

COMPARING THE THEME OF SUBMISSIVENESS IN JAMES JOYCE'S *EVELINE* AND WILLIAM FAULKNER'S *A ROSE FOR EMILY*

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Abstract

*Submissiveness is a complex phenomenon that can manifest in different ways in different contexts. It is a behavior that is characterized by a willingness to yield to the will of others, often to the point of sacrificing one's own interests or desires. This research paper compares the theme of submissiveness in James Joyce's *Eveline* and William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*. Both short stories portray female protagonists who are trapped in their societal roles and are unable to break free. The study analyzes the ways in which the characters' submissiveness is portrayed, including their attitudes toward love, marriage, and family. The paper also examines the impact of social and cultural norms on the characters' actions, and how these norms contribute to their inability to assert themselves. Through a close reading of the two works, the study aims to shed light on the role of gender and power dynamics in literature and society, and how these dynamics shape the lives of individuals. The comparison of *Eveline* and *A Rose for Emily* demonstrates the enduring relevance of literary works and their potential to offer insight into the complexities of human experience and social dynamics.*

Keywords: *A Rose for Emily, Comparative analysis, Eveline, Patriarchy, Submissiveness.*

Background of the Study

The portrayal of female characters in literature has been a subject of debate and these characters have often been depicted as submissive, passive, and dependent on male figures. This portrayal is evident in various literary works, including James Joyce's *Eveline* and William Faulkner's *A Rose for*

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Emily. Both of these works depict female characters who are trapped in their societal roles and are unable to free themselves.

In *Eveline*, Joyce portrays the character of Eveline as a submissive woman who is torn between her loyalty to her family and her desire for freedom. Eveline is depicted as a victim of her patriarchal society, which forces her to conform to traditional gender roles. Similarly, in *A Rose for Emily*, Faulkner portrays the character of Emily as a submissive woman who is confined to her house and unable to escape her past.

Several studies have analyzed the theme of submissiveness in literature, with a particular focus on female characters. Donaldson (1974) argues in *Submissiveness in Faulkner's A Rose for Emily*, that Emily's submissiveness is the result of her upbringing in a patriarchal society. Similarly, in *The Feminine Mystique in 'Eveline,'* Gannon (1073) argues that Joyce's portrayal of Eveline reflects the cultural expectations of women in early 20th-century Ireland. The present study seeks to build on these existing studies by comparing the theme of submissiveness in Joyce's *Eveline* and Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*.

Statement of the Problem

This research paper aims to compare the theme of submissiveness in James Joyce's *Eveline* and William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* by analyzing the ways in which the characters' submissiveness is portrayed and the impact of social and cultural norms on their actions. Through a close reading of the two works, the study seeks to shed light on the role of gender and power dynamics in literature and society and how these dynamics shape the lives of individuals.

Research Questions

The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is the theme of submissiveness portrayed in the two works, and what are the similarities and differences in the depiction of the female protagonists?
2. What are the attitudes of the female protagonists toward love, marriage, and family, and how do these attitudes contribute to their submissiveness?
3. What impact do social and cultural norms have on the characters' actions, and how do these norms shape their relationships with male figures in the stories?

Significance of the Study

The study provides a deeper insight into the representation of female characters in literature, particularly in the context of gender and power dynamics. The analysis of the impact of social and cultural norms on the characters' actions sheds light on the ways in which societal norms and expectations can influence individuals' behavior. The study adds to the ongoing discourse on the impact of literature on societal norms and expectations by analyzing the portrayal of submissiveness in the two works. The examination of the literary devices used to convey the theme of submissiveness in the two works provides a deeper understanding of the ways in which literary techniques can be used to convey themes and ideas. The comparison of the theme of submissiveness in "Eveline" and "A Rose for Emily" offers a comparative analysis of the portrayal of submissiveness in literature and how it reflects societal norms and expectations.

Literature Review

Female suffering has been a recurring theme in literature. A vast body of literature exists that focuses on the suffering of female characters and the various forms of violence and oppression they experience. This literature review examines the representation of female suffering in works of fiction, particularly in relation to the themes of gender, power, and society.

Gender has been identified as a significant factor in the portrayal of female suffering in literature. According to Brownmiller (1975), women's suffering is often linked to their gender, which is viewed as a source of weakness and vulnerability. This idea is evident in many works of fiction, where female characters are depicted as victims of physical, emotional, and sexual violence, often at the hands of male characters. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), for example, the female protagonist is subjected to systematic oppression and violence in a dystopian society where women are reduced to reproductive vessels.

