

Feminine Narration: a Feminist Study of *Dubliners* by James Joyce

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Abstract—This preliminary feminist study of *Dubliners* by James Joyce focuses on three female characters in three short stories by applying postfeminist criteria to explore their Other unique feminine narration which challenge and disrupt the conventional masculine cultural system. Following the notion of “the otherness”, these three women’s subjectivity, namely Eveline’s soliloquy narration, Maria’s narcissism narration and Mrs. Sinico’s spiritual narration, have been constructed through interpreting their detailed relevant descriptions in the text. As a result, to some extent, these kinds of narration, which present women’s marginalized modes of narration and differentiate incredibility, have constructed their own feminine narration, as well as, subverted and transcended the dominant masculine system.

Keywords—feminine narration; the otherness; subjectivity; *Dubliners*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dubliners, a collection of 15 short stories, is the first product of Joyce’s lifetime preoccupation with Dublin life. This paper aims to shed light on the feminist analysis of three female characters chosen from *Dubliners*, namely, Eveline in *Eveline*, Maria in *Clay* and Mrs. Sinico in *A painful Case*. These three females, from perspective of postfeminist concept of “the Otherness”, (Siegel 49) have performed their own unique modes of narration which imply marginalization, incredibility and even the potential force to disrupt the existed masculine cultural system. Firstly, Eveline’s monologue presents her Other fluid mode of thinking evidently that disobeys the male tradition — a linear, purposeful mode of thinking. The mode of thinking is, by means of peculiar female sensitivity, free from the bonds of time shuttling back and forth among the past, the present and the future. With this, Eveline’s Other thinking mode, rather discursive or fluid, comes into being. Secondly, Maria, as a spinster, insists on her own way of living without thinking of the traditional appreciation of the woman’s appearance. She acts out her awareness of her own feminine beauty during looking at the reflective image in mirror. Being different from the male narcissism, Maria draws support from the mirror to discover and construct her Self. Finally, Mrs. Sinico, confronting the indifference from her husband and her daughter, shows her rebellious emotion to enjoy her spiritual life. During the days she and Mr. Duffy spend altogether, Mrs. Sinico fulfills her desire to communicate

with others, even to be Mr. Duffy’s confessor. She has constructed her own world based on her pursuit of her own spiritual life. On account of the feminist analysis, existentially varied female narrations incarnate the substantially transcending force that blurs the vested binary between man and woman.

II. EVELINE’S FLUID NARRATION

In the overall structure of *Dubliners*, *Eveline* is the first story of the sequence devoted to adolescence. It mainly describes Eveline’s monologue shaping her conflicting thoughts concerning whether she would escape with her boyfriend named Frank for new life abroad. She, though, falls into hesitation, partially out of a sense of duty to the family after her mother’s death in spite of being a victim of her father’s drunkenness and brutality, and partially fears of an adventurous future. In the process of struggling, the sounds from street remind her of her mother’s behest of keeping the house together as long as she could, and of revolt against the life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness. (Joyce 16) Finally, she stands at the station, but she feels completely paralysed and cannot follow Frank.

The story shows a definite shifting of the point of view. The third person is used and two voices at least can be heard: the narrator’s and Eveline’s monologues are interwoven. The Eveline’s monologue highlights the unique dimension of thinking that breaks bounds of time. From the whole description, soliloquy holds the majority of content, providing rich proofs for the Other female mode of thinking. In addition, the thinking characterizes her Other manner, namely uncertainty and her emotionally double-minded thoughts.

Uncertainty here is referred to seemingly fluid and unstable feminine narration. What Eveline emits is fluidity that disrupts the tyranny of unitary meaning and logo-centric discourse, (Nicholson 8) embodied in uncertainty of time and of theme. With Eveline’s own feminine sensitivity, her thinking is free from the time limits, shuttling back and forth among the past, the present and the future freely. With the characteristic, her thinking breaks through the bounds of time representing instability, discursiveness and flow. Another thing is uncertainty of theme also. Her thinking is frequently distracted from the theme by some trivial things, such as the sounds from the background that plays a

significant role in presenting her Other mode of thinking. Her attention is usually diverted and paid to some trivial things that appear her mind accidentally. Then, naturally, her thinking is flowing with what she hears.

