. He took a last look around the room, the books, the plasma screen TV, the ducks, the sprayer on the window-sill, the lace curtains, the wag-o-the-wall. The wedding photograph on the mantle showed a different Rosie; relaxed, happy, beautiful, not a bit daft-looking, not like now. If her picture was taken now in the same clothes, it would show her mad hair growing out through the dainty wedding hat. Of course, nowadays she wore huge *French resistance* berets which made her look like Henry the Eighth. The suitcases fit snugly into the trunk of his car. Determined and relieved, he began to ease the front-door key from his key ring. He stopped half-way through. He stood for a moment at the hall table.

Back in the sitting-room, he lifted the sprayer from the window-sill. It was almost empty. He unscrewed the top and sniffed.

Michael

West Cork, January 1899.

The narrow roadway from the school had small pools of water scattered here and there on its rough surface, and to Michael's delight, each puddle was covered by a sheet of ice. He moved from pool to pool breaking the ice caps with the heel of his boot. He had started just outside the school and was making his way very slowly towards the forge, ensuring that no puddle was left without his attention. Sometimes it took two or three blows of his heel to break the ice. Other puddles caved in easily, the muddy water splashing over his knees and short trousers despite his quick reflexes. He began to get the measure of the task as he progressed, and could now tell the thickness of the ice by its appearance, and therefore the amount of force needed to crack the cover without getting splashed.

Jim looked up the road from the green double doors of the forge. The fading January sunshine seemed to relieve the countryside of its dowdy winter appearance. The only sounds were from a few birds who, for reasons best known to themselves, hadn't availed of the annual trip south, and of course, from the playing of the boy. He was glad that the year had turned and looked forward to the lengthening of the evenings. He watched as the lad approached, completely consumed by his interest in the ice. Michael was growing fast, he thought, and had the makings of a big fellow like some of his people before him. He went back inside to check on the fire.

Michael completed his ice breaking outside and came through the door to see Jim moving the red hot horseshoe to the anvil with the iron tongs. He watched as the heavy hammer beat the shoe into shape. Sparks flew off the anvil in all directions. Jim seemed to know exactly where to stand at any particular time in the operation ensuring that none of them landed on his thick arms or hands. After inspecting the shoe from several aspects, the blacksmith, apparently satisfied with the shape he had produced, plunged the end of the tongs into a water bath, creating a loud hissing as the fire turned to steam. He dipped the shoe in and out of the water until it resumed its metallic colour and then set it back on the anvil to cool further. He went over to the black mare to calm her, whispering into her ear and patting her neck.

"I don't think it's just a matter of shoeing that has her lame," he said, pointing to a hind leg. "'Tis a pity your father, God be good to him, isn't still with us. There was the man that could sort out a lame horse, no better man. He had the gift, alright, God rest him."

Michael tossed his head sideways to throw his fringe back from his eyes, to get a closer look at the horse. He knew it was from the Driscoll's place back towards Sam's Cross and that its name was Jenny, or Jinny, as local people would say. He knew every horse and pony in the locality, what they were used for, how old they were, and, of course, who owned them. As far as he was concerned, not one of them was a patch on Gypsy, his own white horse. They all ended up in the forge at one time or another. It was assumed until proven otherwise that any problem in the behaviour of a horse had to do with shoes and, while that may have frequently explained matters, the blacksmith was often expected to cure ailments that had nothing to do with shoes or hooves. Before

Michael's father had died, Jim could call on him for his expertise in curing animals, but nowadays, he was left with the job of shoeing and, if that didn't solve a horse's problems, he had nothing else to offer the owner.

Satisfied that the shoe was cool enough, Jim took his place at the off-hind leg of the mare. Gently, but authoritatively, he stood astride the hoof, resting the fetlock against his leather apron. Holding the short tacks in a row between his lips, he completed the filing he had commenced earlier. The shoe was nearly right, and some final work with the file allowed it to be placed flush with the hoof. Jim expertly hammered the shoe on and settled the mare's foot back on the ground.

"Back her out there, Mick, like a good lad, and tether her to the cartwheel outside, will you?" Jim waited for the boy's return and then took down his billycan and two cups and un-matching saucers from a shelf.

"Will you take a sup of tea, Mick?" he asked.

"No thanks, Jim." the boy replied. He watched as the smith poured himself a drop of milky tea and, screwing on the head of the can, replaced it on the shelf. The boy pulled up a wooden stool close to the forge and put his hands in front of him to warm them. Jim sat on a wobbly sugawn chair and looked around the building as if seeing it for the first time, one side of his face lighting up in the glow of the fire. The tea splashed a little as he transferred some from the cup to the saucer, blowing on the liquid to cool it before tilting it into his mouth. Michael knew from before that it took three mouthfuls effected by noisy sucking to empty each fill of the saucer, replenished from time to time from the cup which sat on the anvil. After each round, Jim wiped his mouth with the back

of his hand and cleaned the corners of his mouth by a pincer movement of his thumb and forefinger.

"What did Master Lyons teach ye today?" the blacksmith asked.

"Nothing I didn't know already," said the boy. "He was on about the famine again."

"Do you know what I call it?" asked Jim. Michael knew well what he called it – the 'English Famine' - but he was going to hear it again. And he did. He knew why Jim called it that. Because the English and their landlords and their agents were the cause of it, he knew.

"Didn't your own two uncles give a year in Cork gaol over them bastards before ever you were born? Don't forget that, Mick!" Michael would not forget, nor would he be allowed forget. His late father's two brothers had horse whipped two landlord agents and been thrown in gaol for it.

"Do you know what your uncles did wrong, and why they ended up under lock and key?" This was a question which the boy had not been asked before, and which he knew was about to be answered by the man who put it.

"I'll tell you what they did wrong, Mick, and why they were imprisoned," said Jim. He renewed his saucer before continuing, and slurped his tea. "They went to gaol because they left the bastards alive, God forgive me, that's why they went to gaol," he said. "That's exactly where they went wrong, and don't ever forget that. And you can ask Master Lyons if you like and he'll tell you the very same." He paused, looking in great earnest at the lad.

"How old are you now, Mick?" he asked.

"Eight since October gone," replied the boy.

"I suppose Master Lyons told you all about Joan of Arc?" he asked.

"He did, faith." All of his brothers said 'faith'.

"Well, then you'll be well able to answer me this one. Listen carefully now, here it is. If Noah's Ark was made of wood, what was Joan of Arc made of?"

When the boy could not come up with the answer, Jim continued,

"She was Maid of Orleans! Do you get it? Isn't that a right good one?"

Michael thought for a while and then saw the trick in the answer. Jim was a great man for wise things. Michael had dropped in every day after school since he was five years old.

"Then, there's other things that you should know," said the blacksmith. "There's things that you should know, and that you should keep to yourself and not let on that you know, do you follow me?"

Michael felt secure with Jim. Jim trusted him, and treated him like a grown-up. Jim told him secrets. Michael had never shared these with anyone and knew that he never would. Recently, the secrets, it appeared to him, were bigger secrets. The blacksmith finished his tea, dipping the cup and saucer into the bath of water and shaking them out before replacing them to drain on the shelf. He shook the leather apron to discard any drops which might have spilled from the saucer, and stood up.

"There's work to be done yet before this day is finished; alright for ye youngfellas with time on ye're hands." He said. "Would you tell your big brother that I'll have the cart-wheel fixed by tomorrow evening, if he'd like to call down, and you can bring him the bill, hold on a second and I'll give it to you, and you can tell him that it's at a good price, I couldn't take any more off."

He took a pencil from behind his ear and licked the lead at the end of it. He wrote in a good hand, '*John Collins, Woodfield, to repairs – ninepence - J.Santry.*' He reviewed his note, then sat down again and drew a line through *'ninepence'* and wrote '*eightpence half-penny'*.

Michael took the small piece of hardware paper and put it in his schoolbag. He went out the door into the fading day. He passed around the mare, giving her hindquarters a wide berth, and set for home. He had gone only about forty yards when he heard Jim call after him,

"Michael! Come back a minute, will you!"

Back in the forge, Michael watched Jim put his head outside, look up and down the roadway, and then close the door. Once inside, the smith brought the sugawn to the centre of the floor and stood on it. His hands raised above his head, he carefully brought down a long-handled implement from an overhead roof joist, and stepped down. The loose cloth was removed from the end of a metal pike with great reverence by the smith, who caressed the head gently with the covering, laying it across the anvil and holding it at two places on the shiny wooden handle.

"Hold on to that for a minute," he said. He went back to the door and looked up and down the road again. "What do you think of that, Mick?" His hands were trembling. He did not wait for an answer. "How old would you say 'tis? Give it your very best guess, now," he advised.

The boy was also trembling as he held the polished handle. He did not yet know why, but he knew it was a very important question. He felt a slight tightness in his throat and a pounding in the chest. He was aware that he was unusually alert and vigilant, like the feeling just before landing a trout. But, he

could not think of an answer. Jim began to polish the head of the pike with the cloths. Then he took the boy's hand and placed it at the head of the pike.

"'Tis exactly one-hundred and one years old. My grandfather made it here where you're standing now and he fought the English with it, and my father took it into battle fifty-one years ago, and he did the same thirty-three years ago this year, God be merciful to the two of them."

Michael was unable to speak. He stared at the pike. Jim poured a small drop of oil onto the head and rubbed it with the cloth, which he then wrapped about the head. He went to the entrance and checked the road again. When he returned, he stepped up onto the sugawn and replaced the pike in its hiding place. He turned the wheel for the bellows until the coals began to glow more brightly. He cleaned his hands on his apron, then sat down. Michael hadn't moved.

"Sit down, Mick, 'til I tell you something between yourself and myself." Michael backed onto the wooden stool. Jim continued, "Did you see the end of the pike? Like, how fresh it was looking, did you? I look after it well. No-one only the two of us know where or what it is, and 'tis a thing that we'll keep to ourselves. I can tell you now, as God is my judge, that that pike has been to the heart of Ireland's curse in more ways than one, if you follow my meaning, Mick."

The boy did not follow exactly, yet he knew that he would think about it on the way home. He knew that what Jim was saying was very important. Outside of the forge, or when there were others present, he addressed the blacksmith properly as 'Mister'. Only when they were alone did he call him 'Jim'. That was another one of their secrets. Jim went on,

"Pikes are fine but they won't do the job any more. I'm telling you now that we'll never be free until we have guns and plenty of them. The gun is the only man for them fellas. The gun is the only way to clear them out of our country. Remember that, Mick, and you'll have learned something today. The day for the pike and the day for the talking is long over. Imagine what twelve good men with twelve good guns in every town and every county could do for Ireland! God, I tell you, I wish I was a younger man again!"

The lad picked up his satchel again and said,

"I better be going, Jim, for the milking, like."

"Oh, tear away, let you so. Don't forget the note for John now, mind," the blacksmith said. "I'll give you one more word of advice and you'd do well to remember it. It's about the priests. They'll tell you that there are ten commandments, and they're right. But some of them don't know about the eleventh one. The eleventh commandment says that there is no sin in fighting for your people and your country. So, if a man is fighting for his country and does what he has to do, he doesn't have to go running to priests to tell them all about it. If there is no sin, there is no need for a priest. Remember that, Mick, and remember it well. Good luck to you, now."

The moon was in front of him on the way home. The birds were much quieter than earlier. It would be another clear frosty night, and there would be ice caps to smash with his boot tomorrow.

Sea of White Crosses

The tour bus brought them to *Pointe du Hoc.* It was their forty-ninth visit to the headland; its familiar cliffs dropping away to the sea below, its giant craters caused by the D-day naval bombardment pock-marking the ground over hundreds of acres, huge hunks of masonry lying scattered away from the bunkers. There must have been – originally - twenty or more separate gun emplacements made from reinforced concrete, the immense guns pointed out to sea. The biggest guns had a range of twelve miles, easily covering both *Omaha* and *Utah* beaches.

Colonel Rudder's rangers had scaled the cliffs under heavy machine-gun fire just before dawn on June sixth while the shells from American ships exploded uselessly beyond them, too far inland. Half of the Rangers died on the ascent, a turkey-shoot for the Germans. Caroline could remember the exact number of her husband's company who died that day, and their names, if not all of the faces. But she had an imagined face for every missing one on her list of the dead. She'd recall each man for Woody later, and he'd give chapter and verse once again on where exactly each man was when he 'bought it'. Better, for now, to allow him some silence to take in, once again, the horror of that morning. Woody's worst nightmare, as strong as ever decades on, came from his discovery after the climb that the guns they were sent to destroy had been moved some days earlier by the Germans; all those young men - boys really - shot to pieces for nothing. The 'fuck-up dream', Woody called it. It never surprised Caroline that she got the same dream herself; she was a part of it all, a part of the rangers, a part of Woody.

They would visit the graves at the American Cemetery at *Omaha Beach* later. Years back, on the first visit, Woody had made a list of the plot numbers for every one of the 'boys' who died that day. Most of the names on his catalogue had been killed taking the *Pointe*, but not all. The rest, maybe a third of the fallen, died in close-up fire-fights a couple of miles inland in the *bocage* where the Germans had repositioned the biggest guns. All in all, three-quarters of the 'boys' had died. Woody knew them all, as she did. He always visited each individual grave and said a prayer, only slowly moving on to the next in the sea of white crosses. He had a horror of ever forgetting any one of them which is why their visits had become more rather than less frequent in recent years.

Caroline had known for years that *Pointe du Hoc* was the real reason why they had moved in 1949 from Maine to the south of England. Sure, Woody had lots of other very logical business reasons for the move – and his business got even better after the move – but, she believed, he didn't or couldn't see what was behind it all; dawn on June 6, 1944. In the beginning, she had grievously missed her own family and her book-store, her own life. But, in time, all that faded away as she merged with Woody. No matter what difficulties life threw at them, they had always had D-day together. It made them a stronger unit.

"Everything alright, darling?" she asked. "You just take your time." Caroline's cell phone rang. Jack's name came up on the screen. She decided to ignore it.

She squeezed Woody's arm, and then hung on to it, ready to follow wherever he turned. She allowed him to steer her carefully away from the grass-trodden paths over the uneven ground at the rear of one of the three relatively undamaged bunkers; even these had immense chunks of concrete strewn on the

nearby ground - in craters caused by ‘near misses’. She was careful going down the stone steps, once almost falling, and made sure to crouch low enough to avoid hitting her head going through the tiny entrance; she had knocked herself dizzy the first, or was it the second time. She repeated to herself her usual observation that people must have been much smaller in the 1940s. She knew her way through the simple concrete maze of each bunker, and again thought how hellish it must have been for the soldiers inside while they took twelve hours of pounding with shells powerful enough to throw massive pieces of concrete thirty feet – or more - into the air. She tried not to allow in the image of German soldiers being launched, sometimes in pieces, into the atmosphere, then falling back onto the ground or onto the remains of the bunkers. She knew better, since the first visit, than to share this observation with Woody.

He had never adopted the modern thinking of Allied veterans, some of them going so far as to have commemorative dinners with ‘old soldiers’ from the German side. How could he visit his old comrades in the field of white crosses, he had once asked her, and then sit down to eat, drink and make merry with the bastards who killed them? Caroline knew this attitude well, since the third or fourth visit, and came to adopt it herself. Once, during the seventies, they had met a German tourist couple– about their own age – and their daughter, in one of the gun bunkers, all extrovert and enthusiastic. The little silver-haired man had spoken to them in English, ‘I vass here, zen, ja. I vass in ze var here, yes?’ Woody had told him ‘go fuck yourself’ and dragged Caroline away to more trustworthy Allied ground. After that, Caroline avoided enemy contact, giving Germans a wide berth.

The morning could not have been more gentle, the slightest breeze from the west keeping the temperature down in the low seventies. This exposed headland and, of course, the American Cemetery were, paradoxically in Caroline's view, amongst the most peaceful places she had ever known. Once, while still living in the States, they had taken a trip out west – to the Dakotas – and had, as customary on their vacations, visited whatever historic battle sites they could find. She had sat for hours in the long summer grasses of the plain, only a couple of hundred feet from where, in 1876, George Armstrong Custer and his men were slaughtered and chopped into pieces, and she felt so tranquil that she hated to leave when the day had worn itself out. Woody, of course, had been getting more agitated, to the point of getting really pissed at Crazy Horse. Later, she cultivated a growing dislike for the Lakota Sioux and came to reverse her misinterpretation of the atmosphere at the Little Big Horn. Woody had been pleased with that. Woody was in charge of calling the shots; after all, he out-ranked her.

When Kerrie and Jack were young, they came along with their parents, at least until the teenage years, during which they elected to go to summer adventure camps rather than 'boring old Normandy again'. Caroline preferred it that way, much as she loved her son and daughter. D-day week in June was a special time, sacred really, for Woody and herself. Of course, others might wonder why they did exactly the same things every year, year after year; the *Pointe*, the American Cemetery, the museums – never the German one! - *Omaha* Beach, dinner on the seafront in the little hotel in Colville, the *Mulberry* harbour at Arromanches, a day in Bayeux and two in Caen, and all the memorial services. Others might wonder, Caroline reflected, but they had not been there

that famous morning. If they had, they might understand how she and Woody felt. She had long ago given up attempts to explain what it had been like to non-combatants. They would never know.

The crowds had slowly dwindled over the decades as the veterans grew old and infirm or died. A few years back, was it five or six, Woody had said that there were 'only seventeen of us' left. By then, Caroline considered herself to be one of the seventeen. Maybe, she thought, the others are all gone by now. She hadn't recognised anybody on the tour bus; years back, she would have known a good few of her 'old comrades'. Nowadays, there were young couples who were taking the tour because their grandfathers had taken part in the invasion - their grandfathers, for Heaven's sake!

"I'll answer this. It's Kerrie."

She opened her cell-phone.

"Hello, darling," she said, hoping for an easy ride.

"Hi Mum. Where are you?"

"We're on the *Hoc*. We're on our way back to the coach, appetites all ready for lunch."

"Mum! Please don't, please don't."

Kerrie always had the trigger-happy lachrymal glands.

"We're having a wonderful time here, darling," Caroline appealed. "Now, don't spoil it by upsetting yourself. Allow us this little leeway. It's not too much to ask, is it?"

"Mum, I can't handle it. I just can't. I hate the month of June."

"Well then, you just do your usual thing and put Dad and me out of your head, okay? Just for a few days. Please indulge us. We've earned it, you know."

“Mum, have you any idea how worrying this is? It’s doing my head in, and Jack’s too. Daddy wouldn’t have liked this stuff at all!”

“Let us do the worrying then, Kerrie,” Caroline said. “Just leave it with us. I don’t mean to be bossy, but it’s really none of your business. So, let it go, okay? I have to go now, the coach is here.”

“’Bye, Mum. I’ll call tomorrow.”

“That will be nice, honey. Your father sends his best.”

“Ah don’t, Mum, for God’s sake!”

Caroline closed her eyes to help force the call out of her mind. After a couple of minutes, the bad feeling left.

The battlefield tourists stood in line to board the coach. At the front, a pale old man in a wheelchair eternally nodded his head, his tongue rhythmically going in out in out in out. Apart from a pinched nose and sunken eyes, his head might just have been a bare skull. Caroline recognised him from way back, first name Bentley or Benjamin - something like that - the wheelchair a recent accessory. He had been in a different company to hers and Woody’s, but had somehow been on the same rope as them. He had on the usual old black blazer with the row of medals on the lapel, some dried food stains there too - old soldier’s goo. Woody had never crumbled like that.

“Darling,” she whispered. “There’s that man from Arizona, you know, the one in the chair. Arnold, isn’t it? Bart Arnold? Wasn’t he the third man to scale the Hoc, just ahead of us? I didn’t recognise him this morning.”

Of course, she knew who was first over, and second and third. They were fourth and fifth, even though Woody was wounded in the arm down on the beach before the rockets with the grappling hooks were fired up at the cliff-top.

Adrenaline, he used say; adrenaline got him up the rope. Then he had discovered that a substance in the brain, endorphin, had allowed him to ignore the pain; he hadn't realised that he had been shot until after they had killed all the Germans on the Hoc. He had often joked that they should have given the medal to the endorphin, as if it were some kind of creature like a dolphin or a puffin.

Kerrie's phone call played again in her mind, even more unpleasantly this time. Tomorrow, when the call came, she just wouldn't answer it. This week is for Woody and me. After that, everybody else could do as they damn pleased. Jack too had been bugging her about the trip, giving her the third degree. They had been unrelenting in their efforts to spoil everything, to control Woody and herself. Caroline had undergone yet another unpleasant session with her 'children' before getting away from them at the airport. Kerrie had told her that this would be 'the last time'. Caroline had promised her that it would. Damn right, it would.

The cemetery visit was after the packed lunch. On the way, Caroline checked that she had the catalogue, indicating the section, row and number of each of the graves which they would visit, thirty-eight white crosses and three Stars of David. Woody and herself always said the Lord's Prayer at each one, eyes tightly closed, assuming that the Jewish comrades wouldn't mind too much - it being the same Lord and all. She said hello to the wheel-chair man after he was reassembled for his journey around the cemetery, but he just looked off into the distance out to *Omaha* beach and the ocean beyond. Maybe he thought he was on Coney Island or Myrtle Beach or God knows where. Caroline scolded herself silently for this uncharitable kind of thinking.

The breeze had died down and dense light grey cloud banks had replaced the azure of the morning. As each grave was visited and ticked on the list, the rising temperature and humidity brought down a heavy sticky afternoon. Part way through the visitations, Caroline removed her cardigan and opened the second and third buttons on her blouse, adjusting the dog-tag chain, and remarked to Woody that he should take off his windcheater, that she would carry it for him. She was not surprised that he did not reply; when he was engrossed in his annual tour of their comrades' plots, he was disinclined to enter any conversation.

He was away in some other world, one which she could not enter – no matter how much she wished to go there. It was her greatest wish. Maybe this time, she hoped.

The list led to mostly identical white markers for privates, corporals, sergeants, captains, who had perished more than half a century earlier at ages of twenty-six, twenty, nineteen, twenty-nine, nineteen, twenty-one, on and on. All of them shared the same date of death, June six, 1944. Each soldier got one Lord's Prayer from Caroline, whose lips were getting drier. At Corporal Ben Levin's grave, she had to lean on his white Star for a moment to restore her faltering steadiness. The picture of Ben which her mind summoned up was the usual; Ben just ahead of Woody and herself, breaking suddenly from the hedges into open ground, cut almost in half by the machine guns. Woody and herself had stayed in the cover. Woody had been about to follow Ben, but she had managed to hold him back.

"Slow down, Woody. I need to take a breather," she said. Woody made no answer.

Private Ramirez's final resting place was where she fell, not even two-thirds way down the catalogue. From the ground, she could make out that he was from California, upside down. She recalled the balding top of Ramirez's head as she and Woody, already up on the *Pointe*, tried to haul the rope-ladder upwards. The head had exploded and the rope had gone slack. She could never forget that moment.

She did not understand why she was now so pleased that he was a Christian and smiled at the idea. She could move her head around, but couldn't get up – not that she wanted to. She could not see Woody; maybe he was finishing the round first. Yes, of course. Then, he'd take care of her, like always. She smiled even more. She tried to make out Private Ramirez's first name which was uncharacteristically evading her, but she couldn't put the inverted letters together in any reasonable order. Let's call him Buzz Ramirez, she decided aloud, Our Father which art in Heaven, take good care of Buzz Ramirez, well, you know who I mean, this boy of mine here, nineteen years old.

As her smile broadened, the world slowly became smaller and shorter and narrower, until there was only the Ramirez cross and the closing sky, and the thunder of the naval guns. Woody leant over the edge of the *Pointe*, holding the rope-ladder for her.

"Help me up, Woody," she called. "I'm very tired."

Apple Tart

Noreen walked on tip-toes around his chair to take away the tea cup and the plates. She knew better than to look into his match-distracted eyes. A Scottish commentator suggested that the Angolan team was losing its shape since the restart and playing into the hands of the Cameroons. The Egypt-Senegal game was next, then Ivory Coast versus Tunisia – the big one.

Murtie was on his holidays. Last year, it was the World Cup. He had taken in three matches every day for four weeks and recorded them all for viewing on into the night. Noreen had long ago accepted soccer-watching as a cause of impotence, the beast thrown discalced across his thigh, not a morrog out of it. She had watched him get more cracked by the day until he had to go back to work; herself that was supposed to be the one with the history.

Claddagh showed her the white of one eye looking backwards at her, partly furling his left lip to display a long canine and growled softly, not enough to frighten her but with sufficiency of warning not to step on his foot or near it while Angola took the corner kick. Claddagh was a four-time fan of the biennial African Cup of Nations, and usually gained about twenty pounds during the tournament. Like his master, he lost interest in the other thing during the time that was in it, staying burrowed into the floor in the crocodile disposition.

