

Natali Jensen

English 376

Professor Jarica Watts

December 12, 2016

Modernist Men and a Not So Modernist Look at Women

The early 20th century gave life to Modernist writers in the United Kingdom; writers like Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf were changing the way the world viewed women's roles as they experimented with their stories and made them available to a large audience via literary magazines. However, despite their efforts to empower women, prominent writers like James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence were reluctant to hand over their patriarchal power. Before World War I it was still a common notion that the place of a woman was in the home, but when the able-bodied men left to fight in WWI things began to change as women stepped into the work force. Working women became the norm and at the end of WWI more and more women were thinking along the same lines as Mansfield and Woolf; but many men were resistant to these changes and wished for women to return to their traditional roles. Men's opposition to women outside conventional roles was and still is a problem women face today. To better understand what female modernist writers were up against I will be analyzing Joyce's "The Boarding House," and Lawrence's "Tickets Please." I argue that one can see how women relied on men before WWI in "The Boarding House," and in "Tickets Please" one perceives that even though women's rights were being brought to the forefront of many conversations, multiple men still wished women would fill traditional roles.

Both James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence had complicated views of women. To understand their texts, one must first understand Joyce and Lawrence's complex relationships with women. Joyce's disregard for women was probably inherited from his drunken father John, who often beat Joyce's mother and had a general disregard for females (Stewart). Though strong women do make appearances in Joyce's writings, like Molly Bloom, there are also weaker characters, like Eveline, where the female character is stuck in paralysis. Joyce's writing seems to make note of the female need for a man in their lives. One of the exceptions is "The Boarding House's" Mrs. Mooney, a strong female character, who takes control of what goes on in the story. Lawrence's relationship with female roles is more complex than Joyce's. Lawrence was a friend to many feminists of his time, including Katherine Mansfield (Worthen), but after WWI, Lawrence "began to denounce women, blaming them, and self-conscious sexuality in particular, for the state of the world" (Nixon 15). This attitude manifests itself in "Tickets Please," as the girls become violent towards John Thomas in an attempt to assert their dissatisfaction with his flirtatious behavior, which reminds them of their limited role in society.

Lawrence and Joyce were both married in their lifetimes, but the relationships were complicated, contributing to their portrayal of women in their writings. For Joyce, his relationship with his eventual wife Nora was long lasting and the two were very committed to each other, but Joyce did not see her as his equal in any way. Joyce "had a fascination with [Nora's] untrained mind, and a delight in her body" (Stewart). This depiction illustrates that Nora was beautiful and Joyce enjoyed having her by his side, but she was in no way his equal and she often submitted to Joyce's will when it came to where they would live and how they would live. Lawrence, on the other hand, was married to a woman named

Frieda who he regarded as “the one possible woman for me, for I must have opposition—something to fight” (Worthen). Frieda challenged Lawrence intellectually, however the couple had an open marriage and neither was monogamous throughout the relationship. Lawrence, in contrast to how he portrays women in “Tickets, Please,” did not require Frieda to passively follow his lead. This is in part to their relationship beginning before WWI. World War I changed Lawrence’s beliefs drastically; he began to think that in order to restore the world to its previous glory women needed to be submissive (Nixon 131). Joyce exemplifies how women in the early 1900s faced chauvinism at the turn of the century, but when they empowered themselves during WWI men, like Lawrence, blamed them for the downfall of society.

Joyce’s *Dubliners* collection was published in 1914 before the outbreak of World War I, and before women like “The Boarding House’s” Mrs. Mooney were part of regular society. Although Mrs. Mooney does take control in the story, Joyce does not allow her to take control as a real woman, which contributes to Joyce’s stance that women were not to be “endowed...with a plentitude of artistic power” (Stewart). Mrs. Mooney is described as being “able to keep things to herself,” illustrating that she is not like the stereotypical gossiping woman, but can be associated more with men and their silence (Joyce 56). Furthermore, Mrs. Mooney is a “big imposing woman,” who runs her house “firmly” and she is “stern” when needs be (56). Everything about Mrs. Mooney is described in a masculine way, which for Joyce justifies her position as head of her household and as a female business owner. Scholar, Earl G. Ingersoll argues that “Mrs. Mooney is a powerful figure because she draws upon the elements traditionally labeled “masculine” (Ingersoll 506). I agree, and argue that it is Mrs. Mooney’s masculinity that charges her with the ability to