Evenline's chain of thinking is continuously woven in the conception of the past, the present and the future. Initially, sitting at the window, she is caught in meditation. When she hears someone passing, she begins at once to recall her past childhood that is brought into mind during her pondering the footsteps. And then, her thinking is drawn from the previous experience to the reality. She knows that she, her brothers and sisters are all grown up, her mother died, Tizzie Dunn died too, and the Waters went back to England. Everything changes. (Joyce 23) Until that moment, her thoughts just come back to the point, leaving her home for Frank. At the same time, she is looking around for home, a yellowing priest photograph draws her attention, and simultaneously her father's words come into her mind. Her thinking is always lingering between the past and the present, from the picture to the words by her father. Furthermore, she recalls her treatment from her father at present but frequently inserts her earlier maltreatment she experienced. Now, she feels sometimes herself in danger of her father's violence. (25) She gets nobody to protect her in reality. Slowly, her thought falls into the detailed experiences, such as the invariable squabble for money, hard work to keep the house together, etc. On the other hand, she is, as a matter of fact, involved in hesitation about her elopement with Frank. Seemingly meanwhile, she is dreaming about her new life and depiction of a blueprint in details with Frank. Only in this way, her decision has been strengthened heading for a new life. Eveline's yearning for change shows in her memories of the past, pondering of the present and imagination of the future. Recalling her romance with Frank and her father's attitude towards their affair, Evenline's thinking returns to the reality. After she made decision, standing at the station with Frank, she is thinking of her future fate but uncontrollably recalling back to the past and falling into the condition by now. From discussion above, her thinking is manifested apparently in her memories, her pondering and her imagination. The mode of thinking is free from the constraints of time bounds, shifting freely from the past, the present and the future.

Moreover, uncertainty of theme is also exhibited in her Other feminine narration, which is caused by her sensitivity to the sounds from the background. (Beauvior 146) Eveline, to a certain extent, is distracted by a casual sound and her thoughts may follow the sound unconsciously so that her thinking has been shifted from one topic to another. In the process of consideration, due to her sensitivity, her thinking is frequently decentralized by some trivial things, which might have nothing to do with her points to make decision. The influence of the sounds infers her sensitivity to trivial that embodies her peculiar feminine narration. At first, she is sitting at home, and may not think about anything (nothing is mentioned in the text). But when she hears the footsteps from the background, she begins to follow the tracks of the sound unconsciously. For it, she recalls the earlier appearance of the field where her companions and she played every evening. The footsteps provide the hints for her

to bring her memories back. Bring the time when she was a child and her mother was still alive. And then, her thinking continues to recall the changes of the field. And she brings her thinking back to the present, looking around the room she is in. One picture has caught her attention, and then she begins to think over who is the priest. But when her father's words came into her mind, immediately, her thinking is shifted to her decision about escape. The association from the photograph, as an interlude, is resulted in the divergent thinking present in her leaping and unstable thinking. Furthermore, although at the time leaving for station is approaching, she is still sitting by the window thinking about her father might not as bad as she thinks. At the same time, she can hear a street organ playing down far in the avenue while indulging in her re-judging her father. Following the music, her promise to her mother appears in her mind reminding her of the responsibility for the family as the eldest child. The music reminds her of the moment her mother is dying. As she thinks back the pitiful vision of her mother's life, she trembles as she hears again her mother's voice saying constantly with foolish insistence. That implies her thinking is easily distracted by the sound which is similar to what she hears before. The casual music, as a reminder, gets her mind to focus on her experience and unpleasant undergoing, which reflects her difficult choice. With the influence of the background sounds, her thinking is flowing freely in her own dimension, so Evenline's uncertainty of theme represents fully Other fluidity in her thinking.

