

Hardly joyous: servitude in hardy and joyce



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Both James Joyce's *Eveline* and Thomas Hardy's *The Son's Veto* express the negative effects that service has upon an individual's life. While Joyce uses an intimate obligation, a promise to a dying mother, Hardy's story addresses a wider cultural restriction that is created by social class systems. This paper will explore the disdain felt by both authors towards the obligation of an individual to serve others. Both stories contain a crippling of sorts. *The Son's Veto* centers on a woman, Sophy, who, while dutifully serving the vicar, Mr. Twycott, injures her ankle and has her mobility restricted for life. "Since she was forbidden to walk and bustle about, and indeed, could not do so, it became her duty to leave" (616) Her injury is not discussed with compassion at first. It is her duty to leave. Hardy's language depicts service to the house before consideration of such social compassion as asking for a form of worker's compensation. The novel's connection between service and its negative effects foreshadows the later crippling of her ability to marry out of joy due to her son's wishes. Even in her first marriage, Sophy is unable to express free will due to her servile position. "'No, Sophy; lame or not lame, I cannot let you go. You must never leave me again'" (616). It is not her choice to get married; alas, she marries anyway. Not because marriage will help her financial status, but instead because of the fact that "she had a respect for him which almost amounted to veneration" (Broadview, pg. 616). Sophy's respect comes from her position as his inferior. As the serving class, she has been crippled. Joyce constructs the character *Eveline* in a similar manner to Hardy's *Sophy*. The collection in which she appears, *Dubliners*, emphasizes Joyce's conception of Dublin as a place of paralysis. Yet, even in the story's introduction, *Eveline* appears as a girl whom has had her decision making abilities crippled. There was a time when she could play in the fields

but “ then a man from Belfast bought the field and built houses on it” (20). Even when the field was still present, her father would interrupt the games by chasing them down with his blackthorn stick. Her inability to make decisions is coupled with the physical threat of her father in this scene where service to the economy has trampled the individual’s enjoyment of the land. Furthermore, Eveline’s agency is restricted by her family’s needs. Her mother has passed away and her father has begun to drink heavily. His behavior forces her to “ always give her entire wages-seven shillings” to feed the family (21). Even then, when Eveline has abandoned any possibility of using her money for her own advancement, she must argue with her father and, only at the last minute, hurry out on Saturday night to shop for the family. She has been economically handicapped, much like Sophy with her ankle. Significantly, Sophy’s ankle is not the last of her troubles. Upon her husband’s death, her son refuses to let her marry an old acquaintance, Sam, because of the cultural stain it would place upon him as a ‘ gentleman’. He forces her to swear to God and claims “ I owe this to my father” (621). Not only does he prevent her from marrying a man that cares for her, but also, Randolph manages to become crippled himself. He, the priest, who by position is supposed to be a beacon of light, appears “ black as a cloud” at his mother’s funeral (621). His final appearance symbolizes the darkness that he has driven into his soul. He has lost his father and his love for his mother a long time ago and now the effects of serving his social class and his father’s name have blackened him with evil. In comparison, Eveline after deciding to hold true her promise to “ keep the home together as long as she could” as her deceased mother instructed, appears ghost-like. She appears paralyzed or dead with “ her white face...passive, like a helpless animal. Her

eyes (giving him) no sign of love or farewell or recognition" (23). She is corpselike due to her service of her mother's last wishes. Eveline could have left for financial stability and love and the tropics but instead she is held behind as if her mother's cold, dead hand had reached up from the grave to keep her there. Both Hardy and Joyce manage to demonstrate the negative effects of service on an individual's ability to dream. Both main characters dream of marriage and stability and a more positive life. However, their position of social, financial, and emotional servitude restricts their ability to pursue that happiness. Both novels suggest that it is only through liberation from servitude to others that the individual can achieve true freedom.