Noreen dived at the ringing telephone before the sound could disturb the Cameroon keeper. Cathy, calling from Lanzarotte, crackled on about sun and sand and cheap wine. Noreen closed her eyes imagining it all, wouldn't that be the life.

"Why are you whispering, Mam? I can hardly make out what you're saying to me."

"Am I?" she answered in a whisper. "It must be the line is bad."

"Mam, I'm telling you you should shoot that bollocks." Cathy suggested. Cathy knew the score.

"I have to go, pet, the doorbell is ringing. Enjoy yourself."

"Who's at the fucking door?" His master's voice, loud and clear. Noreen peered out through the side of the kitchen window to see Bid Kennedy's crimson face beneath a crimson moon, her big soft eyes looking the two ways to Cornamona. To gauge by its solid leaning against the wall, her bicycle looked to be in no hurry to leave. Whatever you do, Bid, Noreen thought, don't press the bell again or we're all finished.

"I was baking a few apple tarts, Noreen, and I put one in the oven for yereselves. 'Tis still warm; ye might like it with a cup of tea."

In from the outside world bowled big Bid in immediate acceptance of her own invitation. Her many layers of shocking winter apparel displaced some of the stiff air in the house. To Noreen's rising palpitation, Bid hit the lounge first.

"Jaysus, Murtie, you're not watching that ould soccer again. You're an awful man, entirely. Let me put on the light 'til I see you right."

She illuminated the room. Before Claddagh could set his growling hat, Bid hit him a no-nonsense skelp with her woolly scarf and he made for the space behind the couch - without waiting for the Cameroon penalty kick. Murtie, with pathologic difficulty, constrained the television from living him for a brief moment while the crowd at the equator roared for a goal which he would never see.

"I'll be out to the kitchen in a minute," he commanded shortly to the leftover space ahead of Bid, as she laid the apple tart on his lap.

Noreen had the kettle humming and her best knife ready for the tart. She had given the morning sharpening it – quietly of course - and admiring it. Bid spread herself generously over a kitchen chair. Noreen was reminded of the two of them in St. Osburg's hospital in England years ago waiting for the psychiatrist's ward rounds, always drinking tea, happier days. They were even taking the same tablets, two every day and an injection once a month. Bid used say that they were *therapeutic twins*. Noreen no longer took hers, not since the African business started up.

The kitchen darkened suddenly. The kettle-song petered out. The hall and outside lights died. Murty was back was in darkness, yet the power to the television was miraculously preserved as the loudspeakers began the Senegalese anthem. Bid tried to conceal her rage.

"I don't know how you stick it, Noreen. I just don't know how."

"You better head on, Bid. I'll get the flashlight to help you with the bike and the driveway. No point in being found dead in the morning."

Noreen led her old friend to the door, and guided Bid's bicycle back out to the world at the end of the driveway. As they parted, the flashlight caught Claddagh running past them. He was headed for the unknown in search of a place to bury Bid's apple tart. Faint moonlight helped Bid to keep the bicycle on the tar. After a mile or so, she heard Noreen's call behind her. The second bicycle closed the gap between them half-way to the village,

"Hould up there, girl, and I'll be with you," Noreen shouted.

They pedalled like mad together out of the darkness and into the light of the village.

The referee, Mr Patel of Johannesburg, counted the players on the field and satisfied himself that that his linesmen were in position for the kick-off. He blew the whistle for the start of the game, unaware that he did so without the attentions of the game's greatest fan.

The Ladder

Toss preferred to be called Mr Donovan. He would let you know it. It was a matter of respect, although nobody respected him. He would not smile when he was telling you. You did not take this as the offence that he meant, because he rarely smiled. Tuesday was no different. Mr Donovan was watching the street from Harrigan's Corner, his backside settled on the shop windowsill. None of the town's other ne'er-do-wells would even think of taking Mr Donovan's vantage point. He had been there all morning, same as any morning, always watching. His view included all of Main Street, Junction Street, and Cusack Street. From his facial expression, you would conclude that there was nothing which met his approval in any of these streets. You would be right; he had never been known to approve of anything.

He did not approve of Skinny Allen's approach in his direction, so he looked away. This was his signal to Skinny to stop approaching. Skinny didn't get it, being so thick. Skinny was all talk and no listen. He told you things and you didn't tell him things. By the time he reached Mr. Donovan's perch, he was grinning like a baby.

"Any chance you'd do me a favour, Toss, old stock?" he asked through the idiotic smile and rotten teeth. Mr Donovan turned on him rather than to him. He looked at Skinny as if he were a piece of shit. In fairness, the description was not far short of the mark.

"Fuck off," he said, "you piece of shit."

All charm, last Tuesday, our Mr. Donovan. No different from any other day.

"There's a few quid in it, if you want it." said Skinny.

Mr Donovan looked even more disapproving. Skinny had broken Mr Donovan's most important rule by mentioning business in the earshot of other humans.

He pointed his nose at Skinny and did that kind of snorty breathing that disapproval brings out in people. He repeated his command. It was wasted on Skinny. Skinny stood his ground.

"You only have to hold the ladder for an hour or two. It won't kill you. A bit of work never killed anyone. Sure, what else would you be doing?" he said, still with the stupid smile.

Mr Donovan did not answer. He stood up and walked around the corner. He slipped into a doorway in Junction Street. He made sure that he was not observed. Skinny followed and stood near the doorway, his back to Toss.

"Stay where you are and don't look in at me." said Mr Donovan. "What's all this about?"

"I'm doing the sign on D'Arcy's. 'Tis three stories up. I need someone to hold the ladder."

"What time are you doing it?" asked Donovan from the meanest side of his mouth.

"In about half an hour."

Mr Donovan looked at the women's underwear in the shop window. The knickers hung over a huge sepia photograph of *Titanic.* His reflection in the glass showed a mean face and bullet head. He disapproved of everything he saw. Above all, he did not approve of the idea of work.

"I'm not going to hang around like an eejit while you're putting up the ladder." he said. "What time will you have it up?"

"I'll have it up at eleven o'clock."

Mr Donovan asked, "What'll you give me? You know well I'm not going to work for money. I won't be your employee. If you give me money, I might give you a hand. You know how I feel about these things."

"Ten quid."

"Make it twenty, and slip it to me now, you bollocks."

Skinny held his hand behind him. Donovan relieved it of a score, and said,

"Go away from me, now."

"Did I ever tell you that you're the most miserable man on God's earth?" Skinny said, and left. Mr Donovan went back to his perch to worry about his predicament. He had forgotten to ask Allen if it was the sign on Main Street or the one around the corner in Mitchell Street that had to be painted. No way was he going to be seen holding a ladder on Main Street. God only knew who might see him. He had his position to think about. He had nothing against Skinny that he didn't have against everyone else. They had a history together in the old days in Birmingham. Mr Donovan had a one-roomed flat back there, which he rented out by the half-hour to dirty old men for the purpose of bringing in easy girls for horizontal refreshment. Skinny had been employed down the road as a handy-man, painter and look-out by a wide boy who ran Birmingham's largest stable of low-bottom knocking shops. They used bump into each other, but that was all. Mr Donovan was painfully aware that, because Skinny knew all about Mr Donovan's past, there was danger to his own standing in his home town, so Skinny would have to be kept 'onside'.

Apart from the much needed score, this was the main reason why Donovan would comply with Skinny's requirements.

He was greatly relieved to find that the D'Arcy sign needing renewal was on the Mitchell Street side of the building. Mitchell Street was narrow and unimportant. Few persons had business in Mitchell Street, so there were few chances of Mr Donovan being observed at such a humiliating job as holding a ladder. Mr Donovan tidied his threadbare suit and tie in such a way as to resemble, in his opinion, his favourite movie-star – now long dead - and loosely applied himself to the ladder as Skinny ascended fifty feet to the sign. It read - *Smokers Accessories China and Delf* - misspellings originally installed by Skinny himself, but unnoticed by anyone. He hung his three paint cans on a hook near the top step from which he reached out acrobatically to the sign. Down below, Mr Donovan kept a vigilant eye on the scarce humanity, and a very light one-handed grip on a lower rung, ready to let go and pretend to be just passing by if anyone who knew him might come along. He suffered two or three false alarms in the first half-hour.

When he was certain that nobody else could hear, he called up to Skinny, "Are you going to be up there all day?"

Skinny responded that he had only started and would he, Mr Donovan, mind holding the fucking ladder. Neither Skinny nor Mr Donovan were aware of the watching Mrs. Gerty Liddane across the street at her bathroom window. Gerty, like Mr Donovan, was a watcher by instinct, and knew a thing or two about the world. It was Dr. Hadnet's habit to visit the District Hospital on Tuesday mornings. To reward himself at noon, he usually dropped into Dinny O'Meara's for a couple of half-ones. To reach his destination from the hospital in

the shortest time, he would cut through Mitchell Street.

With his last words upon this earth, or above it, Skinny Allen called down to Mr Donovan,

“Here’s the doctor coming!” Mr Donovan vanished.

He was back at Harrigan’s window before Skinny’s skull made its small dent in the tarmacadam of Mitchell Street. A crowd, including the doctor and a priest, ensured proper terminal attention. The Civic Guards asked the usual questions of hangers-on who would have liked to have been witnesses. A fellow corner-boy asked Mr Donovan, seated on his usual spot, what the commotion down the town was about. He received a sneer in response.

“How would I know, shithead?” Mr Donovan spat.

Mrs Liddane came towards the corner, her brain bursting at the seams. When she saw the face that awaited her, she decelerated. She asked Mr Donovan if she could speak with him. He took a few steps around the corner and hid in a recess between two shops.

“What do you want?” he asked her. He disapproved of her, as he did of all women. “Talk very quiet and slow, Missus, and don’t gimme any grief.”

Mrs Liddane told him that she had seen him holding the ladder and then leaving the ladder unattended. Worse, she suggested that Mr Donovan had been working for Skinny Allen.

She did not get to tell Mr Donovan that he had killed Skinny. Mr Donovan’s face suggested to her that it would not be a great idea.

Through his worst snorting, Mr Donovan gave her his final words on the matter;

“You’re talking through your hole, Missus. I never work for anyone, Missus, ever. You know that well. Did you ever see me working? Tell me that.”

Gertie responded with “Well….no, actually.”

“That’s right. You know well where I stand on that matter, Missus. I always say that a man that’d work for money would do anything for money, and I’m not one of them. You saw nothing. So, now Missus, shag off home to your husband and mind your own business.”

“My husband is dead” she said. The tears came.

“Lucky fucking man” Mr Donovan told her as she retreated.

He went back to his station. He nursed the twenty in his pocket and smiled at last.

Saving Dwyer

The father of the groom is plying her with large gin-and-tonics. He might as well be throwing biscuits to a bear. Every now and again, she laughs in a big horsey way. She is wearing one of those hats with a garden growing in it. The centre-piece is a giant abnormally yellow banana. There are plumes and feathers too, and gardenias. The green ermine cloak could well darken a small football stadium. She's Vasco de Gama on Christmas Day. I watch her from the door of the ballroom. The feeling is warm, pleasing. I wonder what it means.

Her name, Leonora, seems to suit her at last; big, rounded, leonine. She wasn't really a Leonora back that time. She was more a Mimi or an Yvonne, or even a Trixie. And she was our heroine. Still is. She saved Dwyer.

It was Dawson's idea in the first place. He'd been a year away at a university in England, trying to make something out of himself, so he was more shocked than we were. Dwyer had been fine during our last summer together, easy-going, a bit giddy after a couple of drinks, and far too shy to make any moves in the romantic direction. We used tease him that he'd die wondering. All he did was smile and blush. We were in *John Joe's*. Butler called for more cider.

"What did you make of Dwyer?" he asked Dawson. "He's fucked altogether from this holy piety stuff. I'd say meself there's no hope for him."

Dawson replied in a new-found Oxbridge accent - strange that, as he was living in Manchester,

"Why didn't you chaps *do* something?" *Chaps*?

There was no easy answer to this one. Truth was that Dawson had been the guy who did things. We just followed. Seemed right – he was the only one

of us who made it to college. He was still our ‘officer commanding’. The English accent made it seem even more right. He knew most of the story. He had seen Dwyer earlier and had had to look away. I knew he was on the verge of tears, but had pretended not to notice. He couldn’t bring himself to approach his old friend; not in that state.

The cider began to do its job. Ordinary remedies were discounted almost before they were proposed. Butler suggested kidnapping, easily dismissed. Mickey Ferris went for incarceration in the mental hospital in Clonmel, an idea which quickly floundered and sank on legal grounds.

The parody that was now Dwyer came in. He went straight to John Joe at the bar and asked for ‘a little something for the black babies’, a collection for the African missions. He was wearing a hair-shirt and read out loud from the Book of Revelations while John Joe rooted nervously in the till and brought out some coins. He threw them into Dwyer’s tin can and eyed the back door.

Dwyer gave him the papal blessing from the steps of St Peter’s and recommended confession and repentance. He spoke sternly on the curse of drink. He asked John Joe to join him in a decade of the Sorrowful Mysteries and for a promise to give up his evil ways peddling drink to otherwise good catholics. John Joe escaped through the back door. Dwyer had paid no heed at all to his old friends. Saw us alright, but we didn’t register. He was that far gone. After his old friend had gone, Dawson wept silently. He had to go to the men’s room to get a hold on himself. He was gone for ten minutes. He then drank deeply under the weight of the problem. We waited.

“I have it!” he told us at last. “The universal antidote, your only man!”

John Joe's second opinion was sought - a wise man in the ways of the world.

"I'd say 'tis his best chance," he counselled, "Who have you in mind for the job?"

Dawson told him. John Joe laughed a country publican's laugh.

"Sweet Mother of Jaysus, she'll ate him alive!" he gushed, all excited. "If she's half the woman her mother was, he'll need a bag of mickies and a young fella handing 'em up to him!"

Ferris said that Tadgh Riordan told him that she'd go down on the *Titanic.* We formed a delegation. The delegates swore an oath of secrecy, sealed with cider.

From a distance, I keep an eye on Leonora. Time has done her no favours. We're no oil paintings ourselves after all these years. There's a red-faced farmer at her arm. He has crocodile skin on his neck and runny eyes. He looks worn-out. Times aren't that great for farmers or their wives. I know now what the feeling means. I love her. So do we all.

Dr. Dawson, physician *extraordinaire*, sits with Ferris and Butler. He watches me watching her. He winks.

Dwyer's young-lad takes his bride to the centre of the floor and they waltz.

Turkey

Philly was only three back then. Born April 1st, his mam often reminded him of the significance of his birthday, though he didn't come to understand it until he was seven. You could ask him now if he remembers being three, and he'd tell you that he can't recall anything about it. Except for the flying turkey. He remembers the flying turkey, and the spud missiles. He eats steak at Christmas nowadays, and he eats it with a stammer.

You could tell him what he was like when he was three and had curly blond hair that Mam disliked because it reminded her of her in-laws always on the make half of them only twelve-and-sixpence in the mental pound. He had big blue eyes and one of those clefts in his chin which also came from the father's side. Photographs showed that he always was ready to cry but never caught him in the act itself. He did plenty of crying then, but he only did it when all the action was over and nobody could tell him that it wasn't alright to cry because only cry-babies cried. That time, you had to have a good reason for crying and you had to pretend that you were crying over nothing. Like, if you said what you were crying about, you could get yourself in trouble and they'd give you a real reason to cry.

There was a turkey for dinner that Christmas. Uncle Watty, who wasn't a real uncle, had brought it in from his farm the week before. It hung in the scullery by its legs from a six-inch nail with its beak half open and a sticky bit of spit at the end of it and left a mark on the wall that stayed until the place was painted when Philly was ten. He was afraid of the bird and his fear wasn't helped by us brothers telling him that it was still alive and flew around in the

bedroom at night. You could tell him about his nightmares, but even now, he doesn't want to remember the turkey. We don't remind him of any of that stuff.

Uncle Watty, everyone said, could hold a slab of butter in his mouth all day and spit it out just the same at night. The daddy always said wasn't Watty a lovely man there weren't enough like him in Ireland or it would be a better place altogether and if you did him a good turn he'd do you an even better one in return. We kids weren't to call him Watty only Mister O'Meara and don't pay any heed to his missus she was a bit odd no fault in that God bless the mark but anyone could tell there was a bit of a want on her. Any time they came to our house, she just sat up straight in the trap outside, holding the reins for Watty until he had done his business and then handing them back to him. He'd say good luck whatever and tell the horse go on ou'a that. He told his missus that she had a right to have plucked and gibleted the turkey before bringing it into decent people, what was she thinking of at all. The horse dropped a load on the gravel outside the door and took off for Ballinmatthew.

It was a cock turkey, twenty-one pounds in weight, about the same as Philly. His mam said that cock turkeys were tougher than ordinary turkeys and you'd have to cook them for hours and hours and that this one wouldn't fit in the oven, he'd have to be cut up in pieces and bits of him would have to be roasted before other bits of him and his daddy could pluck the fucking thing and clean it out himself or she'd puke. On Christmas Eve, the bird was still on the nail only now it had more thick spit at the end of his beak. Every time we passed in or out of the scullery, we'd jump up and hit the turkey's head and it'd swing by the neck for a few goes like the pendulum on the clock in the hall used to until Daddy belted it with a hammer one night to soften its cough. There was a

half-circle mark on the whitish wall where the beak scraped the wash. The mam told Eamon, her favourite son who took after her side of the family and had straight black hair, that Uncle Watty was a blackguard and what do you think he was at during the war only dropping fire-bombs into letterboxes in Manchester for the IRA and burning all the letters home to their misfortunate mothers from the English soldiers abroad in Africa and Borneo and if he had any decency he'd have brought a hen turkey that you could cook in one piece and eat without breaking your teeth but of course we're only charity cases now ask your father about that.

We all scattered when the daddy came home. We could tell by the head of him that he was loaded with explosives. Philly hadn't sense enough so he stayed around for any excitement that might be on offer. When the mam wired into the daddy about preparing the bird, the boy was stuck to the ground. The daddy came back from the yard then with a hurley and beat the neck of the turkey until its head fell off and the hurley made big dents in the wall, and he said are you fucking satisfied now you whining bitch and what must he have thought he was at marrying a Kilkenny woman. Philly could see the spit between his father's lips just like the turkey's only it had bubbles in it. The daddy asked him what are you looking at and do you want a belt yourself because I'm the man to give it to you, so Philly said nothing, just wet his trousers. He had on that face that always came out in the photographs, and that you can still see hints of any time he comes to visit.

The happy yuletide couple slept together in silence that night, only because there was no spare bedroom, and it was a bad sign of a marriage if husband and wife slept separately. We tiptoed out to Mass in the morning and

delayed as long as we could, standing in out of the sleet in closed shop doorways and archways between townhouses and people saying happy Christmas youssir which just went to show what they knew about life.

The daddy read out loud a story about a fairy woman from *The Holly Bough,* and a tale from *Ireland's Own* about a man who cycles one-hundred-and-seventy miles from Kerry and who had no ticket for the football final and he begs the man on the turnstile to let him in *because I have to see it* and the Dublin man takes pity on him and slips him in through the side-gate and bade him tell no-one like in the Gospel when Jesus gives the same advice and it's all lovely and christmassy but they're still not talking to each other.

The turkey's body was all baldy and looked like a plate of tapioca to Philly. He was glad his mam had cut it up into big pieces because it couldn't fly around the house at night anymore. Anyway, the cat had run off with its head and was eating it under the dresser. He was secure in his delusion that a turkey with no head can't fly. The range oven took less than half of the bird. She said tell your father that there would be no dinner until four o'clock will you be able to remember that you fool or have I to do it myself.

More stories followed, and then, to kill more time, the rosary with us all facing the Sacred Heart picture with the little red lamp under it. Mam only had time for her decade before returning to the kitchen which sent out wave after wave of turkey odour. Himself was not going to have a sandwich, thanks all the same and never ask me things like that while I'm saying the fucking rosary and don't you know well 'twould ruin me appetite for the dinner.

We ran out of stories and prayers by two o'clock by which time the daddy's mouth was getting smaller the way it did when the world was wrong.

The breathing became louder with long sighing bits and his knees felt a need to cross and uncross themselves with increasing frequency. The armchair didn't look as if it could hold him much longer once the arms joined in, pulling and squeezing the tips of his ears and nose like he was checking that they were still there. The bad feeling slowly gathered itself in the air around the chair and thickly spread itself, soon taking a heavy grip on the whole house. By three o'clock, the daddy was rigid as pig iron except for the quivering of his chin, and we were all silent and somewhere else in the house, past masters at chin-reading. The eyebrows were beginning to meet in the middle, the worst sign of all. Only Philly remained so he was selected to bring the latest culinary bulletin, a postponement of the festive dining until five o'clock, which he faithfully achieved, overcoming his role as the family idiot, and transmitting it to the daddy who appeared to be asleep or dead apart from the false teeth rattling and the snorting.

Philly had no training at that stage of his life in the recognition of gathering rage, and in his innocence, carried on as if all was well in God's heaven. Winding up the tin clockwork monkey which Santa Claus had brought for him, he followed it around the floor and caused it to achieve noisy circumambulations of the armchair. He sang and chanted around the room along with his simian friend and walked him down his father's knee to the ankle. The daddy's foot moved quickly and fiercely and the monkey hopped off the wall and became silent and still in three distinct parts on the floor. His ready-to-cry face switched on again, Philly brought the pieces into his mother who said look what you did you eejit you'll never get a toy again and dumped it into the bin with the

gizzards and feathers and caught him over the ear with a dish towel as he ran for the door.

Christmas hadn't yet finished with Philly. Us brothers helped tie his harness in the baby chair at the end of the table and we all sat along either side. The daddy sat at the other end from Philly, glaring at him over the turkey bits, all heaped up on a huge serving plate. While he carved, we all looked at our plates in silence, knowing that any word at all taken from the dictionary could be the wrong one. Philly did not share the inhibition and drummed his little table with a spoon, throwing in what he considered to be entertaining wise commentary and aphorisms. He looked at the portion of pink meat placed before him and said aw he wanted the head to lick like the cat got ha ha ha. The daddy's plate wasn't nearly big enough for the thigh-leg. The steak-knife had great trouble penetrating it, but eventually managed, with the help of grunts, to free a large chunk of steaming red-pink flesh. It found its way somehow into a very tight mouth. All of us would-be diners watched for the reaction. The mam was in a very bad state, shaking all over, not far from dying.

The chewing went on for about two minutes. The meat was then returned to its plate by the spitting method followed by a shout sweet mother of jaysus ye have me poisoned. Apart from a few shallow denture marks, the meat was unharmed. The chef ran for the door, wise woman, as Philly's laughter filled the room. The daddy waited for the silence to follow, and then spoke loudly enough for Mam to hear the verdict over the sobs in the kitchen; he said he wondered what that fucking vulture died of.

More silence should have followed in the natural order of things, but Philly, too green to have assimilated expertise in the interpretation of nuance

sang vulcher vulcher vulcher with great merriment, loudly drumming each syllable onto his table with his spoon and saying eat up your vulcher Daddy and you'll grow up to be a big strong fella like me ha ha ha.

The thigh-leg missed Philly's head and broke the glass on Nora's holy communion picture on the sideboard. The body of the steaming beast, followed, bouncing twice on the table before hitting Philly's chest, rocking the baby-chair a few times, and settling on his table-top. The aim with the potatoes was a little bit off and they ended up smudged on the mirror with all the cracks. Mam arrived back into the room in time to see us all get some Christmas dinner when the daddy ripped out the tablecloth from under the would-be feast and the banqueting arrangements were scattered all over the room and all of us. Philly's ear bled a little from a piece of flying plate but he didn't notice it because he was staring at the monster at the other end of the table who said now look what you're after causing you bastard you've destroyed the Christmas on us all you ungrateful fucker and the worst thing that ever happened in this house was the day you were ever born at all.

Mam said now Denis leave the child alone he's had enough its not his fault that he's stupid and the daddy broke the carving chair on the wall and threw the radio out through the window pane and kicked a big hole in the backdoor and went out into the yard saying fuck ye all I'm getting out of here cos 'tis only a fucking madhouse anyways.

Baby Blue

Walt waited for someone to answer the door. There was a long grey dog so asleep on a shaded area of the front porch that he wondered if it was even breathing. Trafford Poole never stopped boasting about the goddamn hound and how it could almost talk to you. Recently, it was the baby – not the dog. You'd think that it was the first baby born on Earth and that everybody wanted to hear about what all it did today. It was a surprise that CBS didn't have a cameraman in the house to record every burp and fart so the whole of the Evanston could get to share in the experience and every couple say to each other, "Gee, honey! Take a look at that baby! Isn't that something?"

