

# ***Using Beauvoir's Existential Feminist Theory to Analyze the Awakening of Eveline's Feminine Consciousness in James Joyce's "Eveline"***

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**Abstract:** Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the Second Sex and the Existential Feminist Theory have been widely discussed to help with equal rights. Analyzing Eveline's feminine consciousness from the perspective of Beauvoir's Existential Feminist Theory can help with women's independent and feminine consciousness studies. This article analyzes the feminine consciousness of Eveline from two aspects: the reason why Eveline begins to awake, including Frank and the immigration boom's influence; and the reasons for the failure of the awakening of the female consciousness, which is her weak female consciousness has no way out.

**Keywords:** Existential Feminist Theory, Feminine Consciousness, Eveline

## **1. Introduction**

James Joyce, one of the founding fathers of postmodern literature, was an Irish writer and poet known for his "stream-of-consciousness" writing [1]. "Dubliners" (1914) was a collection of 15 short stories that depicted the insensitivity of Irish life (childhood, youth, and adulthood) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and expressed the theme of paralysis. "Eveline" (1904) is the fourth of these stories, which was first published in *The Irish Homestead* [2]. Ireland was in the aftermath of the Great Famine (1845-1851) and a large number of Irish people chose to emigrate to other countries, with official Irish propaganda about the dangers of emigration and the slave trade ("white slave trade") to the population, especially women [2]. In this context, "The Irish Homestead" invited Joyce to write an article, and later Joyce wrote the short story "Eveline", which told the story of Eveline who wanted to escape from her familiar surroundings and change her life but chose to give up at the last moment. Significantly, "The Irish Homestead" was sponsored by the Irish Association of Agricultural Organizations, which took a nationalist stance. So "Eveline" was initially seen as a didactic story aimed at advocating for Irish women of the time to abandon overseas marriages and return to their families of origin [2,7]. However, Eveline reflected on her life and wanted to make changes making her awakening to femininity an indisputable fact.

In addition to "Eveline" being seduced, postcolonial criticism and the theme of "paralysis," scholars focused on feminism. Norris argued that Joyce wanted to use the dilemma to make readers understand the fears of young women in order to pay tribute to women with courage [3]. Wang

analyzed the reasons for the brief awakening of Eveline's feminine consciousness [4]. Cai believed that the Dublin women represented by Eveline were in an oppressed position [5], which was also mentioned in the discourse. She also talked about the relationship between women's status and women's choices [6]. While Wei suggested that it was related to "Orientalism and Catholic expectations of women", which was also demonstrated in Wang and Zhang's articles [7, 8]. Based on the above analysis, this paper concluded that Eveline had a brief awakening (budding) of feminine consciousness, but ultimately her awakening failed. This paper attempted to discuss the reasons for the failure of Eveline's germination and awakening of feminine consciousness from the perspective of Beauvoir's existential feminism theory.

Feminist consciousness emphasizes female subjectivity, which helps women to develop their own initiative and creativity, pursue independent personality and life, and unite "man" and "woman" [6]. The awakening of feminist consciousness can be roughly divided into three stages, namely, "the period of ignorance when one wishes to live independently but has to compromise and be confused", and "the period of growth when the pursuit of independent personality is contradicted by the experience of subjective consciousness", and "the period of awareness of feminine traits and social position", and "the maturity period of pursuing the independent development of being a human being" [9]. This paper considers Eveline's dilemma as the second stage, i.e., the "growth period".

Simone de Beauvoir is a philosopher and writer who advocated the equality of men and women, she believes that the freedom of the individuals only comes when women (others) are free too [10]. Being influenced by Sartre's idea of existentialism, Beauvoir put forward the idea of "Existential Feminism" [11]. Existential Feminism argues that women and men should have equal rights to choose their own life [12]. Besides, it also talks about the marginal status of women and marriage [11].

According to Beauvoir, the "other" refers to people who do not have a sense of self and see themselves as subordinate to the environment or others. Here the other is permanently in the status of an object and often suffers from exclusion and alienation as an individual being, especially in the role of women who are dependent on men and content with the status quo [13]. Eveline could get seven shillings from the work, while she hands over all of her earnings to her father. Still, she also endures the abuse of her father and assumes the liability to take care of and safeguard the family. Eveline chooses to stay with the original family at the moment when she could leave along with Frank, the state of Eveline is complied with the definition of the others from Beauvoir. Therefore, it is feasible to analyze the awakening of the female consciousness of Eveline with the existential feminism theory by Beauvoir.

