

An Analysis of Female Images in Dubliners from the Perspective of the Other

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Abstract: James Joyce, one of the most influential and innovative writers of the 20th century, is the author of the short story collection *Dubliners* that expresses the theme of Irish mental paralysis and shows more female characters than any other works of James Joyce. However, due to British colonization and the Catholic Church, Joyce inevitably presents Irish women as the Other. According to the theory of the Other put forward by existentialist feminist Simone de Beauvoir, which holds that women's inferiority is caused not by biological differences but by culture, the paper analyzes the reasons why female is considered as the Other and presents female images in *Dubliners*.

Keywords: *Dubliners*; The Other; Female images

1. Introduction

In the summer of 1904, while still living in Dublin, Joyce began publishing a series of short stories in a newspaper, the *Irish Homestead*. The stories would eventually grow into a collection titled *Dubliners*. In 1914, Ireland was under the control of Great Britain and the Nationalist movement. *Dubliners* depicts the life of the lower middle class of Dublin in the early twentieth century with realistic and satirical expressions, paralysis and death throughout the book. The various stories are all marked by epiphanies, in which a character experiences a profound realization about life or themselves. The *Dubliners*' characters, ranging from school-skipping boys, old maids, teenage girls, cunning tramps, etc., live in the city of Dublin, feeling lonely, stupid, or desperate.

2. Simone de Beauvoir's Theory of the Other

Simone de Beauvoir, a French existentialist writer, is one of the founders of feminist movement. After the two world wars, Beauvoir felt that gender inequality was becoming more pronounced. Because of the war, a number of men were sent to the battlefield, leading to social production work cannot continue. In this case, the government had to allow the women to get the liberation. Women believed that they get had a new lease of life and took the initiative to join all sorts of work in society, expecting to be able to get equal pay as men. It seemed that women began to achieve equal rights and be freed from fixed ideas. Life had really improved and was no longer like it used to be. But after the war, men returned to society and women became "redundant" again. The government returned society to men in an attempt to make social life go back to the way it had been before the war. In this circumstance, women faced being fired by the boss, which meant that they were forced to give up their work used to spend a lot of passion. Even if some women broke through to hold their own work, their situation was still very difficult. In the face of discrimination in work and demanding treatment, women were deeply stung by the unfair society. However, they used to dare not speak out, just struggling in this unequal society. After a series of thinking and exploration, Simone de Beauvoir found the unshakable subordination of women from beginning to end. Combined with some other thoughts, the concept of the Other was incorporated into the thought of female human rights, and the famous "Woman is the other" was put forward. The famous phrase that "one is not born, but she becomes." (Beauvoir, 1974, 295) greatly influences the development of feminism.

3. The Female Images of Women as The Other in Patriarchy

In *Dubliners*, Joyce recreates the domestic life he witnessed as a child: the women are obedient and dutiful and the men are

“drunk, robbed of their money, and in debt”. (James Joyce, 1982) The home is more like a prison for women, and it is the women who most need to break it. However, the women have the least power to do so.

3.1 Disappointed Spinters

Maria, the heroine in *Clay*, is a kind single old woman with a warm personality. She stays in the laundry all day. The children help her get the job. Maria may not even find a job to make a living alone without her children's help. Maria is not married or living with her children, and her colleagues often make fun of her single life. Although she says she doesn't need a man, her desire for love can be seen in a meeting with a gentleman on the tram. At a family party on Halloween, Maria feels something soft and wet in a blindfold game. The clay Maria comes into contact with is associated with death and burial. It seems that Maria's life will die step by step in loneliness and desolation, and her desire for love will be buried by reality. Maria lives in an era when women have no marriage or family, no support or happiness, which is considered as unfortunate.

In the story, Maria is an old spinster who doesn't marry anybody. *The Second Sex*, written by Simone de Beauvoir (1997), wrote that “Men often regard spinsters as mean, obnoxious women in the traditional male system.” She is an object independent of a man's value. Men assume that women will eventually return to marriage, family, and even become part of their husband's property. As far as men are concerned, she becomes a monster, unable to communicate with people, away from the domination of men -- a completely different existence. Obviously, in a male society, an old maid cannot be a normal person.

