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HPEN7014 – Shifting Times and Worlds: Modernism & After

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Modernism marked a phase of experimentation, within which traditional ways of writing were challenged and new forms of experimentation, style and narrative techniques were developed. Whilst it is impossible to define an exact time frame in relation to literary Modernism, Childs's definition is widely accepted and states that the period is:

Primarily located in the years 1890-1930, with a wider acknowledgement that it develops from mid-nineteenth century and begins to lose its influence in the mid-twentieth century.¹

Childs adds that Modernism is an attempt to: 'represent consciousness, perception, emotion, meaning and the individual's relation to society through interior monologue, stream of consciousness, tunnelling, defamiliarisation, rhythm [and] irresolution'.²

The impact of events such as World War I, the industrial revolution, globalisation, advances in technology, and the rise of women's movements and feminism can be clearly identified within Modernist literature.

This essay will explore the representation of female gender roles in relation to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and James Joyce's *Dubliners*; identifying how and to what extent, traditional female gender roles are challenged and potentially deconstructed within Modernism.

The term 'gender role' is used to define the characteristics and behaviour adopted by a person that are specific to their defined gender, determined by societal and cultural norms, standards and expectations. Scott argues gender is a category constructed through cultural and social systems. Unlike sex, it is not a biological fact determined at

¹ Peter Childs, *Modernism, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 18.

² Childs, *Modernism*, p. 3.

conception'.³ During the Victorian period (1837 – 1901), binary gender roles were primarily based on the birth sex of men and women. Constructed gender roles were codified in terms of opposing roles within society, resulting in 'separate spheres'; that of the public (male) and the domestic (female). The man, considered strong and intelligent, was expected to be the earner and the provider for the family. As Kathryn Hughes suggests, the woman, who was deemed 'physically weaker', yet envisaged to be 'morally superior', took care of the domestic sphere of the family and the home.⁴ This categorisation generally related to the middle/upper classes, as the working-class woman tended to have little option other than to find employment in order to survive.⁵ This distinction can be clearly seen at play by comparing middle-class female representations in Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* to Joyce's working women in *Dubliners*.

The phrase 'The Angel in the House' is used to embody the stereotype of the Victorian woman, having been adopted from the title of a popular poem by Coventry Patmore.⁶ 'The Angel in the House' devoted her life to her husband and children and demonstrated traditionally 'feminine' qualities such as meekness, charm, submissiveness and purity. Virginia Woolf describes 'The Angel in the House' as:

Intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it--in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it--she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty--her

³ Bonnie Kime Scott 'Introduction' in *The Gender Of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott, Illustrated edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 1–18, (p. 2).

⁴ 'The ideology of 'separate spheres' rested on a definition of the 'natural' characteristics of women rather than men. Women were considered physically weaker, yet morally superior to men, which meant they were best suited to the domestic sphere.' Kathryn Hughes, 'Gender Roles In The 19th Century' in *The British Library* (The British Library) <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>> [accessed 6 April 2021].

⁵ '19th and Early 20th Century | Striking Women' <<https://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/19th-and-early-20th-century>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

⁶ 'The Angel in the House, by Coventry Patmore' <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4099/4099-h/4099-h.htm>> [accessed 7 April 2021].

blushes, her great grace. In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel.⁷

The emergence of Modernist literature, whilst coinciding with what is today defined as the first wave of feminism,⁸ was initially perceived as primarily masculine in nature and male authored. According to Scott, 'Modernism as we were taught it at mid-century was perhaps halfway to the truth. It was unconsciously gendered masculine'.⁹ Virginia Woolf was included in the literary canon, somewhat as a female exception. Over time Woolf's perceived merits as a writer have increased, in that she is today, held in regard as both a founding Modernist and Feminist.¹⁰ As Feminist literary readings and critique developed in conjunction with the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, many other female writers were added to the canon. Marcus argues this point stating that:

British Modernism was largely defined on the basis of literary themes and forms drawn from the work of TS Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound and though more ambivalently DH Lawrence. When Virginia Woolf was included in this canon it was most often as an exemplar of 'feminine' modes of writing and of an early twentieth-century (over) subjectivism.¹¹

Whilst Modernism can be considered to be dominated by the male and the masculine, there are identifiable examples within male authored texts that demonstrate the beginning of a shift towards non-traditional gender roles, along with elements of challenge in relation to a realist perspective. Childs argues that 'changes away from

⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women' in *Killing The Angel In The House* (Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 1–9, (p. 3).

