УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ „ГОЦЕ ДЕЛЧЕВ“ - ШТИП
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

UDC 81
UDC 82
UDC 008

ISSN: 2545-3998
DOI: 10.46763/palim

ПАЛИМПСЕСТ

МЕЃУНАРОДНО СПИСАНИЕ ЗА ЛИНГВИСТИЧКИ, КНИЖЕВНИ И КУЛТУРОЛОШКИ ИСТРАЖУВАЊА

PALIMPSEST

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LINGUISTIC, LITERARY AND CULTURAL RESEARCH

PALMK, VOL X, NO 20, STIP, 2025

ГОД. 10, БР. 20
ШТИП, 2025

VOL. X, NO 20
STIP, 2025

П А Л И М П С Е С Т

Меѓународно списание за лингвистички, книжевни и културолошки истражувања

P A L I M P S E S T

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ПАЛИМПСЕСТ
Меѓународно списание за лингвистички, книжевни
и културолошки истражувања

ИЗДАВА
Универзитет „Гоце Делчев“, Филолошки факултет, Штип

PALIMPSEST
International Journal for Linguistic, Literary
and Cultural Research

PUBLISHED BY
Goce Delchev University, Faculty of Philology, Stip

АДРЕСА
ПАЛИМПСЕСТ
РЕДАКЦИСКИ СОВЕТ
Филолошки факултет
ул. „Крсте Мисирков“ бр. 10-А
п. фах 201
МК-2000 Штип

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The International Scientific Journal "Palimpsest" is issued twice a year in printed form and online at the following website of the web portal of Goce Delcev University in Stip: http://js.ugd.edu.mk/index.php/PAL
Papers can be submitted and published in the following languages: Macedonian, English, German, French, Russian, Turkish and Italian language.
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UDC 821.111(417)-31.09
DOI:

Theoretical paper

OTHERNESS AND GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN JOYCE'S *DUBLINERS* AND *ULYSSES*

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Abstract: This paper examines the construction of women as the "other" in James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* through a feminist theoretical lens, employing a close reading of selected women characters, including Eveline, Maria, Gretta Conroy, Mrs. Mooney, Gerty MacDowell, and Molly Bloom. By analyzing pivotal narrative moments such as Eveline's paralysis at the dock, Maria's disrupted rituals, Gretta's emotional silence, Mrs. Mooney's tactical manipulation of gender norms, Gerty's self-objectification, and Molly's embodied monologue, the paper illustrates how Joyce both reflects and subverts early twentieth-century patriarchal norms. Women's identity is shown to be performatively constructed and narratively constrained, yet occasionally resisting these limits through fragmented acts of agency. Irigaray's notion of woman as the supporting "mirror" to man clarifies the structural marginalization of these characters, while Butler's emphasis on repetition and performativity exposes the instability of gender roles in Joyce's texts. The study also engages with recent feminist literary criticism that re-evaluates Joyce's work in light of contemporary concerns, foregrounding voice, embodiment, and shifting models of women's subjectivity, while also addressing the intersection of gender and class through insights from material feminism and social reproduction theory. Ultimately, Joyce's fiction is shown to participate in a complex negotiation of gendered identity, revealing both the constraints of patriarchal narrative and the latent potential for feminist disruption.

Keywords: *Joyce; feminist literary theory; gender performativity; otherness.*

1. Introduction

The construction of otherness in modernist literature has long preoccupied feminist critics, particularly in relation to how patriarchal discourse circumscribes women's agency, voice, and subjectivity. James Joyce's fiction, situated at the intersection of literary innovation and socio-cultural commentary, offers a fertile terrain for interrogating the mechanisms through which femininity is both constructed and constrained. As Estévez-Saá (2024) demonstrates in her centennial study of Joyce's women, the author's relationships with key real-life