Thirdly, Evenline's double-minded thinking undoubtedly serves for her feminine demonstration of the fluid mode of thinking. On the whole, she is confronting a question of "to be or not to be". Between the family and her completely new life, her mode of thinking displays hesitation, and it is escaping from masculine arbitrariness. Without reaching the extremity, her thinking represents the fluidity, which carries female emotionalism proposed by Simone de Beauvior. This lack in stability and control underlies woman's emotionalism. (152) Before making a choice, Evenline tried to weigh each side of the question. Thus she never puts each side to the extremity but leaves aside some space to each side of a question because she frequently considers the questions with her own emotions. Once one side of a problem in her thinking becomes overweight, her thinking would be withdrawn towards another side. In her double-minded thinking, her mode of thinking has been exhibited with her ambivalent feelings. Every time she thinks over a matter, her mind inevitably is swinging back and forth between two sides. Originally, her first sentence accounts for her father's brutality and violence at that moment, and yet her thinking is turning to another side — her father occasional kindness towards her. With it, her father's image is lingering between the violent and the kind one, and between the badness and the goodness. She is struggling between her affection for her father that exists innately and her abhorrence that she lives under the shadow of her father's violence. Eveline's thinking continuously sways between the bad faith and the good faith. Her father's image, a typical patriarchal male, a brutal and violent but occasionally nice father, has come into being among her double-minded thinking.

Therefore, Evenline's thinking is fluid. Following post-feminist conception of the Other, female can construct her subjectivity in her Other manner by ignoring the male conventions. The pioneer Simone de Beauvoir proposes if man's transcendence and subjectivity involves objectification of woman, the most obvious reversal would be to objectify man. (Raman Selden 159) Evenline's soliloquy breaks through the bounds of time and theme. Her divergent and double-minded thinking is free from the linear masculine thinking focusing on one thing to produce a logical analysis according to the hierarchical relationship. (Foucault 226)

III. MARIA'S NARCISSIST NARRATION

Maria is the leading role in *Clay*, the shortest story in the collection. The story is about a popular and ancient divination game played on All Hallow's Eve. Various items are arranged and a blindfolded person has to choose one of them. Generally, a ring is included and if a woman touches it, this is a sign that she would marry in the following year; If she touches a prayer book, she would go into a convent; Traditionally, if touches a piece of clay, she would die. Maria, the heroine, is employed at Dublin by Lamplight institution as a laundry. On Halloween day she takes a tram to the Pillar and goes shopping nearby. She buys some candy for children and some plum-cake for the Donnelly's. But unfortunately she leaves the cake on the tram and then she boards another tram going north towards Drumcondra and gets off at the Canal Bridge. Finally she arrives at Donnelly's house, her brother's family, with some candy. Taking with Joe for a while, Maria is invited to participate in the game. Blindfolded Maria is led to the table to see what she would get. She touches a soft wet substance that is clay. Although she is given another chance to play after a while, the story ends with a gloomy song.

Maria's existence, as a spinster, conveys a potentially transcending force over the male conventions. In the masculine system, according to the post-feminist notions, men generally consider a spinster as a narrow-minded and detestable woman who is the object independent from the male value. (Kimmel 286) Men assert women must finally fall back to marriage and family being as a part of husbands' possession. Consequently, for a virgin, who is not conquered by a man to step off from the marriage, men take her as a witch. (Foucault 232) Maria does not marry anyone so, in men's view, she has become a monster, a crazy person that people are unable to communicate with and would stay at a distance from the male dominance. In the story, Maria is the other woman who liberates herself from the range of the male domination, at least from the marriage.