Worse, the arrival of the Poole child had started Emily up again about why Walt and she don't have a baby of their own and the side effects of the pill that she took for years and the state of the world. Last week, she was at it again; he hadn't even washed his hands after work when she came on with the bit about tonight could be their lucky night and she had read about a special position for doing it that would give the egg and the sperm a better chance of getting together. He had almost got strangled and had to wear loose shorts at work for three days to ease the blueballs. An evening with the Pooles and she'd take no prisoners. He hoped that Traff had plenty of whiskey in. Traff opened the door and then the screen door. He spilled some of his drink on the wooden floor. He had on a t-shirt that said "I am a Proud Father!" and bermudas.

"Come on in, friends, to the happy house." He grinned like a loon. "Laura's out back. Just put his majesty to bed."

Emily went ahead of them to give Laura the blue baby clothes that had cost fifty-five dollars of good money. The women hugged on the back porch, both talking excitedly and at the same time; transmitters on, receivers off. Traff apologised to Walt for the heat in the house. He said that the air-con was too noisy for baby. He poured the bourbon and got out some ice. Outside, they sat on the swing chair. The heat was bad. Walt cooled his hands with his glass. Traff brushed off his questions about how things were going in the Fire Department, and went on instead about the baby looking like old granddaddy Poole's photograph, and went into the house to get it. Walt swung the chair a bit more to work up a breeze. Even in the shade it must have been up there in the nineties, humid as hell. Em had said that he shouldn't get direct sunshine on his tackle because it dropped the sperm count – straight out of another magazine or the internet.

Granddaddy Poole looked like any old guy you'd meet down at Welfare, all wrinkly and pissed with his life, who mightn't be so sure it was Friday. Walt hoped that the baby didn't look like that. Traff kept on about the Pooles who came from Iowa and won the West from the Native Americans and had one guy who raised the flag at *Iwo Jima.* The baby would be raised with a fit and proper sense of history. Walt nodded constantly and said how right on that was and put the empty glass into Trafford's hand.

My Mommy is the Best Mommy in the World, he read off Laura's t-shirt. The girls stood out in the sun, turning hot dogs on the barbecue and drinking vodka.

"Keep the voices down, boys," Laura said. "Daniel likes it nice and quiet." Traff parted with some more whiskey and ice. Walt felt the alcohol begin to hit

the spot, reach the parts. He caught Laura's eye over Emily's shoulder. Laura winked at him.

"We think he should go to North-Western," Traff said. "Laura's going down Monday to see if she can enrol him now." He drank. "That right, honey?" he called to his wife, "Nothing but the best, eh?"

Laura didn't hear, always on transmit. They went inside after eating the dogs; too many mosquitos coming from the stagnant water on the waste ground behind the back yard. Traff kept the whiskey coming without having to be asked every time. The girls sat together on one sofa, the boys on the other. Walt noticed the clock making its way to ten. Traff was still on about the baby. Laura made a big ceremony about opening the blue baby suit. The front said in silver, *True Blue – All-American Baby Boy.*

"We have an announcement to make," Em said. "We're planning to join you soon with a baby of our own. Isn't that right, Wally?" The vodka was working.

"Do you hear that, Traff?" Laura squeaked. "We'll make a double booking at North-Western."

Traff said, "Let's drink to that, summer come louder!" He laughed at this and splashed out some more whiskey and vodka. Walt threw his off in one go, then got some more about how the Pooles threw in their lot with Sherman and drove the Johnnie Rebs back as far as Mexico, some of them all the way down to *Tierra del Fuego*

Emily got to her feet and steadied slowly.

"Okay, friends. It's time to visit Daniel in his den. We gotta see him before we go."

Laura said okay, that everyone would have to sneak upstairs and only whisper so as not to disturb Danny Boy.

“Shoes off, everybody,” she said. “We don’t want to wake him. This is his first time to sleep this long.”

They followed Laura up the stairs. Walt had to keep near the wall in case he’d lose balance. Laura made lots of hush signals outside the bedroom door before opening it. She took Walt’s drink from him and placed it on the floor. They shuffled into the room and circled the little bed. Walt hit his head off a plastic Donald Duck which hung from the ceiling. Everybody did a kind of whispered giggle. They waited in the absolute silence to adapt to the darkness. Soon, they could make out the tiny shape in the bed, and everybody leaned forward.

Walt felt the coldness start in his legs first, then spread up through his body. For a few seconds, he thought he might pass out. He was unable to move.

The others filed quietly out of the room, leaving him where he stood immobile.

Em whispered, “Come on Wally, don’t hang around. Let him rest in peace.”

Walt moved slowly and closed the door quietly after him. The others went ahead downstairs. In the lounge, it was Laura who freshened the drinks. Emily got in first, all squeally.

“Isn’t he the most beautiful little baby you ever saw? Oh, my God, he’s just awesome! I can’t believe it! I can say definitely, Lor, that you’re one lucky girl.” She slurred ‘definitely’.

Laura looked over at Walt on the sofa.

"Are you okay, Walt? You look like you just seen a ghost."

Walt took a long drink and made a friendly face. He needed to get out of there.

"No, I'm fine. Just a bit tired is all. We ought to be going. It's almost eleven." He made to get up. Trafford gave him a strange look which he pretended not to see.

They stood around awkwardly in the hot room taking turns to peer out the front window until the cab arrived. After the goodnights, Em lurched a little on the way to the taxi. In the back, straight away she started up the romance bit, putting her hand on Walt's thigh and rubbing it up and down, slowly working her way to first base. Walt removed her hand firmly and put it back in her lap.

"What the fuck's the matter with you?" she snapped.

Walt didn't answer for a while. She didn't wait anyway.

"What is it with you?" she asked. "You go see your best friend's new baby and you don't even say it's a nice kid and sit there like they're the enemy. I am so fucking embarrassed. Let me tell you that tomorrow first thing you are going to call Traff and apologise. You can tell him you had too much booze, which is true, or anything you like, but, sure as hell, you're going to apologise."

Her voice was raised. The driver with the navy turban and the smart beard was looking in the mirror with his eyebrow up. Walt waited again. Emily looked away from him out the side window. He tried his best not to slur his words.

"Did you not see the baby, honey? Did you not see the fucking baby?"

She turned and gave him the what-are-you-crazy-or-something look.

"Of course I saw the fucking baby, as you call it! What's with the baby?"

"The baby was dead!" he said. "The fucking baby was dead!"

Emily stared at him all the way through his eyes and into the back of his head.

"Are you completely nuts?" she said. "Are you out of your mind or something? Just how much booze did you put away?" She paused, still with the look. "Let me get this straight; you go to our friends' house, drink all their whiskey, go see their new baby, decide that it's a dead baby, come downstairs, sulk in the corner, don't even say a word about it to its parents, and get into a cab and tell me the baby is dead. For Christ's sake, get real and gimme a break!"

"I'm telling you. The baby was dead!" he said.

The driver turned round halfways.

"Is everything alright, please?" he asked.

"Sure, everything's alright," Em said. "I'm just stuck in the back of this jalopy with a husband who's a nutter. He goes to our best friends' house, doesn't even bring them a gift for their new baby because he's so goddamn cheap, and cheapskate that he is, he drinks all their booze and gets into your cab and talks like a fucking looney tooner. And you better watch out for yourself, Mohammad, 'cos he might not give you the fare! Bastard's so cheap, he only lets the sperms out one at a time! Don't tell me about 'alright'; I'm all stocked up with 'alright' for now, okay?" She paused. "Anyway, how come this is any of your business? Why don't you just watch the fucking road or maybe they don't got any roads in your desert!"

The cab moved on through downtown and on towards Skokie. The man

in the blue turban watched the road. His passengers looked out their side-windows. Occasionally, Walt said, mostly to himself,

"I'm telling you. I'm goddamn telling you! That baby was dead."

BOOK CHAPTERS FROM *Navajo Gene*

Chap 4: Louise's Last Testament

The only window in my fifth-storey apartment in the Bronx looks out over a narrow passageway between my building and the next. Directly opposite is a blank grey wall. If I press my face against one side of the window until my left cheek and forehead are squashed and painful, I can see another window one storey down. I don't do that any more because nothing ever happens at that window. I've never seen a light down there so maybe no-one lives in that room. Anyway, I don't know anyone in the next building. I don't know anyone in this one either. My building was all one residence generations ago. Now it's all divided up into tiny units designed to drive people mad – leastwise, it seems to do it for me. My apartment is my crypt. The décor has never changed in all that time, so when I look around me, I think I should be one-hundred and fifty years old - not thirty-four. I have a small bedroom where I have to climb onto the bed from the feet end because there's no space at either side. I call it my tomb. The room with the window is small with a sofa and TV and a small table against the wall under the window. I can sit at the table and admire the grey wall. I've got a lap-top on the table where I do research for tracking people, mainly bringing up maps and stuff. Captain Nardello said he couldn't give me an allowance for this because it's not police property. Screw Nardello.

I moved the computer out of the way and opened the stuff that Paul Laselle gave me. There was my first surprise; stapled to the papers was a certified cheque made out to Edward Galvin for twenty-five thousand dollars and

a note which tells me that it's for my time and don't return it even if I decide not to take the case. So, now it's a case.

There was a photocopy of an old document which was handwritten in French. There was a space at the end which had three signatures. The date beside the signatures was 8 February 1952. There was a modern stamp from a notary in Wellesley, Mass. The translation was typed and went to three compact pages. The translation was also notarised. There was a photocopy of a map on the same kind of paper as the translation. It showed detail of somewhere in *Basse Normandie*, France. There were circles made by a red ballpoint around some of the place-names. I started with the translation. My French hadn't had any exercise in recent years.

It began:

In the name of God and his Holy Mother Mary Queen of Heaven and our beloved Saint, Terese of Lisieux, I, Louise Clotilde Bertrand, born 14 August 1919, at Pont d'Ouilly in Lower Normandy, France, affirm this, my sworn statement before two witnesses. I am soon to leave this world and I wish this statement to be left as my final testament in this life. I swear this statement in the knowledge that I am soon to die.

My story concerns a single day in 1944 during the Liberation. I remember well the date, 17August 1944 because it was my 25th birthday. That is the day that my dearest sister, Sophie Dubois, was murdered before my eyes by those unspeakable pigs.

The page blurred suddenly. My heart thumped in my chest and in my head. I swayed in the chair and had to shake my head a few times to stop

myself passing out. I looked again at that paragraph but couldn't focus. I shook my head again some. There was that name-*Sophie Dubois.*

My grandmother's name was Sophie Dubois! She lived in Lower Normandy – somewhere near a town called Falaise. My grandmother was executed by the Gestapo in April 1944. That's what her daughter, my mother, Jeanne Dubois had told me. She told me about it many times. The document continued;

I have never spoken of this to any person from that terrible day. It is my greatest hope that this testament will come into the possession of my nephew who is my only remaining family. He is, I believe, living in the United States of America but his whereabouts there is unknown to me. He sailed from Cherbourg to Boston in September 1948. I have entrusted my lawyer, Monsieur Gerard Rousseau of Falaise with the difficult task of finding him, and have paid his fee in this matter in advance.

Falaise! I had to get up. I walked around the room, loosening my clothes. There didn't seem to be enough air in the apartment. I opened the door. I put on some fresh coffee. I walked around the apartment again. My legs were jumpy so I kicked them a bit on the landing outside the door and came back in. I had a feeling close to the one I used get when I'd hear Brother Dominic sneaking towards my bed. It's a feeling I don't have a name for. It's one I don't like. I didn't like where this story was going – or worse, where it might bring me. I poured the coffee and sat down.

Perhaps, my dear nephew – I can not but hope that you are reading this-you will be able to find in America the two children of Sophie Dubois, Jeanne Marie and Emile. They sailed from Cherbourg to New York early in 1949. They will not remember me. They were too little. They will not recall Louise Bertrand

who cared for them when their mother was killed; Louise Bertrand who had to give them up because she could not keep them; Louise Bertrand who loved them so much with all her being and all her soul; Louise Bertrand who arranged for them to be taken to her cousin in America when the French authorities commanded that they must go to a public orphanage; Louise Bertrand who thinks only of them as she leaves this life. Dear nephew, should you find them, let them know in the name of our Blessed Lady the truth of what happened on that evil day. They will know what they must do for Sophie and for themselves. And, for me.

The morning was clear on my 25th birthday. The shelling had kept everyone awake all night as the Allies got nearer and nearer. The Germans were retreating to the east in a great hurry. They had abandoned the garrison and the police station at Thury Harcourt some days earlier. They were not so proud now. All morning there were horses and trucks and cars full of soldiers and even some tanks hurrying to get away. Sometimes a group of planes attacked them on the road. It was a wonderful feeling to see those pigs jumping from their cars and diving into the hedges. I saw many Germans lying dead and dying on the roadway and in the ditches. The sight made me very happy. Perhaps this emotion is difficult to understand for someone who was not in France during the four years of the German occupation. Everybody I knew, and those I did not, shared this joy. I was excited that the Liberation was to be so soon.

Sophie and her two babies lived only one kilometre from my home. We had agreed that we would make some tricolours together to welcome the Liberators. The previous day we had sewn the white pieces of our two flags onto the red, but could not finish as it had become dark too early. I cycled my bicycle

towards Sophie's farmhouse against the retreating Germans. As each truck full of soldiers passed, I called Vive la France to them loudly and spat at them and cursed their mothers. How wonderful it was to see such arrogant heads bowed. Sophie was overjoyed and even her two little ones were excited although they could not have understood what was going on. We quickly sewed the blue pieces onto the white. Our flags were no masterpieces! We were too excited to do them straight because we did not know how soon the Allies would arrive. We agreed that we would bring some wine down to the road and kiss them all. But more important, we would wave our country's flag in the faces of the Germans! Sophie could see that I couldn't wait to get back to the road. She said I should go ahead while she dressed Jeanne and Baby Emile in the clothes she had specially made for this day, and that she would join me in ten minutes. When I got down to the road, there were still some German cars going east. Now they were travelling very fast. There was a lot of artillery noise coming from the east from the direction of the village of Pont d'Ouilly where there had been gunfire all the previous day and night. Also, there was some shooting which could not be far away. Very soon, there were no more German cars and, for a while, nothing at all.

I waited as another truck, travelling in the opposite direction, came along the road from Pont d'Ouilly, from the little road which goes through Menil-Hubert to Sophie's house on the route to Rouvrou. It was one of those German half-tanks. I was ready to spit at the soldiers when I saw that the helmets were different. It moved very slowly towards me. The uniforms were different, not the grey of the Germans. I think my heart must have stopped for a few beats. I was unable to move. Then I was weeping and waving my flag and running to the

truck. Then I was on the hood looking in at the driver and kissing the windscreen. Never in my life before or since did I have such desolate joy. The truck stopped and I got down onto the road. I thought of Sophie and how she had missed this special moment. The truck stopped and an English soldier who was holding a rifle got out. I jumped into his arms and kissed him many times. He said something to calm me down, and then made a gesture with his hand going to and from his mouth which meant that he was thirsty. I did the same thing until he nodded his head and I pointed to the little road to Sophie's, still making the drinking sign to him and to all the soldiers sitting in the back. He nodded and got back into the truck. It turned into the gateway to the farm. Sophie would have her own personal liberation, I thought.

Many times, my dear nephew, so very many many times, since that day, I have regretted what I did that morning. The guilt has never allowed me a peaceful moment. Only death will free me from it. I thank God that my time is to be soon.

I didn't want to read on. I closed my eyes and tried to breathe slowly and deeply. After some minutes, I got up from the table and went down in the elevator to the street. In my neighbourhood, anybody in the street at night is up to no good, so I had to be alert. That probably helped take me out of myself. I walked up and down the block a couple of times. My right hand never left the gun in my waistband. It's that kind of neighbourhood. I joked to myself that being occupied by the Germans was pussycat stuff compared to my part of the Bronx.

Back inside the apartment, I decided that a shot of Jameson was needed before I could face the next part of Louise's story. I made it a big one. It didn't help.

I stayed by the roadside for some time, perhaps half an hour, I cannot be sure. No further trucks or cars came, no more Germans and no more English. There was still much noise from the artillery in the distance. I thought to join Sophie and help with the welcome for our liberators, but first I moved down the road beyond the bend where there is a long straight stretch to the west. There, I could see perhaps two kilometres of the road from Trun. There was nothing coming. I crossed the fields to go the shortest way to the farmhouse. Sophie and I had often come this way on our many walks together, and had worn a path through the grass. The pathway went around the old cow-house and on to the farmhouse. I had just reached the cow-house when I heard the screaming. I went into the old stone building and looked from its window. What I saw has visited me in my dreams every night of my life.

There were eight soldiers, one of them an officer, around the door. Most of them were drinking wine from cups from the farmhouse. They were shouting and laughing. The officer sat on the sill of the window, watching the men. Sophie was being pushed from one soldier to the next. Each man in turn tore at her clothes before throwing her to the next man. Her screams made no difference. Most of her clothes were torn to pieces. Then two soldiers violently removed the last of them. The children were now screaming and running to their mother. The officer shouted something to the men. Two of them grabbed the infants and threw them into the front seat of the truck and closed the doors and windows. Sophie begged them, saying she would do whatever they wished if they didn't

harm the children. The soldiers laughed. Then they put her on the back of the truck and each man violated her, most of them beating her about the head when she screamed. The officer watched from the window-sill and made no effort to stop his men. During Sophie's ordeal, he lit and smoked a pipe. When the men were finished with their filth, he came to where poor Sophie was lying on the back of the truck. He spoke excellent French. Taking her by the hair, he asked her what her life was worth. She answered that it had no worth. He pulled her upright and asked her what the children's lives were worth. He told her that he was going to kill them. Then Sophie told him that she had something of great value which he could have if he spared her little ones.

She told him about the paintings by Monsieur Degas which were hidden in the attic. The officer returned some minutes later with a roll of canvasses. He walked back to Sophie and told her the children would live. He asked one of his men to hold the paintings.

Then he took out his pistol and shot Sophie through the forehead. The men threw her in through the door of the house. The officer lit his pipe again and shouted some order to the men. They brought gasoline cans from the truck and set the farmhouse on fire with Sophie's body inside.

The strangest thing happened to me. I could hear my grandmother Sophie calling my name in French over and over again – *Eduard, Eduard, Eduard*…. and, strangest of all, I could only hear it in my left ear. I looked over to my left side, but of course there was nothing. Nothing - except that everything in the apartment was much smaller than usual. The calendar on the back of the door looked like it was only a couple of inches from top to bottom. It is really about twenty inches long. My lap-top on the table had reduced itself to the size of a

cell-phone. I closed my eyes for a while. When I opened them, everything was back to normal. I poured another shot. In the bathroom mirror, I saw someone else, someone not me. I usually see a short balding guy whom I believe to be unattractive because of too much French nose. This wasn't me. This man was wearing a British Army officer's uniform. He was about the same age as me, only taller and much thinner. He had blue eyes and a high forehead up to his military cap. He was probably handsome. He was unshaven for a couple of days. There was a smoking pipe in his mouth, and he was smiling.

And, he was dead!

I don't know what time I woke, but it was getting light; not that much light gets into my place. My head was on the table, crushing the documents. I wasn't expecting what I saw. All of the walls of the room were covered in graffiti. Each word was three or four feet tall. Each word was repeated over and over. *Sophie, Emile, Jeanne, Louise*. The story was the same in the kitchen and in the bathroom…..*Sophie… Emile*…… The felt pens which I used for marking overheads in the precinct were scattered all over the apartment. The sofa was slashed to pieces, hundreds of knife wounds.

I went to Dunkin Donuts for breakfast, after I changed my clothes which were wet with piss. I bought some paint and some brushes to undo the damage I had done during my spell. But, first things first – I went back to Louise's document.

The soldiers got into the truck while the fire was raging and drove towards the road. They slowed for a brief moment to throw the children out through the windows and then drove on. I had been unable to speak or move before this. I felt I would never be able to move again, but some instinct made me run to the

children. They were screaming again. I got to Emile first who had landed on the grass He did not seem to be badly hurt. Jeanne's arm was broken and crooked above the wrist.

So, that's what gave my mother the funny arm. She could never tell me about it.

How I managed to carry the little ones home to my mother I cannot know. The many Allied troops who sped past us were of no interest to me now. I hoped they would all be killed. My mother sent me on my bicycle to get Dr Gachet, who lived six kilometres away, but he was not home. His housekeeper said he had been taken by the Germans. Mother did what she could for Jeanne and Emile. She said I must not report to anyone what had happened. It would not be wise to say anything against the Liberators. I was to say that it was the Germans who killed Sophie! The next night, my uncles buried the remains of Sophie behind the farmhouse. No questions were asked. For many things in the war, no questions were asked.

In the next two paragraphs, some words were blanked out.

And so, my dear nephew, I pray that you will find Sophie's children in America and tell them the truth of what happened. From that day, I have cursed those soldiers, but above all the officer. The soldiers called him xxxxxxxxxxx. After the war, I made enquiries about this evil man. His name is xxxxxxxxxxxx and he is alive. He resides at a village which is named xxxxxxxxx in the Department of xxxxxxxxxx in England. I check on this every year. He is still there.

This man took the paintings which Sophie had said would take care of her children. After my husband Philippe was taken and shot by the Gestapo, she told

me that she and the children would be alright. She said that the pictures would take care of me also. She was keeping two paintings for me. The pictures had been in the farmhouse for three generations of Sophie's people. Her grandmother had told her that some day they would be worth a great amount of money. The paintings are the work of the famous artist Monsieur Edgar Degas. I have seen them, and they are beautiful, all five of them. Now, xxxxxxxxxxx has them. He has in his possession what is the right of Jeanne and Emile, and you, dear nephew, and me.

I checked the French document. The same words had been erased.

One day, before the war when we were young, Sophie told me the story of the paintings. A long time ago, Monsieur Degas was a frequent guest at the chateau of Monsieur Valpincon at Menil-Hubert which is only a few kilometres away. There, he had painted many pictures in a studio which the Valpincon family provided. Sophie's grandmother was for many years tutor to the children of the house near the end of the century. Of course, Monsieur Degas was very famous by then, but he had left many pictures in the studio, as there was little demand for his work back in 1880. He was not so famous at that time. When Sophie's grandmother could no longer work, she was given some pictures as a farewell gift in recognition of her service to the young ones.

Now, my dearest nephew, I must close my story. The doctors at Falaise have told me to prepare for my journey to my eternal reward, that there is little time. I have tried to pray for my salvation, yet I can not as my heart is filled with anger. I pray that God will understand that I am seeking Justice for my people, Justice for Sophie. Please know that if you have received this, my final

testament, I will be happy in my life beyond the grave. I do not doubt that I will soon meet Sophie and my beloved Philippe.

Farewell.

Louise Clotilde Bertrand.

I stayed in the apartment painting and thinking for three days. There were no more spells and I didn't drink any more Jameson. I went out and bought a new sofa.

Then, Laselle called.

Chap 12: Housecall from Hughie

Nigel let himself in quietly to his mews townhouse for the last time. The Saturday night drinks had made him a little tipsy. He hated coming home since Geoffrey had left him. He reached for the light-switch in the hallway outside the lounge, but before he could turn it on, he was gripped by several pairs of strong arms and wrestled to the floor. He was unable to move and could not see his attackers. His head was pulled back roughly and duct tape applied to his mouth. He barely noticed the needle going into his arm. He was held lying face-down until he passed out.

"I thought you were never going to come back to us at all at all." A man's voice, Irish. "I was afraid you had gone away with the fairies."

The room was faintly lit by what little daylight penetrated the heavy drapes. Nigel Sowton could not move. He was taped hands and feet to a chair. The light came on. The huge figure came towards him and sat down in another chair directly facing his.

"I suppose we better do the introductions first – no point in getting off on the wrong foot, ha?" the man said.

He was immense; well over six feet and strongly built. The huge head and neck arose in one piece from the chest. Wiry red hair ascended from mid-forehead in a series of ridges. The face had a softness which was not repeated in the rest of him. Tiny blue eyes were close together under wispy red eyebrows.

"I'll just take off the tape so that we can have a little chat. If you feel like doing any shouting, I'd say to you that it would be a bad idea. Are you with me now?"

The older man nodded. The Irishman removed the tape gently.

"Taking them things off sudden can be terrible painful. I hope it didn't hurt, now."

His captive managed a whispered, "No."

"Well, here we are now, just yourself and meself. I'm Hughie, and the boys tell me that you are the man I need to talk to. Have I it right at all?"

"Who are you?" Nigel was wet and soiled.

"I'll tell you all about that in a minute. So long as you stay nice and quiet, we'll get on the finest together." The blue eyes were friendly, even appealing. "I've a few things to put together first, and then we'll have our little chat."

"Who are you? What do you want?"

The big man moved his face closer.

"I'll have to ask you to say nothing else for the time being. You see, the way I have it planned, I'll be asking the questions and you'll be supplying the answers. Do you follow me? Now, with regard to your question about who I am, didn't I tell you that I'm Hughie? Sure, that's all you'll need to know."

Hughie rose from the chair and moved it back a couple of feet. He dragged a mahogany coffee-table across the rug and set it down between the two chairs. Apparently satisfied with the arrangement, he said,

"I'll put on the kettle. I hope you buy the Tetley's tea; 'tis the nicest of the lot."