figures, especially Nora Barnacle and Lucia Joyce, reveal a complex interplay of admiration, dependency, and narrative control. Her gender-focused analysis highlights how these women were central to Joyce's literary imagination, while also remaining confined within men-authored frameworks of representation. Building on Estévez-Saá's insights, this study shifts the lens from biographical women to fictional women characters in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. It examines how figures such as Eveline, Maria, Gretta, Mrs. Mooney, Gerty, and Molly are constructed within patriarchal narrative structures that simultaneously give them presence and limit their agency. While Estévez-Saá (2024) foregrounds the women who shaped Joyce's personal life, this analysis focuses on how his fiction reflects and reproduces the dynamics of otherness through literary form, narrative control, and symbolic roles assigned to women. This study engages with two of Joyce's seminal works, *Dubliners* (1914) and *Ulysses* (1922), to examine the discursive and symbolic formation of women as "the other." The framework draws on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, wherein gender is not a stable identity but an iterative, socially enforced performance (Butler, 2006, p.178), and Luce Irigaray's critique of phallocentrism, which posits that women are constructed as the mirror-image of male subjectivity within the symbolic order (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 133-137). These theories expose how femininity in Joyce is both enacted and destabilized within systems that render women visible only as lack, silence, or spectacle. Rather than treating Joyce's women characters as marginal, this analysis considers them as sites of semiotic tension, positions from which gendered ideologies are enacted, interrupted, or reconstituted. Heather Callow (1992) highlights how Joyce's women's voices in *Ulysses* reveal the performative instability of restrictive gender roles, subtly undermining patriarchal authority. Building on this, Alyssa O'Brien (2000) focuses specifically on Molly Bloom's monologue, emphasizing its multiplicity of voices and shifting identities as a powerful disruption of fixed notions of femininity. Similarly, Christine von Boheemen (1989) interprets Molly as a symbolic figure whose fluid narrative style challenges normative gender representations. Together, these critics illustrate that Joyce's women characters, far from being mere symbols of domesticity or eroticism, embody fissures within patriarchal norms where voice, body, and affect resist easy assimilation.

This theoretical framework informs the close readings that follow, which focus on moments of rupture, repetition, and withdrawal across women characters. Instances such as Eveline's paralysis on the threshold of departure, Maria's scripted and ritualized movements, Gretta Conroy's retreat into memory, Mrs. Mooney's calculated negotiation of power, Gerty MacDowell's gendered spectacle, and Molly Bloom's radically embodied interior monologue each reveal the mechanics of gender performance and symbolic exchange. For example, Eveline's silent decision not to flee reflects not personal indecision but the force of cultural inscription. Maria's "clay" symbolizes death, marking not only the end of romantic possibility but the erasure of social legibility as a woman. In contrast, Molly Bloom's unpunctuated, associative speech exemplifies what Luce Irigaray (1985) describes as *parler-femme*, a feminine mode of discourse

characterized by fluidity, interruption, and embodied multiplicity. As Irigaray explains, women's speech "steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished" and resists fixed, linear meaning, requiring "another ear" attuned to its "other meaning" (p. 29). This discourse is never identical with what it means but is "contiguous" and always in process, touching and retreating, reflecting a different economy than masculine, phallocentric language. Molly's monologue embodies this *parler-femme* through its raw corporeality, emotional flux, and refusal to be confined within patriarchal narrative logic, thus staging a radical feminine subjectivity that disrupts normative structures of gender and voice.

Recent feminist theories further expand the interpretive scope of Joyce's gender representations. Material feminism, as developed by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2008), rethinks embodiment and agency through the material conditions of social life, while Nancy Fraser (2016) and Lise Vogel (2013) emphasize the role of class and social reproduction in shaping gendered identities. These perspectives complement Butler's performativity and Irigaray's symbolic critique by situating Joyce's women characters within broader economic and social contexts. As Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (2000) argue in *Semicolonial Joyce*, class and colonial hierarchies are inseparable from gender formations in Joyce's Ireland. Incorporating this framework allows for a more detailed understanding of how Joyce's women are both socially constrained and materially positioned within intersecting structures of power.

2. Women in *Dubliners*: Performativity, Silence, and Ritual

James Joyce's *Dubliners* offers a gallery of women figures whose identities are shaped less by active rebellion than by structural constraints and internalized expectations. Eveline, Maria, Mrs. Mooney, and Gretta Conroy each engage with domestic, emotional, or symbolic spaces that limit their agency. Through these figures, Joyce reveals how gender is not an essence but a regulatory performance shaped by cultural repetition (Butler, 2006), and how women subject is constructed within a symbolic economy defined by men desires (Irigaray, 1985a).

