

## The Male Figure In James Joyce's "The Boarding House", "Counterparts" And "Eveline"

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### ABSTRACT

Literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has always given priority to the male figure and his dominant role in the family and the society. Through ages, women have been subject to the moods and characters of their husbands, fathers or even brothers. Women's life was at home, and if few of them started working, their role was limited. There was a clear imbalance between men and women. James Joyce is an Irish writer and a central figure in the modernist movement whose origins are to be found in the literature in the mere representation of reality but with a new emphasis on the unconscious with the works of Freud and others. This study will examine the role and image of the new male figure that fails to complete his duty whether as a father, or a breadwinner or simply a parent who gives affection and security to his children in James Joyce's short stories, "The Boarding House", "Counterparts" and "Eveline", the three of them published in his 1914 collection of short stories Dubliners.

**Keywords:** Male Figure, James Joyce's, The Boarding House, Counterparts, Eveline.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

Patriarchy is not necessarily a characteristic of evil, injustice and oppression; however many critics and theorists understand and prove it to be an image of negative feelings in a certain stressful situation or society. James Joyce develops an intriguing sense of progression and complex patterns in his collection of short stories "Dubliners". He introduces the people around the events in his life in Dublin; therefore, the characters seem to be linked to real people and man is the core on who the family is built. Originally appearing in Dubliners, his short story "The Boarding House" is the tale of a harsh, and divorced father who humiliates his wife. Joyce presents the suffering of the mother and her daughter Polly in this story because of the abusive alcoholic father, whose absence causes them social and psychological problems. He fails to fulfill the fundamental parenting role and is unable to maintain a good relationship with his family while he is still married as well as after his divorce. In his second story "Counterparts", Joyce presents again a father, Farrington who is incompetent at work and is drinking all the time with his friends. Moreover, he doesn't care for his duties towards his family. He has an explosive and violent behavior at work but also at home. Farrington is dissatisfied with his life of routine and repetition. His work is monotonous, which in fact enrages him. He is the abusive father Joyce witnesses typically in Dublin. All actions in this short story dramatize the failed relationship with his wife and his children especially his son Tom. Concerning the third story "Eveline", it shows a dysfunctional male figure who completely controls his wife as well as his daughter Eveline. The father is a tyrant who expect his daughter to do everything at home in addition to holding down a regular job. Eveline is doomed, living with an abusive, cruel and selfish father. She suffers in her life like her mother and feels dead inside. Her father destroyed her as well as her mother. Obviously, James Joyce exposes real situations in these three stories to show how the male figures, even though they are failures, are controlling the family in particular and the society in general. These women were living in a patriarchal society and were subject to many pressures and restriction that affected their mental stability. The three selected works clearly show the psychological oppression exerted on the female characters by men and its devastating consequences. Joyce draws the attention of the readers on the harmful and damaging on the dimensions of gender discrimination and the extent to which women are exploited. He embodies the Irish female who cannot achieve liberation because she

is restricted by the harsh masculine society. The three stories under study expose the same problems that prevailed in the society of the time as well as the same feelings of oppression due to dysfunctional man-woman relationships.

## 1-2 Statement of the Problem

Men are always introduced as superior beings and the masters of the house. However, they are not always successful in their role. Some of them fulfill this function as good fathers and provide the needs of the family, but others as in the three stories under study fail. The female characters in the three selected stories are similar in that all of them have an alcoholic husband who doesn't care about family ties and exerts domestic violence. In the "The Boarding House" there is separation between Mr. and Mrs. Mooney partly for this reason, first because he is drunkard and also he once tried attack her with a cleaver. Moreover, Mr. Moony is irresponsible when he starts to serve rotten meat to the customers and thus, fails in his business. Although Mr. Moony is not the main character, everything that happens in the story consequences of this acts and his behavior. In "Counterparts", the same is with Farrington whose work doesn't give him any satisfaction and increases his anger and abusive behavior. He too drinks a lot drink and curses everything. His incompetence at work is repeatedly emphasized; he is a loser who vents his frustration at home when he beats his son Tom. His reputation is lost and is a complete failure.

