

# *Women's Survival Dilemma from the Perspective of Female Writers*

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**Abstract:** With the research on gender issues for a long time, women's studies have become very mature in all aspects. Although the theory is rich, there is still little concrete practical progress. This article focuses on the analysis of the perspective of female writers and looks at the current situation of women's life from their perspective. By perusing a considerable number of literary works, this paper selects four female writers and conducts an analysis of their representative works to elucidate three types of female survival predicaments: the absence of female desires, the absence of a female voice, and the presence of female objectification. By analyzing the works of these female writers, an obvious problem was reflected: the living conditions of women described in their books are still outdated in today's society. Until now, many women's desires have been ignored. Even as a gender that makes up half of the population, many important works lack a female perspective, and the image of women is still objectified, not only in literature and movie works, but also in real life.

**Keywords:** Women's rights, Objectification of women, Misogyny, Female writers.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, with the rise of feminism, people have made a specific analysis of women's survival predicament in a certain aspect. There are also many literary and film works containing abundant female images. With the development of science and technology, the media is playing an increasingly important role in the process of culture and ideology dissemination. Literature and films also rely on the media for communication. However, the mainstream of media is still to tell the story from a male perspective, implanting the idea of male supremacy to weaken the role of women. Indeed, many media genres as well as the general style of mass information have long been implicitly male or fixed on male audiences.[1] And there are still a lot of invisible discrimination against women, and women are also facing serious survival dilemmas.

Fortunately, more and more female creators are emerging and creating from a unique female perspective, although, few people specifically analyze works from the perspective of female writers to reveal the plight of women's survival and offer solutions. Therefore, this paper intends to analyze the common survival dilemma of women in different times by studying several classic literary works created by female writers. By doing so, this article tries to call for women's power and voice in every field. In addition, it also hopes to encourage women who are still trapped under the patriarchal system to bravely break through barriers, break stereotypes, pursue their passions, and speak out for women all over the world.

## 2. The Absence of Female Desires and *Near to Wild Heart*, *Gone with the Wind*

One invisible survival dilemma of women is the lack of rights to chase desires. Due to the asceticism, the medieval European society has always emphasized the restraint of desire. However, since the liberation of the mind in the Renaissance, the social atmosphere has gradually become free and open. But that's only relative to men. Ascetic thought has always been invisibly tied to the standard of female behavior. Under the ascetic concept, women are usually expected to be chaste and pure, while men are less likely to be subject to the same requirements. This has led to a double standard in sexual behavior, with women expected to maintain their virginity while men may be encouraged to explore sex. It also limits women's right to freely express their feelings, believing that women are wives waiting to be chosen and should not have a mind of their own. In addition, women always appear as a subordinate role, to put everything in the family, cannot have the ambition to pursue what they want. The demands of the patriarchal society on women make the natural human part suppressed, and no one will reward the natural style of women.

But there are also many female writers who realize the injustice of this and speak out boldly. *Near to Wild Heart* is one such work. It's a book written by Clarice Lispector, a female writer from Brazil. As a protagonist of the book, Joanna has her own thoughts on many subjects, such as marriage and death. Regarding marriage, she doubted the meaning of women, believing that being a married woman meant that she had a predetermined destiny without the right to be unhappy. Just like she said "Marriage is the end, after marriage there is nothing more. Just think there's always someone by your side, and you'll never be alone. -- Good heavens! - Can never be alone, ever. Being a married woman means that her destiny is set. From that moment on, it was a matter of waiting for death. I feel not even the freedom to be unhappy..."[2] To pursue true happiness, she does what seems to be a deviant act: leaving her family. Put the act itself aside, Joanna at least has the courage to face her heart and pursue her desires.