Eveline stands at the edge of freedom but cannot take the leap. As she recalls "the invariable squabble for money on Saturday nights"(p. 24) and feels the "odour of dusty cretonne" in her home (p. 23), her bodily reaction signals more than nostalgia, it is a visceral reminder of her entrapment in domestic repetition. Her paralysis is dramatized when "her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (p. 26), marking her retreat not as indecision but as a moment of performative breakdown. Butler (2006) posits that gender is constituted through the reiteration of a norm or set of norms, emphasizing that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (p. 179), thereby highlighting the performative and socially constructed nature of gender identity. Eveline's role as a dutiful daughter has become so deeply ingrained in her identity that to depart would rupture her entire sense of self. Her failure to move is not a weakness but the embodied cost of interrupting gender's scripted continuity. The closing silence, thus, signifies

the violence of performativity's demand for coherence, making her paralysis a tragic resistance shaped by fear, obligation, and cultural scripting. The final scene captures her immobilized body: "Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (p. 26). In this moment, she is not merely indecisive; she is caught in a performative contradiction. Eveline's lifetime of dutiful daughterhood, her promise to her dying mother, her care for siblings, and fear of paternal violence, constitutes the script she is expected to perform. Her paralysis is the failure of this performance to generate coherence with her desire. Earlier, Joyce describes Eveline sitting "in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cretonne" (Joyce, 1992, p. 23), thus evoking a sensory atmosphere of decay and stagnation. This domestic stasis reinforces Irigaray's (1985a) critique that woman is fixed in the symbolic realm of home and reproduction, circulated between men rather than occupying a subject position. Eveline becomes an object existing in relation to patriarchal structures. Even her imagined escape with Frank is not self-initiated agency, but entry into another structure of male governance. The story ends not with transformation, but with silent resistance, a refusal that affirms her subjectivity through negation. But even earlier scenes underscore this internalized conflict. Eveline recalls her childhood promise, "to keep the home together as long as she could" (p. 25), a vow that haunts her as moral duty and entrapment. Her mother's final words, "Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!" (p. 25), cryptic and incantatory, signify the cyclic burden of women's sacrifice. Eveline does not understand the words, yet feels bound by them. This echo of matrilineal submission marks what Butler (2006) calls "sedimentation" (p. 178), which refers to gender identities that become naturalized through repeated behaviors until they appear essential or innate. From the perspective of social reproduction theory (Fraser, 2016; Vogel, 2013), Eveline's paralysis is not only psychological but also material. Her inability to leave reflects the economic precarity and domestic obligations imposed on working-class women in early twentieth-century Dublin.

On the other hand, Maria's life in "Clay" is built on harmlessness and routine. Her visit to Joe's house is marked by a childlike eagerness to please, evident in her careful planning, buying cakes, and preparing her clothes, but also in her deferential behavior with the children. During the Halloween game, when Maria reaches into the saucer and touches the lump of clay, "There was a great deal of laughing and joking" (p. 72). This moment is laced with discomfort. Maria's innocent confusion, as she laughs along without understanding, demonstrates how she is both symbolically erased and emotionally excluded. She is denied access to the knowledge of her own fate. This quiet marginalization reveals not only the cruelty embedded in everyday social rituals but also how deeply Maria has internalized her position within them. Maria performs femininity as self-effacement, not empowerment. Irigaray's (1985a) theory of woman as a commodity within the symbolic order further clarifies Maria's role: she is not a subject but an object passed between social roles, without space for her own desire. The ritual does not affirm her individuality but underscores her disposability. She is introduced as "a very, very small person indeed" (p. 71), a description that visually and symbolically minimizes her. Working in a Protestant laundry, an institution