The third story "Eveline" exposes the same situation with an abusive and cruel father who used to beat his children with a thorn stick when they played in the garden with the children of their neighbors. He also forced his daughter Eveline to work just to give him the money in order to buy alcohol. He is unrespectable and harsh but also unavailable all the time. And before that, he was already a bad husband who used to be violent with her mother to the extent that she got mad. As a consequence, most of the characters develop psychosis and cannot build healthy relationships with others. This oppression can take many forms, but mainly it is a psychological oppression exerts upon the female characters by their husbands or fathers and having devastating consequences. When thinking about women's rights, it is important not only to consider the society in which these women are living but also their situation within their families. This research will shed light on this issue and the different forms of abuse against women due to the presence of the failed man.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to present Joyce's "The Boarding House", "Counterparts" and "Eveline" from different perspectives with a focus on the failed male – female relationships. In the three stories, the female characters are controlled by men and frustrated. This research attempts to make a link between the theme and the techniques used, mainly the stream of consciousness technique and interior monologue. Joyce used these techniques to explore the inner world of the characters. The three stories do not follow any chronological order; the flow of memories and thoughts are chaotic at times. Joyce portrays the problematic relationships between women and men in general as he witnessed it in Ireland. The husband, father and society make it impossible and hard for a woman to choose and decide how to live her life, leading to loss of identity and freedom under the control of the man who prevents her to have a good life. Women used to depend on men in every single action as a result of the patriarchal male society. They considered women as physically weak characters. Gender-based oppression had a negative impact on all females in Ireland. Such violence against women caused lifetime scars both psychologically and physically. In The "Boarding House", Mrs. Mooney faced her husband and divorced because of her unsuccessful marriage. On the other hand, her daughter Polly is also a victim of her parent's divorce because she is forced to continue her life without a father while she feels that she needs a man like her father in order to protect her. In addition, "Counterparts" has been hailed by many critics as a significant achievement in the realm of women's rights, their inner lives and struggles. Also, in "Eveline" Joyce described the controlling and dominating man in the family who destroys all the family relations. Eveline is a victim of her father and she sacrifices her life after the death of her mother when she refuses to escape with her lover in order to have a better life. Instead, she prefers to stay with her harsh father and take care of her siblings as she promised to her mother. This leads to adopt a passive attitude with her lover like "a helpless animal. Her eyes gave no sign of love or farewell or recognition"(Dubliners, 1914, 39). All the female characters in these three works are tragic figures living in total disharmony, pain and continually lost in their restless fear and thoughts. The main argument of this study is to prove that the female characters in these stories get their tragic and hopeless end because of the males who imposed their decisions on their lives and made it impossible for them to make the right choice.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

while most critical studies rely mainly on the existential and feminist aspects of the three selected stories, not enough attention is given to the male-female dynamic. James Joyce attempts to register responses and reactions of his characters to each other in the context of familial relationships. Joyce succeeds to make the theme of familial relationships central and basic in his stories. He presents the turbulent and emotional world of the neurotic female characters who suffer from an acute alienation stemming from marital unhappiness and pushed to the verges of insanity. At the same time, the female characters are unable to struggle for their rights to have access to equal opportunities in all aspects of life and thus endure legal sex discrimination. This research examines our understanding of marital harmony and women's relationships with men as well as the wife-husband relationships. The female characters in the three stories have the same struggles as the women in the traditional society of the Middle East.

Studying the lives of women depicted in these stories helps us know how different historical, cultural, and traditional value systems affect women's lives in different times and contexts and how these systems can result in long- psychological issues. James Joyce in his three short stories depicts the lack of communication between husband and wife and the father and his children and the unavailable consequences of such a gap. In "the Boarding House" Polly and her mother live a difficult situation because they miss the presence of the male figure; therefore, they suffer, having no one to help them build a respectable future. Moreover, Joyce in the other two stories " Counterparts" and Eveline" refer to the rigid life between man and woman in Ireland. The reality of Ireland implies the violence and self- enclosed essence of the nation that is reflected in the home.

