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Portfolio

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Part One: A critically annotated bibliography on a provisional project of your choosing or of research into a particular theoretical position.

An Annotated Bibliography on Metadiscourse

Topic: The annotated bibliography is on the use of metadiscourse in academic writing. Metadiscourse is normally referred to as ‘the ways in which writers and speakers interact through their use of language with readers and listeners’.¹

Entry One

Hyland, Ken and Polly Tse, ‘Metadiscourse in Academic Writing: A Reappraisal’,
Applied Linguistics, 25 (2004), 156-77 <DOI: 10.1093/applin/25.2.156>

In this study, based on an analysis of 240 postgraduate dissertations in six disciplines (applied linguistics, public administration, business studies, computer science, electronic engineering and biology) (p. 157), Hyland and Tse try to propose a consolidated version of the model of linguistic resources that writers use to make their stance and interact with readers. According to Hyland and Tse, metadiscourse is linguistic devices assisting the organization of discourse, aiding the expression of writers’ viewpoints and helping the engagement of readers as members of certain community (p. 156). Basically, the function of metadiscourse is two-fold: textual organization and social interaction. In line with the two basic functions, Hyland and Tse (p. 168) draws a distinction between interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse, with the former emphasizing the function of organizing texts and the latter interpersonal interaction. Through the study of the postgraduate research writing in different disciplines, Hyland and Tse (p. 173) argue that every discipline tends to have its own distinguished habits in academic writing. In other words, specific writing customs are acknowledged within different discipline or academic circles. This gives academic writers enlightenment that they shall consider these variations and conform these disciplinary habits when writing research articles to gain more approval and acceptance of their communities.

Between the two main categories of metadiscourse identified by Hyland and Tse, interactional metadiscourse, which lies at the core of academic communication as a socio-

¹ Ken Hyland, ‘Metadiscourse: What Is It and Where Is It Going?’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 113 (2017), 16-29 <DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2017.03.007>.

Part One: A critically annotated bibliography on a provisional project of your choosing or of research into a particular theoretical position.

rhetorical activity, is of particular interest to me. Similar to disciplinary variation, possible differences may also exist in different paradigms, which might be an interesting topic for further reading and researching.

Entry Two

Hyland, Ken, 'Metadiscourse: Mapping Interactions in Academic Writing', *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 9 (2010), 125-43 <DOI: 10.35360/njes.220>

This study is based on the same corpus as the one in Hyland and Tse's research in 2004,² focusing on the advanced second language writing by predominantly L1 Cantonese speakers, whose dissertations form a four-million-word corpus of 240 research articles (in the disciplines of applied linguistics, public administration, business studies, computer science, electronic engineering and biology) (p. 131). Similar theoretical background is drawn in the two papers, which employs ten subcategories altogether between interactive and interactional metadiscourses, aiming to reveal the rhetorical and social distinctiveness of disciplinary communities (p. 125).

Two things make the current study novel and significant. The first thing is that Hyland adds the degree variable to find the variations across the doctoral and masters sub-corpora. He finds that the PhD dissertations contained much more metadiscourse overall, which can be seen as a greater awareness of readers and self by PhD students (p. 134). While Hyland admits that there is no definite correlation between more metadiscourse and better writing, we can to some extent hypothesize that the quality of academic writing is related to the use of metadiscourse, which might also be an interesting topic in later research. The second thing is that not only corpus data, but also interview data are collected. Two MA students and two PhD students in each discipline (24 interviewers altogether) were interviewed. In this way, the author manages to both gain insights into the text data and discover something about student writers' own preferences and thoughts on disciplinary practices (p. 131). In all, the results show that the use of metadiscourse varies both in the degree variable and in the disciplinary variable.

² Ken Hyland and Polly Tse, 'Metadiscourse in Academic Writing: A Reappraisal', *Applied Linguistics*, 25 (2004), pp. 156-77, <DOI: 10.1093/applin/25.2.156>.

Part One: A critically annotated bibliography on a provisional project of your choosing or of research into a particular theoretical position.