Another example is *Gone with the Wind*. Whether it is relationship or career, the protagonist Scarlett has shown absolute ambition and courageously pursued. In Scarlett's four relationship experiences, she has always been clear about what her goal is, strive to pursue it, and never regrets it. Whether it is love or marriage, Scarlett is in an absolute dominant position and occupies the initiative. In the beginning, the author points out the charm of Scarlett from the inside out. "Scarlett wasn't pretty. Yet men rarely realize it when they are captivated by her charms." [3] As a woman, she has obvious femininity and charm. She was good at dealing with men, and even enjoyed the feeling that men were obsessed with her and fell at her feet. At that time, women lacked the freedom of love and marital autonomy. Women seem to have been waiting, waiting to be loved, waiting for their parents to arrange a "good" marriage for them. But Scarlett chooses not to obey and chooses to pursue what she wants. In the face of feelings and desires, she perfectly demonstrates the independence and strength of women. For her career, in the 19th century, the South of the United States was still in the traditional slave plantation economic system, deeply influenced by the patriarchal ideology, women had no social status, and the only thing they had to do was to stay at home and take care of their husband and children. In addition, they have no financial resources, cannot work outside the home, are financially dependent on their husbands, and cannot achieve economic independence. However, Scarlett chose to ignore these tacit but unreasonable requirements for women. She bravely rebels the traditional rule of patriarchal culture and has faith in achieving the career what man can do. From the change of her personal experience during the war, her strong rebel spirit against man's oppression can be perceived.[4] She dared to break the shackles of society on women at that time, refusing to let herself become "a lovely, elegant and charming creature."

It is natural for women to want to pursue their desires, and it is the basis for all other rights to be pursued.

### 3. The Absence of a Female Voice and *A Room of One's Own*

When women have the courage to pursue their desires, they will naturally chase more rights that belong to them, such as the right to create and have their own voices.

As early as 1928, in a speech, Virginia Woolf criticized the lack of free speech for women in the social environment and made an important point: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction".[5] This means that when women want to create, they must meet two conditions. The first is obviously the ability to spend money on your own, and the second is the need for a room of your own. Women have to revolve around the family all day, worrying about family trifles, "cleaning the dishes, putting the children to bed"[5], there is no time and space to think and create. Woolf pointed out that women are always thought to be unselfish, but women have the same feelings as men.[5] Women also want to show their talent, rather than write good work and not get published because of their gender. Woolf hypothesizes that if Shakespeare had an equally talented sister, she would still not have been a good writer. Simply because she was a woman, she was denied the right to education, let alone literary creation.[5]

According to Woolf, she believes that the portrayal of women in contemporary works is too one-dimensional. She wrote in the *A Room of One's Own*: "All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. ... And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends. ... They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception, they are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that ..." [5] Based on this, there is the Bechdel test, a measure of the representation of women in film and other fiction. And this test just has three standards: The movie has to have at least two named women in it who talk to each other about something besides a man. This seems simple enough, but in fact, there are very few existing films or works of literature that meet this standard. Experiments confirm that in movies that fail the test, women are portrayed as less-central and less-important characters. [6] There have been so many works of individual heroism in which the main character is almost always a man, and the mentors around him are also almost all male characters. The female characters only play a foil role in it, only used to highlight the personal charm of the male characters. Even in common group works, the configuration of the leading group is more male roles than female. For example, in *Harry Potter*, the main characters are two males and one female. In these works, it is obvious that the names of these female characters are not mentioned, they appear as a subsidiary character, becoming the mother, wife, lover of the main character, and have no way to own their own names. Even the creators like to arrange exaggerated conflicts between two female characters competing for the love of a male character, which makes the few communications between female characters also through the male. What's worse, in some works adapted from history, the creators are also used to erase the existence of women, placing the achievements of women on the male characters, and imputing some evil things that men have done to female characters. Women not only lose their right to speak in real life, but also are forced to remain silent in literary works. And this is all because of the lack of female creators. If women were allowed to tell the story themselves, there would be no more "silenced and disappeared she".

In short, this also reflects a cruel reality, that is, in literary film and television works, female roles are always objectified.

### 4. The Presence of Female Objectification and *Misogyny*

When talking about the most repressed part of women's existence in a patriarchal society, it is common to think about objectification. Sexual objectification refers to viewing the target as a

collection of bodies or parts fulfilling the desires or needs of others, rather than as a person, thus ignoring the intrinsic qualities of external contingencies. Sexual objectification mostly occurs in women and has a stronger negative impact on women. It has long been a prominent gender issue and scholars have long argued that women are denied a basic sense of humanness—are objectified—when focus is directed toward their physical rather than mental qualities.[7] After the "dehumanization" of women, men also naturally lose empathy, resulting in violent emotions, and have a desire to conquer, control and destroy. When the whole society is enveloped in the atmosphere of the objectification of women, another social phenomenon: misogyny appears. As Chizuko Ueno says: "It's hard to imagine a society without misogyny." [8] Misogyny is simply the disgust of women. But it's not just in men, it's also in women.