⁸ 'The first wave of feminism took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emerging out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage.' Martha Rampton, 'Four Waves Of Feminism', *Pacific University*, 2015 <<https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>> [accessed 22 April 2021].

⁹ Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Introduction' in *The Gender Of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott, Illustrated edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) pp.1-18, (p.2).

¹⁰ Suzette Henke, 'The Modern Tradition' in *The Gender Of Modernism*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott, Illustrated edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 622-628, (p. 622).

¹¹ Laura Marcus, 'Woolf's Feminism And Feminism's Woolf', in *The Cambridge Companion To Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Sellers, 1st Edition (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 209–44, (p.210).

realist representations of character and Victorian discourses of gender are evident in several canonical writers, such as Joyce, James and Lawrence'.¹²

Dekoven adds further intricacy to this argument by stating:

A closer look at Modernism through its complex deployments of gender reveals not only the centrality of femininity, but also, again, an irresolvable ambivalence toward radical cultural change at the heart of modernist formal innovation in the works of both male and female writers.¹³

Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* was published in 1927 and as Fenald suggests, is considered to be the most autobiographical of her works.¹⁴ Pease regards the work as a 'landmark achievement of Modernism'.¹⁵ Woolf deploys the innovative techniques associated with Modernism, which include an experimental narrative structure, game-playing with the omniscience of the narrator, use of the 'stream of consciousness' and shifts to the subjective from realist and objective representation. The text presents a psychological ^{view?} review of the characters and their roles in relation to gender (some with more coherence than others) with emphasis on thoughts and feelings inside the mind, as opposed to the traditional, realist focus on the plot/storyline. The characters Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay are based on Woolf's parents.¹⁶

The concept of 'centrality of femininity'¹⁷ is explored in detail in 'The Window', the first of three sections of which *To the Lighthouse* is comprised. The reader is introduced to the first female protagonist, Mrs. Ramsay, who on a superficial level exemplifies the 'Angel in the House' — she demonstrates beauty, charm and selflessness: 'She bore about

¹² Childs, *Modernism*, p. 135.

¹³ Marianne Dekoven, 'Modernism And Gender' in *The Cambridge Companion To Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 174–193, (p.175).

¹⁴ Anne E. Fenald, 'To the Lighthouse In The Context Of Virginia Woolf's Diaries And Life' in *The Cambridge Companion To To The Lighthouse*, ed. by Allison Pease (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 22–34, (p. 22).

¹⁵ Allison Pease, 'Introduction' in *The Cambridge Companion To To The Lighthouse* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 16–21, (p. 16).

¹⁶ Fenald, *To The Lighthouse In The Context*, p. 22.

¹⁷ Dekoven, *Modernism And Gender*, p. 175.

with her, she could not help knowing it, the torch of her beauty; she carried it erect into any room that she entered'.¹⁸ Through the omniscient narrator and the stream of consciousness technique, Mrs. Ramsay is portrayed as unselfish and sympathises with her husband and the other males in situ before meeting her own needs. It is indicated that she feels this attitude towards her, requiring sympathy and the massaging of the ego is agreeable, and she admires and respects the male characters for their typically 'male' features and behaviours. She implies therefore, that she does not have needs of her own:

Indeed she had the whole of the other sex under her protection, for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to find agreeable.¹⁹

A clear dichotomy of sex-based gender roles is exhibited by Woolf through the portrayal of the Ramsays' marriage. Mrs. Ramsay focuses on the minutiae relating to middle-class social conventions and concomitant outward appearances with regards to both herself, her family and the numerous visitors present — 'it was so important what one said, one did'.²⁰ In contrast, Mr Ramsay typifies the role of the Victorian male, is prominent in the public sphere through his work as a philosopher and is perceived to be 'absorbed in himself, he is tyrannical, he is unjust'.²¹ As a man, he values the qualities of 'courage, truth and the power to ensure'.²²

This depiction of contrasting gender roles reinforces the 'centrality of femininity'²³ embodied by Mrs Ramsay. Showalter identifies the 'polarity represented by characters

¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, (Wordsworth Classics), 2002, p. 30.

