



IDENTITY CRISIS AT THE PARTY: JOYCE'S "THE DEAD" AND WOOLF'S "THE NEW DRESS"

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ABSTRACT. The present contribution offers a comparative analysis of James Joyce's short story "The Dead" and Virginia Woolf's "The New Dress", reflecting on the possible reasons that could explain the inexistence of previous critical comparisons of two texts written by two authors whose work has been amply studied and who have been frequently related by criticism. Considering the recurrent motif and context of the party in modernist literature, the study focuses on the identity crises experienced by the protagonists of both short stories. Taking into account Anthony Elliott's reflections on the agents involved in the construction of the self, as well as recalling Joyce's concept of "epiphany" and Woolf's notion of "moment of being", we analyse the concomitances detected in two stories that deal with the identity crises suffered by their respective protagonists, that deploy an analogous structure and share the use of similar symbolism.

Keywords: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, "The Dead", "The New Dress", party, crisis.

CRISIS IDENTITARIAS EN LA FIESTA: “LOS MUERTOS”, DE JOYCE, Y “EL VESTIDO NUEVO”, DE WOOLF

RESUMEN. El trabajo ofrece un análisis comparativo del relato de James Joyce “Los muertos” y el de Virginia Woolf “El vestido nuevo”, reflexionando sobre los posibles motivos que explicarían la inexistencia de comparaciones críticas previas de dos textos escritos por dos autores cuya obra ha sido ampliamente estudiada y que han sido frecuentemente relacionados por la crítica. Tomando en consideración el motivo y contexto recurrente de la fiesta en la literatura modernista, el estudio se centra en las crisis identitarias que experimentan los protagonistas de ambos relatos. Y teniendo en cuenta las reflexiones de Anthony Elliott sobre los agentes que participan en la construcción del ser, a la par que el concepto Joyceano de “epifanía” y el “momento del ser” al que se refirió Virginia Woolf, se analizan las concomitancias que se detectan en dos relatos que tratan las crisis identitarias que sufren sus respectivos protagonistas, presentan una estructura análoga, y comparten el uso de un simbolismo similar.

Palabras clave: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, “Los Muertos”, “El vestido nuevo”, la fiesta, crisis.

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Parties and social gatherings abound in modernist fiction. We only have to recall their inclusion in James Joyce’s stories in *Dubliners*, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and in *Ulysses*. Similarly many parties appear recurrently in Woolf’s novels, in Katherine Mansfield’s short stories, and even in T. S. Eliot’s poetry (“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”), or in D. H. Lawrence’s novels, to mention some cases among the many that can be found. Critics have not failed to notice this recurrent motif of the party and even signaled some of its uses. Thus, Christopher Ames’s *The Life of the Party: Festive Vision in Modernist Fiction* (1991) or, more recently, Kate McLoughlin’s collection of essays in *The Modernist Party* (2015) have become inevitable references. McLoughlin, in the introduction to her volume of essays, argues that “On a technical level, the party as topos: enables authors to gather characters together; provides narratological anticipation, climax and aftermath; gives scope for descriptive detail; constitutes a natural venue for heteroglossia (often in antiphony with omniscient narrative); and allows minor genres such as gossip and anecdote a moment in the light” (17). She also mentions that they offered artists the possibility of rendering the material conditions and changes brought about by modernism – in architectural design, clothing fashions, food and drink, etc. – and that they conveyed an alternative treatment of space – domestic interiors – and time – emphasising the evanescent and fleeting nature of time and even the inevitability of death. (17-18)

It is undeniable that, just as many modernist writers had recourse to artist protagonists (aspiring, frustrated, successful fictional artist figures are recurrently

featured in modernist fiction) for their reflections on identity and subjectivity, the motif of the party also offered them a unique context for the representation of and reflection on identity quests, for exploring the nature of the self, for describing crises of the self, and for deploying the individual's delicate relationship with society. Furthermore, the creative dimension of the party has been emphasized to the point that MacLoughlin considers that both party giving and party going can be considered as creative arts on both the part of the host as well as the attendees at the party.¹ This artistic view of the party is grounded on the performative dimension of an event that involves the preparation of the scene by hosts and of the performance by both hosts and attendees (the selection of the costume, the host's reception as well as the guests' party entrance).