Power dynamics also play a crucial role in the representation of female suffering in literature. Male characters are often portrayed as possessing power over female characters, which they use to perpetrate violence and oppression. This power dynamic is evident in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, where the female protagonist is subjected to physical and emotional abuse by her husband, who is a physician and therefore holds power over her (Gilman, 1892).

Society is another significant factor in the portrayal of female suffering in literature. Societal norms and expectations contribute to the oppression and marginalization of women, and this is often reflected in works of fiction. In Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, for example, the female protagonist is subjected to societal expectations that dictate that she must marry for wealth and social status, leading to her eventual downfall and suffering (Wharton, 1905).

In recent years, there has been increased attention to the representation of female suffering in literature, with many works exploring the complexities of gender, power, and society. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, for example, depicts the experiences of female characters during the Nigerian Civil War and highlights the various forms of violence and oppression they endure (Adichie, 2006).

The portrayal of female suffering in literature offers valuable insights into the complexities of gender, power, and society. Through a close analysis of works of fiction, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which societal norms and expectations contribute to the oppression and marginalization of women and how gender and power dynamics shape the lives of female characters. The portrayal of female submissiveness in literature has been the subject of extensive scholarly research. A vast body of literature exists that examines the representation of female submissiveness in various works of fiction. This section provides an overview of some of the key studies on the topic.

One of the earliest studies on the representation of female submissiveness in literature was conducted by Elaine Showalter. In her book *A Literature of Their Own*, Showalter argues that female submissiveness is a pervasive theme in women's literature (Showalter, 1977). She examines the works of various female authors, including Charlotte Bronte and Virginia Woolf, and shows how their female characters are often portrayed as submissive and passive.

Another important study on the portrayal of female submissiveness in literature is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. This book examines the representation of female characters in nineteenth-century literature and argues that female submissiveness is a product of patriarchal society (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979). The authors show how female characters are often depicted as passive and submissive, and argue that this is a result of the limited opportunities available to women during this time period.

More recent studies have continued to explore the theme of female submissiveness in literature. In her book *Reading Women: How the Great Books of Feminism Changed My Life*, Stephanie Staal examines the portrayal of female submissiveness in various works of literature, including Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (Staal, 2011). She argues that the submissiveness of female characters is often a reflection of societal norms and expectations.

In a study on the representation of female submissiveness in contemporary literature, Emanuela Militello examines the works of various female authors, including Toni Morrison and Alice Walker (Militello, 2018). She argues that contemporary female authors have moved away from the passive and submissive portrayal of female characters and have instead created strong, empowered female protagonists.

Comparative literature is the study of the similarities and differences between literary works from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This field of study seeks to explore the ways in which literary works reflect and respond to cultural and historical contexts, as well as the ways in which they engage with universal themes and human experiences. In this theoretical framework, this study explores how comparative literature approaches the study of two classic literary works, *Eveline* and *A Rose for Emily*.

Research Methodology

The research employs a qualitative comparative analysis approach. This method allows for a detailed examination and comparison of the theme of submissiveness in the two literary works. The research involves a systematic and in-depth analysis of the selected texts to identify and compare various elements related to the theme of submissiveness. The selected texts were analyzed using close reading techniques to identify instances of submissiveness and related elements such as character traits, narrative techniques, symbolism, and thematic development. The analysis involves identifying specific passages, dialogues, and descriptions that contribute to the portrayal of submissiveness in both works. The research focuses on understanding how the theme is presented, developed, and resolved within each narrative.

Feminist Literary Theory is utilized as a theoretical framework for this comparative analysis to explore the portrayal of female characters and their experiences of submissiveness in the selected texts. It will consider the

influence of societal expectations, patriarchal norms, and the female struggle for agency within their respective contexts.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The portrayal of female submissiveness is a central theme in both James Joyce's *Eveline* and William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*. In *Eveline*, the titular character is depicted as a young woman who is torn between her duty to her family and her desire for a better life. Throughout the story, Eveline is shown as being passive and submissive, allowing others to make decisions for her and feeling trapped by her circumstances.

Similarly, in *A Rose for Emily*, the main character, Emily Grierson, is portrayed as a woman who is dominated by the patriarchal society in which she lives. She is shown as being submissive to her father's wishes and later to her lover, Homer Barron. Like Eveline, Emily is depicted as being trapped by her circumstances and unable to break free from the expectations placed upon her by society.

