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## VOICES IN JAMES JOYCE'S "THE DEAD": A BAKHTINIAN READING

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine James Joyce's "the Dead" in *Dubliners* through the perspective of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, polyphony, and dialogism. The text includes representation of differences of culture, ideology and language through its characters. Joyce's "the Dead" highlights Gabriel's realizing his self through his dialogues and relations to other characters, whose ideologies, behaviours, culture and ways of speech impress Gabriel. It will be put forth that James Joyce does not control or dominate over the characters' voices, allowing for and giving place to heteroglossia in his short story "the Dead". Also, it will be propounded that the characters have their own worldviews and ideologies which constitute dialogism through their communication and interaction with one another without being finalized by the author or narrator. At the end of this paper, it will be concluded that social, cultural and historical backgrounds of each character are revealed and they are not mingled or controlled by the narrator. Therefore, Bakhtin's terms: heteroglossia, dialogism, polyphony and unfinalization are applied to James Joyce's "the Dead".

**Keywords:** Dialogism, Polyphony, *Dubliners*, James Joyce, Ideology.

### Introduction

Joyce's *Dubliners*, published in 1914, consists of 15 short stories among which "The Dead" was the last one concerning the events taking place in Gabriel Conroy's aunts "Misses Morkan's annual dance" (Joyce, 1993: 127)<sup>1</sup>. "A chorus of voices [are] invited" (143) to the party, among whom are Gabriel Conroy, Kate and Julia Morkan's favourite nephew and Mary Jane's cousin, Gabriel's wife Gretta, Mr Bartel D'Arcy, a tenor singing "the Lass of Aughrim" in the party, Gabriel's Irish nationalist friend Miss Molly Ivors, Freddy Malins, who has a drinking problem; also, there are some dead characters about whom the aunts, Gabriel and Gretta talk: Gabriel's grandfather Patrick Morkan, Julia and Kate's brother Pat Morkan, Gabriel's mother Ellen Morkan, and Gretta's dead love Michael Furey, who aimed to study music but died at an early age.

Almost all characters are from Irish middle class families and "though [Aunt Morkan's] life was modest, they believed in eating well; the best of everything: diamond-bone sirloins, three-shilling tea and the best bottled stout..." (128); the party is a gathering of various people from different social backgrounds; therefore, the story has many voices to present heteroglossia, representing different social groups, ideologies, and worldviews. Heteroglossia is the stratification of language, which means many-voicedness to Bakhtin since various ideologies, worldviews, social classes, groups, professions and many others shape and stratify language at any time and place. As Joyce has put it in the story, "It was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan's annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family, the members of Julia's choir, any of Kate's pupils that were grown up enough, and even some of Mary Jane's pupils too" (128). However, these voices are not dominated by the limited-third-person-narrator. Each character has his/her own conscious, which communicates without exercising power over the other. In this sense, Joyce succeeds in establishing a polyphonic work.

### 1. The Polyphonic Structure of the Story

In a polyphonic novel the voices of conscious characters "are not merged in the unity of the event" (Bakhtin, 1984: 6), and such a novel presents equal rights for each character together with his/her own world. That is to say, in a polyphonic novel, the author does not control or dominate over the characters'

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter page numbers without a writer's name indicate James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1993, first pub. 1914) Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd.



voices, allowing for and giving place to heteroglossia. Regarding heteroglossia, and the heteroglossic situation of language Bakhtin states that:

Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound. (Bakhtin, 1981: 288)

The different sounds are represented through various characters from different worldviews. For instance, Miss Ivors represents the Irish nationalist with her utterances whereas Gabriel is the opposite, representing the English rule and ideology. However, they have their own worldviews and ideologies which constitute dialogism through their communication and interaction with one another without being finalized by the author or narrator. In this sense, in "The Dead", each voice has his/her own ideology, culture and worldview, which interact with one another, and therefore makes the story polyphonic. Regarding polyphony and the polyphonic work, Bakhtin remarks that