The present contribution compares two short stories that precisely feature modernist parties, Virginia Woolf's "The New Dress" and James Joyce's "The Dead", two narratives that, surprisingly, have not been compared before despite their similar structure, technique and symbology, for a series of reasons that this essay tries to identify. Albeit we should briefly recall first the history of composition of both stories. "The Dead" was the last story included in *Dubliners*, a collection finally published in 1914. "The Dead" can be interpreted as a story that functions as a sort of summary, revision and reinterpretation of the previous tales included in the book, although offering a much more benevolent perspective. In fact, Joyce himself admitted that in his previous stories he had been too severe with his fellow Dubliners and that he had forgotten to portray the beauty of the country, or the hospitality of its inhabitants that he wanted to consider in "The Dead" (Ellmann 1983: 231). Virginia Woolf's "The New Dress" was written in 1924 whilst Virginia Woolf was already preparing one of her major novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* (published in 1925). Some critics consider that the story was, in fact, intended as a chapter to be included in the novel, a novel with which it shares some characters and events such as Mrs Dalloway, the hostess of the party in both novel and short story, or the celebration itself. In any case, the story was not published until 1927 when it appeared in the May edition of the New York magazine *The Forum*. Later on, it became part of the posthumous collection *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories* published in 1944, and much later was included in another volume of stories, entitled *Mrs. Dalloway's Party*, which appeared in 1973.

When Virginia Woolf wrote "The New Dress," she had begun to read and to take notes on *Ulysses*, and she had already read *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and, very probably, *Dubliners*.² It is a well-known fact that Woolf never remained indifferent to Joyce's work. Woolf praised Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in her well-known essay "Modern Novels". Later on, she proceeded to *Ulysses*

¹ In this sense, I would add that it could be even interesting to consider the participants in the modernist parties as pseudo-artist figures, although this should be the object of a different analysis from the one offered here.

² Although I have not been able to find real evidence about Woolf's having actually read *Dubliners*, many critics have explicitly established connections between Joyce's work and Woolf's fiction (see, for instance, the case of Suzette Henke, mentioned later on in this article).

when the first chapters of the novel began to appear and were sent to her by Harriet Shaw Weaver, albeit on this occasion she expressed a profound dislike of *Ulysses*, a work that she described to T. S. Eliot as “underbred” and the result of “a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples” (Ellmann 1983: 528). Notwithstanding, her reaction to Joyce’s masterpiece was always highly ambivalent and anything but indifferent. Hermione Lee in her seminal biography of Woolf describes very well the conflicting feelings that Woolf displayed during her reading of *Ulysses* as reflected in the notes she took between 1918 and 1919:³

She tries to do justice to ‘the undoubted occasional beauty of his phrases,’ his attempt to ‘get thinking into literature.’ Then she runs up against the insuperable difficulties of what she perceives as Joyce’s ‘egotism’ and his ‘desire to shock.’ She reproaches herself for injustice while thinking that all he wants to do is ‘show off.’ She recognises that his method ‘cuts out a lot that’s dull.’ She considers that he is ‘quite right, morally, not artistically’ to do what he is doing. (Lee 1997: 403)

On Joyce’s part, we have only been able to find among his myriad of letters and essays a meagre reference to Woolf in a letter addressed to Harriet Shaw Weaver on 20 July 1918, that runs as follows:

TO HARRIET SHAW WEAVER

29 July 1918

Universitätstrasse 38, Zurich

Dear Miss Weaver: After nine weeks’ illness I am at last able to read and write again. I am sorry that the other episodes of *Ulysses* have been delayed. A few days [ago] I sent the sixth episode ‘Hades’ to Mr Pound with a copy for you and very soon I shall send the seventh ‘Eolus.’ I received also *The Voyage Out* by Mrs Woolf and shall now begin to read it. I beg you to convey my thanks to her for the interest she has taken in printing of my book. (Joyce 1957: 115-116)

Suzette A. Henke has asserted that “There is no question that her [Woolf’s] reading of *Dubliners*, *Portrait*, and *Ulysses* made an indelible impression on her artistic sensibility” (1986: 40). And, significantly enough, she establishes relationships between Joyce’s “The Dead” and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* in the following terms and focusing on the similarities that she detects between Michael Furey (the dead young man mentioned in “The Dead”) and Septimus Warren Smith (who commits suicide in Woolf’s novel): “Consider, for instance, the similarity between those two romantic martyrs, Michael Furey and Septimus Smith. One dies for love of a woman, the other for a universal, mystical love that cannot survive in a loveless country” (Henke 1986: 40). Henke also relates Gabriel Conroy to Clarissa Dalloway:

³ Johanna X. K. Garvey, in “Woolf and Joyce: Reading and Re/Vision,” studies Virginia Woolf’s “*Ulysses* Notebook” and discusses her ambivalent reaction to the book as shown in both the style and topics of *Jacob’s Room*, the novel that Woolf was writing while she read *Ulysses*.

Gabriel Conroy thinks of the young man who died for Gretta's sake: "Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age" [...] Similarly, Clarissa Dalloway evaluates Smith's revolutionary act of suicide: "She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living... A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate" [...]

The two scenes from *Dubliners* and *Mrs. Dalloway* have common roots in Shelley and the romantic tradition. But their resemblance is so striking that it seems more than coincidental. A decade before Woolf's publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Joyce provided in "The Dead" a model for a social "party consciousness" invaded by the recognition of death. (Henke 1986: 41)

Henke is, therefore, one of the few critics who have established connections between Joyce's *Dubliners* – "The Dead" in particular – and *Mrs. Dalloway*, since most comparative studies on both authors have focused on the possible influence of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, or on the technical impact and some thematic echoes of *Ulysses* in works such as *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Jacob's Room*.⁴

It has been acknowledged that Virginia Woolf's short stories have not received the same critical attention as her major novels (Besnault-Levita 2008: 1). It is also worth remembering that many of her short stories were considered by the author herself as sketches for the novels. This is the case of the story in question, "The New Dress", in which we find a middle-aged female character, Mabel, attending a party hosted by Mrs. Dalloway. These circumstances could explain why this short story has been mainly overlooked by critics and, especially if we take into account the many echoes we can find in it of Joyce's "The Dead" and of its protagonist Gabriel Conroy, it is quite inexplicable that comparisons between both texts have not been established up to now. The present contribution intends to fill in this critical omission and offer a comparative analysis of two stories that feature not only a similar topic and akin protagonists but also deploy an analogous structure and symbology.

Some critics have emphasized that "The New Dress" is part of a series of short stories focused on the party motif, written by Woolf between 1922 and 1925, and that also include "Happiness", "Ancestors", "The Introduction", "Together and Apart", "The Man Who Loved His Kind", "A Simple Melody" and "A Summing Up". In fact, these stories were published in a single volume entitled *Mrs Dalloway's Party* in 1973. Notwithstanding, "The New Dress" is, in comparison with the rest of the

⁴ Karen Lawrence's "Gender and Narrative Voice in *Jacob's Room* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," Johanna X. K. Garvey's "Woolf and Joyce: Reading and Re/Vision," and Suzette A. Henke's "Virginia Woolf Reads James Joyce" are representative examples of critical studies focused on the analysis of, respectively, the influence of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, of *Ulysses* on *Jacob's Room*, and of the impact of *Ulysses* on *Mrs Dalloway*.