¹⁹ Virginia Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 5.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 45.

²¹ Ibid. p. 34.

²² Ibid. p. 4.

²³ Dekoven, *Modernism And Gender*, p. 175.

such as Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay... 'male reason, intellect, force and sterility, versus female emotion, lyricism, love and fecundity'.²⁴

Woolf demonstrates the paramount importance of the institution of marriage, held by the middle class at the turn of the twentieth century. Through the narrator, the reader has access to Mrs. Ramsay's internal dialogue which asserts that 'an un-married woman has missed the best of her life'.²⁵ She is consumed with 'match-making' amongst the other guests, 'William and Lily should marry',²⁶ 'Minta must, they all must marry'.²⁷ It is evident that a woman of the Victorian era, could potentially see no other viable option than to marry, a frustration which was also voiced by Woolf in her diaries and essays.²⁸ A contrasting perspective on marriage is offered by Woolf in the final section of the novel, in the Rayley's marriage: despite Paul having an affair 'far from breaking up the marriage that alliance had righted it'.²⁹

On closer inspection, the character of Mrs. Ramsay proves considerably more complex than a simple personification of the 'Angel in the House', demonstrating an underlying, somewhat secret, interest in the wider opportunities for women, in line with societal change. Through subtleties within the complexity of the narrative, it is suggested that Mrs. Ramsay experiences some private reflections (perhaps doubts) that she would 'never share with her children nor with her husband',³⁰ relating to the traditional role within which she is confined. She admires independence and the qualities of Dekoven's

²⁴ Elaine Showalter, 'Killing The Angel In The House: The Autonomy Of Women Writers' in *The Antioch Review*, 32.3 (1972), pp 339-53, (p. 341).

²⁵ Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 36.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 19.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 36.

²⁸ Specifically, Woolf writes about Queen Victoria's furious reaction to Women's Rights, the notion that the essentials of a woman's being is to be supported by and minister men, employment options limited to a needlewoman or governess and the limitations of life classes for women to learn how to paint. Virginia Woolf, 'Two Women' in *Killing The Angel In The House* (Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 34-43, (pp.35-36).

²⁹ Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 130.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 43.

description of the 'New Woman'.³¹ Lily 'would never marry...but she was an independent little creature, Mrs. Ramsay liked her for it'.³² 'There was in Lily a thread of something; a flare of something of her own which Mrs. Ramsay liked indeed, but no man would, she feared'.³³ It is revealed that at one point Mrs. Ramsay 'had something' an education 'of her own perhaps'.³⁴ In addition, the reader is presented with an elusive sub-text, concerning the unknown fate of a former lover and a suggestion of an elapsed intimacy.³⁵ This is a theme which is similarly explored in Joyce's *Dubliners*, in the story 'The Dead'. The inclusion of this fragmented memory from the past, potentially undermines other thoughts about the functionality of her marriage; suggesting that Mrs Ramsay had previously experienced a life and desires of her own. Showalter argues that Woolf chooses 'avoidance' in relation to 'unthinkable, unspeakable and unprintable' elements of female experience.³⁶ Nonetheless, it can be exemplified through the text, that Woolf conversely, brings this issue to the attention of the reader through Mrs. Ramsay, who with the hindsight of maturity, sometimes felt 'nothing but a sponge sopped of human emotions' ³⁷ and explains that 'she had experiences which need not happen to everyone (she did not name them to herself)'.³⁸ On an internal level, Mrs. Ramsay further questions her views and actions:

She thought, possibly she might have managed things better – her husband; money; his books. But for her own part she would never for a single second regret her decision, evade difficulties or slur over duties.³⁹

Woolf renders subtle inner conflict and questioning, not only with regards to the self, but symbolically to the wider, changing position of women: 'if it were an escape for her too,

³¹ 'The 'New Woman' is 'independent, educated, (relatively) sexually liberated, orientated more toward productive life in the public sphere than toward reproductive life in the home.' Dekoven, *Modernism and Gender*, p. 174.

³² Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 13.

³³ Ibid. p. 75.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 21.

³⁶ Showalter, *Killing The Angel In The House*, p. 4.

³⁷ Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 24.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 44.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 5.

to say that people must marry, people must have children'.⁴⁰ 'Was she not forgetting again how strongly she influenced people?'⁴¹

Woolf's application of the 'writerly' technique,⁴² leaves the reader to their own interpretation of this vignette, along with the problem of determining meaning in respect of Mrs. Ramsay's inner dialogue. Mrs. Ramsay is killed off within the second part of the novel, 'Time Passes'; there is no resolution, no closure, the reader is simply told that 'she died very sudden',⁴³ third hand through the narrator. Vadillo suggests that her death is the 'modernising agent forcing the new generation left orphaned by her death to draw a line between past and present'⁴⁴ and that this tragedy forces 'Mr. Ramsay into a 'more androgynous position' in which his 'his softer masculinity entices fondness from the new generation, (his son James and the painter Lily Briscoe)'.⁴⁵ On the journey to 'The Lighthouse' (the third and final section of the text), Mr. Ramsay praises James for the first time, resulting in James being 'so pleased he was not going to let anybody take away a grain of his pleasure. His father had praised him'.⁴⁶ Mr. Ramsay takes on softer, nurturing, characteristics which could be perceived to be 'female', providing the reader with a striking and surprising example of ambivalence in relation to gender roles.

Through the lens of Mrs. Ramsay, uncertainty is again identified relating to her daughter's personification of anticipated gender roles, 'sporting infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers, in Paris perhaps, a wilder life,

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 44.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 44.

⁴² 'Readerly and writerly (lisable and scriptable) - French literary theorist Roland Barthes proposed these terms in *S/Z* (1970), translated as *S/Z* (1974) to distinguish between literary works that because of their specific formal qualities either constrain the reader to adhere closely to the text with little or no room for interpretive manoeuvre (readerly), or, demand that the reader work hard to make sense of the text and effectively contribute to its very writing (writerly)'. Ian Buchanan, *The Oxford Dictionary Of Critical Theory*, 2nd edition online (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018). Listing under 'Readerly'.

⁴³ Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 101.

⁴⁴ Ana Parejo Vadillo, 'Generation Differences In *To The Lighthouse*' in *The Cambridge Companion To To The Lighthouse*, ed. by Allison Pease (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 137-204 (p. 139).

⁴⁵ Vadillo, *Generational Differences*, p. 138.

⁴⁶ Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 153.

not taking care of some man or other'.⁴⁷ Prue is likened most to Mrs. Ramsay and 'was going to be far more beautiful than she was'.⁴⁸ Woolf subsequently slays the second 'Angel in the House' by expediting Prue's death in a stereotypically gendered fashion, during childbirth.⁴⁹ Andrew, the Ramsay's son also falls subject to tragedy, but in contrast, he is killed (in a masculine manner) at war, his death 'mercifully instantaneous'.⁵⁰

Cam, the youngest daughter is 'wild and fierce. She would not give a flower to the gentleman...she clenched her fist. She stamped'.⁵¹ Abel compares Cam to Woolf, arguing that through Cam, Woolf dramatises the narrative dilemma of the daughter who thinks back through their father'.⁵² Cam, along with her brother James take a physical, emotional and spiritual journey to the lighthouse. Cuddy-Keane argues that Cam 'is struggling with the blocking effect of male dominance, encapsulated in memories of her father's commands'.⁵³ However, Woolf embraces Cam with an 'epiphany'⁵⁴ of sorts. As Mr. Ramsay's masculinity softens Cam's view changes: she states he is 'most loveable, he was most wise; he was not vain, not a tyrant'.⁵⁵ Which in turn, leads her to the understanding that she can 'go on thinking whatever [she likes] without consequence 'for there he is, keeping his eye on me'.⁵⁶

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 49.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 98.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 99.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 16.

⁵² Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf And The Fictions Of Psychoanalysis* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 46.