## **2. Reasons for Eveline's Awakening of the Female Consciousness**

### **2.1. Frank's Influence on Eveline**

The reason for her awakening of the female consciousness for Eveline may be analyzed from two aspects. First of all, Frank may serve as the inducement. The living status of Eveline before meeting Frank is as follows: her mother and her partners in childhood have left, she needs to clean the house every week, her work is being criticized by Miss Gavan, and her own income is handed over to her father, and it is hard for her to get the money supporting the family back, and Eveline needs to take care of two young children. It can be said that Eveline is a vital factor to maintain the family. However, Eveline does not have the right to make any decisions in the family, and even "sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence" [15]. Eveline as a female living in a Catholic family (the Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque and the photo of the priest friend of her father are displayed at home) has been lying in a position of the others before meeting Frank. She is dependent on her father and obeys her father. However, the ideal living status of Eveline after meeting Frank is changed "People would treat her with respect then. She would not be treated as her mother had been" [15]. What she wants is

to be respected and to be valued rather than “the others” and “objects”. The appearance of Frank has provided a way out for Eveline and promotes Eveline to start to think about the life she wants.

According to the opinion of Beauvoir, the position of “the others” of the female is acquired rather than born. In this paper, the author believes that Eveline’s position of “the others” is caused by her family environment, the control from her father, and the entrust from her mother which are binding Eveline. However, the female is confronted with pressure from all aspects in the process to seek to get rid of the position of the others, including public opinion and others [13]. Seen from the considering process in the full text of *Eveline*, it can be understood that Eveline always lies in the dilemma between going and not-going, and she has considered a lot of “unfavorable factors” after leaving. “What would they say of her in the Stores when they found out that she had run away with a fellow? Say she was a fool, perhaps; and her place would be filled up by advertisements. Miss Gavan would be glad” [15]. Eveline would consider the pressure of public opinion, and worry about her reputation after leaving. Such kind of pressure and oppression makes it difficult for the female to jump out of the tedious life and look for the essence of living, and further find out the independent direction [14]. Therefore, Eveline tries to persuade herself to stay with her original family: “In her home anyway she had shelter and food, she had those whom she had known all her life about her [15].” When Eveline is wondering whether to leave away from the home or stay, Frank appears as a factor for Eveline to solve her current predicament. Frank can offer a new home and a new living environment for her.

Seen from the perspective of the existential feminism, the female may be inspired to re-examine her own current situation and try to change the current situation and finally realize her own true existence [14]. The inspiration is what Frank brings to Eveline. The previous numbing and repeated daily affairs are exhausting for Eveline before meeting Frank, and the appearance of Frank has brought a different life for Eveline, “He took her to see The Bohemian Girl and she felt elated as she sat in an unaccustomed part of the theatre with him. He was awfully fond of music and sang a little. People knew that they were courting and, when he sang about the lass that loves a sailor, she always felt pleasantly confused. He used to call her Poppens out of fun” [15]. Frank offers another attitude to life for Eveline so that she would reserve some time for herself rather than being busy with family affairs. Frank places Eveline in the center position, and when staying with Frank, Eveline becomes a young lady looking for fun in her own life rather than from the edge position in her original family. In this way, Eveline would consider which kind of life is in her needs and find her own way of living. Eveline begins to make the change - running away with Frank and staying away from the original family. Therefore, Eveline may regard Frank as a lifesaver and hope to leave with Frank and change her own situation.

It is difficult for females in marriage to obtain individual value by improving their own ability, and more of them are complying with the requirements of the male. The majority of marriage relationships are characterized by the lower status of the female than that of the male, the females are required to abide by the marriage and family rules established by the male. Marriage is more like a career rather than a state for the female [14]. Eveline has to pay for the expenses of the family, while she still needs to hand her own income over to her father, otherwise, she would be scolded by her father. It is actually related to the marital status of the previous generation. Her mother's attitude towards the family affects Eveline and makes Eveline obey her father naturally. The pattern of her relationship with Frank has changed Eveline’s opinion on the marital status of her parents; Eveline has realized that there exists not only one marital status that the female is dependent on the male, and not all the females pay everything for the family. Eveline has seen the low status in a marriage of the female, and she is crazy about the sacrifice of her mother in her life and duty, and she is afraid of becoming a "victim", and even “stood up in a sudden impulse of terror” [15]. But it is not easy for Eveline to make the change. At that stage, Eveline believes that leaving with Frank becomes the best

choice to escape, and Frank happens to be an inducement to stimulate the resistance consciousness of Eveline.