historically associated with the regulation and punishment of women's bodies, further situates Maria within structures that discipline rather than liberate. When she visits Joe's home, she is praised for being so good-natured, and she blushes with pleasure. These small affirmations are the only social currency she receives. Her selfhood is formed through affirmation of docility and maternal helpfulness. She performs womanhood not through active self-definition but through scripted gestures of care, propriety, and silence. Her final song, *"I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls,"* carries an ironic dissonance: it evokes fantasies of aristocratic elevation "With vassals and serfs at my side" (p.75) that sharply contrast with her modest and marginal reality. This disjunction highlights how Maria's desires are mediated through borrowed, patriarchal scripts rather than articulated in her own voice. A material feminist approach (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008) clarifies that Maria's constrained existence arises from both symbolic erasure and material deprivation. Her repetitive domestic rituals embody the limited economic autonomy available to unmarried, working-class women, revealing how gender performativity is reinforced by socioeconomic subordination.

By contrast, Mrs. Mooney appears more empowered than Eveline or Maria. Her ability to leave her abusive husband and take control of a boarding house displays a form of woman's agency uncommon in the other stories. Rather than dismantling dominant gender norms, Mrs. Mooney strategically operates within them, re-performing societal expectations to serve her own goals. Her power reflects a form of pragmatic adaptation rather than transformative resistance. She has left her abusive husband, runs a boarding house, and orchestrates the marriage of her daughter Polly to Mr. Doran. Joyce's metaphor is telling: "She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat" (p. 44). Her agency is assertive and pragmatic. Yet this authority is not subversive. Butler (2006) suggests that gender performances can reveal their constructed nature when repeated with irony or exaggeration. Mrs. Mooney, however, does not parody patriarchy, she reproduces it. She wields the language of social respectability and honor, long-standing tools of patriarchal control, to manipulate Mr. Doran into compliance. In Irigaray's terms, she commodifies Polly for social gain, reinforcing woman's role as an object of exchange. The effectiveness of her strategy is evident when Mr. Doran reflects anxiously on the social consequences of refusing to marry Polly, he imagines escaping his predicament entirely: "He longed to ascend through the roof and fly away to another country where he would never hear again of his trouble" (p. 47). This highlights the social pressures and moral expectations that constrain his agency, while Polly remains largely voiceless in the unfolding drama. Mrs. Mooney's authority is not emancipatory but derivative, exercised within masculine systems of language and exchange. Her victory is not feminist empowerment, but a transaction conducted on patriarchal terms. Yet, as Attridge and Howes (2000) suggest in *Semicolonial Joyce*, such pragmatic agency must also be read within the intersections of gender, class, and colonial capitalism. Mrs. Mooney's control of her boarding house and her daughter's marriage negotiations illustrate how Irish women's agency was materially conditioned by class hierarchies and the moral economies of survival.

Gretta Conroy in "The Dead" stands out among Joyce's women characters for her emotional depth and narrative impact. After Gabriel's romantic overture, she responds with quiet intensity: "I think he died for me" (p.158). Earlier, Gabriel's notes the way light plays across her, describing her as he stood beneath the fanlight: "She was standing right under the dusty fanlight and the flame of the gas lit up the rich bronze of her hair" (p. 152). This visual moment subtly hints at the emotional distance between them, Gretta seems "other," resisting Gabriel's narrative possession through memory and silence. In Irigaray's framework, such retreat reflects how women's desires and subjectivities are often obscured or suppressed within patriarchal discourse. Irigaray (1985a) argues that women lack independent symbolic agency; their voice is frequently mediated or erased within masculine-defined structures of meaning. On the other hand, Butler's theory of performativity explains how identity is both enacted and undone not through grand statements but through the limits of language and action. Gabriel's epiphany at the end, standing at the threshold of sleep and death, reveals gender and selfhood as fragile, unstable constructions, undone by what cannot be performed, possessed, or fully narrated. Gretta's memory of Michael Furey, "I think he died for me" (p. 158), shatters the illusion of intimacy Gabriel has projected. She is not merely a wife, but a bearer of an unknowable past that renders his narrative powerless. Gabriel assumes roles of marital affection, intellectual authority, and cultural superiority throughout the party, but Gretta's silent grief shatters this performative façade. As Butler (2006) argues, the traumatic and unspeakable can disrupt the coherence of gender roles, revealing identity as a fragile construct. Gretta's memory resists Gabriel's interpretive control, and in confronting it, he loses the narrative he thought he commanded. Earlier, Gabriel's declaration, "I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!" (p. 137), asserts Eurocentric detachment, yet Gretta's affective withdrawal undermines that position more deeply. Her retreat into memory is not passivity but, in Irigaray's (1985a) terms, an assertion of subjectivity through what is withheld. "She was fast asleep," Joyce writes (p. 159), yet her silence contains emotional force. Gabriel is left alone, facing "the snow falling faintly through the universe" (p. 160), a symbol of dissolution and the collapse of masculine certainty. Through Gretta, Joyce enacts a quiet subversion: the disruption of patriarchal narration through the power of feminine absence. From a class-conscious feminist standpoint (Fraser, 2016), Gretta's emotional distance also mirrors the silent labor of middle-class women whose affective work sustains masculine selfhood. Her memory of Michael Furey becomes a reminder of how economic and emotional economies intertwine, destabilizing the bourgeois ideal of romantic possession.