stories mentioned, a much more carefully elaborated, properly structured and symbolically complex narrative. Therefore, it can be argued that the study of “The New Dress” as part of a series of party stories, or its consideration as a sketch for the novel *Mrs Dalloway*, has done little favor to a text that deserves further critical attention due to a thematic and formal excellence that this study vindicates. Furthermore, it is our contention that the dramatic effect of Michael Furey’s “appearance” and effect upon Gabriel Conroy at the end of the “The Dead” has probably lead critics to focus on Septimus Warren Smith’s similar haunting of Clarissa Dalloway in Woolf’s novel. Therefore, it seems that critics have opted for focusing on comparisons between “The Dead” and *Mrs Dalloway*, ignoring that “The New Dress”, as literary product, stands on its own and that a consideration of its structure and symbology favours the comparison with Joyce’s “The Dead” that we propose here.

Both Joyce’s “The Dead” and Woolf’s “The New Dress” deploy a three part structure that involves the preparation for and arrival of guests at a party, the celebration of the social event itself and a third and final stage involving the conclusion of the gathering or the moment in which some characters abandon the meeting. We also find in the two stories two adult protagonists suffering an identity crisis that becomes more dramatic on occasion of their attending a party. In Woolf’s text, Mabel is taking part in Mrs. Dalloway’s party. And in Joyce’s “The Dead,” Gabriel visits his aunts, the Misses Morkan, for the celebration of the Epiphany. Since the moment of their appearance in the story, both Gabriel and Mabel are featured as too self-absorbed and self-centred characters. Furthermore, they deploy signs of insecurity about their own selves, about their role in society and in their relationships with others. And this insecurity leads both to react in a very similar way, isolating and protecting themselves, adopting what can be described as a defensively and even aggressively preposterous attitude.

The party motif provides the scenario in which both Gabriel’s and Mabel’s crises are most clearly deployed, since it involves their public interaction with other human beings. The contrast between their unstable self-loathing inner selves and the external public image they want to project is most explicitly exposed on the occasion of such a social event. Virginia Woolf made overt reference in her *Diary* to what she called “the party consciousness” that she wanted to explore in her fiction (Woolf 1980: 12). Therefore, parties are more than mere social gatherings in her fiction and become useful means to reflect on the interactions among human beings and serve as crucial occasions for the exposure of identity crises.

As soon as Mabel and Gabriel enter their respective parties, they begin to feel their own inadequacy and both adopt a defensive even deprecatory attitude with regard to the rest of the guests. Therefore, Mabel thinks about the rest of the participants in the party as “ordinary” and “insignificant”: “She could not face the whole horror [...] not among all these *ordinary* people” (“The New Dress” 171, emphasis mine), “Rose Shaw and all the other people there as flies, trying to hoist themselves out of something, or into something, meagre, insignificant, toiling flies” (“The New Dress” 171). Similarly, Gabriel offers the reader several instances of his

self-assumed superiority when confronting his aunts' guests: "Gabriel smiled at the three syllables she [Lily] had given his surname and glanced at her" ("The Dead" 139), "He looked up at the pantry ceiling, which was shaking with the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above" ("The Dead" 140), "The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his" ("The Dead" 141).

