Feminism Criticism

“Eveline” By James Joyce conveys an internal struggle of feminism through Eveline’s eyes as he captures the function of patriarchy and how it operates. This theory of social, economic, and political equality is shown throughout this story through her internal cycle from daughter to wife. She is conflicted by her vow to fulfill her mother’s wishes, her desire for change and attachment of environment, succumbing to the dangerous lifestyle out of her norms, and leaving her father.

During this time period, it was unheard of for most women to be able to make independent decisions without masculine consent. She was given a choice by the man but the two choices were to pick a man to live with. She could stay with her father and live the safe, normal life that her deceased mother had hoped for or she could go with Frank and live the dangerous sea life that deep down she had loomed for. This presses on the constructs of patriarchal society. It portrays that women are viewed more as property of men to just pass along.

There were constructs put on her throughout her life. Socially, economically, class awareness, family honor and perception from the town. Patriarchal and matriarchal theories were developed because of the perception of the community and the way she thought about her mother’s character.

This leads back to how this theory of patriarchy operates. There are many different themes that are apparent in this story that relates back to feminism. (Isolation, alienation, epiphany.) “She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.” I like this quote because it feel like it summarizes modern day feminism due to the sheer oppression and treatment. This is literally the effect that men had on women back then because of the lack of equality and decision making. This is an example of how patriarchy operates because it holds up traditional male qualities as central and every other opinion or ideal is inferior.

This is why she was left to make a decision between the two men because that was the societal norm. Women were expected to live and conform to these masculine norms. Joyce wrote this also to explain the role of women and understanding gender roles. This goes to show you how nowadays daughters are still very interested in their families and respect their mom’s opinion more than ever. In the story the mom’s death influenced her perception of female weakness. Society has told her she is powerless and that makes her feel like there is nothing she can do that has an effect. This lack of power and confidence is why she cannot make this tough decision in her life and relays on a man to save her from this situation. It all boils down to, what can she do to be the most happy but also justify the answer to the society, her mom, and herself. Patriarchy in this context is a tool to display her guilt and essence.

Eveline is conflicted with many different paths and struggles to bare. She was raised in an environment of oppression so she has dealt with her share of violence, between the death of her mother and seeing the guilt of her father.
I really liked this story and it opened my eyes to how constricted women were back then and it's scary because that wasn’t even long ago. Joyce’s message was delivered very well and i liked the development of the characters to show her internal struggle with herself and her ultimate decision.