3.2 Desperate Housewives

Mrs. Chandler in *A Little Cloud* is a female representative who obeys tradition. She is occupied by chores and her family members without any spare time to enjoy herself, but her husband, Little Chandler, is a man who has fantasy. Poetry is his favorite thing. This is something his wife cannot understand, so he never reads poetry to her. His wife is beautiful but very practical. Little Chandler once bought his wife a shirt. She tried it on and liked it, but when she saw the price, she decided to return it. It can be seen that in the family life, Little Chandler is not happy, no one can communicate with him and his spiritual world is lonely. He has no idea how to communicate with his wife at home. He is so coward that he can't bravely pursue his dream and try his best to realize it. Therefore, there must be some conflicts between them. Mrs. Chandler is dissatisfied with her present life, for she is stuck in the whole family. Therefore, she can't control herself and loses temper when she finds that the family is out of her expectancy. Unluckily, she lacks the ability to look for the reasons for her dissatisfaction and believes that a traditional wife is the highest principle of a woman's life, for she grows up in a male dominated society and is subject to passive patriarchy and ideological hierarchy. (Zhang Hui, 2022) She lacks the ability to realize her paralysis, let alone change her life and fight against fate. Desperately, she chose to follow social customs and continued to be an unhappy traditional wife.

4. The Female Images of Women as The Other in Religion

The origin of female subordination can go back to the Bible. In the Bible, Eve, the first woman, came from one of the ribs of her husband, Adam, and was therefore physically and spiritually inferior to Adam, like an accessory. She was not born for herself, but as an adjunct to Adam. So women are supposed to be submissive and need constant care and tolerance. Just as Frazer has said, “Men make the gods, women worship them.” Women play a secondary role in the family, having no real say in decision-making, and are deprived of many of their privileges at home. After being labeled as “daughter”, “wife” and “sister”, women have to take on the responsibilities within the family and accept their auxiliary identity, and gradually become victims of male domination. Men indeed decide whether their supreme divinities shall be females or males; women's place in society is always that which men assign to them; at no time have they ever imposed their own law (Beauvoir 1974: 109).

4.1 Unfaithful Wives

“The body of a virgin is like the freshness of secret springs, the morning sheen of an unopened flower, the eastern sheen of a pearl on which the sun has never shone” (De Beauvoir 1974:186). In “A Painful Case,” Mrs. Sinico, despite her wealth, feels the emptiness of her marriage. Mr. Sinico doesn't care about her at all. In his eyes, his wife has no charm at all. Mrs. Sinico is bored and lonely all day in her life until one day she meets Mr. Duffy at a concert in Earlfort Terrace. Mr. Duffy, a cashier in a private bank, is quite stoic. Mrs. Sinico strikes up a conversation with Mr. Duffy, and from then on they begin dating. They exchange ideas about books, music, and spiritual life, and both enjoy the spiritual world they create. Two lonely souls comfort each other and intertwine their thoughts. Mrs. Sinico no longer feels lonely and isolated; she finally finds hope in life. But in *Stoic Dublin*, normal relations between married women and single men are forbidden. When the intrepid heroine, Mrs. Sinico, enthusiastically takes Mr. Duffy's hand, presses it to her cheek and takes her first steps in the pursuit of her own happiness, she clearly crosses the moral boundaries drawn by society.

As a traditionally married woman, she is not supposed to have any intimate relationship with any man except her own husband. If she had done so, she would surely have been severely punished. In Mr. Duffy's opinion, "friendship" between men and women should not involve sexual relations. To him, Mrs. Sinico seems like a dirty, flirtatious slut who is the real destroyer of their relationship. So he decides to break up with Mrs. Sinico. She should be condemned and hated like the evil Eve.

4.2 Obedient Sister

An elder daughter in Dublin, is due to play the role of a second mother in the family. She must appear weak, gentle, and hard-working in the name of being feminine. There were few opportunities for women to work and economic independence in Ireland at the beginning of the 20th century. (Miao Chunqi, 2004) In this social environment, most women have no choice but marriage and family. "The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to bring the woman the promised happiness -- there is no guarantee of happiness -- but that it leaves the woman incomplete; She was doomed to repetition and routine" (De Beauvoir 1974:496). Eveline is the story of a young woman who attempts to escape his father's abuse. Unfortunately, like other women of her time, she has no independent financial ability, and the freedom she longs for is just her fantasy of marriage life. When she stands on the dock, she suddenly realizes that her future might repeat her mother's life, the slavery, abuse and endless self-sacrifice associated with marriage. "My mother sacrificed everything in her ordinary life and died of madness." (James Joyce,1982) It seems that women have no way out in the society at that time, and resistance is doomed to failure.

5. Conclusion

According to Simone De Beauvoir's "the other" theory, women are not born women. James Joyce successfully shows the miserable fate of Dublin women by revealing the limited roles of Dublin women. It is the limitation of female role that leads to the tragic status of female as the second sex. Thus, Joyce made a mockery of traditional notions of gender. These Dublin women turn out to be disappointed spinsters, desperate housewives, unfaithful wives and obedient sisters. It is through this subversion of traditional notion of gender that James Joyce deconstructs the cultural myths to the very core.

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