## 1.5 Research Questions

- 1- What are the implications and consequences of the controlling male figure in the family and the society?
- 2- How does James Joyce present women's mental development in the context of a particular society and family?

3-How does psychoanalysis interpret the psychosis of the female characters in the three selected stories?

## 2. Literature Review

This part of the study presents some critics of the three stories "the Boarding House", " Counterparts" and "Eveline". It intends to review existing literature written by some critics who depict this complex image of the male figure and others who focus basically on the cases behind men who oppress women. It also demonstrates the application of a psychological approach. Many books and articles have been written on James's Joyce short stories which reflect his representation of woman's oppression as a result of cultural norms and men's domination. He presents his countrymen as cheaters, drunkards, gossipers and child schemers and batters. Moreover, he portrays them all as dysfunctional people who are unable to seize the chances that life offers. In other words, Joyce shows how women are subjugated by men who are granted a certain power for their role in society. Many theorists such as Unger and Crawford show that most people understand through their culture and norms that men protect women, and women live under their control. Also, Susan Griffin (2016), finds that under the men's domination system, a woman is bound by the feminist behavior and rules and is also accused when she is assaulted and unable to protect herself. This is due to the prevailing culture that discourages her from learning how to get her rights and defend herself. " Each girl as she grows into womanhood is taught fear, the form in which the female internalizes both chivalry and the double standard". "The passive woman is taught to regard herself as important, unable to act, unable even to perceive, in no way self- sufficient "( Woodcock, 1982, 9). So, fear paralyzes her and restricts her behavior. Accordingly, Joyce in his three short stories portrays all the female characters as social and psychological victims. Their social ties impact their mental state to the extent that they become easy victims of many unknown and known inner traumas. James Joyce symbolizes the internal conflict in his stories as a result of conforming to the society's expectations which are opposed to an independent and free life. Other writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman fight intensely against the. Lack of women's rights and identity; her unhappy experiences during her first marriage helped her to argue vehemently on behalf of women's rights. She wondered why men's professional life overshadowed women controlled their domestic life. Gilman understood that by giving women greater intellectual freedom, this will enable them to get an equal position with men . similarly, Joyce discusses the same issue in his stories. Most

articles shed light onto control their oppressive men as ruling figures possessing some kind of force and power that they use in the wrong way to control their oppressing family. All the women in the three stories are oppressed either directly or indirectly and abused.

### 3.Methodology

This research will adopt a psychological approach shedding light on the stream of consciousness of the characters. It will rely mainly on Freud's psychoanalysis theory in order to understand the motivations and actions of the characters. Psychoanalysis is

a method of textual interpretation depending on the theories developed by Freud and Jung and constructed by modern theories such as R. D Laing and Jacques Lacan. Applying psychological elements aids to make a critical analysis of the works of literature dating back to the late 19th century when Freud's writing developed his central theories of repression, sexuality and its manifestation in neurosis (Freud 1953-74).

James Joyce believed that literature should deal with actual life, and this is exactly what he did in Dubliners. This collection of 15 short stories presents the moral condition of Ireland "the maleficent and sinful being" The three selected short stories of my study are "The Boarding House", "Counterparts" and "Eveline" which analyze the psychological problems of Irish people at the beginning of the 20th century. Instances from the stories are given as all women are represented and subject to stress and injustice. It examines the situations of women and the role of the male figure in such a patriarchal society as Ireland as well as the psychological consequences on their lives. Joyce used psychoanalysis to examine and analyze the situations and stressful experiences of the characters in the three stories. He adopted specific techniques such as the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue in order to understand the psychological conflict of the characters. Joyce criticizes the males who live in Dublin because most of them suffered so much from poverty caused by spending their money on alcohol(Lakshmi Narain books, 2). Consequently, those males lived a psychological dilemma that led them to adopt a harsh behavior toward their families and even towards Dublin. It explains why Joyce escaped to France and lived in Paris where he published his collection Dubliners (1914) and why he emphasizes the reality of Dublin in his literary works and what he said to the Irish man Arthur Power: " I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin, I can get to the heart of all the

