

THE LITERARY ESSAY

Writing about short stories, poems, novels, and plays

THE BASICS:

- Never refer to an **author** by their first name only. Provide the author's **full name** the first time you reference them, then refer to them by their last name or as "the author."
- Put **titles** of poems and short stories in "Quotation Marks" and those of novels and plays in *Italics* (Underlined in handwriting).
- Distinguish the **author**, who wrote the work, from the **narrator**, who tells the story. In fiction, the author is never the "I" or the storytelling voice.
- Use the **present tense** to discuss the story, but past tense to talk about real events.
 - Example: James Joyce **was** staying in Paris when he wrote *Ulysees* (real event). In his novel, the main character **walks** through the streets of Dublin (fictional event).
 - See the handout **Verb Tenses: Writing about Fiction and Nonfiction**.
- **Summarizing** may be used when needed to give context and background information.
- Certain elements must be included in your introduction and conclusion. See the **next page**.

QUOTATIONS & ANALYSIS:

- Keep **quotations** brief and to the point. Quote key words and short phrases.
- **Make sure your quote fits your sentence grammatically.** Any abrupt shifts in tense and person between quotes and your own sentences should be avoided.
 - Quote a **full sentence** to avoid these shifts. (The narrator says, "I came to see the dawn.")
 - Use **[square brackets]** to replace pronouns and past tense verbs if they do not fit your grammar. ("because [he] drink[s] at the stream of time"; she "finally [runs] to the beach")
 - Use **ellipses (...)** to skip over unnecessary parts. (The narrator explains how "Gabriel ... finally told [him] the truth.")
 - See the handout: **Quotations**.
- **Analyze your quotation after providing it. Explain how the quote links to your thesis and supports it.** As a rule of thumb, aim for at least two sentences of analysis for every quotation.

LITERARY TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES:

- Identify **literary techniques and devices** if required by your teacher; choose the ones that you understand well and that you can relate to your thesis.
 - Safe bets for **novels and short stories**: Characterization, setting, imagery, description, flashback, symbolism, and tone.
 - See the handout: **English Exit Exam: Techniques and Devices**.
 - Safe bets for **poetry**: Symbolism, imagery, tone, alliteration, rhyme, and meter.
 - Safe bets for **plays**: Characterization, dialogue, monologue, symbolism, and setting.



THE LITERARY ESSAY

Continued

Title indicates topic and suggests thesis

An Analysis of Gabriel’s Self-Estrangement in James Joyce’s “The Dead”

by Sam Fisher

Introduction:

Hook

James Joyce’s “The Dead” explores the theme of being alienated from one’s self. Gabriel, the

Essential background information

main character in “The Dead,” is a member of the Irish upper class in early twentieth-century Dublin. Despite being surrounded by a rather conservative family and group of friends, Gabriel identifies himself as progressive, does not believe in class distinctions, and promotes the idea of leaving Ireland to explore the modern world.

Thesis statement (phrased to include a preview of three main points)

However, an analysis of Gabriel’s conversation with Lily, his speech at the dinner table, and his thoughts when observing the snow falling all over Ireland reveal how Gabriel ultimately alienates himself from his modern ideas.

Body Paragraph:

Topic Sentence

During Gabriel’s conversation with Lily, the assumptions he makes about her due to her gender and social class lead him to realize that he may not be as progressive as he would like to be.

First Sub-Point

Evidence: Given as brief summary

When Gabriel first enters Misses Morkans’ house for their annual dance, Lily, the maid, greets him and helps him remove his coat and boots. **Gabriel starts a conversation with Lily**, which would have been unusual at the time given the gap between their social classes. The fact that Gabriel speaks to Lily can be perceived as evidence that he does not support class distinctions.

Analysis

Second Sub-Point

Evidence: Introduced and given as a brief quotation

During the exchange, Gabriel asks Lily whether she is still in school, to which she replies that she is not. Gabriel then tactlessly states that he supposes he will see Lily at her “wedding [...] with [her] young man” (Joyce 6). **Here Gabriel implies that because Lily is not getting an education and that she has little money, her only resort is to find a man who will marry and support her.** This assumption suggests that Gabriel does not think that members of the lower class have a very high potential. There is also arguably some sexism to this assumption; Gabriel may believe that because Lily is a woman she cannot survive alone and needs a man by her side. Gabriel tells himself that he believes in gender equality and in the abolition of class distinctions. However, his conversation with Lily suggests otherwise.

Analysis

Wrap-up Statement

Gabriel realizes this and may begin to ask himself what his principles mean if he does not live according to them.

Conclusion:

Recap of three main points, which serve as a restatement of the thesis

In conclusion, Gabriel first realizes that he does not always live according to his progressive principles when he speaks to Lily. At the dinner table, Gabriel makes a conscious effort to distance himself from his modern ideas. Ultimately, Gabriel has an epiphany while observing the snow through his hotel window: progressive ideology does not have its place in early twentieth-century Ireland.

Discussion of the insights arising from the entire essay

Through these three moments in Gabriel’s night, it is clear that he completely alienates himself from his avant-garde ideas.

Source: Fisher, Sam. "An Analysis of Gabriel's Self-Estrangement in James Joyce's 'The Dead.'" *Dawson English Journal*, no. 7, Winter 2016, <https://www.dawsonenglishjournal.ca/issue/issue-7/>.

For more information, contact the Academic Skills Centre.