make the same decisions a father would make. Serving as a contrast to Mrs. Mooney's masculinity is Polly, who is described as "a slim girl" with "soft hair and a small full mouth" and she has the "habit of glancing upwards when she [speaks] with anyone" (Joyce 57). Not only does her physical appearance embrace the beauties of womanhood, but by describing her as looking up and away when she is talking to another person, insinuates that Polly does not know what she really wants. This contrast between Mrs. Mooney and Polly juxtaposes the roles of men and women with Mrs. Mooney representing the determined male aspect and Polly the undecisive female.

Mrs. Mooney's situation as business owner and single mother enhance her masculine qualities and gives her the same authority as a man. Ingersoll points out: "Mrs. Mooney must not only provide for herself and her children, but also fulfill a father's responsibility—finding an eligible husband for a daughter" (507). Mrs. Mooney's brothel is host to a plethora of men who "like to feel that there is a young woman not very far away," and while Mrs. Mooney allows Polly to freely flirt with these men, she is also a "shrewd judge" because she does not want Polly involved with the men who do not mean business (Joyce 58). Without a husband, Mrs. Mooney is responsible for securing her daughter's future, and in order to ensure that future, Polly must get married. Although Mrs. Mooney has managed a life where she does not need a man, it is not the life she wants for Polly.

Polly's relationship with Doran provides Mrs. Mooney with the perfect opportunity to not only secure her daughter's future, but her virtue as well. In order to enhance Mrs. Mooney's masculine role in her daughter's life Joyce parallels Mrs. Mooney to the Christ. As Mrs. Mooney is preparing to go and save her daughter's virtue she watches Mary clean up breakfast. As Mary clears the tables she gathers "the crusts and pieces of broken bread,"

which alludes to the last supper Christ had before sacrificing himself for mankind (Joyce 59). The “broken bread collected” reiterates Joyce’s intention as everything else is put “under lock and key,” (59) which alludes to the power Christ has with “the keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19). Right after this empowering description, Mrs. Mooney recalls her interview with Polly the night before and the reader gets the idea that Mrs. Mooney is omnipotent in knowing the deeds of her daughter as divulged by “Polly [knowing] that she was being watched” (58) long before her mother’s intervention. This furthers the parallel between Christ and Mrs. Mooney by giving her the omniscient characteristics of Christ, allowing her to see everything and then serve as judge on Polly’s issue of morality. With the same characteristics as Christ, Joyce is giving Mrs. Mooney the authority of a man, which then enables her in convincing Doran that he stole Polly’s innocence, and that he must make amends by marrying her. Ingersoll argues that Doran’s “chances of answering Mrs. Mooney’s charges have been reduced by the Church as an agency of patriarchy,” which patriarchy is reflected in Mrs. Mooney’s all-knowing persona (Ingersoll 508).

Joyce complicates Mrs. Mooney’s authority at the end of “The Boarding House,” in order to convey that although a woman may have masculine attributes, she remains a woman without the same power of a man. Mrs. Mooney is successful in convincing Doran that he is in the wrong and “he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation” (Joyce 60). The key word here is “almost” because it highlights the uncertainty Doran is feeling. Despite Mrs. Mooney having masculine characteristics, and having similar attributes to Christ, she is in fact a woman, which leaves room for Doran to question her actual authority. As he recalls the moments between Polly and himself, Doran realizes that “it was not altogether his fault that it had happened” and he begins to question whether or