The new kind of character appearing in [the polyphonic] work has a voice constructed in the same way as the authorial voice is constructed in an ordinary novel... The character's speech of himself and of the world is as weighty as the traditional authorial discourse; it is not subordinated to the objective character of the hero, as one of his characteristics; at the same time it does not serve as an expression of the authorial voice. (Bakhtin, 1984: 13)

The character has his own world as the author does not interfere with him. Although the character and the narrator seem to be in dialogue in a way, this interaction is not shadowed forth by the authorial voice. Joyce does not interfere with Gabriel's way of thinking; therefore, "[the] author's voice is only one among many which lets the characters have 'free speech' " (Guerin, et al., 1999: 350). Miss Ivors' utterances shape Gabriel's utterances in the story since utterances "are populated - even overpopulated with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981: 294). Gabriel's utterances are shaped and changed by Miss Ivors' and his wife's utterances, which also incline Gabriel to question his self. Therefore, the social and psychological conditions shape Gabriel's utterances. Regarding this interaction, Bakhtin states that "at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, psychological - that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any conditions" (1981: 428). Such differences occur because of heteroglossia which is "the diversity of speech styles in language" (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 232). Bakhtin comprehends "language as the material medium in which people interact in society" (Jefferson and Robey, 1982: 160). That Gabriel writes at the Daily Express astonishes no one but Miss Ivors because she imbeds ideology in that journal; therefore, the journal becomes an ideological subject, on which Gabriel and Miss Ivors discuss:

I have found out that you write for The Daily Express. Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Why should I be ashamed of myself?" asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and trying to smile.

"Well, I'm ashamed of you," said Miss Ivors frankly. "To say you'd write for a paper like that. I didn't think you were a West Briton." (136)

Although Gabriel and Miss Ivors are friends and they are fellow countrymen, they have different ideologies as observed in their discourse and dialogue. Discourse in a polyphonic work focuses on the oppositional struggle of different voices and ideological thoughts, which are stratified by the centrifugal forces of heteroglossia. In other words, through heteroglossic situation of a polyphonic novel, multiple ideological and social meanings and discourse are established. After Miss Ivors accuses him of being a "West-Briton", Gabriel does not know what to do:

A look of perplexity appeared on Gabriel's face. It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in The Daily Express, for which he was paid fifteen shillings. But that did not make him a West Briton surely... Nearly every day when his teaching in the college was ended he used to wander down the quays to the second-hand booksellers, to Hickey's on Bachelor's Walk, to Web's or Massey's on Aston's Quay, or to O'Clohissey's in the bystreet. He did not know how to meet her charge. He wanted to say that literature was above politics. But they were friends of many years' standing and their careers had been parallel, first at the University and then as teachers: he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her. He continued blinking his



eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books. (136-37)

Miss Ivor's speech and the way she addresses to Gabriel is provocative and full of ideology since she directly calls him a "west-Briton" and tells him he should be ashamed of writing for the Daily Express, a supporter of the British rule. Miss Ivors, as "the speaker [,] talks with an expectation of a response..." (Bakhtin, 1986: 69), but in some cases silence may be a response, as well. Miss Ivors' harsh criticism, imbedded with ideology, does not influence as much as his wife's story about Michael Furrey. Shotton remarks that "an utterance is a real unit of dialogue in the sense that it comes to an end when another speaker begins to respond to it" (Web); in this regard, it can be stated that when Gabriel does not sustain the conversation as Miss Ivors aims to, she leaves the party. Since Miss Ivors is perceived as an ideological subject, she cannot be influential on Gabriel whereas Gretta is influential on her husband with her story now that she is not a subject of any ideology. Gabriel realizes this situation and he asks himself "Had she really any life of her own behind all her propagandism?" (138). Miss Ivors implies through her utterances that Gabriel, with his behaviors, is an English member shaped by the British rule, social institutions, and ideological discourses. The social differences are reflected as they are; that is, the author does not interfere with the ideas and world views of the character; he lets them speak. None is confirmed by the narrator or the author. Voices are not "subjected to the authoritarian control of the writer himself" (Jefferson and Robey, 1982: 163).