⁵³ Melba Cuddy-Keane, 'Movement, Space and Embodied Cognition' in *The Cambridge Companion To To The Lighthouse*, ed. by Allison Pease (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 73–84, (p. 76).

⁵⁴ 'The literary term 'epiphany', in its original inception in James Joyce's draft-novel *Stephen Hero* (c.1901–6), has become synonymous in critical accounts of modernism with the moment of transcendent insight, intensity of experience or revelation. In a literary movement in which a prevalent aesthetic aim was the representation of a reality beyond appearances and below material surfaces, the significant moment came to epitomize the endeavour to capture, however fleetingly, the 'truth' of subjective experience'. Claire Drewery, 'The Modernist Short Story: Fractured Perspectives', in *The Cambridge History Of The English Short Story*, ed. by Dominic Head (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 135–51 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316711712.009>>.

⁵⁵ Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 141.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 152.

Woolf provides a contrasting female gender role, through the character Lily Briscoe, exemplifying Dekoven's description of the 'New Woman'.⁵⁷ It is through Lily that we see the most resistance and rebellion. Lily chooses to follow her 'vision', to create her art as a painter and remain single. She 'need not marry, thank heaven she need not undergo that degradation. She was saved from that dilution'.⁵⁸ Lily is however, riddled with self-doubt in relation to her purpose, she is haunted by Mr Tansley's repeated mantra 'women can't paint, women can't write...'.⁵⁹ 'Demons set on her, who often brought her to the verge of tears'.⁶⁰ Lily experiences inner conflict and questions her 'own inadequacy, her insignificance'⁶¹ whilst still somewhat conforming to the traditional female gender role in 'keeping house for her father'.⁶² This representation can be interpreted to symbolise the female artist of the time and elements of Woolf and her own creative vision. Lily's character is developed further in the final section of the text 'The Lighthouse'. Importantly, the setting is 1920, ten years on from the beginning of the narrative, in which World War I has happened and the Modernist movement has progressed.⁷ The reader sees Lily achieve her vision, in completing her painting that she first started ten years ago. She states 'it was done, it was finished...I have had my vision',⁸ symbolising the progress of feminism and women's rights. As McIntire argues:

If there are "heroes" of the story, they are Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Woolf had to "kill" Mrs. Ramsay, its outmoded "angel," but it was a necessary death and part of Woolf's brave voyage into feminism's future.⁶⁴

Here, potentially, ambivalence towards gender roles has been defeated, resulting in a positive resolution. Similarities can be found in comparing Lily's realisation of her vision,

⁵⁷ Dekoven, *Modernism And Gender*, p. 174.

⁵⁸ Woolf, *To The Lighthouse*, p. 74.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 35.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 14.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 14.

⁶² Ibid. p. 14.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 154.

⁶⁴ Gabrielle McIntire, 'Feminism And Gender In To The Lighthouse' in *The Cambridge Companion To To The Lighthouse* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 95–107, (p.106).

with the stream of consciousness delivered by Molly Bloom, which starts and ends with a resounding 'yes' in the conclusion of Joyce's *Ulysses*,⁶⁵ which Attridge claims makes it possible to identify 'the erosion of cultural and ideological barriers between the sexes'.

⁶⁶



Dubliners can be perceived as an earlier attempt by Joyce, to explore what Dekoven calls 'irresolvable ambivalence towards radical cultural change',⁶⁷ particularly within the psychological positioning of the complex female characters. Specific examples can be identified within elements of the stories 'Eveline', 'A Mother', 'Clay', 'The Boarding House' and 'The Dead'. Joyce is widely considered a forefather of Modernism,⁶⁸ employing symbolism and imagery, the use of the 'epiphany',⁶⁹ and narrative techniques such as shifts in perspectives and the stream of consciousness.