Moreover, a class-based reading deepens the analysis of Joyce's women in *Dubliners*. Eveline's economic dependence, Maria's working-class marginalization, and Mrs. Mooney's use of marriage as social mobility all reveal the gendered dimensions of class struggle. From a material feminist perspective (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), their limited choices are not merely symbolic but materially conditioned by labor, income, and social expectations. Nancy Fraser's (2016) concept of social reproduction underscores how women's unpaid domestic

labor sustains the very structures that confine them. In this sense, Joyce's domestic realism exposes how gender performativity operates within the constraints of class and economic survival.

3. Women in Ulysses: Desire, Performance, and Subversive Voice

While women characters in *Dubliners* primarily inhabit spaces of silence, ritual, and limited agency, *Ulysses* presents a broader spectrum of women's subjectivity, moving from passive repetition toward performative self-fashioning and embodied resistance. The shift from characters like Eveline and Maria to Gerty MacDowell and Molly Bloom reflects a transition from women defined by domestic scripts to women who more overtly disrupt gendered expectations. This movement, from spectacle to interiority, from constrained silence to discursive abundance, marks Joyce's evolving engagement with women's consciousness and opens the text to feminist re-readings. Susan Stanford Friedman's (1998) work on gendered narrative voice and cultural identity provides a useful lens for understanding how Joyce's experimentation with form allows gendered subjectivities to emerge and transform across the novel. Similarly, Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985) argues that modernist narrative forms, through fragmentation, non-linearity, and rupture, can encode gender tensions and challenge dominant patriarchal structures, a framework that resonates with Joyce's stylistic innovations, particularly in "Penelope."

Joyce's portrayal of women in *Ulysses* also reflects intersections of gender and class. As Marjorie Howes (in *Semicolonial Joyce*, 2000) observes, Molly Bloom's linguistic and sexual freedom emerges within the material realities of colonial Dublin, where gendered identity is entangled with class position and national subjection. Thus, Joyce's feminist subversions are never detached from the socioeconomic landscape that frames them.

In the "Nausicaa" episode, Gerty MacDowell constructs herself through borrowed imagery of sentimental fiction and Catholic virtue. Her thoughts echo romance novel tropes: "There was an innate refinement, a languid queenly hauteur about Gerty…" (p. 635). Gerty's narrative voice is filled with clichés, a pastiche of consumer culture and patriarchal fantasy. Her self-presentation, adjusting her stockings, displaying her ankle, is a carefully performed script designed to be watched, and Joyce's ornate, sentimental prose parodies Gerty's own internalized romantic ideals. A material feminist reading (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008) further exposes how Gerty's self-stylization is shaped by the commodification of femininity in early modern consumer culture. Her performance of purity and desire reflects the circulation of women as aesthetic and economic objects within patriarchal capitalism. The exaggerated, florid style of Gerty's internal monologue reflects her absorption in romantic ideals drawn from popular fiction, positioning her femininity as a performative spectacle. The narrative structure, which oscillates between her thoughts and Bloom's gaze, implicates the reader in a layered voyeurism: Gerty imagines herself as the object of desire, unaware that she is indeed being observed. This dual perspective exposes how gender is co-constructed through both self-stylization and external consumption. Her