For men, misogyny is easier to explain. When people watch movies, they will find that there are many movies with scenes of female abuse or women being raped. In making these films, directors habitually turn their cameras on the victims, the women themselves. But if think about it, these scenes have no purpose at all, but to increase the sexual pleasure of the male audience. There's research shows that males who viewed the sexually objectifying video felt that the victim in the date-rape condition experienced pleasure and "got what she wanted." [9] In the sadomasochism scene, the woman is objectified as an object to be tampered with, a doll to be vented with, the woman exists as a symbol, but not as a person. "They only regard women as sexual props, no matter which woman, as long as there is a nude, miniskirt and other 'female symbols', can react, like Pavlov's dog drooling when he hears the bell, it is really amazing." [8]

But when this situation happens to women, it's more complicated. Because misogyny in women is self-loathing.[8] Women respond to objectification through self-objectification. That is, "internalizing an observer's perspective on the self" self-objectification, in turn, leads to negative outcomes such as body shame, restrained eating, and diminished attention and mental performance, and is consequently linked to objectification.[10] There are two main ways that women misogyny occurs, one is by cutting themselves off from other women, and the other is by catering to the dominant male aesthetic. For the first type, these women would consider "being a man" as a virtue, in other words, they often regret being born female and want to be male They erase the original advantages of being a woman, and put on the adjective that modifies men, and then become a "masculine woman." However, this is also related to the social environment. In any language environment, adjectives with masculine characteristics are always used in praise, such as "virile", but adjectives with feminine characteristics are always accompanied by derogatory meanings, such as "effeminate", and even the curse words include women. Besides male friendships are often described as full of loyalty, but female friendships, on the contrary, are full of intrigue - even though this is not exactly the truth. While for the second type, there's more complicated situation. In recent years, there has been a popular term on the Chinese Internet, "scraping", which is actually a kind of soft pornography. It refers to the vulgar behavior on short video platforms such as TikTok, which attracts attention by scantily clad and provocative behavior. But this behavior is mostly found among female anchors. By frequently presenting women in revealing attire, popular media content not only invites other (male) media characters to gaze at women's bodies but invites media users to do the same. [11] This is a contradictory behavior, in the process of soft pornography, these women put themselves in the position of being stared at, become an object in the eyes of men, a sexual symbol, and even takes the risk of sexual harassment. But on the other hand, these female anchors will get a lot of comments and even earn a lot of money. This is totally another deformed social product under the control of male ideology, and it is also a kind of invisible oppression of women.

Generally speaking, misogyny is a product of patriarchal society, it is everywhere, and it happens to people of all ages and all genders.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, literature is generally able to reflect social reality, but unfortunately there is a lack of female perspective. Female writers have keen insight and empathy for the same gender, and it is also of great significance to speak on behalf of women. Their works have sharply revealed the plight of women's survival, such as the absence of female desires, the absence of a female voice and the presence of female objectification. Ignoring women's desires, patriarchal societies confine them in limited areas with rules and regulations. The men who set these rules enjoy a free world, but the women self-regulate and even pass these restrictions on from generation to generation. Society prevents women's voices by restricting their desires and brings the invisible requirements of women in real society to literature and film and television works. In these works, the appearance of women as a positive image is constantly weakened or even erased. So, it is not surprising that sexual objectification of women occurs. While men gaze at women, women are still constantly self-examining and becoming objects objectified within the patriarchal society. There is a strong correlation among these problems, which mutually influence one another and ultimately result in the survival predicament of women in real life.

Overall, some of the female dilemmas mentioned in this article are relatively visible. Female authors use their own soft emotions and unique perspectives to give their works realistic meaning. But there are still many more hidden problems that are not covered in this article. For the creators, more female power is needed to directly point out problems. Let the entire society confront and reflect collectively and deliberate on how to eliminate these invisible difficulties in female survival in the near future.

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