'Eveline' builds on the theme of 'paralysis' that weaves throughout the text. It is first identified by Joyce in the opening story 'The Sisters'. Joyce uses free indirect discourse, to reveal the innermost thoughts of Eveline, a working-class adolescent, who is faced with inner turmoil through the opportunity of a marriage proposal. Eveline deviates from the conformity of the traditional female role by going out to work (albeit in a typically 'female' role of a shop-worker). Her reasons for doing so are likely financial, due to her lower placement in the class system, in comparison to the characters in *To The Lighthouse*. Whilst she exists within the public sphere, Joyce places her within the home environment. She is required to hand over her earnings to her violent father, who

⁶⁵ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, NT.Pdf, p. 1305

<https://planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free_ebooks/Ulysses_NT.pdf> [accessed 19 April 2021].

⁶⁶ 'It is possible that is, to read *Ulysses* as a text in which, on the one hand the cultural stereotype of the female flow is foregrounded, literalized, demystified, and produced. Whilst on the other hand, a more potent ungended flow operates throughout the text erode the cultural and ideological barriers between the sexes'. Derek Attridge, 'Molly's Flow: The Writing Of "Penelope" And The Question Of Women's Language' in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35.3 (1989), 543–65 (p. 556).

⁶⁷ Dekoven, *Gender And Modernism*, p. 175.

⁶⁸ Marcus, *Woolf's Feminism And Feminism's Woolf*, p. 210.

⁶⁹ Drewery, *The Modernist Short Story*, pp. 135–51 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316711712.009>

with patriarchal control, and treating Eveline as his property, states he 'wasn't going to give her his hard-earned money'.⁷⁰

Eveline is given the opportunity of marriage for reason of love as opposed to the functional Victorian ideal; her prospect Frank is 'kind, manly, open-hearted'⁷¹ demonstrating a shift away from the Victorian male stereotype. Through Eveline, the reader is initially encouraged by the notion of a reaction against the expectations of society and that she will not allow herself to be 'treated like her mother had been'.⁷² However, Eveline begins to experience further conflict in relation to her 'promise to her mother, her promise to keep the home together for as long as she could'.⁷³ She had consented to go away, to leave her home. Was that wise? She tried to weigh each side of the question'.⁷⁴ As Leonard argues the reader is 'invited to see what a psychological prison the home has become'.⁷⁵

Eveline's paralysis is magnified by Joyce's use of the fragmentation of time and lack of chronology. She decides to stay, denying her (at this point in time) a 'happy ending'. Scott suggests:

We meet Eveline at home but learn about her work. She does the housekeeping, cares for her younger siblings and also works in the public realm of the stores. The story denies her marriage and the fulfilment of a romantic plot.⁷⁶

 11

In 'Clay', the reader is offered a vision of the potential of Eveline's future life, presented by way of Maria, a 'middle aged, unmarried, working women who outwardly claims she

⁷⁰ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Wordsworth Classics, 1993), p. 24.

⁷¹ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 24.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 24.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 23.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 23.

⁷⁵ Garry Leonard, 'Dubliners' in *The Cambridge Companion To James Joyce*, ed. by Derek Attridge (Cambridge University Press), pp. 87–102, (p. 100).

⁷⁶ Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Gender, Discourse and Culture' in *James Joyce* (The Harvester Press Limited, 1987), pp. 46–76, (p.61).

'didn't want any man or ring'⁷⁷ who 'thought how much better it was to be independent and to have your own money in your pocket'.⁷⁸ Whilst this could be interpreted as signifying an unprecedented level of choice and power for women, depth is added to this argument by Leonard, who states that Maria can be read as 'a sad woman daily regretting her unmarried state'.⁷⁹

Through Eveline, Joyce presents the suffocating paralysis faced by women in Ireland at this time, not only in relation to the pull between the public and the domestic sphere but relating to the further complexity of the disparity of the old and new Ireland. Johnson provides a complementary summary:

Carefully examined, Joyce's supposed indictment of Eveline as a passive victim unfolds into a nuanced depiction of one steeped in competing codes of femininity....in representing Eveline, then, Joyce lays bear the constructedness of femininity, its production in individual cases as the confluence of particular combinations of 'ideals' adopted from culture's impoverished and constraining lexicon.⁸⁰

Joyce presents several other examples of women entering the public sphere or remaining unmarried. In 'A Mother' the reader is introduced to 'Miss Devlin [who] had become Mrs. Kearney out of spite'.⁸¹ Joyce, like Woolf, portrays the institution of marriage as a social and societal transaction: 'when she drew near the limit and her friends began to loosen their tongues about her, she silenced them by marrying Mr. Kearney'.⁸² Mrs. Kearney takes on what can be seen as a male responsibility, as she argues with 'the committee' to secure the contracted payment for her daughter's musical performance. Joyce creates reaction, evoked by deviation from the acceptable role of the female, resulting in the significant comment 'I thought you were a lady'.⁸³

⁷⁷ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 72.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 73.