cities of the world" (Richard Elmann,520). In addition, Harry Levin clarifies that "Joyce spent the rest of his life brooding upon (Dublin), and writing about it"(Harry Levin, 10). Obviously, he started his first literary work with a huge bitterness against Dublin. He criticized its political, social, religious and domestic institutions. Then he tried to explain his aim when selecting Dublin as a main picture of paralysis in his two famous letters, first when he said: " I called the series Dubliners to betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city "(Stuart Gilbert,55) as well as in his second letter when he mentioned " I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the center of paralysis" (134). Paralysis is the most significant theme in his collection. He believes that the Irish people in his city Dublin suffered from the impossibility to move; these people are bonded and frustrated by the restrictions of the society, which lead them to psychological damages and spiritual death.

#### 4. Findings

This research makes a deep psychological analysis of the dominating and repressive male figure and also the failed man-woman relationship that is based on Sigmund Freud's psychological concepts . Joyce used psychological concepts to deal with these three stories as an expression of the state of mind and also with the psychological make-up and structure of the personality of the author. Freud believed that is possible to cure the mentally disturbed people by making them conscious about their unconscious thoughts and behavior, thus gaining 'insight'. The word psychoanalysis was invented by Freud as a procedure of the analysis and therapy of neurosis at first, then, it developed to be an umbrella of varied theories in the history of civilization. (Abrams 290). The plot of " The Boarding House", " Counterparts" and "Eveline" has an element of mystery as the fathers in the three stories. Hence, they are unable to resolve their inner conflicts and they suffer from psychosis and cannot think logically. This affects badly their wives and children. On the other hand, the three stories have also a deep philosophical concern about the meaning of life. All the protagonists are dissatisfied with their existence and search for a more meaningful life, which leads them to deviate and plunge into alcoholism. They are always in a state of conflict with their selves as well as with the world around them. The result of this psychological conflicts leads them a tragic end. All the female characters are in conflict too with the monotony of their life in Dublin as well as with the household responsibilities and their abusive and alcoholic men. Therefore, they try to change their life but they cannot such

as what happened with Eveline. The latter could find safety and love with her lover and she could say good bye to her present life, but finally she does not elope with him because she thinks such a decision would destroy her (Favgnoli and Giliepie, 52). Also, in the two other stories, Joyce shows the dilemma of not being able to make the better choice for themselves. Therefore the stories end on a gloomy note. A just system with the same laws applies on both sexes and the same measures is needed. It is the role of society to compromise and balance between men and women.

## 5. Conclusion

James Joyce is a prominent modernist writer who shows great interest in the inner thoughts of the female characters living under the control of men. He deals in his stories with the stream of consciousness technique. This method is interesting to investigate and explore the inner world of the characters as it is one of the features of modernism used by modernist writers (Stevenson 41). Joyce depends heavily on the psychological elements enhanced by this method; the narration style which is used by Joyce does not follow a chronological order, and the three stories are governed by the thoughts of the characters and show the readers how there is a strong link between reality and imagination and illusion. Joyce applies this method in order to clarify the inner conflicts of the characters such as Mrs. Moony whose memories narrate the story, and it is up to the reader to decide if the memories are true or false. “Eveline” for example shows how this daughter feels as if everything around her is unreal, manifesting another symptom of neurosis. It becomes clear that it is only through a deep and psychological reading that we can understand the multi-faceted and complex worlds of these female characters better. Finally, this study will end on an overview of the findings along with a comparative psychological analysis of the male and female characters. The characters in the three selected three stories have the same cultural and historical background; they are very similar in their childhood. They all suffer because of their failed relationships with the opposite sex inside the family, which leads to psychological damage.

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