In addition, Maria's appearance, from the very few sentences, presents an image of witch who has very long nose and a very long chin, appears on Halloween day. To some extent, Maria's image rightly satisfies the male standard evaluation about a spinster. For Maria, an unmarried woman, the reality is that she is at the state of Other opposite to the masculine ideology. Furthermore, Maria is willing to fall in love with herself, which manifests her narcissism that is more disruptive to the male traditions.

Female narcissism indeed is different from the male. Man thinks and hopes he is the subject in the world and thereby he should be acting in an initiative way. Consequently, he would not observe himself and find Self by means of mirror and might have no interest in mirror to show his initiative. Woman, however, is impelled to find her superior importance in her own world. Then, finally, she has become her own subjectivity by inspecting herself in mirror. By observing herself in the mirror, she can obtain confidence to build up her otherness to realize her narcissism and to establish her own subjectivity. In Maria's narcissism, she presents her satisfaction towards her image in mirror although she is not young and pretty in man's eyes. For man, woman's pretty appearance is her possession that world acquire the male favor and at the same time it is the capital so that woman can rely on man. (Kaminer 9) Opposite to the male traditions, Maria doesn't take this point of view. In mirror, Maria has discovered and enjoyed her enchantment. And even she demonstrates the tendency of narcissism, which promotes her to construct her Self in the process.

Apparently, the tendency to be a narcissist is evident in the story. Despite her body has been branded with the changes of years, she still has found "a nice tidy little body". Her affection for her appearance has not reduced in these years and her subjectivity has been under construction as well. In mirror, she constructs her own subjectivity to realize her femininity. In addition, her femininity has been projected in her daily life. Maria is portrayed as a woman who is good at housework. From it, her femininity as a housewife is manifested; her maternal image comes into being when she is nursing Joe and Alpha; what's more important is her excitement is popped out when she proves as an economically independent woman. Moreover, the recognition from people around Maria supplies the possibility for her to be a narcissist. Maria is a warm-hearted and competent woman. She can cut these barnbracks perfectly that seemed uncuttable. She is a peace-maker since she was always sent for when the women quarreled over their tubs and always succeeded in making peace. In the story, everyone is so fond of Maria. To a certain extent, the appraisal like that has represented her existential value.

Furthermore, her attitude toward marriage and her caring for her brothers incarnate her indifference to a ring or a man and her unique femininity as well. Firstly, before Maria goes to Joe's house, her colleague Lizzie Fleming says to her that she is sure to get the ring. Although Fleming has said that for so many Hallow Even, Maria has to laugh and says she doesn't want any ring or man either. (Joyce 152) When sitting on the tram on her way, she is falling into pondering that she arranges in her mind all she was going to do, and thought how much better it was to be independent and to have her own money in her pocket. (159) Obviously Maria enjoys her independence and, with her present condition, she has stood out of the male domination and found her female subjectivity in her Other position as a woman. On the other hand, Maria exhibits her unique femininity when dealing with her brother Joe and Alphy. She recalls the happy time when they are together and hopes such beautiful time can be back again. She nursed Joe and Alphy before while she is

unmarried. So Joe often says *mamma* is *mama* but Maria is his proper mother. (160) In this way, she has experienced what a married woman would undergo — to be a mother. As a result, on this special occasion, she has put much attention to the job, the relatives and the life but to find a man.

Therefore, Maria's affection for her appearance, her independence, her attitude toward marriage and her unique femininity make her attain support from the mirror and incline to being narcissistic with the image in the mirror. Not similar to man, woman achieves self-fulfillments by means of her own immanence. (H. M. 45) In mirror, her own space, she confirms her immanence, which is transferred into a kind of transcendence for her to achieve her subjectivity. This transcendence reflects the force going beyond the prejudice that man and most of woman hold in reality. When confronting with marriage urge, her eyes sparkle with disappointed shyness, which makes her realize the necessity of rediscovering her own self. Before the mirror, observing her appearance and body she finds her real self in this still object. Standing before the mirror, Maria recalls her image when she was a young girl, thinking about her peculiar enchantment. Although the youth never comes back, she projects her satisfaction about her young image on the present image in mirror. Following this way, she falls in love with herself as she can find her own identity that she wants to show her subjectivity in mirror. Maria constructs her love for herself by discovering her Self in the mirror.