Despite these similarities, there are also notable differences in the portrayal of the female protagonists in these two stories. For instance, while Eveline is depicted as being torn between her duty to her family and her desire for a better life, Emily is portrayed as being more interested in maintaining the status quo and preserving the past. Additionally, while Eveline's passivity is portrayed as a source of frustration and unhappiness, Emily's passivity is depicted as a means of coping with the loss of her father and the changing society around her.

Both *Eveline* and *A Rose for Emily* present a complex and nuanced depiction of female submissiveness, highlighting the ways in which societal norms and expectations can shape the lives of women. While the stories share similarities in their portrayal of passive female protagonists, they also offer distinct perspectives on the theme of submissiveness, ultimately emphasizing the complexity and diversity of women's experiences. In both short stories, the attitudes of the protagonists toward love, marriage, and family contribute to their submissiveness.

In *Eveline*, the titular character is torn between her love for Frank and her duty to her family. Throughout the story, Eveline's feelings of obligation to her family weigh heavily on her, leading her to feel trapped and unable to make a decision about her future. Her attitude toward love and marriage is colored by her family's expectations, and she ultimately decides to stay in Dublin and fulfill her duty to her family rather than running away with

Frank. This attitude contributes to her submissiveness because she is willing to sacrifice her own happiness and desires in order to fulfill her duties to her family.

Similarly, in *A Rose for Emily*, Emily's attitudes toward love, marriage, and family are shaped by her father's overbearing presence and her family's social status. She is depicted as being subservient to her father's wishes and, later, to the expectations of the townspeople who view her as a relic of the past. Emily's attitude toward love and marriage is also colored by her family's social status, as she is unwilling to marry someone who is deemed beneath her station. This attitude contributes to her submissiveness because she is unwilling to break free from the expectations placed upon her by her family and society, leading her to live a lonely and isolated life.

In both stories, the attitudes of the protagonists toward love, marriage, and family are influenced by external factors such as societal expectations and family obligations. These attitudes contribute to their submissiveness by limiting their choices and forcing them to conform to the expectations of others. Ultimately, the portrayal of these attitudes underscores the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, highlighting the ways in which societal norms and expectations can limit their agency and freedom.

Social and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping the actions of the female protagonists in both short stories and their relationships with male figures in the stories.

In *Eveline*, the protagonist's actions are shaped by the social and cultural norms of Dublin in the early 20th century. Eveline is expected to fulfill her duties to her family, including caring for her abusive father and younger siblings. These expectations are reinforced by societal expectations that women should prioritize their familial obligations over their own desires. Eveline's relationship with her lover Frank is also affected by these norms, as she is hesitant to leave Dublin and run away with him due to the social stigma associated with leaving her family behind. Ultimately, these norms lead Eveline to remain passive and submissive, unable to break free from the expectations placed upon her.

Similarly, in *A Rose for Emily*, Emily's actions are shaped by the social and cultural norms of the small Southern town in which she lives. The story is set in the aftermath of the Civil War, during a time of significant social and cultural upheaval. Emily's relationship with her father is shaped by the

patriarchal norms of the time, with her father exerting significant control over her life and limiting her opportunities for social and romantic relationships. When she enters into a romantic relationship with Homer Barron, Emily's actions are shaped by the social norms that dictate that women of her social standing should not associate with men of lower social status. Ultimately, these norms contribute to Emily's isolation and her inability to form meaningful connections with others.

In both stories, social and cultural norms exert a significant influence on the actions of the female protagonists, shaping their relationships with male figures and limiting their agency and freedom. The portrayal of these norms underscores the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, highlighting the ways in which societal expectations and gender roles can restrict their choices and opportunities for personal fulfillment.

James Joyce's *Eveline* and William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* use various literary devices such as symbolism, imagery, and characterization to convey the theme of submissiveness and the impact of societal norms on the female characters.

In *Eveline*, Joyce uses symbolism to convey the theme of submissiveness. The images of dust and decay throughout the story, such as the "dusty cretonne" curtains and the "yellowing photograph," symbolize Eveline's trapped and stagnant existence. Additionally, the characterization of Eveline as passive and submissive highlights the impact of societal norms on her life, as she is unable to break free from her familial obligations and cultural expectations.

Similarly, in *A Rose for Emily*, Faulkner uses symbolism to convey the theme of submissiveness. The image of Emily's decaying mansion represents her isolation and entrapment within the confines of her society and cultural norms. The characterization of Emily as a passive and submissive character is also emphasized through the use of imagery, such as the description of her as "a small, fat woman in black," which symbolizes her lack of agency and control over her life.