He returned from the kitchen after a few minutes, carrying a cup of tea which he set down on the table.

"I'd give you a cup for yourself only you'd need your hands loose for drinking it," he said. He sat down and sipped from the cup.

"The finest! Best of them all, the Tetley's. You wouldn't have any nice bikkies, by any chance?"

The older man's breathing was coming very rapidly. He tried to control it without much success. The tightness in his chest reached for his jaw.

"There are biscuits in the red tin on the kitchen table."

Hughie brought the tin and sat again.

"Sure, if it isn't my very own favourites, the *Digestives*! The mammy used to buy nothing else. She taught me how to dip them in the tea; just enough to soften them and warm them, but not too much, she used to say, or they'd melt into the cup, God be good to her." He made the sign of the cross. "Just tell me now where David Sowton is, like a decent man."

"David Sowton was killed in Bosnia, for God's sake!"

Hughie consulted his watch. "Oh Lord save us, would you take a look at the time! The morning's nearly gone on us."

He finished the tea and closed the biscuit tin. Nigel heard the sound of washing from the kitchen, then the cup being replaced in the closet.

"I better set up me stuff," Hughie said when he returned to the lounge, "or we'll be here for the day."

He brought a gym bag from the hall. He sat again facing the old man, the table between them. He unfolded a square white napkin and placed it carefully on the table. From the bag he removed a small metal hammer and various sizes

of nails, lining them up neatly in order of length on the starched and pressed linen napkin. They progressed in size from one inch to about six inches. Finally, he placed beside the nails a small can with a spraying nozzle at the top. He sat back for a moment to admire the arrangement.

“Tell me,” Hughie said, “Are you a catholic or a protestant or what are you at all?”

“No religion,” the old man managed. His lower teeth were now painful.

Nigel’s breathing was out of control. Pins and needles stung his feet and hands and his lips. He began to weep silently. Hughie brought a small scissors out of his pocket. He stood above Nigel and began to cut away the hair in a small circle at the crown of the head. He continued the conversation;

“That’s a pity. Sure, where can a man turn when the world is getting him down if he has no religion to fall back on? Keep the head as still as you can now, that’s a good lad. Maybe you’d take a look at the catholic doctrine sometime. No compulsion, of course, but maybe you’d approach it with an open mind. Of course in your own case, if you decide to join up, they’d want you to drop all this homo nonsense.”

Hugh went into the kitchen, returning with a glass of water. From the bag came a small plastic container. He tilted six or seven dark red pills onto his palm.

“Now, me lad, I’ll have to get you to throw these down you. I’ll hold the water nice and steady. That’d be the best way. The other way I’d have to hold your nose. No point in that, sure you’ll be swallowing them anyway.”

The old man knew that he had no choice and co-operated. His lips were twitching uncontrollably. Hughie brought a tissue from his pocket and carefully dabbed away the excess moisture from around Nigel’s mouth.

“Tell me something now. I know you’re not a religious man, but did you ever hear of Pope Celestine the Fifth?”

The old man shook his head. He stared at the nails. Nausea and dizziness came in waves. The pressure pain was worsening.

“I suppose you wouldn’t be a great man for church history, being an atheist and a queer and all. Well, you’ll love the story of Saint Celestine. He became pope a long time ago. Saint Malachy himself predicted that Celestine would become pope over a hundred years before the poor man was even born. Saint Malachy is from County Down, same as my people, though he had to spend time in Armagh, being the archbishop at the time. A saintly man in every way, Saint Malachy. Did you know that he prophesised exactly the last one-hundred and ten popes? Well, he got it right every time right up to the present man.

“Now, here’s the interesting bit. Didn’t he stop counting after one-hundred and twelve popes? That’s because the second next man’ll be the last pope of all time, and he’ll be known as Peter of Rome, just like Saint Peter himself. What do you make of that? You’d have to come to the conclusion that the world is going to come to an end after the second next man. There’s no other logic to it at all, I’d say.”

Hughie looked into the old man’s eyes with great earnestness.

“’Tis things like that which might make you consider the church all the same. It’s never too late. Keep an open mind, is all I’d ask. But for now, I’d like you to tell me where your nephew is.”

Hughie went into the small hallway for a couple of minutes. When he returned, he was dressed in the full regalia for saying Mass, all sparkly white with a green smock which had a large cross embroidered into it. He took the spray-

can from the table. One by one, he sprayed the tips of the nails, and set them back neatly on the table.

"Just a little antiseptic. No sense in risking an infection," he explained. "In all my years of practice, I don't think I ever caused an infection. Not bad for a big clumsy lad from Down, would you say?"

He put the spray can to one side of the napkin.

"Now, where was I?" he continued. "Oh, yes. Saint Celestine. A very holy man entirely. When he was old, they took him out of the monastery and made him pope against his will. He did his best, the poor creature, but sure the poor man wasn't suited to the job at all, so, for a finish, he resigned after seven months and took himself back to the cloisters or his beehive or whatever they had in them days. Of course, popes don't resign, as everybody knows – they have to die. You can't have two popes running around the place at the same time. The new pope that came after him locked me poor man up in a dungeon, and sure wasn't he dead within a year or two. They canonised him soon afterwards. But, wait till you hear the story. Only very lately, the most recent pope gave permission for the doctors and the scientists to take x-ray pictures of Celestine in his tomb, like they do with the mummies in Egypt. You'll never guess what they found! Go on. I'll give you three guesses."

Hughie was animated and awed by what he was about to reveal. The old man felt warm urine trickling down his thighs. He had abandoned hope. He didn't try any guesses.

"Do you give up? Well, will I tell you?" Hughie asked in triumph. "Right," he continued. "Wait till you hear this. Pope Celestine had a big hole in the top of his skull which they reckon was made by a ten-inch nail! Didn't the whores drive

the nail down through his head and on down into the neck! What do you think of that?"

The man in the chair had great difficulty focusing on the lunatic in front of him. The big man selected the smallest nail, and lifted the hammer. He stood again beside Nigel's chair.

"Oh, God, I'm sorry," he said. "My manners are gone to hell. I forgot to tell you what the pills are for. You see, when I have to ask questions, I have to be shocking careful if the person is old, say over sixty. The heart can be dickey enough at that age, and when the manly stuff starts, the heart can give out. Then, sure there'd be no answers to the questions. So what the pills do is they prevent the heart from stopping in the middle of the hard part, just when the tongue is loosening up. But they're not harmful, so don't be worried about any side-effects."

Hughie went back to the bag.

"Jaysus! - may God forgive me for swearing – didn't I nearly forget to show you what I brought for you."

He withdrew a massive nail, perhaps a foot long, and proportionally big in girth. He was triumphant now, laughing loudly. He held it up in front of his prisoner.

"What do you make of that? I gave months looking for it. Christ, you should have seen the strange places I had to search for it. 'Tis the nearest thing I could get to Celestine's one. I'd say it would hold up a bridge, or keep an aircraft carrier together. I'll need a brave drop of anti-septic for this boyo, I'd say."

He picked up the spray-can and directed it to the end of the nail.

"Tell me the God's honest truth now," he said. "Did you ever see the like of it?"

The old man did not answer. He was dead.

Hughie leaned over him and whispered an *act of contrition* into his ear, just as he had done for his own mother on the morning he had drowned her in the Lagan river.

SHORT HUMOROUS ESSAYS

The Laying Hen

Now where were we? Yes; the new consultant contract and the stuff about how the ordinary punter out there (you may remember him from the old days; he's the patient) wonders what planet the consultants are living on that they were so quick to dismiss a salary of over 200k. as having a Disney quality. As best one can guage from the leaks from the negotiations, there is now about 230k on the table, with overtime etc to bring in another 30 or 40 big ones.

I gave the Christmas scrutinising this pancake. It required a lot of cortex. I fed it plenty of Omega 3. With such a weapon at my disposal, I was bound to come up with a solution, although I haven't yet fully understood what the problem is. Apparently what I was to solve was how a public-only contract would still allow the holder to make his/her fortune, a traditional reason for reading medicine. Forget all this nonsense about serving the community and making a contribution, and you only getting eight times the average industrial wage. I could see that in the post-Celtic Tiger days, the world has changed. Greed is good.

My solution is the Laying Hen. Most heterosexual docs end up in some kind of permanent relationship, sometimes going as far as matrimony. Mindful of the expenditure which such a union requires down the road and the cost of SUVs, the quarter mill won't go a long way nor leave enough breathing room for proper accumulation of bullion. One therefore should take into account the earning capacity of the economic isotope/element traditionally known as the spouse or partner.

My suggestion is that all prospective candidates for hospital posts should fortify their economic position with a laying hen, ideally a spouse who is at least a potential consultant at the time of enrolment into the unit. In the case of the layer being male, ac or dc, the same rule applies. Of course, there is no such entity as a Laying Cock in Nature, so I permit the term Laying Hen to refer to both sexes.

The economic unit, formerly known as ‘family’ will thus have a laying capacity of 230k x 2, plus the overtime/unsocial hours chances. Let’s round it off at upwards of a half mill. There should be some takers at that figure. Naturally, a bit of speculation on property would come in handy as well.

World-class planning for these essential economic unions should be commenced at an early stage, going forward year-on-year, and ideally in a school which has been designated a ‘centre of excellence’ such as Gonzaga or Clongowes Wood. Jesuit matchmaking cells should flourish. The ideal time to begin the planning process is around the first hormonal surge coming up to the Junior Cert. Lads and Lassies deemed to be capable of getting the 450 plus points, and who have the right attributes, such as sufficient honesty and sincerity to be able to fake their way through the new suitability interview, should be encouraged to hang together exclusively.

It goes without saying that the HSE will, with its customary panache and speed, facilitate the new arrangements by offering new posts in combinations, rather than singly, in order to ensure that, whenever possible, a combined economic medical unit will be appointed. Posts such as Consultant Obstetrician/Pathologist at Wexford or Consultant Geneticist/Radiotherapist at

Roscommon would be on offer, ensuring that the unit could live as a unit. The unit that stays together preys together.

Naturally, a renegade doc, who has been a difficult child but who has run off with a building speculator from Ireland's top earners list should be given a bye into the system. That is a straightforward case, you must agree. But what about the poor consultant who has married a layer of very small eggs (a Hen of Youghal), the like of which you would only find up a tree in a bird's nest? How is he/she going to fit in going forward? Doesn't look good.

The worst scenario of all would be the case of the poor guy/gal whose wife/husband wants to stay home and bring up the family. Personally speaking, I don't think there's any place for this class of indolence in our society - and rightly so. Imagine someone at home minding children when he/she should be out on the M50 on the way to the mint.

Shocking really!

Visitor in Rome

Bad news from the Vatican in the *Irish Independent* last week. It has been reported that Benny himself is at the back of it. It's a complicated story. You see, they've brought out a new 20-page rule-book which is to be sent to all bishops "to reflect the new spirit introduced by Pope Benedict in the sainthood process." It is not stated who this new spirit is, although you'd possibly be right if you suspected that he's related to Holy or the Etcum spirit (220) rather than Blithe or Restless.

It is not yet known whether this new spirit contacted the visible head directly or was summoned by Big Ben during prayer, the traditional method of getting the spirit to come – though some favour meditation. Vatican Radio sources have commented that, during the introduction ceremony, the pope indicated to his right side throughout and appeared to shake hands warmly several times with the new spirit.

Because of the spirit's invisibility, an hereditary deletion, very few of the cardinals could see anything – allowing, of course, for the *specsavers* factor. One monsignor from Manila told Philippine Wireless that he had seen a (very) small white dove. This was disputed by Cardinal Marco of Venice who said that it was definitely a pigeon. Cardinal Power of Waterford corrected him gutturally, pointing out that 'twas only a rogg (*rogga-rogga,* he translated for Archbishop Roo of Perth). Canon Flectamus (Genoa-Levatay) bobbed up and down to show off his recent knee replacement and his piety simultaneously. He said it was a

miracle, whereupon he was frowned upon in the age that is in it, three proven miracles being the minimum.

An initial air of optimism was soon dispelled by Cardinal Martins, the Prefect of the *Congregation for the Cause of the Saints*, who, in his address to the Princes of the Church, stated that the 'sainthood process' would now need "more sobriety, more rigour, more accuracy and maximum caution." Pope Benedict, he announced, "is preparing to crack down on the numbers of new saints created by the Catholic Church." A jesuit cardinal objected to the wording, pointing out that any eejit would know it was God who created everything, even saints. He was ignored, and roundly tut-tutted at by some, for being a traditionally meddlesome Jesuit.

At Martins's prompting, the wine servers withdrew and were replaced by altar boys serving Ballygowan, thus introducing the first leg of the new regime. It was his opinion that the second leg was unnecessary as there was a sufficient degree of *rigor* abroad in his audience, even amongst the still living. With regard to accuracy, he drew attention to the fact that, in a recent case, mistaken identity had allowed elevation of a ninth century muslim warlord to sainthood as virgin and martyr, subsequently declared to be patron saint of Toomevara; it appears that his scimitar was mistaken for a hurley. Finally, urging 'maximum caution', Martins instructed the prelates to consider levitation below two feet as not being properly miraculous.

In making the sainthood process more selective, he suggested (ex-cathedra) that candidates for sainthood must, from now on, appear in person at the hearings for their Cause, and if invisible, at least sign the attendance record. He expressed concern that Pope JP II had beatified 1345 people in his time,

while Pope Benny has already made 559 ‘Blessed’. He felt strongly that it was unfair to leave these people in limbo – as regards promotion – in view of what was happening in Heaven at present, and mindful of the embarrassing detail that Limbo had been decommissioned years ago. They, the assembled, were saying to Blesseds, “If you were really all that holy, how come they didn’t canonise you? What were you at on the quiet?” Candidates from silent orders, anxious to defend themselves are said to have been noticeably upset and some of them became wildly gesticulant – no longer a sin; demoted to bad habit, however undesirable.

Meantime, JP II and Ben had only canonised 497 between them. This left a cumulative waiting list of 1407 Blesseds, some waiting for decades. Martins has called in the HSE to solve the waiting list problem. Some Dublin surgeons whose hands have been blessed by the pope objected, saying they should have been called in first. They would recommend a two-tier system.

Martins urged the lads to remember the difficult case of his namesake Blessed Martin, whose photographs had faded and been blown away as dust in many the Irish household over at least half a century before he got the full retro-cranial hula-hoop.

The Eastern Orthodox delegate suddenly jumped to his feet, chanting that he could see the new spirit sitting on the cardinal’s head. It is believed that the poor man suffered an epiclesis.

He was removed in a Vatican City Council ambulance, the siren blaring *Ave, Ave* through the streets of the Holy City.

The Seven Deadly Questions

Never mind your Shakespeare and the seven ages of man. He failed to put the most meaningful questions to his readers. These great questions are common to us all, and sadly, are generally unanswered except in very rare instances. I have asked myself a few of them in my time, and have received no answers. No doubt, I'll put the rest of them to the test as I deteriorate, a mathematical certainty.

After weaning from the breast or similar substitute, one goes through a period of indoctrination and conditioning which is generally described as education. Hardly have the first tentative bristles begun to appear on the *smig* when the first question is posed. This is often first committed in front of a looking-glass, or in the case of the more imaginative, the mind's eye. It goes "Who am I?" There is no answer to it. It is best glossed over, and if not, quietly discussed with one's imam or other spiritual adviser. Very many seemingly normal citizens have gone off the rails over the millennia in search of this holy grail. The best answers offered have usually given the queryist and all belonging to him a licence to kill other persons who are getting a different answer to this question. Here, a bit of good advice. Don't ask the question.

Hot on the heels of this first inquisition for its survivors comes the second – "Why am I?" As many of you will already know, this is a disaster. Do not go there. Put notices up around the house warning your descendants against asking

it. Arrange for an inscription on your tombstone which says, “Ask not ‘why am I?’ - just keep the head down.” The best advice here is ‘don’t ask’.

Next, comes “How am I doing?” The brainwashing has worked. You are now measuring the immeasurable. If all were to be revealed, you are not doing very well at all. If you were really doing well, you would not be asking the question in the first place. There is no answer to this one at all at all. If you get answers like ‘you’re doing just great’ or ‘pure shite’ from yourself or others, seen or unseen, the man above, or all of the above, do not base your thinking on them. By all means, take tablets if they are indicated, but do nothing sudden otherwise. Keep the head down even more. All of the answers are stimulants towards delusion.

Three questions gone and no answers; it’s tough going. Lasts you about fifty years. You have stopped asking the three and life is just about tolerable. Do not fall into the trap of number four which poses,

“What is it all about?”

Pondering this inscrutable pudding has been the downfall of many a good man or woman as the case may be. You are put into a downward spiral, the net effect of which is that you then start asking the first three again. No, stay away from number four. Keep the head down. The real questions are yet to come, and the answers, where forthcoming, will be equally meaningless.

Time ticks away and you’re not half the man you used to be. You are nicely settled into the unquestioning life and it’s not bad at all. Your handicap is going up but you can still sink an odd birdie putt on the greens of life. At best, you are somewhere around the bunker on the seventeenth with an uphill lie, with, for the older and less fortunate, a small puddle of water at your feet. If you

were to ask the no-no question about how you are doing, you would probably be told lies. We all know that a comment like “Begob and isn’t it only mighty you are looking, fair play to you” isn’t all that far from the mass-card to follow.

The next question will have a true and surprising answer. It will be asked of and answered by your missus or your husband. It can crop up at any time of day or night, at home or in the shopping mall, though, hopefully not when you are driving the car on the autobahn. Ask it, by all means. This time, there really is an answer, so go for it!

The question is “Who have I?” The spousal response can be instantaneous, like “What?!” or in some rural parts, “Fot?!” On second thoughts, keep the question to yourself (without asking ‘who am I?’ of course). The complications are dreadful, and include doctors and solicitors. Say nothing and keep saying it. Yes. This is definitely the best option. If you were then to ask ‘how am I doing?’ you would be told that you are doing very well indeed, but, as we have seen, that would not be true.

You might or, more likely, might not remember the first time that you ask your penultimate question. You will certainly not know what a penultimate is any more. You may still be able to do ‘pen’, but that’ll be the height of it.

This dreaded query is “Where am I?” This is the beginning of the end. Although there is a perfect answer, it is immaterial. Immaterial, of course, will be well beyond you. If you could still ask ‘how am I doing?’ the true answer, if such exists, would not carry an affirmative message. You won’t be able to do ‘affirmative’ either, I’m afraid.

The final question has been, to my certain knowledge, asked only by persons who appear to me in my visions. They tell me that there is no answer.

They suggest that I tell you, before it is too late for either of us - in the event of our waking-up in a deceased state some morning - that you should not bother asking;

“What was that all about?”

The Kisfosti Kambola Man

I couldn't tell you for definite that Peter is no longer with us. If he's still around, which seems unlikely, he's about one hundred and eight years old by now. I don't know where his family might be at this time so I cannot say whether his discovery was ever recorded on tape or in writing. I suspect that all has been lost to posterity.

His job was as a general hand in Jody's timber yard. He cut the planks, did the books and made the deliveries. The dark blue pick-up truck came from a time before the war. The brakes weren't great and there were lots of dinges in the bumpers and bonnet, two entirely related phenomena. The timber yard was at the bottom of a hill. Peter would park the jalopy half way up the hill, its nose facing the river wall. When it had a mind not to ignore gravity, it would make its way down the hill unaided and hit the wall. It might stay there until the next delivery time or Peter might come out and address it in swahiliform words and repark it. It was at such a moment that I first heard his linguistic capabilities. I asked him what had happened to the truck. He answered as follows;

"Kisfosti kambola sabjinti go heigue."

The words were unknown to me at that time. He would later teach me some invaluable phrases and words which did not impress Brother Guilfoyle in the Monastery school. I once answered a question directed at me through the medium of Munster Irish with some Peterspeak,

"Tamara lauri tomatig sab." Bould out.

This was to leave the holy man unimpressed and reaching for his lead-lined leather strap. He told me I was a brazen pup and to be fair to the man I could find no grounds for disagreement with him, it being a reasonable enough description at the time. If everybody was saying it, there was bound to be a grain of truth in it.

On Sundays and holydays, Peter attended mass. The priest would offer "Dominus Vobiscum" to which the altar boys would get ready to chant "Et cum spirit 220." Peter would be heard at the back of the chapel quietly intoning his own response;

"Iguriamsha stramboli."

Every time I met Peter after that first encounter, he would wax away in his own private language, never saying a single recognisable syllable. I never heard him speak one word of English, which I assumed to be his mother tongue. Eventually, I stretched up to be nearly five and a half feet in my stockinged feet, and drifted away from the home town to pursue worthless pastimes such as almost growing up and reading medicine. I never met my man again, occasionally sighting him in the distance on my increasingly shorter visits to God's own garrison town. It is to my eternal disgrace that I never learned more of the petrine tongue. I feel it would have been helpful to me in a lot of embarrassing situations in later life, which is what I assume today is called.

None of the words appear anywhere on the internet. I have dined with famed linguists all over the globe, and not a one of them could understand a word or identify the origins of the mystery tongue. All the more remarkable, because as far as I know, Peter was never out foreign and did not study beyond primary level. The Christian Brothers offered little in the way of African or Asian

languages at the time, despite their involvement in worldwide missionary endeavours.

Only in recent days have I come to the conclusion that Peter's fantasmolalia was his and his alone. He, in my deranged view, invented a new language which was designed to be spoken and understood by only one person – himself. If you think about it, you must come to the conclusion that he lived in an ideal world of his own making, a personal Narnia, a conversational Eldorado, a communications Utopia. Shame on me that I did not appreciate the import at the time and make copious meaningless notes. Meaningless in the sense that the words, I suspect, have no translation into any other tongue. 'Iguriamsha' merely is. It has no other meaning. When Peter said 'Kisfosti', that's all he meant. It translates as 'Kisfosti' and nothing else. It means - 'Kisfosti.' It conveys a sense of 'Kisfosti' to the listener, and now, I hope, to the reader. The utter genius of it!

Finally, one needs a feeling for the background from which this idiosyncratic autolalia derives its sounds. I can only give a highly erudite opinion, (or 'guess' as you know it.) There would have been Irish words floating around during Peter's boyhood days. There would have been endless Latin being spat out on endless Sundays. There would have been showings of "King of the Kyber Rifles" generating Hindi sounds, and lots of films showing the heart of darkest Africa with its Swahili sounds and Doctor Livingstone, I Presume epics with God only knows what kind of verbiage, all heard in the darkest heart of Tipperary. There were whooping sounds from the Apache, Sioux, Blackfoot, Iroquois, Cree and Crow available almost every night of the week in the Excel cinema. I suggest that all of these influences contributed to the unique cadence of the new unilingo.

I could be wrong of course. If so, all I can say is what Dr. Livingstone said to Stanley in response to “Doctor Livingstone, I presume?”

“Kisfosti kambola sab”.

Know what I mean?

A New Syndrome

Ten years is really only a short time in the greater scheme, so one wouldn't be wise to overstate the magnitude of changes in such a short period. *Medicine Weekly* is ten years old – not this particular issue, mind – and some of the stories are the same as those carried in the first edition, confirmation that the more things change the more they remain the same. Yet, there have been some remarkable developments.

Evolution, for those who erroneously accept such a deviant interpretation of the world, is generally conceded to be a fairly slow process. It's not today nor yesterday that we were high in the trees throwing banana skins at our enemies, still unaware that, far down the DNA road we'd be using clubs as weapons and putting them to effective use in the provincial championships.

There are some aspects of evolution in our species which seem to have accelerated at a faster pace than the rest, moving so quickly that one can actually see the results within the puny span of one's own lifetime. Then, there are those metamorphoses, best thought of as mutations, which are evident within shorter periods - such as the ten years in which a new syndrome has eluted itself from the chromosome. This is not to suggest a cause and effect relationship between the two phenomena, although such cannot be ruled out without a double-blind study.

I must put it to the reader that the syndrome of *Spontaneous Supracapital Photosensitive Extra-ocularity (SSPEO)* is such a manifestation of accelerated evolution. This condition, requiring the presence of at least two X chromosomes,

is concordant for the similarly rapid evolution of the SUV. Unheard of before the era of the Celtic Tiger, it has become endemic in a few short years. Most of my double-X neighbours suffer – or benefit – from the condition. The two additional eyes, always covered with Ray-Bans, are located within a swathe of newly-blond hair and are embedded superiorly (it appears) within the tissues at the junction of the anterior third and posterior two-thirds of the skull bones. They are pointed in an upward and celestial direction. They have never been described in the absence of designer shades, suggesting possible further mutation within mutation. There is a strong direct relationship with family income and station-in-life perception.