From the very beginning readers detect that Gabriel as well as Mabel have tried to distinguish themselves from their friends not only mentally but even physically, wearing garments that would make this distinction conspicuously evident. Thus, Gabriel's appearance in and defense of galoshes, forcing his wife to wear them since "everyone wears them on the continent" (142), can be compared to Mabel's attempt at being "original". This was the motif behind her decision to take her mother's Paris fashion book of the time of the Empire, since she conceives that women were then "much prettier, more dignified, and more womanly" (170-171). Consequently, Mabel chooses to wear at the party a peculiar dress, a designed garment. As she recalls, "the pale yellow, idiotically old-fashioned silk dress with its long skirt and its high sleeves and its waist and all the things that looked so charming in the fashion book, but not on her, not among all these ordinary people" (43). Both garments (galoshes and yellow dress) function symbolically in the stories since the protagonists' suffering and consequent crises begin immediately as soon as they discover that these items prove to be failed means to protect and single them out from the world and from the people surrounding them. Divested of the protection of their shielding garments, both protagonists make significant and similar moves once they are at their respective parties: Gabriel goes first to a "remote corner of the room" (149) and then "retired to the embrasure of the window" (151), and Mabel moves "straight" to the far end of the room, "to a shaded corner" (170). These movements are intended to preserve their isolation and to protect themselves from public exposure.

Both protagonists also find solace in literature, a bias that, in their own opinion, also dignifies them above their friends. Thus, Gabriel muses over his superior literary tastes that are not shared by the guests at the party ("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 recognize from Shakespeare or from the *Melodies* would be better" 141), and Mabel recalls once and again her literary interests as something that singles her out and protects her from the anguish of facing the world around her ("Tags of Shakespeare, lines from books she had read ages ago, suddenly came to her when she was in agony, and she repeated them over and over again" 171; "She would go to the London Library tomorrow. She would find some wonderful, helpful, astonishing book, quite by chance, a book by a clergyman, by an American no one had ever heard of" 176). It seems that once garments failed to shield them, they looked for solace in their literary tastes that, in their opinion, prove their superiority and justify their feeling ill-at-ease in the company of those whom they consider less illustrated guests.

Gabriel and Mabel also share personal circumstances. Both are married and have two children. At a given point during their respective parties, they delve into their

private lives and into their past family history with a mixture of nostalgia, regret and failed expectations. Mabel remembers the difficult financial circumstances undergone by her family that, in her opinion, led them to a life of ordinariness and sordidness:

But it was not her fault altogether, after all. It was being one of a family of ten; never having money enough, always skimping and paring; and her mother carrying great cans, and the linoleum worn on the stair edges, and one sordid little domestic tragedy after another – nothing catastrophic, the sheep farm failing, but not utterly; her eldest brother marrying beneath him but not very much – there was no romance, nothing extreme about them all. (“The New Dress” 175)

In a similar tone, Gabriel Conroy cannot forget his mother’s earnest efforts at preserving the dignity of family life and cannot forgive her rejection of his choice of Gretta as a future wife:

Her photograph stood before the pierglass. She had an open book on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constantine who, dressed in a man-o’-war suit, lay at her feet. It was she who had chosen the names for her sons for she was very sensible of the dignity of family life. Thanks to her, Constantine was now senior curate in Balbriggan and, thanks to her, Gabriel himself had taken his degree in the Royal University. A shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used still rankled in his memory; she had once spoken of Gretta as being country cute and that was not true of Gretta at all. It was Gretta who had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown. (“The Dead” 147)

The contrast between their past romantic expectations and the consequent projection of an ideal self of their own, and their present unexceptional circumstances, made evident on the occasion of the parties they attend, prompts the unfolding of the crisis. Thus, Mabel recalls her romantic aspirations and opposes them to the actual conventionality of her marriage:

For all her dreams of living in India, married to some hero like Sir Henry Lawrence, some empire builder (still the sight of a native in a turban filled her with romance), she had failed utterly. She had married Hubert, with his safe, permanent underling’s job in the Law Courts, and they managed tolerably in a smallish house, without proper maids (“The New Dress” 175)

And Gabriel, who had defied his mother’s reservations about his future wife, and considered his attachment to Gretta as something unique and special, discovers that his wife had been involved in a really passionate past love story with a man named Michael Furey. The discovery of this previous lover leads Gabriel to acknowledge the lack of romance in his own marriage and to assume the heroic dimension of the young man who died passionately in love with his wife: “Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dimly with age”. (“The Dead” 176)

