

Film Worksheet 2.9

The Dead

Knowledge base

1. Review your knowledge of the short story.
 - a. Read the brief summary of the storyline.
 - b. Trace Gabriel's feelings as they change in the course of the story. How does Gabriel feel at the party and how does he feel later at the hotel?

Summary

*At ten o'clock in the evening on a snowy night in early January, Gabriel Conway and his wife Gretta arrive at the annual Epiphany party organised by Gabriel's aunts at their home in Dublin. There is dancing, music, singing and a big dinner at which Gabriel will preside. During the party Gabriel wavers between moments of feeling confident, sure of himself and magnanimous, and other moments when he feels unnerved, insecure and tired of the party. When it is time to leave, he notices that his wife has stopped to listen to someone singing an old Irish ballad, *The Lass of Aughrim*. She seems transfixed. Gabriel and Gretta leave the party and go to a hotel for the night because the weather is too bad and their home too far away. Gabriel is feeling passionate but his wife seems distant and upset. Gretta begins to cry and tells Gabriel the story of Michael Furey, a young man who loved Gretta but who died. He had sung the ballad to her when they were young lovers. Listening to Gretta, Gabriel is at first irritated and angry, but then reaches a state of self-awareness and subsequently of calm acceptance and neutrality. The story ends with the promise of a journey 'westwards'.*

2. The clip you will watch concerns the moment when Gretta tells Gabriel about Michael Furey.

Where will the scene take place?

First impressions

3. Read the dialogue in your book (pages 282-283, lines 18-72).
 - a. How should the actor playing Gabriel deliver the speeches (with anger/jealousy/calm/sarcasm...)? Explain your answer.
 - b. How should Gretta appear and speak?

4. Watch the clip for the first time.

Did the film version match your expectations in terms of the two characters?



The Dead

(see film clip on the Class Video DVD)

In more detail

Script and composition

5. Watch the clip again.

How close to the original dialogue does the script remain?

6. The position of the camera remains fixed giving greater importance to the composition and facial expressions.

- a. Where are the two characters in relation to one another?
- b. In which direction do the characters mainly look?
- c. What are their predominant facial expressions?
- d. Which piece of furniture completes the composition in the background on the right? Check its importance in the narrative of the short story.

Conclusions

7. Read the information about the film adapted from *Wikipedia* and answer the questions.

- a. What is the relationship between the film's director and its leading actress?
- b. What was unusual about Huston's direction and the film's release?
- c. Where was the production filmed?
- d. Was the film admired by critics?



The Dead is a 1987 film directed by John Huston, starring his daughter Anjelica Huston as Gretta Conroy and Donal McCann as her husband Gabriel. *The Dead* was the last film that Huston directed, and it was released posthumously.

Huston, in fact, directed the movie, at eighty, from a wheelchair, standing up to look through the camera. It was adapted from the short story *The Dead* by James Joyce (from his short works collection *Dubliners*). The film adaptation is largely faithful to Joyce's short story, with some alterations made to the dialogue to aid the narrative for cinema audiences. It was filmed on location on Usher's Island, Dublin.

It received good reviews from critics who have described it as an "exquisite" and beautifully understated film and it was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. It was also nominated for an Academy Award for Costume Design.