actions are described as deliberate posing, embodying the aesthetics of idealized womanhood. Butler's (2006) theory of gender performativity offers a useful lens here: Gerty's femininity does not stem from a stable identity but is "performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (p. 34). Her speech and gestures imitate cultural scripts of desirable femininity, revealing gender as a citation of norms rather than their origin. The illusion falters when Gerty rises and her physical limp becomes visible, a rupture in the fantasy that underscores the fragile construction of her persona. Irigaray (1985a) would suggest that Gerty operates within a masculine symbolic order where the woman is both idealized and consumed. Her thoughts reveal how her subjectivity is constructed through male desire. As she imagines "no prince charming is her beau ideal... but rather a manly man with a strong quiet face" (Joyce, n.d., p. 641), Gerty conforms to romantic ideals that render her legible only through feminine display. The religious imagery in her inner monologue ties her identity to purity and sacrifice, echoing Freud's (1912) Madonna-Whore complex. Yet Joyce's juxtaposition of her sentimental fantasy with Bloom's voyeurism critiques this dynamic, exposing how femininity is staged and simultaneously devalued. Gerty's performance anticipates what Gill (2007) describes in postfeminist media culture: femininity as a bodily project, constantly surveilled and self-regulated under the guise of empowerment.

In contrast, Molly Bloom in the "Penelope" episode speaks in a raw, associative, and uninterrupted monologue that defies narrative containment. This unmediated narrative foregrounds the body not merely as theme but as voice, placing women's corporeality at the center of narrative production. Her corporeal, sexual, domestic, and emotional thoughts flow without punctuation, asserting a feminine subjectivity that is sensual and self-affirming: "I was a flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair" (p. 1303). Molly's direct expression of desire and thought not only subverts masculine narrative norms but also re-inscribes women's embodiment into the act of storytelling. Toril Moi's feminist theory, developed in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), provides a framework for understanding how feminine narrative voice acts as a challenge to patriarchal discourse. Her concept of feminist language emphasizes how narrative form, especially the stream of consciousness, can disrupt male-centered authority, allowing the body and subjective women's experiences to speak for themselves. Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique thus becomes crucial. It offers direct access to Molly Bloom's interiority, bypassing patriarchal mediation and staging her voice as a site of resistance and self-creation. Unlike Gerty's stylized and externalized narrative mode, filtered through sentimental tropes and a third-person narrator, Molly's voice flows unimpeded, unpunctuated, and unrevised. The narrative form itself becomes an enactment of feminist resistance, where language mimics the rhythms of thought and embodiment.

Molly Bloom's monologue resists stable definitions of gender identity. Her recollection, "because he never did a thing like that before" (p. 1217), expresses disappointment in Bloom's emotional and sexual withdrawal, pointing to the fractures within their marriage. Unlike the passive women's roles often inscribed