not he should bind himself in marriage to a girl beneath his station (62). When Doran leaves his room to go talk to Mrs. Mooney his “glasses became so dimmed with moisture that he [has] to take them off and polish them” (63). This moment symbolizes the confusion Doran is experiencing, which is due to Mrs. Mooney’s authoritative masculine attributes being confined in a female’s body. Doran does not want to be tricked into marrying Polly, and when it comes down to fleeing the scene or meeting with Mrs. Mooney, it is not Mrs. Mooney’s character that takes control over his actions, but “the implacable faces of his employer” that push him down the stairs (63). While Mrs. Mooney is a type of Christ-figure, she has no real power over Doran, because she is a female Christ-figure, which juxtaposition leaves Doran room for doubt. However, Doran’s employer is the Catholic Church—which is led by men—whose influence pressures him into taking actual steps towards retribution. Men usurp Mrs. Mooney’s alluded authority, which is Joyce’s way of reiterating that even though Mrs. Mooney adopted masculine attributes, her authority runs shallow compared to that of real men. Mrs. Mooney’s daughter cannot survive without a man, and Mrs. Mooney, while surviving, is unable to have a significant influence over Doran, whom she needs to take Polly off of her hands.

The need for men as patriarchal leaders began to fade with the commencement of WWI and women entering the workforce. With the onset of WWI Lawrence also supported Joyce’s notion that women were inferior to men and needed to be submissive, he struggled with the idea of what men would do with “the dangerous errors committed by modern women (sexual assertion, presumption to mentality, demands for love from sons) and the antidotes to them” (Nixon 7). In “Tickets, Please” Lawrence’s wrestle with society’s acceptance of new modern women comes forth in analyzing the text. Lawrence sets the

scene of the tramway system being run by crippled men, but “the most dangerous tram-service in England, as the authorities themselves declare, with pride, is entirely conducted by girls” (Lawrence 225). Unlike, Joyce’s setting in “The Boarding House,” where Mrs. Mooney is the exception in running her own business, Lawrence’s story is filled with working girls, around the same age as Joyce’s Polly. These women are “fearless young hussies” and while they are not described to be masculine like Mrs. Mooney, they are conveyed as being modern in “their ugly blue uniforms” and “skirts up to their knees” (225). Furthermore, these women are animalistic as they “pounce on the youths who try to evade their ticket-machine” and like a ferocious animal “everybody fears them” (225). Rather than rely on masculine attributes to differentiate these women from ‘proper’ women, Lawrence chooses animalistic features to highlight the metamorphosis that has occurred in women with the onset of WWI. Women have adopted their own ferocity in order to obtain power and prestige in the absence of the strong men who have been sent off to the front lines of war.

Annie is the central focus of Lawrence’s story and it is through her that Lawrence chooses to reveal the negative changes that characterize modern women. Annie is like the other girls that work for the tram-service who are “quite comely” and “sufficiently attractive” and because of this she attracts the attention of the only suitable male in their line of work, John Thomas (Lawrence 227). Annie thinks of herself as smarter than all the other girls John Thomas has conquered and “for many months” she keeps “John Thomas at arm’s length,” not wanting to become another one of the girls who quits after a night with him (227). However, despite her efforts Annie eventually permits John Thomas to enter her life outside of work at the local fair. She is attracted to John Thomas and she instantly

lets her guard down as she allows him to come to her “in a very warm and cuddly manner” (228). Lawrence is juxtaposing Annie’s desire to be an independent working women, with what Lawrence feels is the natural woman—one who needs a man in her life. Much like Joyce conveys in “The Boarding House,” by having Mrs. Mooney try to secure a man for Polly, Lawrence is placing John Thomas in Annie’s life in order to convey that although Annie may be a modern woman, she still has an underlying desire to find a man to hold her all “comforting and cosy[sic] and nice” (229). Lawrence is illustrating women as being defensive in accepting the things they want, because they are afraid to let go of the power associated with working. This independent attitude is what hinders the progress of humanity according to Lawrence’s point of view.