IV. MRS. SINICO'S SPIRITUAL NARRATION

The first section of the story, *A Painful Case* is devoted to the presentation of the meeting between Mr. Duffy and Mrs. Sinico at concerts. And then they make appointments regularly at her home. Their friendship grows, as he shares his intellectual life with her. But one night, she makes the mistake of catching up his hand passionately and pressing it to her cheek. Then, he leaves her. Four years later, Mr. Duffy reads in the paper of Mrs. Sinico's death that she has been knocked down by a train while crossing the line at a station in a state of intoxication. At time moment, Mr. Duffy's first reaction is one of disgust at such intemperance, and of self-righteousness. But on second thoughts, he feels ill at ease and after a bit of self-pity and realizes the burden of loneliness.

Simone de Beauvoir proposes that it is not nature on woman's own account in her emotional life. Woman's emotional life within the constraints of a situation where she finds herself treated as the Other, attempts to draw out the ontological meaning of these emotional attitudes. (Butler *For*: 310) In male world, man insists woman should sacrifice herself to engage in the family so as to make her as a subordinated woman. For a woman, what she should pursue is to get man happy and ignore her own feelings. However, Mrs. Sinico has been struggling for her own way of living. Her pursuit is mainly manifested in the days when gets long with Mr. Duffy. Although she lives in a rich life supported by her husband, she notices, as a woman, she still has the right to get her spiritual world besides a material one. She is aware that she is not an object but a woman who has her own thinking capability. She indeed enjoys the spiritual world

that she and Mr. Duffy have created but later, due to her passionate behavior, she has to confront the hindrance on the way of pursuing her spiritual world. And then, she is addicted to her spiritual life with her other manner — drinking the spirits. With her other mode of pursuit, however, she lives in her own spiritual world without man. Under the state of drunken she really rejects the male view of Otherness that man has endowed her with to set up her subjectivity.

Mrs. Sinico is not a woman who yields up to her fixed destiny easily. Firstly, during the first meet with Mr. Duffy, her potential struggle is portrayed through Mr. Duffy's eyes. Mrs. Sinico's eyes were very dark blue and steady. Their gaze begins with a defiant note, but is confused by what seems a deliberate swoon of the pupil into the iris, revealing for an instant a temperament of great sensibility. She knows she has a mind as men do to enrich her spiritual world. At the first meet at the concert in Earlsfort Terrace, Mrs. Sinico shows her initiative that she starts talking at first. At that moment Mr. Duffy feels surprised that she seems little awkward. A few weeks later, they meet again. Mr. Duffy seizes the moments to talk to her covering the topic about her family. Then, meeting her at the third time by chance, Mr. Duffy finds the courage to make an appointment. Finally, they always meet in the evening and choose the quietest quarters for their walk together. What's more is he lends her books providing her with ideas and sharing his intellectual life with her. In this process, she has constructed her own spiritual life and expressed herself by reading books, accepting different ideas and sharing her opinions with him frankly. And gradually, she is aware of her subjectivity by holding a leading position to influence on Mr. Duffy in their communication. Little by little, he entangled his thoughts with hers. Furthermore, Mrs. Sinico creates her own spiritual world in her own way. Many times she allowed the dark to fall upon them, refraining from lightening the lamp. The dark discreet room, their isolation, the music that still vibrated in their ears united them. She establishes her own space so as to imagine her desirable life and self-examine what she has said and done. In the darkness, she can gallop in her imagination like being in another world, and escape from the tradition, from her husband's indifference and her daughter's misunderstanding. In her spiritual world, she is the owner of herself to make her inner world filled with vitality through catching herself listening to the sound of her own voice. And her voice for struggle can be heard in this fancy of darkness. She constructs her own spiritual world in which she obtains her freedom and finds her subjectivity. Thirdly, Mrs. Sinico's death implies the climax of her pursuit to achieve her own spiritual world. Mrs. Sinico's death is reported in the newspaper four years later since she separated from Mr. Duffy. From the narration about her recent conditions told by her family, she is frequently drunk. Her husband mentions she begins to be rather intemperate in her habits, and her daughter witnesses her mother has been in the habit of going out at night to buy spirits. After the separation from Mr. Duffy, she still knows what she wants is to get spiritual concerns, so she changes her way to fulfill her pursuit. In reality, she fails to build up her spiritual life with Mr. Duffy. In Other way, she continues her pursuit to be a state of drunkenness. Drawing support from spirits, she acquires her