in patriarchal discourse, Molly's sexuality is expressive and unapologetic. She thinks openly about her affair with Boylan and reflects sensually on her own body and desires. Her language, "I was a flower of the mountain" (p.1303), marks a return to a woman-centered sexual experience, one grounded in affect and corporeality. Butler's theory of performativity helps illuminate this refusal of coherence. Molly's voice shows that femininity is not a stable essence but a shifting construct. Her repeated "yes" becomes an assertion of presence that evades closure. In contrast to Gerty's staged femininity, Molly's speech reveals the dissonance between inner life and social scripting, positioning her as both subject of desire and agent of critique. Irigaray (1985a) emphasizes the need for women's language not anchored in masculine logic. Molly's speech approximates this: it is circular, rhythmic, and embodied. It represents what Hélène Cixous (1976) later called écriture feminine, a form of writing that expresses the woman's body and desire. Molly's closing lines: "and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (p. 1305) are an affirmation not of men's possession but of a self-possessed voice. This final "yes" gains significance when viewed against earlier moments in the novel where consent and compliance are shaped by social expectation such as Gerty's performance for the male gaze, which implies an internalized, unconscious assent to objectification. Molly's repetition of "yes" at the close of *Ulysses* transforms a historically loaded signifier of feminine compliance into an expression of sexual agency and embodied affirmation. Rather than a passive acquiescence, her "yes" pulses with sensuality, memory, and desire, breaking free from patriarchal containment. In this way, it resonates with Luce Irigaray's (1985) call for a feminine mode of expression that resists the linear, logical, and monolithic structure of phallocentric discourse. Irigaray envisions a feminine language that is fluid, multiple, and intimately tied to the body, qualities that characterize Molly's unpunctuated, rhythmic monologue. Simultaneously, Molly's voice echoes Hélène Cixous's (1976) concept of *écriture féminine*, a writing of the body that disrupts fixed meaning through multiplicity, affect, and desire. Molly does not merely speak, she writes herself into being, asserting a subjectivity grounded in the body's lived rhythms. Her final "yes" becomes not a closure but a generative affirmation, a linguistic act of feminine self-inscription that challenges the symbolic order. When viewed through the lens of social reproduction theory (Vogel, 2013; Fraser, 2016), Molly's monologue can also be read as an articulation of domestic labor and affective exhaustion. Her embodied voice exposes the tensions between sexual autonomy and the economic dependence that structures women's lived experiences in patriarchal modernity.

4. Conclusion

This study's synthesis of feminist perspectives, from Butler's performativity and Irigaray's symbolic critique to more recent material and social reproduction theories, reveals that Joyce's representations of women intertwine performative identity, embodiment, and classed material conditions. Gender in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* thus emerges not as an isolated discourse of identity but as a network shaped by economic, social, and symbolic forces.

In *Dubliners*, Joyce articulates the paralysis of the feminine as both a psychological and material condition. Eveline's immobilized body at the dock, Maria's ritualized gestures, Mrs. Mooney's tactical manipulation of patriarchal codes, and Gretta Conroy's opaque subjectivity delineate a continuum of female experience grounded in social conformity yet charged with latent resistance. Each character embodies what Butler (2006) terms the precariousness of performative identity, the possibility that repetition might fail and thus reveal the instability of the norm itself. At the same time, Joyce situates these women within the structures of class and labor that material feminists such as Fraser (2016) and Vogel (2013) identify as foundational to gendered oppression. The domestic, religious, and economic forces that define their existence expose the intersection between the symbolic and the material, between ideology and the lived body. In this sense, Joyce's early realism becomes a critique not only of social morality but of the very representational systems through which womanhood is constructed and constrained. *Ulysses* extends and transforms this critique. In Gerty MacDowell, Joyce presents a consciousness assembled through borrowed language, advertisements, romance clichés, Catholic modesty, demonstrating the colonization of female identity by consumerist and patriarchal discourse. Her carefully curated femininity exemplifies what Irigaray (1985a) would call the mimicry of masculine desire, a performance that exposes rather than conceals its own artificiality. Molly Bloom, by contrast, articulates a form of linguistic and bodily autonomy unprecedented in modernist fiction. When read through the framework of material feminism (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), Molly's voice also underscores the corporeal and reproductive dimensions of identity, revealing how domestic labor, sexuality, and language intersect as sites of both oppression and agency.

Across these texts, Joyce's experimentation with narrative form parallels his interrogation of gender. Fragmented perspectives, shifting focalization, and interior monologue enact the instability they describe: the disintegration of fixed identity categories and the exposure of meaning as performative and contingent. Joyce's women are not emancipatory figures in the conventional sense, yet they dramatize the tension between conformity and subversion that constitutes the very possibility of feminist critique. Their silences, repetitions, and deviations are not mere symptoms of oppression but signify points where the patriarchal order begins to fissure. Thus, Joyce's fiction operates as a laboratory of feminist thought avant la letter, a space where gender's performative contradictions are staged and deconstructed. His portrayal of women as both subjects and symbols illuminates the interdependence of language, power, and embodiment in the making of identity. Ultimately, by situating femininity within the material and symbolic economies of modern Dublin, Joyce exposes the cultural scripts that confine women even as he imagines new modes of articulating their subjectivity.

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