Furthermore, the characterization of the male figures in both stories also contributes to the theme of submissiveness. In *Eveline*, Eveline's father is portrayed as abusive and controlling, highlighting the societal norms that dictate a patriarchal system in which women are expected to be submissive and obedient to male authority figures. Similarly, in *A Rose for Emily*,

Emily's father is characterized as domineering and oppressive, emphasizing the societal norms that limit women's agency and independence.

Both short stories *Eveline* and *A Rose for Emily* use literary devices such as symbolism, imagery, and characterization to highlight the theme of submissiveness and the impact of societal norms on the female characters. Through the use of these devices, the authors provide a poignant commentary on the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies and the limits imposed upon them by societal expectations and gender roles.

The representation of submissiveness in both stories reflects the societal context in which they were written and sheds light on the gender and power dynamics present in literature and society. Joyce wrote *Eveline* during the early 20th century in Dublin, a time when Ireland was still under British colonial rule and deeply influenced by Catholicism. This societal context is reflected in the story through the portrayal of Eveline's submissiveness to her father and the societal norms that dictate her behavior. Eveline is unable to break free from her familial obligations and cultural expectations, highlighting the limited options available to women in patriarchal societies.

Similarly, Faulkner wrote *A Rose for Emily* in the early 20th century in the American South, a time when the region was still grappling with the legacy of slavery and deeply entrenched racial and gender inequalities. This societal context is reflected in the story through the portrayal of Emily's submissiveness to her father and the societal norms that limit her agency and independence. Emily is trapped within the confines of her society and cultural norms, unable to fully break free from the restrictions imposed upon her as a woman.

The representation of submissiveness in both stories reflects the broader gender and power dynamics present in literature and society. Women are often portrayed as passive and submissive characters in literature, constrained by societal norms and limited options. This is reflective of the patriarchal power structures that exist in society, where men hold the majority of power and influence.

However, by highlighting the struggles faced by female characters like Eveline and Emily, these stories also challenge gender and power dynamics and provide a commentary on the limitations and challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies. They also provide a glimpse into the societal context in which they were written, shedding light on the power

dynamics that exist in literature and society and the ongoing struggle for gender equality.

Comparing the theme of submissiveness in both short stories is significant as it provides insights into the representation of female characters in literature and the impact of literature on societal norms and expectations. Firstly, by comparing the depiction of submissiveness in these two stories, we can gain a deeper understanding of how societal norms and expectations impact women's lives and their representation in literature. Both stories illustrate the ways in which patriarchal norms and cultural expectations shape the lives and actions of their female protagonists. Through this comparison, we can analyze the similarities and differences in the portrayal of submissiveness and the impact of these societal norms on the female characters. Secondly, this comparison can also provide insights into the impact of literature on societal norms and expectations. Literature has the power to both reflect and shape societal attitudes and beliefs, including those related to gender and power dynamics. By examining the representation of submissiveness in *Eveline* and *A Rose for Emily*, we can gain insight into how these stories contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender and power dynamics in society. This analysis can also help us understand the ways in which literature can reinforce or challenge dominant cultural norms and expectations. Finally, comparing the theme of submissiveness in these two stories can contribute to a broader understanding of the representation of female characters in literature. The depiction of submissiveness is a common trope in literature, and by analyzing how it is portrayed in different works, we can gain insights into the larger patterns and themes that shape the representation of women in literature.

Conclusion

The comparison of the theme of submissiveness in both short stories provides valuable insights into the representation of female characters in literature, the impact of societal norms on women's lives, and the power dynamics that shape gender relations. The analysis of these two stories reveals how societal expectations and patriarchal norms influence the actions and attitudes of their female protagonists. Eveline and Emily's submissiveness and passivity in the face of male authority reflect the limitations placed on women's agency and their confinement to traditional gender roles. The comparison of these stories also illustrates the power of literature in shaping and reinforcing societal attitudes and expectations. Through these narratives, readers can gain a better understanding of how

patriarchal norms have been perpetuated and reinforced through cultural discourse. By examining how these works contribute to a larger pattern of representation of female characters in literature, we can better appreciate the significance of literature in shaping our understanding of gender roles and power dynamics in society. Overall, this research highlights the importance of critical analysis and interpretation of literary works to deepen our understanding of the social, cultural, and historical context in which they were produced. The comparison of *Eveline* and *A Rose for Emily* demonstrates the enduring relevance of literary works and their potential to offer insight into the complexities of human experience and social dynamics.

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