This description of Gabriel's relationship with Gretta as "fading and withering dismally with age" parallels Mabel's reflection on her own marriage to her husband Hubert as "One wasn't happy. It was flat, just flat, that was all" ("The New Dress" 176). This final mental confrontation with their respective spouses in the stories was preceded in both narratives by two personal clashes during the party with guests attending it: in Gabriel's case, we saw his disagreement with two women, Lily —his aunts' maid— and a friend from his student years, Molly Ivors; and Mabel's attitude collides with that of two male guests at Mrs Dalloway's party, Robert Haydon and Charles Burt. These confrontations, despite the different motifs that cause them, serve very well to illustrate the difficulties that both protagonists have when interacting successfully with other human beings due to their own insecurities, their lack of social skills and their failure at controlling and imposing their own views.

Anthony Elliott, in *Concepts of the Self*, distinguishes and vindicates the two forces involved in the construction of selfhood: on the one hand, the individual's own agency, in the sense that individuals make interpretations "about themselves, others and society" (Elliott 2008: 9); and, on the other hand, the influence of social and cultural influences, practices and conventions: "In forging a sense of self, individuals routinely draw from social influences, and maintain their sense of self through cultural resources. Social practices, cultural conventions and political relations are a constitutive backdrop for the staging of self-identity" (10). According to Elliott, "Neither internal nor external frames of reference should be privileged" (10). And this is the problem with both Gabriel and Mabel who had tried to impose their individual subjective projection of their own selves without taking into account the social and cultural community of which they are part and that comes to the fore on the occasion of the party. The disparity between the idealised image of their own selves that they had initially projected and the one they discover as members of a community is symbolised in their respective dramatic encounters with the looking-glass, an element that appears at critical moments in both stories and that leads Mabel and Gabriel to visualise a very different image of themselves from the one they had previously contrived:

Her wretched self again, no doubt! She had always been a fretful, weak, unsatisfactory mother, a wobbly wife, lolling about in a kind of twilight existence with nothing very clear or very bold or more one thing than another, like all her brothers and sisters, except perhaps Herbert – they were all the same poor water-veined creatures who did nothing. ("The New Dress" 176)

A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealizing his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. ("The Dead" 173)

We find in both stories not only thematic and symbolic concomitances, but also, as we have said, a similar tripartite structure that differentiates the arrival at the party, the party itself, and the protagonists' leaving their hosts. It is precisely in the third section of the stories where, after the identity crisis aggravated by the public

exposure at the party, we find Gabriel and Mabel experiencing a revelatory moment that we could call “epiphanic” in James Joyce’s terms or what Virginia Woolf described as a “moment of being” to refer to a similar ordeal. Let us recall that Joyce employed the term “epiphany” in *Stephen Hero*, in order to allude to “a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. [...] the most delicate and evanescent of moments” (1984: 188), and that his brother Stanislaus Joyce made reference to the term again explaining that for Joyce they were “observations of slips, and little errors and gestures—mere straws in the wind—by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal” (1958: 134). Much has been said and written on Woolf’s conception of the so-called “moments of being” and in her well-known autobiographical account “A Sketch of the Past” she related them to “a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances” (1985: 72). Both Joyce and Woolf were equally vague when referring to “epiphanies” and “moments of being.” Notwithstanding, both notions imply a sense of revelation, an experience of recognition. The crucial question, however, is to detect who suffers this revelation, who experiences this recognition: the writer, the character, or the reader?

Let us relate the idea of “epiphany” and of “moment of being” to the two stories we have been analysing, “The Dead” and “The New Dress.” The conclusion of “The Dead” hints at a change of attitude in the case of Gabriel. At the end of the day, and no longer protected by his galoshes, he accepts and even welcomes the snow that is falling all over Ireland, “It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, [...] 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” (176). Gabriel, after all his efforts at singling out his own self, at projecting idealised images of his persona, seems to have finally reconciled himself with his own humanity that, similarly to the snow, inevitably unites him with Michael Furey, with the West and with the rest of human beings.