## 2. Heteroglossia in "the Dead"

Bell and Gardiner state that "centripetal forces push [language and ideology] towards unity, agreement and monologue, while the centrifugal forces seek multiplicity, disagreement and heteroglossia" (Bell, 1998: 16). Gabriel aims at establishing a monologue and agreement but Miss Ivors seeks disagreement; therefore, heteroglossia is reinforced through such dialogues. Unitary language, uttered by Gabriel, tries to establish a cultural and socio-political centralization to restrict the diversity of language and its heteroglossic nature, created by Miss Ivors' utterances. The stratification of language pushes language against centralizing forces due to its heteroglot nature. Regarding this nature of language, Bakhtin states that "[heteroglossia] is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre...by means of the social diversity of speech types" (1981: 262). In other words, being a polyphonic work, and applying heteroglossia in it, the Dead has a diversity of language through its diverse characters, who dialogically interact with each other.

Each character talks on behalf of his/her own worldview; therefore, Joyce's "The Dead" has multiplicity of voices because "heteroglossic situation...differs from general narration, as it involves interaction among two or more characters speaking in their respective voices to represent different aspects of a reality in a form of dramatisation" (Fonseka, 2014: 168). In each language, there exist many utterances – unrepeatable and unique – now that different social classes, groups and generations constitute various utterances and discourses in time within the self, that is to say, inner speech or with other people through language. Different classes, generations and groups of people constitute the utterances in time within the self, that is to say, inner speech or with others through language which is a stratification of different discourses such as "social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of passing fashions..." (Bakhtin, 1981: 263).

Gabriel establishes a dialogue with Lilly, the housekeeper. Gabriel tells Lily "I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?" (130) to which Lily answers "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you." Gabriel did not await such a reply; therefore, Gabriel coloured, as if he felt he had made a mistake and, without looking at her, kicked off his goloshes and flicked actively with his muffler at his patent leather shoes" (130). As observed, although Gabriel tries to communicate with some people, he cannot achieve establishing a prosperous dialogue. For instance:

He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning, for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers. Some quotation that they would recognise from Shakespeare or from the Melodies would be better...He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. (130)



Before Gabriel gives his dinner-speech, he thinks several times about what and how to talk. Responses to or remarks on his utterances cause disturbance and make him feel uncanny about the way he addresses to people.

Another factor to be discussed in the story is chronotope, which means time and place. Regarding chronotope, Bakhtin states that it is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981: 84). Temporal and spatial relationships are represented in the utterances, language and discourse of the characters to reinforce the characters' worldviews and ideologies. The Irish nationalist Miss Ivors asks "O, Mr. Conroy, will you come for an excursion to the Aran Isles this summer?" (137). The Aran Isles is a group of island located on the west coast of Ireland but Gabriel is not interested in them because since he writes in the Daily Express, and had an education in an English college, Gabriel stands for the centripetal forces, which is the English rules and ideology in this case. There exists a conflict during the interaction and stratification of language, which is shaped by centripetal and centrifugal forces. If language moves towards the centre (to the ideology of the authority - ruling class), then it is called "centripetal", which tries to unite ideological thought. The centre is established by the centripetal forces, which has a unitary language, opposed to heteroglossia. Gabriel thinks and behaves as if he was English when he stands up for his writing in the Daily Express or his travelling to Europe so he stands for the ideology of the ruling class. However, Miss Ivors argues against Gabriel's attitudes because as a nationalist she is against the ruling class. She seems to be "an admonishing nationalist mother, perhaps as an ideological counterweight to Gabriel's Wes Briton mater" (Backus, 2001: 127). When language moves against that center, the centrifugal forces are constituted. The centrifugal force of heteroglossia stratifies ideological thought. Two different intents are stated synchronically; therefore, each utterance brings forth another response, which forms discourse - focusing on the oppositional struggle of various voices. As the representative of the centrifugal forces, Miss Ivors goes on and says "It would be splendid for Gretta too if she'd come. She's from Connacht, isn't she?" to which Gabriel replies shortly "Her people are" (137). "The province of Connacht has the greatest number of native Irish speakers at between 5-10%" (Wikipedia), so Miss Ivors actually implies Gabriel that he needs to speak Irish and visit Ireland, as well. The dialogue demonstrates the situation:

"Well, you know, every year I go for a cycling tour with some fellows...we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany," said Gabriel awkwardly.