As in all exotic syndromes, there is the downside. Some would-be SSPEO sufferers appear in the literature, sporadically of course. This variant, *Pseudo-SSPEO*, or *DummyYummyMummy Syndrome,* is to be found in less salubrious neighbourhoods such as Contarf, Terenure, Clontibret and Nenagh. Their extra ocules are said to be rudimentary and coccygeal, and the shades duty-free. Physicians, in charitable locations, treating this latter condition generally recommend victory in the national lottery as best practice in a fairly hopeless situation.

It is too early to say whether there is a genetic form. Scanty reports exist suggesting a mother-daughter transmission in cases where there is automatic transmission in the SUV. In these reports, development of the condition in the offspring appears to be sparked by spontaneous pregnancy before or, less commonly, after a successful betrothal. It has also been described in male offspring who later become involved in the theatrical and hairdressing domains. Husbands who ‘have eyes in the back of their heads’ are in the majority in

families studied to date. This latter syndrome, *X-linked retrovisuality* or Qutehoor's syndrome will be the topic of a forthcoming communication early in my final decade.

One of the unusual features of SSPEO is the tendency for sufferers to form self-help groups. These are held in the driveways of fee-paying primary schools and in each other's mansions. Wine mornings are held daily in designer kitchens and in Portuguese apartments. Surprisingly, golf is not played by the majority; little time is left for such pursuits after the hairdressers have had their way. By way of recreation, grooming of microscopic dogs is popular, and *Lipitor* is administered to the labradoodles via crystal bowls of designer *Lassie.*

The long-term outlook for the extra eyes is yet unknown.

The Gerrul From Carrick-on-Suir

We buried Jack the other day in a quiet country churchyard in a dignified way, much as he would have liked it. No great fuss, just get on with it. A few of us old friends chatted at the gable end of the chapel after the burial, and recalled evenings of good company and merriment. Jack was usually at the periphery of the group, quietly puffing on the Mick McQuaid, saying little but taking everything in. When he spoke, it was always worth listening. He usually introduced a topic with a 'd'ye know what I'm goin' to tell ye?' The assembled would give full attention, knowing that he was about to reveal an insight gained by long and thoughtful experience.

"Tell me, does anybody go to confession nowadays?" - the relevance to the preceding discussion about rugby lost on the gathering. It was Jack's way of moving the conversation on a bit. The oval ball stuff had been getting repetitive, alright. Time for a change. Few among the attendance would be able to answer his question, unless by way of hearsay. In any event, an answer was not necessary, and would be ignored. The query was merely a way of introducing a yarn and not a search for new information.

"Well, I used to go years ago when the clergy had the bejasus frightened out of us. Wan time, meself and a school-mate went into St.John's; we were only youngfellas at the time. My man went in first. Says he to the priest, 'Father, I was out with a girl.' Says he to me man, 'Oh, were you now? And did you do anything wrong, my child?' Yer man said, 'Well, Father, I'm afraid I kissed her.'

‘Oh, did you now? said the priest. ’And tell me now, my brazen young pup, did you do anything else?’ ‘Well, Father’, says he, ‘I put my hand in under her shirt.’ ‘And why did you do that?’ asks the holy man. I needn’t tell you but he had my friend there! He said the first thing that came into his head, ‘I didn’t think there was any harm in it, Father.’ D’ye know what the holy father said to him? ‘Sure and if there was no harm in it, wouldn’t we all be at it?’ I needn’t tell ye, I made a run for it myself!”

Jack would pause for a short slug of Guinness and a sip of Power’s Gold Label. He’d push down the tobacco in the bowl and light up again. These were clues that he hadn’t finished.

“There was a fella came over from the Piltown side years ago,” he would begin. “It was a Saturday night just after the war. None of ye fellas would remember back that far, but I do. Anyway, he decided he was in a state of mortal sin, d’ye remember them?”

Again, no answer offered or required.

“Anyway, he left it very tight, and only came across the bridge at about two minutes to nine this particular evening. The Dominicans had confessions going of a Saturday night till nine o’clock. Me man raced in the door of the chapel just as the priest was getting out of the box, starting to take off the stole and roarin’ for the dinner. Me man ran down the men’s aisle and dived into the box, awaiting further orders. The priest had to put on the yoke again and get into the box, not very pleased with the state of the nation. He drew back the screen and shouted, ‘Well?’ at yer man.

“Me man says, ‘Bless me Father for I have sinned.’ ‘Get on with it’ said the

holy father, ‘What is it that have you to tell me that’s stoppin’ me getting’ me dinner?’

“ ‘Well, Bless me Father for I have sinned. I rode a gerrul from Carrick-on-Suir’, spouts me man, and he still out of puff from the rush into town. The Dominican says to him, ‘Why didn’t you get the bus instead and you’d a been here on time?’ Needless to say, me man from Piltown had no great answer to that wan.”

Nor had we any great answer to Jack. We knew that after a period of patient listening, he would take the pipe out of the mouth, and say, “Lads, d’ye know what I’m goin’ to tell ye?”, and we’d be off again!

Occasionally, on a night when the Guinness would be at its seasonal sweetest in Harry Boyle’s, melodies would begin to force their way out, and sporadic half-inhibited notes might begin to escape and to hell with the begrudgers. Jack would be slow to join in at first but, encouraged by the company’s apparent recklessness, lack of due decorum appropriate to their high stations in life, and the aforementioned sweetness, he would eventually let it all out, provided he had choral cover from the revellers. The songs were of another time and of a great beauty. *Maritana* was his favourite source. I fondly recall those evenings when he let go and gently sang,

In happy moments day by day,

The sands of life may pass

In swift but tranquil tide away,

From Time's unerring glass.

Yet hopes we used as bright to deem

Remembrance will recall,

Whose pure and whose unfading beam

Is dearer than them all,

Whose pure and whose unfading beam

Is dearer, is dearer than them all.

Agreed. Ar dheis De go raibh a anam dilis..

POEMS

litany

high on church latin
two millennia dead
pruned men implore
virgin most pure ora pro nobis
pubertal antidote

organs always organs
hum-strum benches'
chapel-wood joists
virgin most chased pray for us
and holy purity

rampant boys kneel
hormone-singed
first stubbled
hark in the convent wait for us
mother and violet pray for us

high above stained glass
windows evie hone's
scarlet woman lit up
by a wanker's moon
lady in red

libera nos domine

Nan

evenings you might see her half-scattered
darting by the dunes passing herself out
grey head a ringer for november sky
tiny clockwork birds she calls the diddely birds
race ahead of her to catch up with themselves
but never quite succeed so have to move along
festinant forever on and on

spineless wavelets simper at her feet
and plead apologies for old rages
she knows that *sceal* well
you'd get tired of people she said one time
much as you'd love them all the same
but all the children love you nan
sure who'd love *me* she said

among the rocks
she listens to
new stories from the sea

Hands

We knew your hands then, soft-boned,
malleable. We often held them in our minds,
smoothed and rubbed until your something
genie, faint pretender, transpired
and stayed with us awhile.

We cannot see you as you were.
Listless photographs sit there, do nothing.
We used to summon you to memory,
and you, nearly you, would answer laughing;
seethrough facsimile.

But years died too and, stony-faced,
endowed us near to nothing. Now,
rare dreams, mad movies of the mind,
subvert your images to parody -
while Quisling memory sneers.

The Hill Of Crogue

He won't go there -
The Hill of Crogue,
Sad cypress, cedars, mountain ash.
Grey-backed crows on Michael's wings
Guard the unsuspecting grave-wise paths
Eternal day-dawn grey.

It's on the road
To Caiseal Mumhan
Where bones of Munster's kings
Hide, limestone-seasoned, lost,
The Last Day unremembered for
A thousand years.

He can stroll above these kings
To Cormac's chapel, quiet composed.
But discomposed, he cannot
Walk on wet-boned Crogue.

There, time-decked in geometric rank,
Fresher far than old kings,
Toe to heel agus aon do tri,
His people's corpses dance,

Squelch and macerate and hiss
In dark diamond cedar palls,
Realm of anaerobes, moulds and *things,*
Sappers of the last water.

dan

dan callaghan weary of toil
signed the place over to the son
and was pleased with the terms

his own bed all to himself
a seat to mass every sunday
the run of his teeth for as long as he'd live

he's not so sure now
there's a strange woman
in the kitchen

fogarty

fogarty on his back
from the prison of himself
beheld the ranks of stars
and the light at last

divined his mother's star
only the light
and his father's star
only the light

and loved again

doctor know

he tells me stuff in the middle of
stuff of no account
i see what he can not
i play my deadpan role

herself at his shoulder
has read my eyes
cat-brain pounced on
thespian flaw

she's on to me
through somehow
johari's one-way window
knows i know she knows

she's months ahead
at petal-fall on pine wood and
the gathering of herself
for the long road

Headspin

the poet has too many words
in his head to make
a poem
today.

lose the run of themselves they would
without rhyme or reason
if he let them
out.

a plague of *mots* attracted to
the lightbulb of his mind
has dammed the duct,
(i'd say 'tis fucked)
the brain drain,
at the spout
no doubt.

images too. the usual suspects,
amelita galli-curci
munster finals
galtee cheese
frangipani
battles
bees.

continued....

he envies maurice of two-mile-borris who
told him no bother he'd out-poet
the shite out of all the
great professors
below in
cork.

the head-lab reports at last,
(whisht till you hear).
word/image match,
incompatible,
dangerous.
oh dear.

ah
still
bemused?-
too many words.
it's still today still.
he'll be mused tomorrow.

Hundreds and Thousands

1.

The last leg
The long avenue to the castle
Laid out centuries before
One Roman mile a thousand metres
Then three hundred say
To the Roman back door
Fifteen hundred yards in all
To the phalanx of black-frocked men
Winged oracles of Rome

He awoke there
Fifteen hundred mornings
Fifteen hundred masses
One thousand rosaries
Four hundred benedictions
Five hundred litanies
Two hundred stations
Weeping for poor old Jesus
And His Blessed Mother
And virgins and martyrs
And all the saints
And all the living and the dead

2.

The bell tolled for him
Sixty thousand times
Left-right, left-right
Spitted and polished
According to the scriptures.
Open at page ninety-one
Rules rule the world boys
Aequam memento rebus in arduis,
Servare mentem haud secus in bonis.
If to a town or petty isle
We make an expedition
We must use accusative
Without a preposition –
But if this town or isle we quit
We must recall on leaving it
An ablative without an 'a'
Will grace our composition
Be mindful dear children
Of God's number one rule
Touch not the mickey
In Latin Greek Irish French
Hands outside the quilt
Na bach leis an Cock

3.

Two years to go
A lot more mornings
A lot more bells
Thousands of thousands
Pray for us
Beware of the mickey
Horn of the devil
Only pious ejaculations
Need apply here
In time of temptation
Jesus of Nazareth
King of the Jews
Rex Judaeorum
Grant me a stainless
And a happy death
Remember man thou art but dust
And nearly fifteen

4.

Onward ever onward
Full-bagged Christian soldier
That black-black habit
You'll learn to live
In the world outside
From a world within
From men
Who live in neither
But ring the bell
And ask the question
In the dark priest-hole
Did pollution occur my son
Was there issue
Two hundred million murders
Of God's unborn children
Every time you do it
Limbo ad aeternum for them
Hellfire for your my child
But God is infinitely merciful
For your penance
Five decades and
Fifty years of guilt
Amen

dance

have i ever really danced my dance
that dna divined for me?
or are there caterpillar genes

one day waltz another reel
that dance their dance through me?
i would prefer to dance my dance

before the music stops for good
to make the moves and steps i should
to dance the dance of me.

global warming

silly gaybird
in the wrong country
before his time

looks through my window
from a leafless *acer*
face all query

what month have we at all
where is the mayfly
where are the girls

should i tell him
about melting glaciers
carbon cycles far kyoto

he's too far gone
can't tell his ass
from his ozone

To Lady Alice Fitzwilliam

(*RHS rhododendron 58*)

Sonnet

Men saye thou art a brazen bloominge showe-off,
Yet I dig thee in my strange way, Ladye Alice.
Suche earthy woo shalle not be soil'd by Phallus;
I never rhododendron, that I knowe of.
Although thou art wilde fonde of propagation
And likest ericaceous down belowe
Which leaveth thee in winter; even soe,
If thou not'st minde, let's sticke with conversation.

What doth for me's thy scent; wishe I coulde selle it.
Thine heady perfume, Fitzy, blow'th my mind;
In May, at thirty paces, I can smelle it.
O love perverse! 'tis of the sniffinge kinde!
It envieth not when thou remain'st abed
And gettest thine from bumble bees insteade.

Contre le Montre

It's not that easy write a villanelle
In double time against a ticking clock
And get it done before they sound the bell.

Your mind's alert, the pen will weave its spell.
But nothing happens. Damn! It's writer's block!
It's not that easy write a villanelle.

As seconds pass, the brain begins to swell
In manacles and chains you can't unlock
You rage against the ringing of the bell.

Your time grows short; you're listening for the knell,
And all the while the Muse stays in dry dock.
Impossible to write a villanelle.

You panic! Take deep breaths, relax, just smell
The roses. Simmer down, hang loose, take stock,
And do it quick before they sound the bell!

Then just before surrender, you can tell
That something's happened. Words now run amok.
You find that you can write a villanelle.

Some day, alone and sitting in your cell,
Recall to cogitation this day's shock.
Don't even think to write a villanelle
And shoot whoever reaches for a bell.

Sestina Lente

You're writing a sestina? Do your best
To keep the rules. Just follow what is right.
First settle on end-words you think might work,
Apply iambic rhythm to each line.
There is no place for any sort of rhyme,
And be prepared for multiple rewrites.

The rules are complicated; you rewrite
The end-words in a pattern. Though it's best
To use enjambment to construct your rime,
You might become confused, not knowing right
From left, nor start from finish of a line.
Don't underestimate the task, just work

Away and hope to hell the damn thing works.
Even when you're knackered, you'll rewrite
The six words in your mind till, line by line,
And word by word, the head is not the best.
Daniel's crazy scheme was conjured up right
After feeds of strongish drink. Neither rhyme

Nor reason were applied. He used no rhyme,
Assonant or consonant. Please don't work
With reason; it won't help. To get it right
In the end, you'll need hundreds of rewrites.
You'll come up short each time. My best
Advice? Go back once more to the first line

continued

(Sestina Lente)

And start again, but this time stay in line.
There's little chance that you'll construct the rime,
As Monsieur Daniel meant, until you best
The endless trial-and-error of the work,
The key to consummation. So, rewrite,
Rewrite, (and curse) until the damn thing's right.

When at last you think you've got it right
(The trick of proper sequencing of lines),
Deluded that you're on the last rewrite
Of six mind-blowing stanzas for the rime,
You'll sit back sucking diesel! Such hard work
Deserves, you'll think, a prize. You've done your best.

Then get the Envoi right without a rhyme.
Set pet words in three lines to end the work.
Erase the lot! Rewrite! It's for the best.

McGaherns' Day Out – c.1942

Ye should have kept on for the big match in Clones
And skipped second mass back in Ballinamore;
You'd warned your dad about daft Canon Reilly,
Author of atheists, buffoon for Rome.

All children attending the mass at his chapel
Were harshly detained for the catechal class.
Reilly himself manned the gap at the exit,
His own canon law stating *no child may pass.*

At the gateway the cleric took hold of your ear, John,
Then your dad took a *greim* on the *cluas* of God's man.
Like Siamese triplets ye waltzed up the aisle, John,
Inelegant eejits at Catch-as-Catch-Can.

The canon to the right of you volleyed and thundered
Chapter and verse of the words of Saint Paul,
And poor plastered Jesus above the high altar
Was wondering what He should make of it all.

You escaped in the end by a stroke of good fortune;
The kind *Master Gannon* won you the reprieve;
"Who made the world, boy?" –"God did", you answered,
So Reilly was forced to allow you to leave.

You tasted that day the spite and the violence,
The hater and hated alike in their chains,
And the cold fortress church which withered men's hearts
In the parody country of scholars and saints.

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The Crucifixion of Gabriel Conroy:

a creative personal response to James Joyce's "The Dead"

Gabriel Conroy is possibly the most famous short-story protagonist in history. Just over one hundred years have elapsed since James Augusta Aloysius Joyce, 1882-1941, placed a full stop after the word "dead", committing Gabriel to the mercy of the living, the shades and the now-dead.

In this essay, I will present some general aspects of the story from the viewpoint of an embryo short story writer. I will discuss title, setting, time, main characters, scenes, atmosphere, suspense, tension, ending, dialogue and monologue, language and style. I will then pay particular attention to Joyce's astonishing use of allusion. Finally, as a result of my experience with others' interpretation, coupled with my own reading of the story and some of its critical reviews, I will concentrate on Gabriel Conroy's experience in the story itself, at my own hands, and at the hands of some of his less than sympathetic critics.

Background: "The Dead" was begun in Rome in 1906 and completed in Trieste in 1907 as the final story in the Dubliners collection (Ellmann 253**).** Joyce was working throughout the earlier period as a bank clerk in Rome, living with Nora Barnacle and their baby son, Giorgio, born 1905. Dubliners was not published until 1914, due to the publisher's reluctance to include some of the material.

Source: I use the Penguin Books 1956 edition of Dubliners as my source of "The Dead". This writer was strongly advised to study carefully the story as example of one of the greatest of all. Therein, I should find almost every literary trick in the book as an essential aid in my quest for learning how to write short stories. My reason for selecting this work as subject for my dissertation is as follows. Having read Joyce's story a few times, I enrolled in a weekly class where Irish short stories were reviewed. The grand finale of the course dealt with "The Dead". The class covered the plot, the characters and the inevitable "meaning" of the story, all of which seemed to agree generally with my own preparatory reading of, and around, the story. Just before the class finally broke up, one member raised a last question about Gabriel Conroy, whom we had just tucked in to his bed in the Gresham Hotel in Dublin in the early hours of January 7th 1904, possibly in an advanced state of epiclesis, there to cogitate and ruminate on himself and the souls of the then and future faithful departed.

The question was: "Do you think that Gabriel was at it; playing around a bit?" A few of my classmates stopped at mid-point of their winter re-robing for the "exeunt omnes" to consider the matter and unburden themselves of a final opinion. The consensus was that Gabriel was "playing the field". They were in no doubt; Gabriel was a bad egg. One student was "certain" that Gabriel had been "shagging" Lily, and could possibly have been having a little on the side with Molly Ivors, who had taken "his hand in a warm grasp" (Dubliners 215), and who had "firmly pressed" Gabriel's hand while dancing "lancers" (216), and further, if these gestures were not actually signifying a physical relationship between the two, they showed that Gabriel was certainly "up for it"; isn't that why he invited himself to see her home later in the story? "If you will allow me, Miss Ivors, I'll

see you home if you are really obliged to go" (223). In a confident delivery of a "coup de grace" to Gabriel, one of my classmates suggested that it was "obvious to anybody who had read the story that Gabriel was on the point of raping poor old Gretta in the Gresham hotel!"

The question and the suggestions surprised me. Like Gabriel, a "look of perplexity appeared" (214) on my face, mostly because the comments seemed to reflect an incomplete reading of the text on my part. I had found Gabriel to have been a bit of a stuffed shirt and a bit of an intellectual snob, but I liked him as a somewhat flawed but generous sufferer, like myself, of the human condition. How could I have missed sexual relationships between Gabriel and Lily and between Gabriel and Molly Ivors after two or three close readings, a few sessions of concentrated listening to the audio-tape beautifully read (Norton), and recent viewings of the John Huston film, The Dead? I felt a bit like Gabriel must have done after his encounter with Lily: "discomposed"; the discussion "had cast a gloom" (203) over me too!

I had been warned that too much re-reading of Joyce could induce some rather strange thinking, such as taking in the annual pub-crawl in Dublin on Bloomsday, and can now bear witness to the wisdom of the caution. I read and re-read. In the process, I was to suffer my own epicleses, epiphanies, and anagnorises in due course; the whole point, it seems, of Joyce. I was to learn that it is the reader who is targeted to get the message, and not just Gabriel Conroy. The reader is the misfortunate who is to have a good look at himself or herself in Joyce's looking-glass. But, more of my interior monologue later.

First, I had to find out what James Joyce, a slip of a boy of twenty-five, was doing with the story, and learn what I set out to learn in the first place; how

does his story teach me how better to read stories and other texts and, hopefully, following a reasonable exegesis on my part, with the help of some of the important critical literature, improve indirectly my writing of them?

Following the comments of my classmates, I realised that I must allow the story to tell itself to me. This, then, was strictly private business between James Joyce and me – and Gabriel Conroy. I would then record in detail my own observations and reactions, and set them down on paper. I would assist Joyce in "completing" the story. This writer-reader relationship is beautifully described by Louis B Jones in a chapter of Writers Workshop in a Book entitled "A Note to an Unpublished Writer" where he advises the writer to think of his reader as follows:

> ....the disembodied voice of the author says, I'm alone in a room transcendent of history; you're alone now too: or if anyone is there with you, erase them from your ear. Of course, you must build "my" story only out of your own ideas and experiences. So in this mirror of a shared sentence, recognition takes place: the actual "writing" turns out to be, wholly or in part, the reader's job: the reader actively writes each sentence as he goes; this little fountain of words rises within *your* brain stem. Its substance is provided by *your* reflection and experience. The miracle of the grammatical sentence is that it can be shared – that it can thump softly through the wall of the lonely self. (179)

This essay is the result of this process. Early on in my reading of "The Dead", I realised that I was completing Joyce's text with him. Scholes says of Dubliners

> Joyce's way, then, as illustrated in this story ["Counterparts"], is to give us much food for interpretation and put the work of

> interpretation squarely upon us. He gives us the maximum of conscience-creating labor by inviting us to participate with him in the creative process. To become the ideal reader of *Dubliners* each of us must accept this complicity. (Scholes and Litz 346-7)

I will endeavour to complete the text with James Joyce and, having done that, review briefly what "completions" have been arrived at by others – mainly the critics.

The story: "The Dead" is a short story of novella length. The dead are literally the dead in general, more specifically the dead Michael Furey, youthful sweetheart of Gretta Conroy, and the dead singers of the past, and perhaps those about to die soon such as Julia Morkan (254). In a Gothic interpretation of the story, all of the players may well have been dead already. Alternatively, the main protagonist Gabriel Conroy may have been merely spiritually, emotionally and politically dead, and by inference, so too the middle classes of Dublin, and Ireland. It appears that the title, and some of its imagery of the connection between "all the living and the dead" (256) may have been partially, at least, inspired by a Thomas Moore melody entitled 'O, Ye Dead' in which "the dead answer the living, as if they were whimpering for the bodied existence they could no longer enjoy" (Ellmann 244). In the final scene at the Gresham hotel, Gabriel's soul approaches

> that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not comprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one

> time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling. (Dubliners 255)

Setting: home of the Misses Morkan, a house in Usher's Island, near the centre of Dublin city, not far from the Phoenix Park. The story finishes at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin, a couple of miles distant from the Morkan home. The Morkans; Aunt Julia, Aunt Kate, and their niece Mary Jane live in the upstairs story of the house. The house is lit by gaslight. It has been snowing. The occasion is the Morkans' annual dance which was "always a great affair" and which "for years and years" had "gone off in splendid style" (199).

Time: the story covers the period of "long after ten o'clock" (200) until the early hours of the morning, probably (traditionally) on the night of January 6th, 1904, the feast of The Epiphany.

Main Protagonist: Gabriel Conroy; securely *petit bourgeois,* early middle-aged probably second-level teacher; nephew to Julia and Kate Morkan; husband to Gretta; son of the late Ellen nee Morkan and T.J. Conroy of the Port and Docks.

Main Antagonists**:** Lily, the caretaker's (of the house) daughter, servant girl; Molly Ivors, Irish revivalist-minded co-teacher; Gretta Conroy, originally from Galway, wife of Gabriel; Michael Furey, long-deceased youth and former lover of Gretta.

Ancillary players**:** photograph of Ellen Conroy with her son Constantine; the snow all over Ireland; the west; the dead; Julia Morkan and her sister Kate Morkan, and their niece Mary Jane Morkan - first cousin of Gabriel – possibly spinsters all. Of interest, the two old ladies, relatives of James Joyce, on whom these characters are probably based were widows, lived upstairs in a house at

15, Usher's Island which they rented, and which had a caretaker whose daughter Elizabeth, born c. 1880, was probably the model for Lily (Costello 26). These true-life widows had a role where they "trilled and warbled in a Dublin church up to the age of seventy" (Costello 26), the same Adam and Eve's - the Franciscan church on the South Quays – in which Julia Morkan "was the lead soprano" in "The Dead" (200).

Other personae: all guests of the Morkans; Freddy Malins, a Catholic drunk and his mother; Mr Browne, a Protestant; Bartell d'Arcy, a tenor; Miss Daly, student pianist; Miss Callaghan; Miss Kerrigan; Miss Power; Miss Furlong; Mr Bergin. Others.