“The New Dress” offers us a very different ending: “‘Lies, lies, lies!’ she said to herself, going downstairs, and ‘Right in the saucer!’ she said to herself as she thanked Mrs Barnet for helping her and *wrapped herself, round and round and round, in the Chinese cloak she had worn these twenty years*” (177, emphasis mine).⁵ Mabel abandons Mrs Dalloway’s party adopting a similar attitude of rejection, of uneasiness and of distress to the one with which she entered the celebration. Besides, once again she tries to protect herself with a garment that she, symbolically, had been wearing these twenty years – notice the emphasis on “round and round and round.”

⁵ Angelica Garnet, Vanessa Bell’s daughter and Virginia Woolf’s niece, recalls in the prologue to her autobiographical account *Deceived with Kindness: A Bloomsbury Childhood*, how Julia Margaret Cameron’s mother, that is her own great-great aunt, used to envelop herself in shawls, a habit that she relates to lack of self-confidence: “Julia’s mother for instance, one of the famous and beautiful Pattle sisters, did she also suffer from lack of self-confidence? It was she whom Vanessa, as a little girl, remembered enveloped in layer upon layer of shawls” (12). This image which Vanessa Bell remembered could have been shared with Virginia Woolf and, consequently, have been used by the writer in “The New Dress.”

In "The New Dress" Mabel is not offered the opportunity to experience a moment of revelation and, it is my contention that it is the reader the one who discerns Mabel's conundrum, that is, her incapacity to accept the ordinariness, the weaknesses and the vulnerability of her human condition, something that Mrs Dalloway in the homonymous novel by Woolf was, by the way, able to detect and accept. Therefore, to a certain extent, Mabel experiences what Woolf would refer to as a "moment of non-being," and it is in this sense in which Woolf's "The New Dress" differs from Joyce's "The Dead," two stories that, as we have seen, have much in common.

Suzette Henke reminded us that, on the occasion of Joyce's death, Woolf wrote in her diary on 15 January 1941: "Then Joyce is dead: Joyce about a fortnight younger than I am." And Henke concludes: "She had always regarded Joyce as a kind of artistic 'double,' a male ally in the modernist battle for psychological realism. In her own life, Joyce played the role of alter-ego that Septimus Smith had played for Clarissa Dalloway" (1986: 41). In the case of "The Dead" and "The New Dress," two stories that certainly favour a comparative study – as we hope to have demonstrated –, we cannot conclude that Gabriel Conroy played the role of alter-ego for Mabel Waring. Gabriel's acceptance of the snow falling all over Ireland acquires special significance if we take into account that this dictum was proffered by his niece Mary Jane, whose performance at the piano he had previously despised. At the end of the story we find Gabriel at rest and he seems to have reconciled himself with his family, with the guests at the Misses Morkan's party, and with his own human foibles. A very different attitude is the one adopted by Mabel who abandons the party with the same pride, anger and insecurity with which she had entered it.

Michael Furey was the detonator of Gabriel's epiphany and the absence of Septimus Warren Smith's from Woolf's story could have encouraged critics to turn their eyes to *Mrs Dalloway*, where he certainly appears and induces Mrs Dalloway's "moment of being", and to consider "The New Dress" as a prior sketch for a more elaborated and rounded later narrative. Notwithstanding, we have contended and demonstrated that Woolf's short story is a carefully designed and structured text, rich in symbology, that deserves further study and that can be even compared with Joyce's well-known text. Therefore, the difference in the ending of the stories, that affects the protagonists' dissimilar reaction as well as the interpretation of the epiphanic insight that Gabriel experiences and that in Mabel's case is rather a moment of non-being whose revelatory dimension is only grasped by the reader, should not refrain critics from studying and even comparing these two literary masterpieces.

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