"And why do you go to France and Belgium," said Miss Ivors, "instead of visiting your own land?"

"Well," said Gabriel, "it's partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change."

"And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with - Irish?" asked Miss Ivors.

"Well," said Gabriel, "if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language" (137)

Gabriel behaves like a European, who has no place for local customs. That he wears galoshes, he goes cycling to Europe, he asserts that he is sick of Ireland and Irish frustrates Miss Ivors, who calls Gabriel "West-Briton!" (138). After his discussion with Miss Ivors, Gabriel thinks about being outside: "How cool it must be outside! ... The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington Monument. How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper-table!" (139). Wellington Monument is a "huge obelisk commemorating the Duke of Wellington put up in 1817, two years after his victory at Waterloo. Although Dublin-born to an Anglo-Irish family, he insisted he was not Irish" (169). Similar to the Duke of Wellington, Gabriel behaves and talks as if he was not an Irish; therefore, space has a crucial role.

Following this incident, Gabriel tells his grandfather's story, at which everyone laughs:

The old [Patrick Morkan] had a horse by the name of Johnny. And Johnny used to work in the old gentleman's mill, walking round and round in order to drive the mill. That was all very well; but now comes the tragic part about Johnny. One fine day the old gentleman thought he'd like to drive out with the quality to a military review in the park...And everything went on beautifully until Johnny came in sight of King Billy's statue: and whether he fell in love with the horse King Billy sits on or whether he thought he was back again in the mill, anyway he began to walk round the statue.



Gabriel paced in a circle round the hall in his goloshes amid the laughter of the others. 'Round and round he went', said Gabriel, 'and the old gentleman, who was a very pompous old gentleman, was highly indignant. Go on, sir! What do you mean, sir? Johnny! Johnny! Most extraordinary conduct! Can't understand the horse!' (149-50)

Gabriel's grandfather behaves like an English noble man when he talks to his horse by calling it "sir". He is unaware of his comic, and culturally shaped situation, as is the case when Gabriel talks the reason why he wears galoshes as the English do. Like his grandfather, Gabriel is a wannabe (imitator), who "...had taken his degree in the Royal University" (135), where he was shaped by the dominant ideology. Therefore, as institutions, both his family and his education life shaped and reshaped his conscious. The galoshes represent the fashion, and his search for identity. Another character, Aunt Julia is shaped by the religious ideology but since she was a woman, she was expelled from the church. Mr. Browne, Aunt Kate and Julia and Mary Jane talk about singing in the church choir, from which Aunt Julia was thrown away. Regarding this issue, Aunt Kate says that "I know all about the honour of God, Mary Jane, but I think it's not at all honourable for the pope to turn out the women out of the choirs that have slaved there all their lives...But it's not just, Mary Jane, and it's not right" (140). Mary Jane replies, "Now, Aunt Kate, you're giving scandal to Mr. Browne who is of the other persuasion" (140), by which she implies that "you're letting a Protestant see our faults" (170) as Joyce has put it in the notes at the end of his book.

Another instance that strengthens the fashioning of the characters' conscious occurs when Mary Jane, Mr Browne, and Mr Bartell D'Arcy discuss whether there are good singers. Mary Jane says that there is one whose name "was Parkinson...A beautiful, pure, sweet, mellow English tenor" (144). Although they are Irish, they cannot think about an Irish tenor; unconsciously they concentrate on thinking an English tenor. Therefore, just like Gabriel, these characters are shaped by the English ruling class, and Mary Jane "had been through the Academy and gave a pupils' concert every year in the upper room of the Ancient Concert Rooms. Many of her pupils belonged to the better-class families on the Kingstown and Dalkey line" (127). Mary Jane feels close to the ruling class and the ruling ideology since she is in dialogue with "better-class families on the Kingstown" (127), which is in southwest London. And it is she who does not want her aunts to discuss with Mr Browne, who is a Protestant. The ruling ideology (represented by Mary Jane, Gabriel, and Aunts) tries to shape the language and society through the unitary language, which applies centripetal forces.