⁷⁹ Leonard, *Dubliners*, p. 97.

⁸⁰ Jeri Johnson, 'Joyce and Feminism' in *The Cambridge Companion To James Joyce*, ed. by Derek Attridge, 2nd edition (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 194–212, (p. 204).

⁸¹ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 99.

⁸² Ibid. p. 99.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 108.

Subsequently, we see ostracisation of the female as 'Mrs. Kearney's conduct was condemned on all hands'.⁸⁴ Joyce further adds the statement through the female perspective that 'they wouldn't have dared treat her like that if she had been a man'.⁸⁵ This example further identifies both the prejudices faced by women, along with ambivalence in the gender role and the resistance to any radical change or acceptance of equality for women. As Johnson states, Joyce's stories provide 'realistic' representations of real men and women' whilst questioning the 'social, political, religious, economical structures and discourses' that have produced them.⁸⁶

In 'The Boarding House', Joyce employs Mrs Mooney to further explore shifts in gender role. She is a married woman who has taken the unusual action of separating from her husband due to his behaviour and abuse: 'a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined woman'.⁸⁷ The female is thus shown to cross into the public sphere, running a business in the form of a boarding house. Through Mrs. Mooney's daughter, Polly the 'perverse madonna',⁸⁸ Joyce introduces the idea of female sexual desire. Polly 'flirted with the young men'⁸⁹ and instigates an affair with Mr. Doran. In finding out about her daughter's pre-marital, sexual activity, Mrs. Mooney manipulates and coerces a marriage proposal in order to conform to societal expectations and presents a fraudulent notion of purity, at the expense of her daughter. As Scott states: 'Mrs. Mooney certainly acts powerfully in her own space, which is both familial and professional'.⁹⁰ Johnson adds that 'she pretends to an ideal of feminine purity in order to secure an economic advantage for her daughter (and of course herself)'.⁹¹

Through 'The Dead', the reader is introduced to a further ensemble of unmarried women, who whilst spanning class, are engaged in employment: Aunt Julia a 'leading

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 108.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 107.

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Joyce And Feminism*, p. 203.

⁸⁷ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 43.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 44.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 72.

⁹⁰ Scott, *Gender, Discourse and Culture*, p. 61.

⁹¹ Johnson, *Joyce And Feminism*, p. 202.

soprano', Aunt Kate a music teacher and Lily the caretaker's daughter who carries out housemaid work. Again, we see women participating in the type of work deemed 'suitable' at that time.⁹² Joyce uses fragments of discourse to disclose changes in female attitudes, such as Lily's expression of her opinion that states 'the men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you'.⁹³

Joyce briefly introduces Miss. Ivors, who voices Irish nationalist views⁹⁴ and can be seen to symbolise the 'new woman'.⁹⁵ She defies etiquette in prematurely leaving the domestic setting of the dinner party, exclaiming she can 'take care of herself'.⁹⁶ Had Joyce further explored the character of Miss Ivors, perhaps greater parallels could be drawn with regards to Woolf's Lily Briscoe.¹³

Similarly, the final scene in 'The Dead' examines the relationship between male and female through Gabriel and Gretta Conroy, mirroring Woolf's portrayal of Mrs. Ramsay's unspoken loss. Gabriel mistakenly assumes his wife, like him, is preoccupied with thoughts of sexual activity. She instead, reveals that she is reminiscing about a lost lover, from a time prior to her marriage: 'while he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her own mind with another'.⁹⁷ Gabriel is both shocked and shamed by this revelation and unable to comprehend the notion of his wife having desires of her own and love for another man. He subsequently describes himself as a 'ludicrous figure' and a 'well-meaning sentimentalist',⁹⁸ articulating how 'poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life. He watched her while she slept, as though he and she had never lived as man and wife'.⁹⁹

⁹² '19th And Early 20th Century | Striking Women'.

