

# Themes in modern literature essay sample

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Modernism in “ Aunt Helen”, by T. S. Eliot and “ Eleanor Rigby”, by John Lennon and Paul McCartney “ Aunt Helen”, by T. S. Eliot and “ Eleanor Rigby”, by John Lennon and Paul McCartney are poems which comprise characteristics of modernism. Loneliness, social alienation and isolation, double standard and relegation of religion are the main themes emerge from these literary pieces. Miss Helen Slingsby, the poet’s aunt in “ Aunt Helen”, was an unmarried woman who lived alone, except for her servants and pets. Aunt Helen was aloof and isolated, and after her death there was silence on earth and in heaven. The repetition of the word “ silence” represents the lack of interest in her. Not only that her death resulted in indifference but she had no impact on anyone’s life but her parrot, which “ shortly afterwards...died too.” “ Eleanor Rigby” is also about social alienation and isolation. Both Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie were lonely people, who lived in the same alienating society, worked in a church but failed to make any significant contact with people around them or with each other.

Eleanor was the cleaner of a church, dreamed to get married but had to settle for picking up the rice after other’s weddings and “ waiting at the window” for someone who would not show up. Father McKenzie was a priest who wrote sermons to believers that wouldn’t listen (“ no one will hear”) and spent his nights mending his socks so he could look notable in the eyes of people who excluded themselves from church (“ No one come near.”) Double standard is another theme in these two poems. Aunt Helen “ lived in a small house near a fashionable square” and “ cared for by servants”. She was a “ proper Bostonian”, a social class who had been the vanguard of American idealism and progressive thinking and set the standards for taste and good

judgment. She didn't have a family of her own, and thus she left her legacy to her dogs and parrot ("The dogs were handsomely provided for"). She cared only for her pets and left nothing to her servants who cared for her and outwardly abided by her rules.

The servants were 'careful' while the aunt lived but after she was gone, they were engaging in the kind of sexual activity she would have despised.

Eleanor Rigby was a woman who had to wear the "face that she keeps in a jar by the door." She put on the face of a nice religious person, symbolically she hid her true empty self. Father McKenzie, by "darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there", was ashamed and hid himself just as Eleanor did. Both "Aunt Helen" and "Eleanor Rigby" jest ironically at the futility of spiritual quests. The poems evoke spiritual emptiness. In the first, "the undertaker wiped his feet—He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before" and the footman "holding the second housemaid on his knees - who had always been so careful while her mistress lived" symbolizes the moving away from religion as well as the breaking of old values. In the latter the names of Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie suggest they both were Irish, and the church, as a setting, implies on their Catholicism. According to the Christian doctrine, salvation refers to the phenomenon of the soul being saved from some unfortunate destiny by divine agency, Father McKenzie in "Eleanor Rigby".

However, Eleanor Rigby ended up dead "in the church and was buried along with her name" and not only her, but "no one was saved". The last line of stanza 3 symbolizes the break of religious faith and the estrangement of modern society. T. S. Eliot and Lennon and McCartney make use of from and <https://assignbuster.com/themes-in-modern-literature-essay-sample/>

style in order to convey their message. In “Eleanor Rigby”, the sequence of structure is inconsistent. The decreasing length of lines 2 and 4 in the three stanzas, as well as the interrogatives in the closing line of each, build tension until the inevitable end of Eleanor Rigby and the imperative statement that “no one was saved”. It seems as if loneliness is worsening as time pass on, and ends in a forlorn death. In a first glance, “Aunt Helen” gives the impression of a paragraph consists of five run on sentences and no pattern. The form, which doesn’t seem to be poetic in stanza form and lacks pattern, accentuates the absence, or emptiness, in Miss Helen Slingsby’s life. Although both poems’ form expresses a similar theme of loneliness, they are very different in their structure.

While “Eleanor Rigby” is divided into three stanzas, consisting of a verse and a chorus, that are rhymed in the same pattern – the first and the second lines rhyme as well as the third and the forth, “Aunt Helen” has a more free form. The five sentences assembled in the poem are differed in length and the rhyming scheme is inconsistent – the last word of the second sentence rhymes with the last word in the following line (“street” and “feet”), and it is the same in the next sentence. However, the next rhyme has a different pattern – the first line in the last sentence rhymes with the third line of the sentence (“mantelpiece” and “on his knees”). Aunt Helen’s life and death are described in a somewhat formal way, as mostly brief and to the points words are used. There are commas and full stops and no question marks or exclamation marks. While “Aunt Helen’s” informative nature emphasizes the lack of metaphors, Eleanor Rigby “Lives in a dream”, wears “a face she keeps in a jar” and is “Buried along with her name”.

“Eleanor Rigby” opens with foreshadowing the introduction of two lonely people “Ah, look at all the lonely people!” The end of the poem – the death of Eleanor Rigby – is almost expected, while the formality used in “Aunt Helen” avails in creating an unexpected revelation – the rejection of “old” morality, expressed in the act of the two servants on the dining room. The writers use symbols to communicate their messages. Eleanor Rigby “picks up the rice in a church where a wedding has been”. This symbol of unification of two people in a wedding ceremony contradicts the main theme of the poem – loneliness.

In “Aunt Helen” the reference to the Dresden clock continuing after her death symbolizes the alienation of a society in which people don’t leave a significant effect. Time continues without them. The overuse of “no one” and “nobody” in “Eleanor Rigby” intends to establish the theme of loneliness and alienation. The narrator mocks both Eleanor Rigby, who “was buried along with her name”, and Father McKenzie, who meant nothing to nobody, and whose only accomplishment was the burying of Eleanor Rigby. In “Aunt Helen” it is the repetition of “silence” that conveys this theme. T. S. Eliot and Lennon and McCartney deal in their poems with modern themes – solitude and faith fading. In “Aunt Helen” and “Eleanor Rigby” the writers demonstrate these issues by using contemporary free form and language.