## **2.2. The Immigration Boom Serves as Another Reason**

The other reason for the appearance of the female consciousness for Eveline may be related to the immigration boom in Ireland at that time. Originally, the female is required to lie in the different family units by the society, the female would offer more recognition to the male they are contracting with, their self-consciousness is relatively weak, and most of the females are mainly dependent on the male. In this way, it is difficult to counter even if the female realizes that they are being oppressed [14]. However, the immigration boom in Ireland has broken the balance at that time. A large number of Irish females emigrated to the UK. Although there is a risk of becoming white slaves, young female immigrants have become the boom in Ireland at that time [7]. As a young female, Eveline is likely to be influenced by the surrounding females and have the idea of leaving her original family. Buenos Aires, where Eveline and her boyfriend plan to go, is also an important transit point for the transaction of the white slave at that time. "Frank is not frank," and the consideration of Eveline which lacks safety parameters has been discussed by Kenner, Mullin, and other scholars [16,17]. Even though, it is undeniable that Eveline is likely to be influenced by the trend of social thoughts, and have the idea to immigrate and pursue her own life. It is the other reason for the germination of the female consciousness of Eveline.

## **3. Reasons for the Failure of the Female Consciousness' Awakening of Eveline**

### **3.1. Unequal Relationship Pattern between the Genders**

The pattern of getting along between Eveline and Frank is still dominated by the male and subordinated by the female. Whether it is proposed to run away, the way they run away, or the life after running away are all dominated by Frank. "She was to go away with him by the nightboat to be his wife and to live with him in Buenos Aires where he had a home waiting for her" [15]. It can be seen that the information Eveline knows all come from Frank: the plan to leave is made by Frank, and the future life is also described by Frank. It is determined that the following life is still dominated by Frank even though Eveline leaves home, and Frank is the one who dominates her decision. For Eveline, going to Buenos Aires with Frank have the risk of falling back to "the others". Because Eveline cannot guarantee that Frank wouldn't control her. For example, when Eveline considered the factors to stay, she felt that there was at least food and shelter at home, which proved that Eveline knew that she could only rely on Frank after she left by boat. This actually admits that Eveline can't live without Frank, and if she doesn't listen to Frank, Eveline is likely to lose a place to live. So, Eveline changed from obeying her father to obeying Frank, which is not really independent for her. Therefore, "run with a fellow" is not a feasible independent path for Eveline; it is just entering into another male-dominated oppression environment from the original male-dominated oppression environment.

### **3.2. Eveline Herself**

Beauvoir has pointed out several ways to liberate the female, including active participation in labour, participation in social transformation, and the establishment of the female subject consciousness [14]. Seen from the perspective of Eveline, she has her work to support herself, and she has the idea to pursue her own life, while she cannot change the oppressed situation. Eveline wants to leave and she is full of hopes for the future, but if the future does not change, if leaving does not make her truly independent, then Eveline's ideas will be shaken.

Besides, from Eveline's point of view, no matter what choice she makes, she will be tormented. On the one hand, is that she had sworn to her mother, and on the other hand, is the pursuit of herself. When Eveline is indecisive, her health status became the decisive factor for her to stay. Hu argues that Eveline chose to give up because of seasickness [2]. This article agrees with this point of view. Eveline herself has a hard time making a choice. She wants to find a way out but she cannot, at this moment, any small factor may affect her own decision. "She felt her cheek pale and cold and, out of a maze of distress, she prayed to God to direct her, to show her what was her duty" [15]. Physical discomfort makes Eveline want to give up. So, she starts making excuses for herself, or perhaps she sees the discomfort as a guide from God to let her fulfill her own responsibilities. This article believes that Eveline realized that both the two choices were not independent ways out, so she was affected by the factor of seasickness and finally chose to stay, which led to the final failure of her female consciousness awakening.

To conclude, the weak female consciousness has appeared in the patriarchal society, and it is difficult for Eveline to find a way to be independent herself, so she chooses to compromise finally. Eveline and Frank are not actually equal, and Eveline herself realizes that she has no way out. Therefore, Eveline chooses to stay in a more stable original family at the moment of boarding, and it leads to the failure of the awakening of the female consciousness.

#### 4. Conclusion

The reasons for the appearance of the female consciousness in Eveline and the failure of the awakening of the female consciousness finally in the works of Eveline written by James Joyce are analyzed from the perspective of the Existential Feminist Theory by Beauvoir. The appearance of weak female consciousness for Eveline is firstly caused by the appearance of Frank, which has offered certain enlightenment for Eveline; and the other is influenced by the general trend of the immigration boom of Ireland at that time. Eveline cannot realize the real herself no matter what kind of selection she makes under the context at that time due to the relationship between Frank and Eveline as well as Eveline's consideration. It is hard for the weak female consciousness to find a way out of the male-dominated society at that time so Eveline finally chooses to return to the original family, and her awakening of the female consciousness is failed finally.

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