⁹³ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 129.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 137.

⁹⁵ Dekoven, *Modernism and Gender*, p. 174.

⁹⁶ Joyce, *Dubliners*, p. 141.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 158.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 158.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 160.

In contrast to Woolf, Joyce enables Gretta to verbalise her experience to her husband. Unveiling, as Johnson states 'masculine desire born of projection rather than objective observation'.¹⁰⁰ Scott notes pointedly that Gabriel's 'supposedly simpler wife, the stay-at-home Gretta':

Has a world of emotional experience that he has not traversed, It is an unconscious territory that interests Joyce as a mature writer far more than women's work or her tentative entries into the cultural discourse and territory formerly shaped and dominated by men'.¹⁰¹

Joyce offers an illuminating example of the blurring of gender stereotypes, emphasising Gretta's female sexual desire and deviation from the role of 'wife'. This leads to Gabriel questioning his position as a 'man' when faced with Gretta's sincerity. The reader is presented with a further layer of ambivalence in relation to gender roles and a return to the paralysis introduced at the beginning of the text, as opposed to 'radical culture change'.

To conclude, this essay has identified the presentation, exploration and analysis of gender roles in both Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Joyce's *Dubliners* with specific attention to the 'female'. Whilst there are notable differences in how this theme is approached within the two texts, the expectations and constraints of the traditional, realist role of the sex-born female have been clearly explored by both. Joyce and Woolf negotiate the 'centrality of the female'¹⁰² and make attempts to deconstruct traditional roles, blurring the domestic and public spheres and the role of the female, indicating a broad but complex shift towards change and equality for women. This change however, is treated with ambivalence, trepidation, nervousness and uncertainty; triumph can be seen in Lily Briscoe reaching her vision, but this is counter-balanced by Eveline's 'paralysis' in *Dubliners*. In respect of Modernism, both Woolf and Joyce can

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *Joyce And Feminism*, p. 207.

¹⁰¹ Scott, *Gender, Discourse And Culture*, p. 61.

¹⁰² Dekoven, *Modernism And Gender*, p. 174.

be considered epitomic of the movement, by shifting towards but not yet achieving what can be described as 'radical cultural change'.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 174.

Ambivalent Female Gender Roles in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and James Joyce's *Dubliners*

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

72/100

Instructor

There is a clear and sustained argument here, offering good primary textual analysis support by wide ranging secondary materials on Modernism in general and the chosen texts in particular.

I think the idea of codes of construction from Showalter is central to this kind of argument and might have been used more if anything.

The Dekoven quote allows you to develop a clear thesis. There are, of course, readings of the end of *TtLH* which are more negative than yours seems to be in terms of what LB's vision means.

You might have linked more across texts.

Well presented.

PAGE 1

PAGE 2



Comment 1

earlier really



Missing ":"

Missing colon:

Colons are used to introduce lists, explanations, and quotations as well as to separate a clause for emphasis.

PAGE 3

~~Strikethrough.~~

PAGE 4



Comment 3

Is a male author's take on gender roles necessarily the same as a woman's

PAGE 5

~~Strikethrough.~~

Text Comment. [view?](#)



Comment 5

How are you defining coherence here? Is this a coherence deliberately created by VW? If so why?

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

QM

Missing ":"

Missing colon:

Colons are used to introduce lists, explanations, and quotations as well as to separate a clause for emphasis.

Additional Comment

Don't use ... here

PAGE 8



Comment 6

excellent

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11



Comment 7

Is progressed the right word here?



Comment 8

Isn't this as ambivalent a moment from the reader's pov as the reaching of the LH?

PAGE 12



Comment 9

Try to find a way of linking across texts

Strikethrough.

PAGE 13



Comment 11

do you agree then that this is what she wants? or what JJ is interested in saying that she should?

PAGE 14



Comment 12

excellent quote

You could pick up more on the key idea of codes of construction here

PAGE 15

PAGE 16



Comment 13

why doesn't he?

Strikethrough.

PAGE 17

PAGE 18