freedom in the darkness. In the spiritual world, she creates herself and liberates herself from male-dominated society. With that, she is able to release her emotions, her family's indifference and even Mr. Duffy's disgusting response counts little to dominate herself in the spiritual world.

Mrs. Sinico seems to be the most miserable woman in the story because of her death, but her persistence in her spiritual enjoyment has shown her transcendence at her Other place. At the beginning, she manifests her struggle in connection with her appearance. And then, she constructs a spiritual world with Mr. Duffy with whom she meets at concerts and builds up their friendship. In it, she obtains her freedom and subjectivity with her enjoyment in their communication. Although they are separated, Mrs. Sinico still continues her pursuit of spiritual world. At the state of drunkenness, she has achieved her own subjectivity without any male help. What's more important one is, in her own spiritual world, she has acquired her freedom and become the leading one.

V. CONCLUSION

Though in the males' view, female is the Other object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the male who is the dominant being in the society, woman possesses the destructive force toward patriarchy as an independent human being who refuses to be objectified. (Hall 890) According to the post-feminist concept of the Other, a woman can be in the position to break up the bonds of the patriarchal society and define herself by her own uniquely inherent femininity. (Butler *Bodies*: 108) In this way, woman is capable of gaining the equal position to redefine female existence and it is acceptable for a woman to be different from a man in real society. (Hekman 52)

This paper covers Eveline's fluid narration, Maria's narcissist narration and Mrs. Sinico's spiritual narration, to interpret their unique feminine manners which contain the disruptive force to the male traditions. Firstly, unlike the male standard mode of thinking — to think logically and purposefully, Eveline's Other dimension, to think fluidly and discursively, is manifested in her soliloquy. Her soliloquy breaks through the bounds of time and theme. And her divergent and double-minded thinking is free from the masculine thinking that is a linear and focusing way to produce a logical analysis according to the hierarchical relationship. With her sensitivity about background sounds, her uncertainty of the time, the theme and double-minded mode of thinking exhibit the female unique mode and present the true female existence. Her divergent thinking deconstructs the male arbitrary thinking. Secondly, Maria keeps herself from falling into marriage but to fall in love with her image in mirror. In it, her own space, she confirms her immanence, which is transferred into a kind of transcendence for her to acquire her subjectivity. This transcendence reflects the force going beyond the prejudice that man and most of woman hold in reality. With the affection for her appearance in mirror, her independence in daily life, her attitude toward marriage and her unique femininity make Maria obtain support and incline to being narcissistic with the image in mirror. Finally, Mrs. Sinico's persistence in her pursuit of her spiritual enjoyment has also

shown her transcendence at her Other place. In her own spiritual world built with the help from Mr. Duffy, she attains her freedom and subjectivity with her indulgent in darkness. Even she is separated from Mr. Duffy, Mrs. Sinico still continues her pursuit by means of help from spirits. In her own spiritual world, she acquired her unique femininity to become the leading role in the story. On account of the feminist analysis, existentially varied female narrations incarnate the substantially transcending force that blurs the vested binary between man and woman. (Clare 69)

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