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A Feminist Perspective of The Dead

Margot Norris' criticism of "The Dead," published in 1994, explores a feminist perspective of James Joyce's work. Norris focuses on his critiques of feminism and himself that are subtly hidden in the narrative of his writing. There are a multitude of topics touched upon in this essay, but the main point of priority is Norris' constant debate between Joyce as a feminist versus a misogynist. She starts by writing about his early publications. When he was eighteen years old, he deeply praised a work by Henrik Ibsen, and said that the author had an 'insightful representation of women.' This in itself is a fair point, but Joyce goes on to say "he seems to know them better than they know themselves" ("Ibsen's New Drama" 64). It is bold to say that a man knows the ways of women better than women themselves. Joyce is a brilliant man, but he is overconfident. Much like Gabriel Conroy, he seems to believe that his work is above politics, and he uses women as tools for his own writing in the guise of being a feminist. This statement follows the opinion of Joyce being a misogynist. This point that he made was written early in his career, and his opinions of feminism seem to broaden over time.

As Joyce grows as a writer, he becomes aware of his contribution to the patriarchy, and uses his writing to critique this. He uses Gabriel Conroy to ridicule the sexist ideas of his time, especially in the character's interactions with women. Norris notices that in "The Dead," Joyce uses a technique that she dubbed a "stifled back answer" (Norris 192). The text represses women, there is a protest against the point made by said women, but then the objection is

silenced. This happens during Gabriel's interaction with his wife, Lily, and Miss Ivors. When he talks to Lily, she attacks him with the phrase "the men that is now is only all palaver..." (Joyce 23). Gabriel is originally shocked by this, but quickly finds a way to brush away this bold statement made by a woman, leaving the point made by Lily silenced. In the interaction with Miss Ivors, Joyce describes her as a woman whose intelligence is tantamount to Gabriel's own. Miss Ivors critiques Gabriel's involvement in the *Daily Express*, and he is taken aback by her blatant 'attack' on him. The prose of the narration makes it easy for the reader to side with Gabriel, Norris explains, but Joyce writes it that way because it is written from an early 20th century masculine perspective. He knows of the sexism that is deeply rooted in society. He subtly inserts his own criticisms of masculinity by showing its weaknesses that are often overlooked in most works at the time. "The Dead" encourages its readers to reflect on these hints of progressivism and bring attention to the reformation of women in Dubliner (and modern) society.