Themes: in the most benign reading, "The Dead" is a love story; the love between Gabriel and Gretta. However, there are many other themes which permeate, and at times, dominate the tale; the mortality of us all; the present, the future and the past; Irish nationalism; the moral paralysis – "hemiplegia" - of the colonised Dubliner (Ellmann 163). Other themes include religion, class structures, education, art versus life, Irish hospitality, music, alcoholism, the urban/rural divide, and the role of women in 1904 society.

The main protagonist Gabriel Conroy, with his wife Gretta, arrives somewhat late for the annual dance at the Morkan apartments. He becomes involved in unexpected confrontational exchanges with Lily and Miss Ivors, before being called upon to carve the goose and give the after-dinner speech. He gives fulsome praise to his hosts and absent friends, notably the hospitable Irish people of the past. Following the party, he travels by cab to the Gresham hotel in "a riot of emotions" (254), hoping to renew his stale, perhaps non-existent, physical love-life with his wife. When he makes his advances, he finds that Gretta

is not interested because she is grieving for Michael Furey, a long-dead lover from her youth. Initially enraged at her infidelity of mind and astonished at the intensity of her feeling for the dead boy, he calms himself. In acceptance of his situation as second choice, he reviews his own perceived inadequacies and his mortality, surrendering totally while the snow falls softly “on all the living and the dead ” (256). Frank O’Connor summarises the action in saying that we are slowly brought in “The Dead” “through a series of themes all of which find their climax in the hotel bedroom” (Scholes and Litz 301).

Point of view: the narrator is omniscient. Gabriel Conroy’s interior dialogue is the striking feature of the way the story is shown. It is the method by which his character is developed and expanded upon (the only character presented in this way), firmly placing him as the main protagonist.

Gabriel’s character is not merely descriptive or static. As the story unfolds, he responds to the action and dialogue and, at story’s end, is probably changed. Development of each “scene” in the story is mostly achieved by dialogue and, to a small extent, non-verbal events. The narrator minimally editorialises mainly through Gabriel himself. Several characters; Lily, Miss Ivors, Mrs Malins and Gretta are developed mainly by their dialogue with Gabriel. Others, such as Freddy, D’Arcy, Mary Jane, Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia are revealed and/or reveal themselves in the general dialogue and action of the story – all in Gabriel’s presence. This strongly suggests, early on in the narrative, that it is Gabriel whom the reader expects to be the one visited by an expected epiclesis or epiphany, in keeping with Joyce’s stated intentions in writing Dubliners:

> I am writing a series of epicleti – ten – for a paper. I have written one. I call the series *Dubliners* to betray the soul of that hemoplegia [sic] or paralysis which many consider a city. (qtd. in Ellmann 163)

There is physical description of most of the characters enough to allow the reader some idea of their appearance as in the cases of Mr Browne; “a tall wizenfaced man with a stiff grizzled moustache and swarthy skin”, Freddy;

> a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel’s size and build with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruding lips. His heavylidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy. (210)

This, perhaps, is a representation of the simian appearance of the Irish so beloved of and frequently represented in the British press caricatures and cartoons of the time. Of Julia and Kate, the narrator writes:

> [they] were two small plainly dressed old women. Aunt Julia was an inch or so the taller. Her hair, drawn low over the tops of her ears, was grey; and grey also with darker shadows, was her large flaccid face. Though she was stout in build and stood erect her slow eyes and parted lips gave her the appearance of a woman who did not know where she was or where she was going. Aunt Kate was more vivacious. Her face, healthier than her sister’s, was all puckers and creases like a shrivelled red apple and her hair, braided in the same oldfashioned way, had not lost its ripe nut colour (204)

And Gabriel?

> a stout tallish young man. The high colour of his cheeks pushed upwards even to his forehead where it scattered itself in a few formless patches of pale red; and on his hairless face there scintillated restlessly the polished lenses and bright gilt rims of the glasses which screened his delicate and restless eyes. His glossy black hair was parted in the middle and brushed in a long curve behind his ears where it curled slightly beneath the groove left by his hat. (202)

He also has a "plump body." I will refer later to the possible significance of the "groove left by his hat" (202). Next, Miss Ivors:

> a frankmannered talkative young lady with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. She did not wear a lowcut bodice and the large brooch which was fixed in front of her collar bore on it an Irish device. (213)

Mr D'Arcy, the tenor: "a dark complexioned young man with a smart moustache" (226). Later, we are to find that he is "as hoarse as a crow" (241). The reader is given an occasional glimpse of some small but important physical characteristics of others, such as Gabriel's unspoken insult about Miss Ivor's "rabbit's eyes" (217), or Mrs Malins, who is "a stout feeble old woman with white hair. Her voice had a catch in it like her son's and she stuttered slightly" (216).

The descriptions are not just of physical appearance but also include the narrator's presentation of other attributes: attitudes, such as Miss Ivor's Irish nationalist brooch; economic circumstances, such as Gabriel's fancy spectacles or the aunts' plain clothing; health, such as Freddy's boozy facial features or his

mother's stutter or Julia's incipient confusion; ageing, in the case of Browne, Mrs Malins and the two aunts; occupation, such as Browne's weather-beaten and swarthy face – possibly a seaman. We are not told why Browne is a guest at the party so we can include him as one of the "old friends of the family" (199). Everybody else is there for a reason; the aunts and Mary Jane are hosts, Gabriel and Gretta are close relatives, Mrs Malins is, most likely, an old friend of the aunts and seems to have sailed over from Scotland especially for the occasion, in addition to trying to get Freddy sober, and so, Freddy must be invited. Aunt Kate and Mary Jane have no doubt invited their middle-class pupils and, Mary Jane, being involved in the musical world outside, has possibly invited D'Arcy, perhaps for "show" or maybe to have him sing at the party (which he refuses). Again, we are not sure why Miss Ivors was invited; although we are shown that Gretta calls her "Molly" which, in 1904, would suggest a close personal relationship. The invited young men could possibly be boy-friends or dancing partners for the pupils or pupils themselves.

There are two sittings for the meal, the "bit" players first. The principals, who are seated for the more formal carving of the goose and, presumably the best of the food, consist of the three hosts, Gabriel and Gretta, D'Arcy, Freddy and Mrs Malins, and Browne; nine persons, at least. In the film, The Dead, there are fifteen people at the table, including Mr Bergin, Mr Kerrigan – probably, -Miss Daly, Miss Furlong and Miss O' Callaghan, who, in the original story, is to play the piano to accompany D'Arcy singing "The Lass of Aughrim" at the end of the night. Of perhaps peripheral interest, none of the ladies at table in the film are wearing "low cut bodices"; they are all modestly wrapped up to the chin.

Scenes: the story is presented in a series of scenes, most of them at the Morkan home: 1. Gabriel and Lily interact downstairs. Lily snaps at Gabriel. 2. Gabriel and Miss Ivors interact while dancing. Ivors accuses him of being a “West Briton”. 3. Mary Kate plays piano, Aunt Julia sings. 4. The dinner party proceeds, including Gabriel’s after-dinner speech. 5. In a farewell scene downstairs, Gretta listens to “The Lass of Aughrim”, sung by D’Arcy, which puts her in mind of dead Michael Furey. 6. The Conroy’s make their way to the Gresham hotel, Gabriel in a high amorous state. 7. The Conroy’s interact in the bedroom of the hotel. 8. Gabriel considers love, life, and death matters while Gretta sleeps.

In the earlier scenes, Gabriel is repeatedly made to feel uncomfortable (by women) in his middle-class establishment cocoon, particularly by Miss Ivors, who, twice, calls him a “West Briton” (214, 216). By party’s end, he has recovered his *bonhomie* and is waxing romantic and lustfully about his wife, like a man “on a promise”. The story then very slowly gathers momentum towards its crescendo in the Gresham hotel where Gabriel is shaken to the core of his being by Gretta’s revelations about her love for the dead Michael Furey. Most of these actions occurs through dialogue, external mostly, but internal in Gabriel’s case. The use of dialogue brings unexcited and not over-dramatic flow to the earlier scenes. Most of the story’s crescendo-diminuendo moments take place in Gabriel’s head, notably those following his encounters with Lily (at the beginning), Ivors (in the middle), and Gretta (at the end). Gabriel, it appears has big trouble relating to women.

Atmosphere, suspense, mystery and ending: Joyce evokes an atmosphere of early twentieth century Catholic Dublin empire-leaning, almost-segregated middle class life, with its rituals, manners, social divisions, and unchanging but

decaying self-comforting values and attitudes. There is also a very strong Gothic element throughout the narrative; the house itself, the not-far-from-death Julia; the dead Michael Furey; the departed Patrick Morkan and his horse; the characters' fixation on the past and the dead: the discussion at dinner about the monks sleeping in their coffins, the frequent reference to the dead, and their virtues, Gabriel's final interior dialogue in which "his soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead" (255), and the striking, slow onomatopoeic image of the snow "faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead," blurring the separation of life and death (256). Above all, Joyce maintains throughout, by means of a tight but calm narrative, an intense sense of reality which, although less exciting than escapist traditional fiction, produces much more believable characters and events from which this reader did not expect a dramatic or entirely determinate resolution. By the time of the only long narrative in the story, Gabriel's after-dinner speech, there is little possibility of becoming bored or uninterested, because the narrator already has the reader well-hooked by the earlier events, and the reader – this one, at least - has entered Gabriel's internal/external world. Joyce holds the interest of readers suspensefully "by raising questions in their minds and delaying the answers" (Lodge 14). The questions are raised throughout the evening at Usher's Island, on the way to the hotel and in the hotel. Then come the "answers" in so far as they go.

Approaching a Joyce story, or any good modern short story, I do not expect a neat solution or a happy ending. In this regard, Joyce more than lives up to these expectations in "The Dead". At the end, the reader has as many questions as answers. On re-reading, it became more obvious to this reader that

it is he himself who is expected to provide the answers. The combination of Joyce's text and the reader together produce the final emotional and intellectual experience.

It is a story which therefore requires many unhurried readings, for there is an almost endless supply of imagery, allusion and semiotics, all of which expand and enrich the experience of this narrator-reader duality, over and over. To me, there seems not to be one superfluous word in the fifty-seven pages. Re-reading, I keep on providing Joyce with reasons why some words are there, such as the "fanlight" over Gretta's head, and its imagery of the Annunciation or pilgrims' scallop-shell of Compostella. When I find some possible signifiers whose signified or whose relevance I cannot create, such as Mrs Malin's "beautiful big fish," I can hazard a Christian guess or laterally, an erotic stab in the semi-darkness, e.g. codpiece. Whatever the meaning, I know that the beautiful creature is no accident. In the land of words, Mr Joyce is not at all accident-prone.

Dialogue, through which most of the story is effected, brings up the inevitable Irish conversational subjects; alcoholism, religion, the pope in Rome, politics, the role of women, servants, literature, music and its heroes, the weather, and death. By story's end, one is very familiar with the character of Gabriel, one feels one knows fairly well some aspects of Kate, Julia, Freddy, Molly Ivors, Browne and Mary Jane, and one would like to know more about Lily and Gretta. Almost all of what we learn about the characters is given to us through dialogue. The external dialogue is crisp and convincing, the internal more self-probing, emotional, deductive. Both are natural and believable.

Language: style and pace Joyce uses simple everyday language throughout. Other than "thoughttormented," a pompous neologism used twice by

Gabriel (219, 232), there is not a single difficult word in the story. Descriptions are direct to the point. Sentences, for the most part, are uncomplicated and simply understandable. There is no hyperbole except when used in Gabriel's head, where it is occasionally allowed to wax fiercely, but in a controlled fashion; controlled by Gabriel himself. Before leaving his aunts' house, he looks at Gretta and "A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart" (242). On the way to the Gresham, "the blood went bounding along his veins and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous" (243). On the way upstairs to the hotel bedroom, "he could have flung his arms about her hips and held her still for his arms were trembling with desire to seize her and only the stress of his nails against the palms of his hands held the wild impulse of his body in check" (246). At the hotel window, he "looked down into the street in order that his emotion might calm a little" (247). Later, "a dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind and the dull fires of his lust began to glow angrily in his veins" (250). When he is rejected by Gretta, "a shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself a ludicrous figure" (251). Each time after such strong emotions of love, desire, rage and self-loathing, he does manage to calm himself down. We learn from this that, whatever his faults, Gabriel does not overly react in the presence of high emotion and has adult mechanisms in place to ensure proper behaviour. The narrator occasionally interposes some direction around Gabriel's thoughts but does not editorialise or pass judgement; after Gabriel has felt that "some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him" (252), probably the climax of the story, the narrator writes directly, "But he shook himself free of it with an effort of reason" (252). Gabriel's internal dialogue is at times filled with pomposity and

intellectual arrogance - “orating to vulgarians” (251) - at times calling on figures from Greek legend, and sometimes even lapsing into Elizabethan parlance, a signal to his need to persuade himself that he is superior to his aunts, his wife and the assembled guests. But, however pompous Gabriel is, his is hardly the thinking or behaviour of some Victorian sexual predator-monster suggested by my classmates or some critics.

Pace: As the pace of the story increases towards the end, the focus narrows down to Gabriel and Gretta, and finally to Gabriel alone. At the conclusion, the narrator’s distance from Gabriel seems to shorten until, in the final action, it is difficult to separate Gabriel’s voice from the narrator’s.

Language: there are many examples of what I think of as Joyceisms, i.e. personification, in the writing, similar to those employed in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and in other Dubliners stories; in “The Dead”, “there scintillated restlessly the polished lenses and the bright gilt rims of the glasses which screened his delicate and restless eyes”(202), “a look of perplexity appeared on Gabriel’s face”(214),“a murmur in the room attracted his attention”(219), “A dull yellow light brooded over the houses and the river”(243), “the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky”(243), “the dull fires of his lust began to glow angrily” (250). Joyce’s fondness for attributing intent or personality to inanimate objects can be found extensively in Portrait; “swift December dusk had come tumbling clownishly after its dull day” (III,109) “the droning voice of the professor continued to wind itself slowly round and round the coils it spoke of”(V,210). Further examples abound in Dubliners; “The shadow took her faded dress into shelter but fell revengefully into the little cup behind her collar-bone”:[“A Mother”] (161); “a spirit of unruliness diffused itself among

us" ["An Encounter"] (18). Although language and times have moved on by a century, I enjoy this English as much as I have done in my school days, however unwieldy either were. On the other hand, Sean O'Faolain, writing in 1948, was by then less impressed by Joyce's language, especially by the use of simile, than he had been years earlier:

> It is a measure of the speed of this latter-day intensification of language that we can already read much of the earliest Joyce with a shock of surprise at the innocence of their style and the superficiality (in the literal sense of surface-ness) of their English.... When we read *Dubliners* long ago we had a different sensation. We admired the intensity, as we then thought, of the struggle to grapple with the shapes and faces of things, the vivid graphic quality of the descriptive detail. Today there is little of this kind of pleasure in his descriptions. They do not, we observe, grapple to compress, they peer and catalogue painstakingly, and the words are not always well-chosen: - (198)

The varied pace of the writing is salutary (to this reader). Joyce demonstrates that his use of language can match the intensity of the action or emotion he wishes to describe. In the story, which begins quietly, the first note of minor acceleration occurs in Gabriel's difficult exchange with Lily. It calms then until Gabriel is confronted by Ivors, after which second and slightly stronger mini-storm, the pace and intensity is calmed again. A riot of fiercely concentrated emotion crescendos through the latter scenes of the story as Gabriel's state of mind is assailed repeatedly by Gretta and the dead boy at the Gresham hotel. The images tumble unhappily through Gabriel's mind in long sentences in which

the images cascade rapidly, “multicolouredly” and “multitudinously’” on to the next sentence, as in, “A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries” (244), where consonance and words such as “escape” and “coursing” emphasise the rhythm and help to convey the urgency of his emotions. Then, slowly, finally, a slow decelerating but repetitive alliterative onomatopoeia to match Gabriel’s slowly falling calm, Gretta’s sleep and the silent lonesome snowfall, eases into the terminal (in more ways than one!) diminuendo “falling faintly” and “faintly falling” (256) of an intensely sleepy lyrical dying paragraph of prose/poetry ending with the near-stuporose “on all the living and the dead” (256), as Gabriel falls asleep. I have now become more aware of how the pace, the sound and the varying intensity of the prose itself can effect the showing of emotion and generation of atmosphere. Similarly, the reader’s emotional response is manipulated by the language and style, moving along through the slow, near-Gothic and never far from the aura of death and dying, to the climax of rampant testosterone-fuelled passion, the rupture and deflation of Gabriel’s sexual and egotistical cocoon, and the final anticlimax of defeat and probable acceptance.

Hugh Kenner coined the term “Uncle Charles principle” to suggest that “the narrative idiom need not be the narrator’s” (Schwarz ed.70). As example, he argues

> the narrator would want us to see that it is Lily, not the narrator, who would use the word “literally” when “figuratively” is the proper word in the first sentence of “The Dead”: “Lily, the caretaker’s daughter was literally run off her feet.” (202)

I think that it would be an unlikely "miss" by Joyce were he to not notice the anapestic rhythm of his first sentence. I suspect that it repeated itself like a jingle in his head for weeks in the streets of Rome – "Lily, the caretaker's daughter/was literally run off her feet." Such rhythmic lines are reminiscent of popular iambic jingles of the time (which I learned from my grandmother, five years Joyce's senior); "She was only a dentist's daughter/But she went with the best set in town!" or, "She was only a baker's daughter/But Lord! How she needed the dough!" Would Joyce modify the narrator's voice in describing a character to that of the character himself or herself? Lily herself, supposedly, would have said "literally." I'm not so sure; perhaps the word "literally" is used because its first two and final two letters spell the name, "Lily." Joyce the master wordsmith, might, to show us more of the real Lily, have more than likely put the word, "literally" into Lily's external dialogue to convey her servant-class Dublinese, if his use of the word "literally" was to demonstrate her *patois*. It seems more credible that he would have maintained, in this instance, the distance between the narrator and the character which typifies the story at least until the final scene, where it becomes difficult to separate Gabriel's thoughts from those of the narrator. Joyce demonstrates this distancing when Lily says "the men that is now is only all palaver" (202) – Lily's *lingo*, not the narrator's. Of course, it could also mean that she got herself rushed off her feet and therefore pregnant!

Allusion and Imagery: Joyce is once reputed to have said, referring to Ulysses, that he had put in so many enigmas and puzzles that professors would be kept busy for centuries arguing over what he meant, or "he admitted to wanting to keep the critics busy for the next three-hundred years" (O'Brien 148).

I found a myriad of puzzles in “The Dead”, many ‘solved’ for me later in the Joycean literature, some unsolved, and some at which I could only guess. “The Dead” is a rain-forest of allusion, semiotics, allegory and imagery; dense, subtle and sometimes impenetrable, meandering creepers of extraneous meaning invading almost every paragraph, sometimes several times. They can be grouped into a number of classes; religious, military, social, historical, musical, classical, sexual and literary. It is not possible to cover even a small sample of these in an essay of this length or objective. I have selected for further elaboration some of the religious, military and sexual allusions.

Religious allusion begins with the date of the story, traditionally the feast of the Epiphany. I was therefore expecting an epiphany at some point, probably at the end. There are some very obvious allusions to The Last Supper in the communal meal shared by the guests of the Misses Morkan, and Gabriel’s speech to the assembled “disciples” of the society of decaying gentility present, and this will be followed by Gabriel Conroy’s crucifixion – vide infra. The religious themes are sometimes expressed directly as when Aunt Kate has a “right go” at the papacy and the Catholic Church because of the way Julia is to be demoted in the choir of Adam and Eve’s church (221). Mary Jane “had the organ in Haddington Road [Church]” (200). Gabriel, named for an archangel, as is Michael Furey, (Michael, the more militant or, perhaps, alpha-male archangel), notices his mother’s photograph “before the pierglass” showing his brother Constantine, named for the first Holy Roman Emperor. Constantine is “senior curate in Balbriggan” (213). Of course, it is a mostly Roman Catholic gathering, Browne being the only outsider, and he is made aware that he is different and “of the other persuasion” (222). Subtle signifiers to religious belief abound; Gabriel and

Gretta live in “Monkstown” (204), there are “two little minsters” of jelly at the dinner table (224). Even less obvious signifiers are “come we cross now” during the dancing (215) and Molly Ivors’s “cross-examination” of Gabriel (216), perhaps alluding to the Way of the Cross and to Pontius Pilate as prelude to the crucifixion imagery in the final part of the story; “It [the snow] lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns” (256). Gabriel tells Lily that his wife takes “three mortal hours” to dress herself” (201), the traditional three hours, perhaps, during which Jesus Christ suffered on the Cross before expiring, “It was now about the sixth hour and the sun’s light failed, so that darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour” (New Jerusalem Bible, Luke 23:44). I will expand on what I see as more expansive crucifixion allegory later in this essay.

The military imagery may represent the subjugating forces of the Crown and/or perhaps the orderly Roman soldiers on the Via Dolorosa and Calvary. The Wellington memorial in the Phoenix Park is mentioned twice by Gabriel in his interior monologues. Wellington, the original “West Briton” was born in Dublin and, as English prime minister following his military career, did everything in his power to ensure that Ireland firmly remained part of the Empire. Molly Ivors twice accuses, once jokingly, Gabriel of being a “West Briton” (214, 216). Perhaps, of further interest in this context, Wellington was given a state funeral in London in which his horse-drawn funeral carriage was followed by a lone riderless white horse. A white horse is mentioned or alluded to three times. Later in the story, there is mention of King Billy’s horse (238) which is traditionally depicted in Orange folklore and some contemporaneous portraits as a white charger. When Gabriel’s cab reaches O’Connell Bridge on the way to the Gresham

hotel, Miss O'Callaghan says "They say you never cross O'Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse" (245). Gabriel says "Good night, Dan" to the statue (245). Perhaps Joyce couldn't resist mention of Daniel O'Connell; his grandmother was an O'Connell and cousin to Daniel (Costello 37). It seems reasonable, in view of the story's general theme of death, to suggest that the narrator is alluding to the most famous white horse of them all; "Immediately I saw another horse appear, deathly pale, and its rider was called Death..." (New Jerusalem Bible Rev 6:8). Other military images can be found throughout the story; Mr Browne "led his charges thither" (208), the dances are "quadrilles" (209) and "lancers" (213), Mary Jane leads her "recruits" (209), Julia carries "a column of table napkins" (210), "an irregular musketry of applause" escorts Julia to the piano (219), two decanters of cut glass "stood, as sentries" and bottles are "squads" and are "drawn up according to the colours of their uniforms" (224). It is interesting to note that "the third and smallest squad" is "white, with transverse green sashes" (224). Here perhaps, the narrator is contrasting the military might of the empire with the puny forces of Irish nationalism and independence. In the preparations for dinner, there is some battle-scene language, There was a "great deal of confusion" and "the noise of orders and counterorders" (225). At the dinner table, Freddy captures Aunt Kate. In the discussions around the dinner table, Mr. Browne refers to the aria "Let me Like a Soldier Fall" (227) from Wallace's "Maritana," sung in the operetta by a soldier pleading for execution by firing squad. Toasting his hosts after dinner, Gabriel "raised his glass of port gallantly" (234), and Freddy conducts the singing, "acting as officer with his fork on high" (235). Or perhaps the military images signify the forces which are lined up against Gabriel to bring about his later surrender in the Gresham hotel when

"some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him" (252). On the other hand, perhaps this was the normal form of conversation in the second city of the Empire, shared by all classes and creeds and exploded only by the extremism of the first world war.

Sexual imagery would be expected from the twenty-five years old Joyce, but is not as rampant as it would become in Ulysses. There is plenty of description of the sap of testosterone rising in Gabriel as he elevates his own (later unreciprocated) and Gretta's desire in his head. Gabriel has booked a room in the Gresham where he and Gretta can get away from their usual home environment and "the years of their dull existence together" (244). He has been romanticising and idealising their relationship since observing her on the stairs at his aunts' place, and when he sees that "there was colour on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining" (242), he mistakenly assumes that Gretta is "up for it", for "a sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart" (242). On the way to the hotel, he reviews their earlier days and their honeymoon, "Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory" and "Like the tender fire of stars, moments of their life together that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illumed his memory" (244); burst and broke upon suggesting that the poor man is on the point of climax. His testosterone levels continue to surge as the porter guides them to the bedroom in a scene suggesting the crossing of the Styx. Gabriel can't wait to get the chap out of the room, not realising that he has just been escorted into a metaphorical dark netherworld. Then Gretta, half undressed, comes to him and kisses him, and he puts his arm around her, but like he has done with Lily and Miss Ivors, he has misread the situation. Gretta does not "yield wholly to his arm" (249). Then, when she brings

up the subject of Michael Furey rather than her dress, he cannot cope because the hormones are overwhelming him, and “the smile passed away from Gabriel’s face. A dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind and the dull fires of his lust began to grow angrily in his veins” (250). Testosterone, the real god of war (in the arteries rather than the veins), does not merely give arousal; it gives anger to the male, particularly if thwarted in its first purpose. Then, in an almost savage state of mind, Gabriel hears that his wife is pining over a dead seventeen year-old boy who loved her with an intensity beyond Gabriel’s capabilities or understanding to date. Soon his anger and, no doubt, his arousal become dissipated. Realising that he cannot compete with this Romeo and Juliet syndrome, he surrenders meekly. Joyce gives imagery to his physical situation by describing the attitude of Gretta’s boots on the floor; “One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down: the fellow of it lay upon its side” (254), perhaps signifying Furey’s straight but dead manhood and Gabriel’s living “droop”, no doubt well established by now.