### 3. Dialogue and Interaction in the Story

Various intentions and a diversity of languages of the characters are in dialogue and interaction, through which worldviews, ideologies, and languages construct a hybrid atmosphere in Joyce's story. As Bakhtin has put it, "the social and historical voices, populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structural stylistic system" (Dialogic 300). The story is like an untouched social order. Gabriel represents the British rule, Miss Ivors represents the Irish nationalism, Lilly stands for the working-class, which only works and serves for the others. The aunts seem to be shaped by religious ideology. Schools, church, family, newspapers are the institutions through which people are fashioned. Since different institutions imposed various ideologies on each character the heteroglossia takes place to ensure polyphony in this story.

Then, at the hotel, Gabriel and Gretta talk about Michael Furey, "who used to sing...the Lass of Aughrim," and who "died when he was only seventeen" (157). When Gretta was a young girl, she would leave Galway, and the night before she left, Michael Furey waited for him all night in the garden under the rain. After a week Furey died and was buried in Oughterard, "where his people came from" (159). Upon learning his wife's dead friend, Gabriel asks "what was he?...He was in the gasworks" (157). Gabriel's learning about a mysterious bygone friend of his wife leads him to think deeply about himself, his wife, and his relations to the others.

Gabriel is lost in thought at the end of the story; that is, in a way, his epiphany. "He watched her while she slept, as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife...He wondered at his riot of emotions of an hour before" (159). Gabriel questions himself and his relationship with his wife, who is now in a stranger-like position. "In Joyce's stories the protagonist makes some kind of discovery" (Balkaya, 2014: 60) and in this case, that he learns how much his wife's lover loved Gretta is his discovery, which makes Gabriel think deeply. Also, the final word is not uttered, nothing is finalized as "the world is open and free [and] everything is still in the future" (Bakhtin, 1984: 166). Gabriel looks outside and watches the snow, which reminds him of dead and the dead: "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly



through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead" (160). As Richard Ellman has put it, the recognition of Gabriel's situation

suggests a concession, a relinquishment, and Gabriel is conceding and relinquishing a good deal - his sense of the importance of civilized thinking, of continental tastes, of all those tepid but nice distinctions on he has prided himself. The bubble of his self-possession is pricked; he no longer possesses himself, and not to possess oneself is in a way a kind of death. (Ellman, 1982: 249)

As observed, Gabriel's utterances and the way he thinks are not finalized. Regarding finalization, Bakhtin states that "as long as a person is alive, he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate world" (Bakhtin, 1984: 59).

### Conclusion

This paper has argued that throughout "the Dead", social, cultural and historical backgrounds of each character are revealed and they are not mingled or controlled by the narrator. Therefore, Bakhtin's terms: heteroglossia, dialogism, polyphony and unfinalization are applied to James Joyce's "the Dead". Bakhtin studies the dialogical nature of language "in its concrete living totality" (Bakhtin, 1984: 181). Since language is active and alive, it changes in time depending on the social, cultural, historical and ideological aspects of each society each time; therefore, language is neither stable nor fixed, and it is "never singular and uncontested but rather plural and contested" (Webster, 1990: 40). Thus Bakhtin examines language by including the dialogic relations that language is in. The dialogic relations in Joyce's *The Dead* enable Gabriel to find his self through others' ideologies, and discourses.

Joyce does not control or dominate over the characters' voices, allowing for and giving place to heteroglossia. These voices are not dominated by the limited-third-person-narrator. Each character has his/her own conscious, which communicates without exercising power over the other. In this sense, Joyce succeeds in establishing a polyphonic work. The characters have their own worldviews and ideologies which constitute dialogism through their communication and interaction with one another without being finalized by the author or narrator.

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