The desires of John Thomas and Annie are presented as conflicting because of Annie’s inability to adopt a traditional female role. After Annie decides that she wants to get to know John Thomas on a deeper level, he deserts his efforts in seducing her because he “[has] no idea of becoming an all-round individual to her” (Lawrence 229). John Thomas does not want any of the women in his life to get to truly know him because he does not want to be subject to a woman who feels in control. This causes Annie to weep with “fury, indignation, desolation, and misery,” which are all words indicative of the apocalypse, yet Annie still has a job and still has her virtue. The reason Lawrence portrays Annie as reacting so terribly to the rejection of John Thomas is because beneath Annie’s independent exterior she still feels a need for a stable male figure in her life. It is the same desire found in Polly, who sacrifices her virtue in order to seduce Doran and subsequently trick him into marrying her. Annie is not alone in her “despair” and she begins enlisting the other girls of John Thomas’ past to help her get revenge (230). It is Annie and her friends’

desire to forcibly remove the source of their feelings of instability. The girls' motivation to reclaim independence causes the story to take on a darker tone, reflecting Lawrence's feelings about modern women, that "no matter how strengthened by the freedoms brought by World War I, women can never be the equals of men" (Breen 72). The girls' indignation is bringing darkness into not only their lives, but John Thomas' life as well.

Much like Joyce's use of "broken bread" to allude to biblical features, Lawrence too uses biblical allusions in order to establish authority in his view that women should be submissive to men. The "half-dozen girls" are awaiting John Thomas' intrusion in their "little waiting-room" on a Sunday described as being full of "darkness and lawlessness" (Lawrence 231). This creates a tone of tension for the reader, as the girls' plot remains unknown at this point. When John Thomas enters the room and sits down with the girls Lawrence begins portraying John Thomas as a Christ-figure. Like Mrs. Mooney's "broken bread," that Joyce used to symbolize a Christ-like character, Lawrence also uses bread to allude to Christ and draw a comparison. As John Thomas sits with the girls they offer him "bread and drippin'" and he eats "his piece of bread" while awaiting his unknown attack (232). Although it can be assumed that the girls were also enjoying some bread at the same time as John Thomas, Lawrence focuses on John Thomas' bread in order to pin him as the Christ-figure in the room—the supreme male-figure.

Much like Christ's last night as a mortal, the peace of sharing bread does not last long. John Thomas' peers attack him, much like Christ was betrayed by Judas and turned over to the Jews who wanted to crucify him. The girls refuse to let John Thomas go until he chooses one of them, instead "they pushed him to a wall" and begin beating him (233). The angry women's attack "has all the strange frenzy of sexual arousal" as they establish their

shallow authority over John Thomas (Breen 64). As Jarica Watts has pointed out, this scene of chaos can be paralleled with Isaiah chapter four where it reads: “And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach” (vs. 4). Not only does this verse from Isaiah refer to the last days, but it illustrates that even if women are independent, they need the Savior, just like the seven girls need John Thomas’ name. Watts further expounds that the girls’ “desire to marry the womanizing John Thomas speaks to the lingering patriarchy constricting post-WWI England” (Watts). For Lawrence, John Thomas has been paralleled to the Savior with the broken bread because the girls’ desire for him to choose one of them alludes to their desire to take his name in marriage—much like a person needs to take on Christ’s name in order to be saved. So while the girls “can vilify him, disrobe him, [and] pummel him,” they are unable to fully conquer John Thomas and “rape him” (Breen 64). John Thomas is the only one with “the power to penetrate, to choose” because he is the one man among women (64). His actions decide the fate of the women beating him up, much like the Christian world depended on the actions of Christ.

Joyce was resistant to women gaining power and Lawrence believed that one of the evils of WWI was the empowerment women gained. “The Boarding House” contextualizes the role of men at the turn of the century, which is important to understand because that is what women like Woolf and Mansfield were up against, whereas Lawrence’s writings grappled with a changing world, and for him it was easy to blame it on the most obvious change—women working where they had not before. “Tickets, Please” echoes “The Boarding House” in that Mrs. Mooney, the prominent example of masculinity in Joyce’s story, is validated by biblical allusions to Christ, as is Lawrence’s John Thomas. By including

parallels to Christ, Lawrence and Joyce speak of a higher power that, although it cannot be seen, exists in many people's minds. For Lawrence and Joyce, Christianity was something they were exposed to when they were young, but did not hold onto as they matured (Worthen, Stewart), however they were well versed in the teachings of the bible. This knowledge gave both men the ability to use allusions to Christ in order to influence their readers—I argue that the reason they included biblical imagery was to enhance the ideal that although men do not have something concrete to establish their authority, the power is there nevertheless. Lawrence saw the chaos that ensued after WWI as evidence that when men lost their authority over women it poorly affected humanity.