Other possible sexual signifiers in the text refer to Lily’s possible pregnancy “the men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you” (202), and, according to Aunt Kate, “There’s that Lily, I’m sure I don’t know what has come over her lately. She’s not the girl she was at all” (206). Perhaps Joyce is suggesting pregnancy chez Lily, in light of her earlier comment about the (then) modern men. In keeping with the tradition of using a dirty mind when reading Joyce, I find myself suspicious when he writes that Mary Jane “had the organ in Haddington Road” (200). The young ladies are scandalised (or pretend to be) by Browne’s “very low Dublin accent” (209). Perhaps the cause of the ladies receiving “with one instinct his speech in silence” could well be that

Browne's "hot face had leaned forward a little too confidently." He says, quoting "the famous Mrs Cassidy" (208), "Now, Mary Grimes, if I don't take it, make me take it, for I feel I want it." (209). Browne hardly needs to do his "dirty old man" impression if it's only about drink! And of course, Miss O'Callaghan, speaking of D'Arcy, says "I have been at him all evening" (241). In the same spirit as many of the Joycean critics who can filter any meaning which is suitable to the agenda they might bring to reading "The Dead", I would have to say "Naughty, Miss O'Callaghan!" She and D'Arcy head off into the early morning together, unchaperoned, as Gretta and Gabriel exit the cab at the Gresham. When Gabriel is being escorted upstairs by the night porter in the Gresham hotel, he "could hear the falling of the molten wax [from the candle] into the tray and the thumping of his own heart against his ribs" (246), a possible signifier of sexual climax. Despite the presence of these few potential sexual signifiers, there is very little in the story to suggest generalised "hanky-panky" goings-on, either generally or, specifically with Gabriel. If Joyce wished us to conclude that Gabriel was anything beyond a randy-tonight-for-Gretta married man, I think he would have let us in on it. He had no problems sharing Molly Bloom's secrets with us!

Death is everywhere in "The Dead", foreshadowing the final climax and anticlimax. On the first page of the story, we are told about the death of Pat Morkan, Gabriel's uncle, and his mother "dead elder sister Ellen" (199), and later on about the "late lamented Patrick Morkan" (237), Gabriel's grandfather. The aunts welcome Gretta, saying "she must be perished alive" (201). The aunts are not too far from death, particularly Julia who has corpse-like attributes, "grey also with darker shadows was her large flaccid face" (204). Indeed, Freddy Malin's facial features could equally refer to a dead man. At the end of the scene

in the Gresham hotel, Gabriel imagines himself at the house in Usher's Island again, with Kate "telling him how Aunt Julia died" (254). Other signifiers appear at the dinner table; many of the great singers of the past are dead. Specific allusions (227) concern operatic singers Therese Tietjens, who died at a young age of cancer, and Ilma de Murzka who committed suicide. There is mention of Donizetti's opera "Lucrezia Borgia", in which Lucrezia summons coffins to be brought to a banquet where she has poisoned the guests. This latter allusion nicely matches the discussion about the monks in Mount Melleray sleeping in their coffins, a topic ended by Mary Jane's comment "The coffin is to remind them of their last end" (230), anticipating the "snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead" (256). There is no further discussion after Mary Jane's comment, "as the subject had grown lugubrious, it was buried in a silence of the table" (230). The song "The Lass of Aughrim" concerns tragic young death. When the guests are leaving at the front door, Aunt Kate says, "Mrs Malins will get her death of cold" (235). It is tempting to regard as a further signifier of death Aunt Julia's music book, "the old leather-bound song-book that had her initials on the cover" (220), reminiscent of the caskets of the time which traditionally sported a coffin-plate inscribed with the deceased's initials. At different times, Aunt Kate and Miss Ivors nod their heads "gravely" and Gabriel smiles at Miss Ivor's "solemn manner" (213). Four young men come into the room after Mary Jane plays her academy piece, and are mentioned twice, perhaps to signify a role as pall-bearers (213). Of course, both Romeo and Juliet and the two murdered princes in the Tower are concerned with youthful tragic death, mentioned, no doubt, to foreshadow our reading of the tragedy of Michael Furey, whose

absence is a very strong “presence” which propels Gabriel to the final denouement in the story.

In re-reading the journey of Gabriel Conroy through “The Dead”, from the time of his arrival until he is reminded of his last end in the Gresham hotel, I was taken by the series of hoops he has to jump through, and wondered why. He “failed” (205) with Lily, he fails with Miss Ivors and finally with Gretta**.**

These three “falls” could be said to parallel the three falls of Christ in the Way of the Cross, the Via Dolorosa. Searching further for the allegory, it is probable that Gabriel’s “old self” dies at the end of the story. Joyce, whom Frank O’Connor refers to as “an all-but-Jesuit” (Scholes and Litz 300), and whom Gogarty called “an inverted Jesuit” (Ellmann 118), had been an excessively pious young man while at Belvedere College with the Jesuits, at least until the time came when he (as Dedalus) began to regard Catholicism as “an absurdity which is logical and coherent” (Ellmann 258n). An idea of his profound knowledge of Catholicism can be found throughout the semi-autobiographical Portrait. No doubt, he would have had a very strong grounding in the Passion and the death of Jesus. When Gretta is responding to Gabriel’s questioning about Michael Furey’s death, she says “I think he died for me” (252), the death of Jesus to redeem each and every individual – or sinner - being a central belief in Christianity. Gabriel makes it clear early on that he really doesn’t want to attend the Morkans’ annual dance. He turns up late, blaming his wife for the delay, “three mortal hours to dress herself” (201), perhaps signifying the three hours before Jesus dies on the cross. Later, Gabriel wishes he wasn’t there, “How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park” (218), and “how much more pleasant it would be there than at the

supper table" (219). But because of family loyalty he has come to the dance. In a way, he is condemned to attend. Continuing the analogy, he is then metaphorically "laden with his cross" – having to worry over and unburden himself of the after-dinner speech in which he comforts the women. In Joyce's description of Gabriel's physical appearance "His glossy black hair was parted in the middle and brushed in a long curve behind his ears where it curved slightly beneath the groove left by his hat" (202) possibly signifying the crown of thorns. There is further allusion to the Crown of Thorns at the end of the story, the snow thickly drifted "on the barren thorns" (256). There are the three falls; when Lily "with great bitterness" (202) responds to his "friendly" (202) conversation; when Miss Ivors engages him in a "crossexamination" and calls him a "West Briton" (216), and finally, when Gretta rejects his amorous advances, spiritually and emotionally cuckolding him at the Gresham hotel. Other crucifixion imagery includes much use of Lenten colour purple, associated particularly with the Passion of Jesus Christ. Colour is hardly mentioned in "The Dead". Yet, purple and its equivalents are found many times in the text; a redfaced "young woman, dressed in pansy" announces quadrilles, Gabriel's childhood apparel is of "purple tabinet" with "round mulberry buttons" (212), and there are "purple raisins" amongst the food displayed (224). In the Gospel (New Jerusalem Bible, Mark 15:17), the account of the Passion states, "they dressed him up in purple, twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on him." When Gabriel is at the height of his testosterone rush in the hotel bedroom, "only the stress of his nails against the palms of his hands held the wild impulse of his body in check" (246). When his defences have been almost overcome, "A vague terror seized Gabriel as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was

coming against him" (252). Perhaps there is an allusion here to the hour of Christ's death when he is finally tempted by Satan, the impalpable and vindictive being, through the mouths of the chief priests and the scribes, to save Himself; "come down from the cross now for us to see it and believe" (New Jerusalem Bible, Mark 15:32). Gabriel, about to enter a world where "his soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead" (255), considers it better "to pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age" (255). With a further allusion, "the time had come for him to set out on his journey westwards" (255), Joyce leaves us, possibly deliberately in his use of the word "westwards", with the choices of death or renewal for Gabriel. In the Calvary context, death, i.e. crucifixion would be the "correct" image. At the end of the story, Gabriel "stretched himself cautiously along the sheets" (255), the latter idea mentioned earlier when doddery Julia and "the caretaker were straightening and smoothing a large cloth" (208), both images potentially suggesting a burial shroud, given the Gothic mood and overwhelming context of death, decay and crucifixion.

Allusions can be obvious or hidden; sometimes, at best, giving subtle hints to the reader. To expect the crucifixion to fulfil one-hundred per cent of what is known about Christ's death is to commit the sin of diagnostic greed. In medical circles, doctors who wait for every possible signifier of an illness to become apparent before making a diagnosis, are accused of "diagnostic greed", and often treat the patient too late! Joyce's crucifixion imagery fulfils reasonably at least ten of the traditional Stations of the Cross (Via Dolorosa or Via Crucis), and perhaps twelve of the fourteen. Thus, one can make a case for direct parallels between Gabriel's journey through "The Dead" and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps I am stretching the all-but-jesuitical imagination too far; one can extract anything one wishes out of Joyce!

Crucifixion signifiers in Gabriel Conroy's journey in '"The Dead" can be thus matched to the Stations of the Cross as follows:

First Station: Jesus is condemned to death: Gabriel is obliged to attend the annual dance. He would prefer not to be there.

Second Station: Jesus is receives His cross: Gabriel arrives and is very anxious about his after-dinner speech, the main 'chore' of the night.

Third Station: Jesus falls the first time: Gabriel fails with Lily.

Fourth Station: Jesus meets His mother: Gabriel interacts with his mother's picture.

Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry the cross: no obvious allusion in text.

Sixth Station: Jesus and Veronica (Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus): no definite allusion, but the potatoes are served by Lily on "a white napkin" (225).

Seventh Station: Jesus falls a second time: Gabriel "fails" with Miss Ivors.

Eighth Station: Jesus comforts the women (of Jerusalem): Gabriel lavishly praises Kate, Julia and Mary Jane in his address.

Ninth Station: Jesus falls a third time: Gabriel "fails" with Gretta at the Gresham hotel.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments and given gall to drink: Gabriel is stripped of his defences and swallows bitterly Gretta's revelations about her lost love.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross: Gretta crucifies Gabriel by telling him that Michael Furey died for her.

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross: After “the impalpable and vindictive being” has come against him, Gabriel is defeated, dying to his old self.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken from the cross and laid in Mary’s arms: Gabriel watches Gretta and notes that “ a man had died for her sake”(254).Gabriel lies down on the bed beside his sleeping wife.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb: Gabriel stretches himself along the sheets. His soul has approached “that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead” (255).

In the Franciscan tradition, at least, there is a Fifteenth Station, “Jesus Rises From the Dead” (Franciscan Cyberspot). It is tempting to think that Gabriel can “match” this one also by suffering an epiclesis or epiphany in which he rises from the depths of his old self to a new beginning. I will further discuss this possibility.

Traditionally, allusions are for the benefit of the reader who can expect to have a deeper understanding of the story, particularly effective if the references are appropriate to the reader’s cultural background and education. The closer the cultures of the author and the reader are, the more likely the reader is to fully interpret the text as intended by the narrator. In “The Dead”, for instance, an allusion to Shakespeare will be most effective if the reader is familiar with the works of the bard of Avon. Joyce appears to be even more clever than that; the reference to Romeo and Juliet is not just of value in processing his reader, but in effecting the thinking and actions of the character, Gabriel. This matter is fully

introduced and discussed by Connor (1-165). In the story, the one intertextual reference to a specific Shakespeare work occurs while Gabriel is in one of his reflective moments alone at the party; “A picture of the balcony scene in Romeo and Juliet hung there and beside it was a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower” (212). Later, Gabriel looks up at his wife on the stairs (240) in a scene reminiscent of the balcony scene and wonders what she might be a symbol of, the connection not yet processed by him. But later, when Gretta describes for him the scene where Michael Furey stood under a tree after he has thrown stones up to her window, Gabriel, who has slowly calmed down from his lust and rage, seems to change. He holds Gretta’s hand and “let it fall gently and walked to the window” (253). Then, “he looked unresentfully on her tangled hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep-drawn breath” (254). He considers how deep the feeling of love was between Furey and Gretta, and next, “a strange, friendly pity for her entered his soul”- strange, because he himself had never experienced such love; it’s a new sensation for him. But he is aware, as a man who is fond of books and literature, and who mentions Shakespeare earlier in the story (203) and has recently seen a portrait of the balcony scene, that such intensity of love can exist; he knows it from Romeo and Juliet. He also has in his mind an immediate description of a new balcony scene, just told him by Gretta. Instead of the anger, jealousy and self-pity which he showed in abundance at his wife’s revelations earlier, he feels this strange, friendly pity. It is the recounting of the Michael-Gretta balcony scene which has changed him. Michael’s balcony scene is described by Gretta,

> I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn’t see, so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the

> back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering. (253)

and

> I implored of him to go home at once and told him he would get his death in the rain. But he said he did not want to live. I can see his eyes as well as well! He was standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree. (253)

In Romeo and Juliet, Act II, scene 1, Romeo is standing near a wall in an orchard –trees- below Juliet's window, and of course, there is a tragic ending similar to that of Michael Furey. Gabriel's responses have been processed by Joyce, by Joyce having Gabriel respond to the Romeo and Juliet allusion. So it is not only the reader who "benefits" from the allusion, but the character. The reader can watch the narrator watching the character respond to the allusions. Gretta's character is similarly responsive to the allusion of the tragedy of young death which reaches her through hearing "The Lass of Aughrim" (242), a song of young and innocent death. Connor refers to this process as "Allusion Mechanics".

Gabriel Conroy's character has been dissected over the past century. He is perhaps early middle-aged. He's been a university class-mate of Molly Ivors who is a talkative "young lady" (213). He has two children, Tom and Eva, of whom he is solicitous, putting "green shades" on Tom's eyes at night, and "forcing Eva to eat the stirabout" (213), and his wife makes a joke of this with his aunts. Gretta, his wife is attractive to him, at least on the night of the Morkan's annual dance, although her face "was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death" (254), and, - while he is watching her walking along the quays - "she had no longer any grace of attitude" (243).Taking into account these snatches of

information, it is probably reasonable to conclude that Gabriel is in his early to mid-thirties, more than halfway through average life expectancy in 1904. He is husband to Gretta of Galway. Their relationship has long been off the boil during "the years of their dull existence together" (244). Gabriel has to replay in his mind the days when their love-life was exciting, "moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory" (244). These, possibly few, "moments of ecstasy" (244) appear to have happened during their honeymoon, now many years in the past. He is so excited at the thought of making love to his wife at the Gresham hotel, that he gets completely carried away emotionally, almost – but not quite – losing control of himself in a flood of hormones and Arthurian-type chivalry of the damsels-in-distress school; "she seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something" (244). Gabriel shuts out all the negative thoughts of her, and goes instead with some wishful notions, newly concocted in his head. He has conjured up an idealised version of Gretta since watching her on the stairs during D'Arcy's singing, "There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something" (240). Meantime, his not-so-hormonal-tonight wife is similarly, if not more so, in a dream world of her own, pining for a dead boy from Galway's rainy past, somewhere in the western mists of time, possibly twenty years back.

Predictably, neither Gabriel nor Gretta are to reach real physical nirvana in the Gresham, each of them bringing to the table their own expectations. My own immature emotional response – one hundred years later - to Gabriel and Gretta's predicament – a sad product of Victorian, romantic up-tightness – is that they could well do with a trip to a relationship/marriage counsellor. Gabriel has some chance; it is perhaps he who sees the light at the end of the story, he who

experiences some form of epiclesis, and he who cries “generous tears” (255) for his wife and for his own shortcomings, “He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love” (255). One wonders whether Joyce found his inspiration for this part of Gabriel’s internal monologue in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night. In Act II Scene IV, Viola tells Duke Orsino, “My father had a daughter loved a man,” and goes on to describe her;

> She never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm i’ the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy
> She sat like patience on a monument,
> Smiling like grief. Was not this love indeed?

In this quotation, one is also reminded of Gretta’s demeanour on the stairs while she listens to D’Arcy sing. January sixth, the Feast of The Epiphany, the likely date for the Morkan dance, is also known as “twelfth night”.

Gabriel has missed the boat in the love stakes. I was left with the hope that the sad couple would take a trip to Galway or the Aran Isles after all, take some long walks around the coast together, and talk to one another, rather than to their ideas of one another, perhaps for the first time since they met. I felt that Gabriel might just about be up for this, but, because of his upbringing and his self-important self-protective world, his poor facility for relating to women, and his state of agitated anxiety, he might hold back at the death to protect his manufactured identity. His background, as far as experience of love is concerned, is not encouraging; just take a look at his mother, “the brains-carrier of the family,” Kate and Julia’s “serious and matronly sister” (212). She was a woman

who “was very sensible of the dignity of family life”, and she made the decisions about the naming of her children. She decked out her little boy, Gabriel in the ridiculous “waistcoat of purple tabinet, with little foxes’ heads upon it, lined with brown satin and having round mulberry buttons” (212). I’d say Gabriel loved it! It was a childhood birthday present; possibly there was not a toy soldier or a train engine in the house! Even in middle-class Empire-leaning Dublin circles of the 1870s, the outfit would have been outrageous. Her “slighting phrases” “still rankled in his memory”, especially her description of Gretta as “country cute” (213). No, Gabriel would not have had much experience of “what must be love” at the hands of the late Ellen nee Morkan Conroy. Cuddling, one imagines, wouldn’t have been big *chez* Conroy. Poor old T J Conroy of the Port and Docks doesn’t make it into the photograph; perhaps his role is completed and he is redundant. It seems as if the late Mrs Conroy also selected the careers for Gabriel via the Royal University and Constantine via the Catholic Church. Gabriel did however show some independence by marrying Gretta despite his mother’s “sullen opposition” to the marriage (213). In his meditations and internal dialogue, while observing her picture at Kate and Julia’s place, he doesn’t express any great regret at Ellen’s passing (213).

Gretta, on the other hand, has given no indication that she might make herself amenable to change; she has perhaps been pining for Furey all through the marriage. If anything is to happen, it’ll have to happen somewhere near Galway, where the Furey obsession will have to be faced down. The only time Gretta expresses desire in the story concerns Galway, “ ‘O, do go Gabriel,’ she cried. ‘I’d love to see Galway again’ ” (218). In his epiphany, Gabriel possibly realises this and decides that “the time had come for him to set out on his

journey westward" (255). This might be a willingness to embrace the west with all its "real"-Irish connotation, and/or Gretta's point of view and background. We are invited to believe that Gabriel is changed in his attitude to his wife. We are not given any hints as to whether Gretta might be able (or unable) to meet him halfway.

Gabriel has been extensively psychoanalysed by the critics. Schwarz gives us such with a more pluralist psychological emphasis (102-124). Gabriel has a major ego problem, a paralytic self-consciousness, and is capable only of viewing the world and its people from that viewpoint. I cannot find fault with the conclusions.

As a physician who has sometimes diagnosed and treated mental illness, I have noted that Gabriel has not had a psychiatric assessment, at least one that I can find in the critical literature. In "The Dead" there are many clues as to his state of mind. I have concluded above that he – and Gretta - may need marriage counselling. Perhaps he needs some other psychotherapy, admittedly hardly the strongest suit in the therapeutic armamentarium of early nineteen-hundreds Dublin, keeping in mind, of course, Sigmund Freud's (alleged, unlikely) opinion that the Irish are the only race which is not amenable to psychotherapy. I feel free to examine this aspect after reading how some literary critics, notably the feminists, have applied, in their devastating deconstructions, late twentieth century idealised criteria to one of their own – Gabriel, a literary critic - who lived one hundred years ago in a world long gone, and who is, regrettably, unable to speak for himself. Joyce makes frequent direct reference to Gabriel's state-of-mind and, additionally, inserts signifiers to it in the story.

In all, I have found thirty-four textual references, direct and indirect, to Gabriel's psychological state. His thinking and his behaviours in the story give us a more comprehensive view. There are characteristic physical signs in his physical appearance which give some clues. He has "restless eyes" (202); his "brows were dark" (210); "the high colour of his cheeks pushed upwards even to his forehead, where it scattered itself in a few formless patches of pale red" (202); before supper and after his failure with Ivors, his "warm, trembling fingers" tap the pane of the cool window(218); as he rises to give the speech, he leans his "ten trembling fingers" on the tablecloth and he smiles "nervously"(230). The blotchy red marks are typical of anxiety in some persons. These signs suggest the presence of an anxiety state. Whether this is abnormal or not is another matter, but it doesn't look good. There are symptoms of anxiety to be found throughout; he is easily "discomposed" by Lily (203); he "feared" his speech would be over the heads of his audience (203); he laughs "nervously" upstairs when only Gretta, Kate and Julia are in his company (205); it "unnerved him" to think that Ivors would be at the supper table (219).

It is thus likely that Gabriel has an anxiety syndrome of some kind. His anxieties are out of proportion to the circumstances he finds himself in; he is the usual star turn of the party, has been giving the after-dinner speech for years, and is amongst his own people. On at least two occasions during the evening at Usher's Island, he withdraws from the company and wishes he were not there at all. His turning up late for the dance may be due to his reluctance to attend. His emotional responses seem excessive for a man in his position.

Moving to his sense of self-esteem, or lack of it, Gabriel does badly again; he's hardly in the door when he decides that his speech will not be any good -"he

would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry" (204), and "his whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure" (205). This is hardly the stuff you expect to hear from an allegedly arrogant Mr Conroy. If you were there, you would be inclined to pat him on the shoulder and say "steady on, old chap, you're amongst friends here!" He continues to beat himself up; better, perhaps, beat himself down, at various points in the narrative; at the end, in the Gresham, he takes a look in the mirror at his face "whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it" (249). The rapid cascading of emotions from sexual desire through rage, annoyance, and delight gives the sense of an emotional puppet on others' strings. Everybody, it seems is able to press Gabriel's buttons, and, in turn, Gabriel is unable to read others – particularly women. His reflections become excessively self-hating but graduate to humble acceptance within minutes.

This emotional roller-coaster seems to be totally disproportionate for a professional gentleman of his standing. On the way to the hotel, "his eyes were still bright with happiness" and "the thoughts went rioting through his rain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous" (243). Soon, however, "a vague terror seizes him" and he regards himself as a "nervous well-meaning sentimentalist", "the pitiable fatuous fellow" and "a shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure" and he feels a shame "that burned on his forehead" (251). He has quite a self-hating combination in these reflections; nervous, pitiable, fatuous, shameful. Not long after this, however, his eyes are filled with "generous tears" (255). He wonders where this "riot of emotions" came from (254), and if it could have been due to the wine, his foolish speech, the merrymaking etc. Then, he suffers an unexpected sudden-onset state of

serenity, gets into the bed beside his sleeping wife, and thinks about the living and the dead, his own doom and Aunt Julia's coming wake.

Gabriel, it can be deduced reasonably from the above, is suffering from anxiety and severe emotional lability. We have no clues as to the possible causes in his case; there are no reports of thyroid function, his blood pressure reading is not recorded, we are not given to understand that he might have a weakness for the drink, unlike one of his alleged prototypes, John Joyce (Ellmann 136). So we must look elsewhere for accompanying symptoms. He does seem to be a little paranoid; Ivors, he thinks, "had tried to make him look ridiculous before people" and "she would not be sorry to see him fail in his speech" (217). There is his feeling that other "bad guys" are out to get him, "some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him" (252). He may be having hallucinations, "he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree" and "other forms were near" – scary! Worse, his own "identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had onetime reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling" (255). This sort of symptomatology is reminiscent of temporal lobe syndromes, which sometimes end up with visions of alien abduction. Of course, there is, too, an element of passive-aggressive personality trait in Gabriel's interactions with Ivors; he is too prone to taking offence, broods on perceived grievous insults and plans his revenge in which he will give her both barrels in his speech.

He has more problems; he hates his mother, having to withdraw after seeing her picture until "the resentment died down in his heart" (212). One can hardly blame him, what with the waistcoat with the little foxes, and her insult to Gretta. Finally, he is a bit of a control freak; the solicitousness about his wife and

children; green eyeshades for Tom and stirabout for his daughter Eva and galoshes for Gretta (205), his easily-offended responses to Lily and Ivors, and his detailed chapter-and-verse advanced planning for Gretta's responses to him in the Gresham all betray the presence of a controlling mentality and, perhaps, some "magical thinking":

> when the others had gone away, when he and she were in the room in the hotel, then they would be alone together. He would call her softly: 'Gretta!' Perhaps she would not hear at once: she would be undressing. Then something in his voice would strike her. She would turn and look at him...." (245)

My clinical medical impression is that Gabriel is suffering from a fairly severe anxiety state which has made him defensive, fearful, controlling, agitated and sometimes aggressive. There is some minor paranoid ideation. We can overlook his potentially alarming near-hallucinative state as being typical of hypnogogic hallucination, a well recognised syndrome of normal persons at the time when waking is first being overcome with sleep. He has no other symptoms which would advance the possibility of psychotic or epileptiform interpretations.

Whether his anxiety is part of a depressive illness we cannot discern clearly from the text or the allusions, but the very low self-esteem and self-hatred is highly suggestive of a depressive illness. On the basis of probability, this latter, i.e. anxiety-depression, is the likely diagnosis. However, keeping in mind the genetics of the matter, in more ways than one, there is a strong smell of John Joyce's breath abroad. All of the symptoms and signs are also compatible with alcoholism on the point of withdrawal syndrome. James, I would propose, got his Daddy right but didn't make Gabriel fond enough of the drink to fully match the

two gentlemen. On probability grounds, therefore, Gabriel is an anxiety-depressive case until proven otherwise.

Ellmann (243-253) reviews the origins of many of the characters in “The Dead” in terms of their relationships to Joyce’s real world experiences and characters. Gabriel seems to be a composite of; Joyce himself, a sometimes literary critic, like Gabriel, for the pro-English “Daily Express”; John Joyce, whose after dinner orations were similar to Gabriel’s according to Stanislaus Joyce, and a Dublin character of Joyce’s acquaintance, Constantine (sic) Curran, known as “Cautious Con” who had “the same high colour and nervous disquieted manner” as Gabriel Conroy (247). Further, Ellmann notes (247) that Joyce may have taken the name, Gabriel Conroy, from a Bret Harte novel or alternatively from a publican in Howth of the same name. It seems to be the consensus that our protagonist is a mixture of James and John Joyce, and Cautious Con. The location of the Morkan dance at Usher’s Island, and the persons of the two aunts and Mary Jane have real-life parallels in Joyce’s childhood (Ellmann 245). Similarly, Bartell D’Arcy and Freddy Malins are based on Dublin persons or composites of persons known to Joyce. He knew of an Edward Malins who was sent to Mount Melleray to cure his drunkenness and who died in 1894 (246). Browne is probably based on Mervyn Archdale Browne, also a protestant, who was married to a cousin of Joyce’s mother. Ellmann further suggests that Miss Ivors could well be based on Kathleen Sheehy, a friend of Joyce’s. She also “wore that austere bodice and sported the same patriotic pin” as Ivors (246). Events in Joyce’s life are reproduced almost unchanged. For example, the letter to Gretta which Gabriel wrote in the past and which he recalls to mind in the story (244) is taken almost directly from a letter written by Joyce to Nora in 1904 (Ellmann

246). In another example, the story draws from an incident in Galway where Nora Barnacle was courted by the young Michael ‘Sonny’ Bodkin, who is said to have contracted tuberculosis. Apparently, during his illness, he left his sick-bed during rainy weather to sing to Nora. He died soon afterwards. Costello notes that Sonny Bodkin did not have tuberculosis, but developed rheumatic fever from his wetting, and this condition subsequently weakened his heart. Because of his delicate condition, Sonny had to abandon his studies at the university in Galway and ended up at a desk job in the local gas company (Costello 246). Michael Furey, in “The Dead” “was in the gasworks” (251). Costello (245) further reveals that Sonny Bodkin came to Nora Barnacle’s in a similar scene to Furey-Gretta’s in “The Dead”. Ellmann notes that Nora was first attracted to Joyce “because he resembled Sonny Bodkin” and “The notion of being in some sense in rivalry with a dead man buried in the little cemetery at Rahoon was one that came easily, and gallingly, to a man of Joyce’s jealous disposition” (243). Perhaps, we can better understand the astonishment and anger which Gabriel felt on hearing about his wife’s love for Michael Furey. Joyce , at least, knew about his own dead rival at an early stage of his courtship, but Gabriel hears about Furey for the first time perhaps after ten or fifteen years of his marriage to Gretta.

There are many other semi-autobiographical echoes in the text of “The Dead”, most beyond the scope of this essay; Gabriel as literary critic, the high place of, and high regard for classical music and opera in the story and in Joyce’s own life, the dominant role of Roman Catholicism, later rejected by Joyce and criticised by Aunt Kate (221-222) in her annoyance at the Church’s demotion of Aunt Julia from the lead-soprano role in Adam and Eve’s church, and the emerging tensions of national identity shown in the scene between Ivors and

Gabriel – a tension which played a role in Joyce's own thinking for many years. Above all of these echoes stand the middle-class Dublin-Irish and the extended Joyce family, at least as troubled as the Morkan and Conroy families.

There are echoes of the alcohol problems of Joyce's family in the drunken Freddy, in the prominence of place given to the discussion about the cure for alcoholism at Mount Melleray, in Gabriel's maudlin after-dinner speech where he sees himself later as "orating to vulgarians" (251), in which there is, paradoxically, lots of over-the-top praise for "two ignorant old women" (219), and in the attention to detail in the descriptions of the alcohol refreshment available at the Morkan home. Perhaps, the certain success of the dance, about which we are told "never once had it fallen flat" (199), can be assured by the fact that there is plenty of booze for everybody, surely the essential ingredient for the success of any Irish social gathering. From my own upbringing, I recall that pariah status for an Irish family could be achieved by holding a dry wedding!

Whatever Gabriel's genetics, Joyce, in portraying the uptight, lukewarm, self-absorbed, anti-nationalist, Empire-leaning, Europhilic, bourgeois, intellectual snob was not allowing Gabriel an easy ride with the reader or the critics. Gabriel's comments to himself about his aunts and the assembled company, noted above (the "two ignorant old women" and his reference to "vulgarians") point to his less attractive aspects, presumably there to cause some repulsion in the reader. The fact that we learn of these flaws through Gabriel's internal dialogue does not lessen the effect. The question might be asked; who amongst us has not had thoughts like Gabriel's about other persons, even close family members? Of course, we all get away with it all the time, because our internal dialogue is not being recorded on the written page or, worse, published in the public domain.

Joyce, having set Gabriel up with all these defects, hadn't quite finished with the poor man's negative aspects. Joyce has slipped into the text some even more telling "killer" sentences designed to set the poor man up for reader and critic, indirectly leading to Gabriel's posthumous second crucifixion at the hands of some literary critics, vide infra. There are six moments during the story in which we are invited to construe for ourselves that Gabriel can be a nasty piece of work, moments where Joyce comes near to giving Gabriel's character the *coup de grace.* Our negative, disapproving side is warmed up slowly by the narrator, and later he gives us the opportunity to experience dislike. The first we know of Gabriel's downside is when he tells Miss Ivors, "I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!" and "Irish is not my language" (216); he is not endearing himself to nationalists at all, an empire man, a "West Briton".

Gabriel is thus set up to judgements from [then and now] republic-leaning critics. It gets worse for Gabriel; he thinks of Molly Ivors as "the girl or woman or whatever she was" and she had been "heckling him and staring at him with her rabbit's eyes" (217), a not so nice Mr Conroy. He wonders about Ivors, "Had she really any life of her own behind all her propagandism?" (219). Things seem cordial enough between Gabriel and Gretta until she asks him to take the annual vacation in the west. Gabriel's nasty side comes out again, this time in external dialogue; " 'you can go if you like', said Gabriel coldly" (218). By now, we have tuned in to the unpleasant Gabriel. Joyce finishes the poor fellow off in the Gresham when he is fully primed for sex with his wife; "If she would only turn to him or come to him of her own accord! To take her as she was would be brutal" (248). This has the connotation that sex against Gretta's will is and, perhaps, has been an option. Gabriel cools down after he hears about Michael Furey and sees

his wife's distress, rethinks his own character, and experiences change and possibly, redemption. Although he waxes lyrical with Joyce in the final two pages, some damage is already done; Joyce has made him a bad egg, for which depiction Gabriel will pay dearly for one hundred years, and counting. His other human failings will be magnified and he will be given attributes and attitudes which will help establish his reputation as a sexual criminal in some quarters. The bad side of Gabriel exposed by the narrator will be taken as a licence to indulge in looking for and finding even more damning evidence against Gabriel within the text and even in versions of the text which do not exist.

I had approached this essay on "The Dead" mainly in a formalist way; the text is the text. I have based my observations on what Joyce actually says in the story. It has not been possible, of course, to avoid deconstructive, historic and genetic meandering in my comments. I have dealt somewhat with the question of reader-response criticism, an approach reviewed by Rabinowitz (Schwarz ed.137-149), in which the reader is expected to complete the text, ideally as a "rule-governed transformative activity" in which "the activity of reading always alters the text at hand" and "[reading] is inevitably –although not exclusively- a constructive act that takes the raw material of the words on the page and builds something else from them" (138). Such rule-governed approach ensures that "reading is always grounded on selections from a repertoire of pre-existing interpretive procedures that are, even if implicit, susceptible to academic scrutiny" (139).

I read the criticism widely <u>after</u> reading the story, and then re-read the story again. I can, in this short essay about my personal creative approach to "The Dead" only highlight some aspects of the criticism. I include a resume of

some of the most important points in a century's criticism solely for the purpose of noting the help that criticism has given me in coming to my own conclusions.

Dubliners seems to have been a late starter *chez* the critics. The delay in its publication from 1907 to 1914 was to concede centre stage to Portrait and Ulysses. Only from the 1950s onward did the short stories receive the degree of attention warranted. While a minority of influential critics working between 1920 and 1950 wrote about literature from a psychoanalytical perspective, the majority took what might be called a historical approach. With the advent of formalism, or the New Criticism, historically-oriented critics seemed to disappear. In the 1950s and 1960s, most of the ever increasing criticism of "The Dead" was dominated by the formalist approach, exemplified by a C.C. Loomis essay on "Structure and Sympathy in 'The Dead' " (Scholes and Litz 402-407). He states that "the full power of the story can be apprehended by the reader only if he sympathetically shares the experience with Gabriel." This understanding [between Gabriel and the reader] "is largely emotional and intuitive; intellectual analysis of the snow symbol, however successful, leaves a large surplus of emotion unexplained."(403). Joyce, he argues, "had to generate increasing reader sympathy as he approached the vision [the final scene], but this sympathy could not be generated by complete reader-identification with Gabriel" because "he is liable to miss those very shortcomings which make the vision meaningful." Joyce in "a monument to his genius," drops "meaningful often semi-symbolic details which deepens the gulf between the reader and Gabriel" while at the same time, generates "what can be best described as 'aesthetic sympathy'; by the very structure of the story, he increasingly pulls the reader into the story"(403). I have alluded to Joyce's killer sentences above. In such a formalist approach, the text is

the text, and it can be interpreted in a correct way; the unity and meaning of a work are discovered by a close reading of its image patterns, including particularly the symbolic aspects.

Over the past sixty years, literary criticism has "oscillated between the poles of formalis and contextualism." (Schwarz ed.73). In 1959, Ellmann published his biography of Joyce, bringing to the fore the crucial relationship between Joyce's life and his work. Ellmann shows us how important it is to see "The Dead" - and all of Joyce's work - in the light of the author's upbringing, family life, and moral and emotional life. He shows the parallels between Gabriel and John Joyce, and between Gabriel and James Joyce. (247). I have noted some of these "coincidences" above. Ellmann gives further analysis of the tensions between the Conroys in "The Dead";

> From a biographical point of view, these final pages compose one of Joyce's several tributes to his wife's artless integrity. Nora Barnacle, in spite of her defects of education, was independent, unselfconscious, and instinctively right. Gabriel acknowledges the same coherence in his own wife, and he recognizes in the west of Ireland, in Michael Furey, a passion he himself has always lacked. (249)

Perhaps, one of the most surprising findings in my researches is in an article by Michael Finney. He suggests that Joyce may have been exposed at Belvedere College to a contemporary school-book, A Practical Introduction to English Rhetoric: Precepts and Exercises written by Charles Coppens, an American Jesuit. In this book, written in 1886, there is a passage from Longfellow;

> The snow came. How beautiful it was, falling so silently all day long, all night long, on the mountains, on the meadows, on the roofs of the living, on the graves of the dead! All white save the river that marked its course by a winding black line across the landscape.... (Finney 4)

Other possible sources for Joyce's description of the snow "all over Ireland" such as that suggested from Homer's *Illiad* surely pale (sic) in comparison to this one!

The viewpoint of the New Historicists is carried in an essay by Levenson in which he reviews the political tensions in "The Dead"; the colonised fading gentility at the Morkan dance versus the Irish revivalism as manifested by Miss Ivors. He reviews the significance of Joyce's self-imposed exile in Trieste in light of the cultural clash about to ensue in Ireland, believing that Joyce would not have wanted to be captured by either side in the argument, but rather, to have the freedom to embrace the best of both cultures. The scenes between Ivors and Gabriel, and the colonial-"real Irish" juxtaposition of Gabriel and Gretta bring these political tensions into the story. Levenson further suggests that the snow which is "general all over" and settling on all parts of Ireland signifies a unified island that "its colonial status has long blocked" and concludes "In such a way does the exile in Trieste send home his equivocal historical gift: a storm-driven Ireland flattened into the shape of a nation." (Schwarz 177).

Schwarz (73-75) reviews the Bakhtin influence in moving away from pure formalism, showing that in "The Dead" there are "multiple kinds of discourse in a dialogue in which they struggle for position and interaction." Bakhtin's idea of

heteroglossia, which indicates that texts are dialogic rather than monologic, was applied to “The Dead” by Kershner in 1989:

> On the one hand Gabriel’s experience is shaped by dialogic encounters with others; on the other, his perceptions are increasingly dominated by an internal dialogue between his everyday inner monologue and the disturbing, unwonted inner voice that calls him lyrically to the outdoors, to the snow, to the west, and to the dead. (75). There is a struggle for supremacy throughout the story between multiple kinds of discourse – or different “languages”; Gabriel speaks and thinks in many tongues which have emanated from his “catholic education, his university education, including Elizabethan language; the language of Irish music; performative, non-syntactical language; the language of fastidious manners as well as the language of passion; the language of nineteenth century literary materialism and its opposite, aestheticism; the discourse of Irish nationalism and the Celtic Renaissance including the Celtic language itself; and the language of desire and sexuality.” (74-75)

In this regard, the narrator of “The Dead” keeps his distance from Gabriel throughout, presumably not wishing to become tarred with the same brush as his very imperfect protagonist. At the end of the story, it becomes difficult to tell where Gabriel ends and the narrator begins. This fusion occurs in such a way as to render Gabriel more human, more sympathetic - if not to feminists. Avery suggests that Joyce may have “heard in the echoes of his ‘moral history’ a voice too much like his own sounding too much like the voice of judgment – too much,

in fact, like Gabriel." Having "raised the issue of elitism and judgment, the narrator abandons his satiric relationship with Gabriel, lest he too be condemned." (Schwarz 418). Throughout, Joyce has presented his characters from a satiric distance, allowing them to show their faults through their dialogue and, in Gabriel's case, monologue. He has allowed Gabriel to show us that he is, in modern parlance, a stuffed-shirt, a pompous ass.

Having been made aware of Gabriel's failings by Joyce and the critics, this reader is ready to wish Gabriel a better future and to consign him to history as an imperfect man who has been given the opportunity for personal renaissance. Some of the more recent feminist criticism has not been so kind to him. A harsh agenda, of which some feminist critics are accused, is best discussed in detail in an article entitled "Gabebashing in Joyce Country" (Murphy 1-23). Alarmed by the "puritanical vehemence" of such criticism of Gabriel Conroy, in which the protagonist is accused of "date rape", "mate rape", and "petty paternal tyrannies masked as solicitude and practiced on the bodies of his wife and children," Murphy argues

> the devil's advocates [some feminist critics] hurl at him [Gabriel] such a volume and concentration of vitriol that anyone within critical distance risks a burn. If Gabriel makes small talk with a servant girl he has known for years, he is a seducer out of a gothic novel, richly deserving the bitter taunt she throws in his direction. If he tips her, he is not giving her a Christmas present, but buying her, somehow silencing her, or compensating her for his own sins or those of other men. According to at least one, he is raping her! (2)

Further;

> If, like most other normal men, on occasion he has a surge of sexual desire for his wife, he has committed some crime called mate rape against the woman who has vowed to become his life's sexual partner, or if that accusation is so clearly preposterous, *near* mate rape. In fact, this rather harmless fictional character becomes the embodiment of every male sin; he does not have a single redeeming vice. (2)

The tension between feminist readings and, perhaps, more benign male readings of the text is where I found myself when I listened to the discussion by my classmates in answer to the question, "Do you think that Gabriel was shagging Lily?" Margot Norris argues that Gabriel may have contemplated making a pass at Lily in the pantry when

> He looked up at the pantry ceiling, which was shaking with the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above, listened for a moment to the piano and then glanced at the girl, who was folding his overcoat carefully at the end of a shelf. (Dubliners 202)

Norris writes;

> One could infer from this sequence of ocular gestures that Gabriel ventures upon a flirtation with Lily only after assuring himself that goings-on in the pantry would not be heard over the noise of dancing and the piano upstairs. If so, then we have here a possible answer to his later question, "He wondered at his riot of emotions of an hour before. From what had it proceeded?" It may have been the surprise of Lily's slim prettiness that inspired his lust, its

> frustration later displaced onto the more sexually tractable wife. (229)

To help her argument along, Norris makes two extraneous additions to Joyce's text in referring to Lily's "slim prettiness" and in converting the coin which Gabriel gives to Lily into a "gold coin" (216). There is neither "prettiness" nor "gold coin" in the text. One need read no further to realise that Gabriel is going to be crucified once again and, indeed, Norris does not disappoint; most of the women in "The Dead" become victims of the male, mainly Gabriel. Her criticism is valid, nevertheless, and adds a balancing if overstated feminist perspective to the dominant male-voiced literary culture of the day. Whether it is appropriate to apply one's expectations to the mores and culture of a century earlier is a fair question in the context of all types of criticism. I would be very surprised if Gabriel was "shagging" Lily, or thinking about doing it in the pantry, in 1904. Somehow, it doesn't fit.

It's not the Gabriel whom I have constructed with the important assistance of James Joyce!

It has not been possible for me to read the story without bringing my own limited rules imbued in me from the cradle upwards. Being male, post-middle-aged, middle-class, somewhat Roman Catholic, Irish, Jesuit brain-washed, Dublin-familiar, scientifically trained, musically somewhat aware, and educated to, at least, second level to some awareness of classical Greek and Latin texts, and having read much of Shakespeare and Browning, it was impossible for me to come unarmed and unbiased to Joyce's textual table. While most of these afflictions have greatly enriched my reading of "The Dead", I am also aware of the potential biases they bring with them. My interpretative and emotional

responses are clearly coloured by my own life experience, gender, influences, education, health, and background.

Joyce has made Gabriel the protagonist of the story while Gretta and the others are bit players who play off Gabriel. I have tried to look at “The Dead” from as many points of view as I can, yet I find myself identifying mostly with Gabriel, and, I think, with James Joyce himself resulting from the strong autobiographical influences in the story. Naturally therefore, I have been concerned with the final climax/anticlimax from a combination of Gabriel’s, Joyce’s and my own viewpoints. In concluding my own interpretation of what happens to Gabriel in the final scene at the Gresham, I am unable to detach my own emotional response from a Gabriel standpoint. Of course, it has helped that I have suffered for many years from a clinically depressed state with anxiety features!

Gabriel is either a changed man ready to embrace Gretta’s, and others’ reading of the world, rethinking his own attitudes and egotistic pomposity, or he is about to renew his ego-defence mechanisms and continue as before. My expectation, wish even, is that he has truly encountered an epiclesis which will allow him to become a more open, non-paralytic father, nephew, husband and Irishman. Of course, I have been influenced in this thinking by Joyce’s stated reasons for writing Dubliners (Ellmann 163). If the author solely wished to portray the extent of spiritual paralysis, as he did in the other stories and in the early part of “The Dead”, and wished to end the matter there, perhaps he would not have written the final scene at the Gresham. He would have ended the story on the doorsteps at Usher’s Island, the main players disappearing into the early morning Dublin gloom in horse and carriage. Something momentous, therefore,

probably occurs at the Gresham. The reader is given the choice as to what may have happened to Gabriel when he wakes up on January 7th 1904.

My reading, biased, conditioned, instinctive, compels me to believe that Joyce gives us hope, through Gabriel, a way out of our social, spiritual and cultural paralysis. The confessional nature of the scene, in which Gabriel realises the error of his ways, dying to his old self, and seems to repent – in the literal translation, "rethinking,"- must surely be followed by absolution and a new beginning. Emotionally, I am not attracted to any other outcome. Intellectually, I am willing to look at all the options. I have outlined above my sense of Joyce crucifying Gabriel. The essential Christian tradition is that after death, Christ rose from the dead. So it should be with Gabriel. The probable allusion to the above-mentioned fifteenth station on the *via dolorosa;* "Jesus Rises from the Dead" is, I believe, the intent of the narrator. I doubt that Joyce would have crucified Gabriel and caused him to repent without affording him the possibility of resurrection. The Irish, who are shown their paralytic state throughout Dubliners*,* must be given some hope of shedding their colonial and ecclesiastic chains. Otherwise, there is little point in Joyce's writing of "The Dead" as *grand finale.* Throughout the whole story, it is clear that Joyce understands his sad fellow Dubliners, complete with their flaws. Yet he writes a love story which he rounds off with lyrical wonderment. This is not the act of a callous man. He has identified the problem. He would not believably refrain from suggesting a solution. Of course, this is a personal reader-response opinion.

Joyce, of course, would have no wish to make it easy for us for, by that stage, we (the readers) are too involved ourselves. There is no single correct/approved path for us. Riquelme, in his essay on deconstruction of "The

Dead", states that the text "frustrates the possibility that readers could ever agree on a single definitive interpretation, one that is decisively superior to all other alternatives" (Schwarz ed. 220). One can agree with this and yet respond individually, emotionally and intellectually, mindful particularly of authorial intentions. The final text is different for each reader. That, for this reader, is one of the glories of "The Dead". Riquelme alerts us, however, to the idea that the text has multiple meanings which are in flux:

> in ways that can startle us out of resting content with single-minded readings that slight one or another aspect of the story's language, structure, actions, and implications. (Schwarz ed. 221)

In reviewing my own response to "The Dead" and in listening to the critics, I remind myself that the story was written over one hundred years ago in what was a different world to the one we have now. I have mentioned that, in line with Joyce's intentions, I expected Gabriel to achieve some kind of epiphanic resolution to his imperfect self. On the other hand, he may have just gone to sleep and woken up the same-old, same-old Gabriel next morning. Whatever the wished-for/most likely outcome, it has been my privilege to spend many months thinking about Gabriel and his people, his double crucifixion, the snow, and all the living and the dead. I have touched upon the parts of the critical literature which have helped guide me but, in the end, have had to form my own response to the story. I have created my own interpretations of some aspects of Gabriel's experiences and Joyce's semiotics while, at the same time, have come to realise that there is no orthodox or correct way to complete the text. I have learned a great deal from the story and from its critics. I have enjoyed Joyce's astonishing use of allusion and allegory, his economic language, his use of internal dialogue

in the case of Gabriel, his showing rather than telling, his great facility for varying the pace of the action by increasing and decreasing the intensity of narrative and, above all, his astounding final scene.

The snow symbol, metaphorical great leveller of all the living and the dead, has remained with this reader long after the book has been put down. My earnest hope is that the experience will help to make me a better writer and, if not, a better reader.

I was so moved by the final paragraphs that I have adapted them to make a poem in tribute to the author of my experience. Very little invention was required from me; I used James Joyce's words.

Words by James Joyce

1

Snow is general all over,

Falling softly on every part

Of the dark central plain,

Soft on Michael Furey's grave.

Perhaps I see him standing,

Grey, impalpable, faint,

Beneath a dripping tree

Or in the white churchyard

Near crooked crosses, thorns

And spears in drifted snow.

Michael, now a shade, who knew

What must be love.

2

Snow is general all over,

Falling softly on treeless hills,

On the Bog of Allen and on dark

Mutinous Shannon waves.

My soul swoons slowly

To flickering wayward forms

Near that region where dwell

The vast hosts of the dead.

I would pass boldly

Into that other world

In the glory of some passion,

Not wither dismally with age.

3

Snow is general all over,

Dark and silver, sleepy fading,

Obliquely falling, westwards.

My journey time has come.

Snow is falling faintly

Through the universe, faintly falling

Like the descent of their last end,

On all the living and the dead.

End.

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