The ending of Joyce's "The Boarding House" and Lawrence's "Tickets, Please" depict women as paralyzed by the authority of the men in the stories. For Polly, she has been waiting "patiently, almost cheerfully, without alarm...giving place to hopes and visions of the future" while Mrs. Mooney interviews Doran (Joyce 64). Polly's future is in the air as she waits for Doran to comply to her mother's demands, yet the prospect of marriage allows Polly to begin to dream of a life outside of the brothel. Polly's position in life is already improving with the simple possibility of marriage; she is brought such peace that she no longer remembers, "that she was waiting for anything" and it is only when Doran's name is mentioned again that she remembers (64). However, Polly's paralysis remains because Joyce does not end the story with a clear conclusion as to whether or not Doran accepted her hand in marriage. Polly must wait for his positive response in order to move on with her own life. Similarly, a post WWI account of a man and multiple women also results in a paralyzed state. Lawrence's characters are "stupefied" after their attack on John Thomas (Lawrence 237). By rejecting John Thomas's choice of Annie, the girls are left

without any clarity. They have denied John Thomas and in so doing rejected the possibility of redemption. This reflects Lawrence's own feelings about humanity after WWI; the war "killed his belief in the potential goodness and progress of his own civilization" (Worthen). There is stagnation in the amount of progress the women can have. Yes, they are able to work in positions originally reserved for men, but without marriage their progress stops there; without man the woman cannot reach her full potential.

The Modernist writers had varying points of view and challenged each other. Literary magazines, who played host to feminist writers and chauvinists, made it possible for writers to be exposed to large audiences and differing perspectives. In looking at Joyce and Lawrence's works, I am hesitant to label them as strictly chauvinist writers. In a world that was changing fast and drastically, Joyce wrote stories that would challenge his audience to think about gender roles and Lawrence wrote to try to challenge the radical views of his peers, specifically the stance that women no longer needed men. There are chauvinist undertones in each man's writings, but without Joyce, Lawrence, and other writers like them, readers are left without an understanding of how drastically the war changed the lives of not only women, but also the men who were accustomed to women in traditional roles. In examining Joyce and Lawrence's text I argue that women can gain a better understanding of what was going on during the rise of the Women's Rights Movement. It is important to know how men felt about women in order to make a claim for equality among the genders and Joyce and Lawrence's writings give that masculine insight women are naturally without, but can gain in reading their works.

Works Cited

Breen, Judith Puchner. "D.H. Lawrence, World War I and the Battle between the Sexes: A Reading of the Blind Man and Tickets, Please." *Women's Studies* 13.1-2 (1986): 63-74. Web.

D.H. Lawrence's "Tickets, Please" and the Apocalyptic Narrative of Isaiah. International D.H. Lawrence Conference. Nanterre, France; March 2016.

Ingersoll, Earl G. "The stigma of femininity in James Joyce's 'Eveline' and 'The Boarding House.'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 30.4 (1993): 501-510. Web.

Joyce, James. "The Boarding House." *Dubliners*. By Terence Brown. London: Penguin, 2000. 56-64. Print.

Lawrence, D.H. "Tickets Please." *The Penguin Book of First World War Stories*. By Barbara Korte and Ann-Marie Einhaus. London: Penguin, 2007. 224-37. Print.

Nixon, Cornelia. *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn against Women*. Berkeley: U of California, 1986. Print.

Stewart, Bruce. "Joyce, James Augustine Aloysius(1882–1941)." Bruce Stewart *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. David Cannadine. Oct. 2007. 13 Dec. 2016

Worthen, John. "Lawrence, David Herbert (1885–1930)." John Worthen *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed. Ed. David Cannadine. May 2006. 14 Dec. 2016