Members of these groups represent themselves and see their readers in quite different ways, as evidenced by the use of metadiscourse (p. 141). Drawing from the gradual refinement of methodology in the papers from 2004 to 2010, we can see that the adoption of sub-corpora and mix-method approach help to reveal more subtle and comprehensive pictures in metadiscourse realm.

Entry Three

Hyland, Ken, 'Stance and Engagement: A Model of Interaction in Academic Discourse', *Discourse Studies*, 7 (2005), 173-92 <DOI: 10.1177/1461445605050365>

Like the study by Hyland and Tse in 2004,³ the current study contributes to interaction in academic discourse both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, Hyland puts forward the stance and engagement model, which is derived from the metadiscourse model in 2004⁴ and embodies these linguistic features in a more detailed manner. In the 2004 metadiscourse model⁵, interactional recourses comprises 'hedge, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self-mention', whereas in the 2005 interaction model, Hyland puts 'hedge, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention' under the umbrella term of 'stance' and takes out 'engagement' as a parallel term with 'stance', comprising components of 'reader pronouns, directives, questions, shared knowledge and personal asides' (p. 182). Making two sides of the 'interactional coin', stance and engagement model constructs the writer-reader relationship, with stance being a writer-oriented attitudinal dimension and engagement being a reader-oriented persuasive dimension. Attending to both stance and engagement, the model in 2005 provides 'a comprehensive and integrated way of examining the means by which interaction is achieved in academic argument and how the discoursal preferences of disciplinary communities construct both writers and readers' (p. 173).

³ Ken Hyland and Polly Tse, 'Metadiscourse in Academic Writing: A Reappraisal', *Applied Linguistics*, 25 (2004), pp. 156-77, <DOI: 10.1093/applin/25.2.156>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Part One: A critically annotated bibliography on a provisional project of your choosing or of research into a particular theoretical position.

Empirically, based on an analysis of 240 published research articles from eight disciplines (mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, marketing, philosophy, sociology, applied linguistics, physics and microbiology) (p. 178) and insider informant interviews, Hyland reemphasizes that ‘writers in different disciplines represent themselves, their work and their readers in different ways’ (p. 187). With more disciplines covered, Hyland’s claim that ‘disciplines in the humanities and social sciences take far more explicitly involved and personal positions than those in the science and engineering fields’ (p. 187) seems more statistically supported and convincing.

The most intriguing part in the study is Hyland’s admission that though we tend to conform to the rules and conventions in our disciplinary communities, we are not ‘the instruments of our disciplines and variables such as individuality and ideolepticity are important’ (p. 191) and that some famous writers ‘do not play this interactive game with their audience’ at all (p. 191). This view tries to strike a balance between community and individuality, thus exhibiting the limitation of such statistically based analysis. Nonetheless, as far as I am concerned, it is necessary that novice and intermediate writers pay attention to the discursual preferences of their disciplinary communities in order to be taken as disciplinary insiders in the early stages of their academic writing career.

Entry Four

Hyland, Ken, ‘Academic Interaction: Where’s It All Going?’, in *Specialized English: New Directions in ESP and EAP Research and Practice*, ed. by Ken Hyland and Lillian L. C. Wong, (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 91-106

In this study, Hyland explores writers’ use of interaction based on the model which views writers as taking a *stance* to convey their attitudes and credibility and *engaging* readers by explicitly bringing them into the discourse.⁶ To see whether interaction in academic writing has changed in recent decade, Hyland creates three corpora of research articles from the same five journals in four disciplines (applied linguistics, sociology, electrical engineering and biology) at three periods over the past 50 years (1965, 1985

⁶ Ken Hyland, ‘Stance and Engagement: A Model of Interaction in Academic Discourse’, *Discourse Studies*, 7 (2005), pp. 173-92 <DOI: 10.1177/1461445605050365>.

Part One: A critically annotated bibliography on a provisional project of your choosing or of research into a particular theoretical position.

and 2015) (p. 108). He finds out that over the years, features of stance and engagement show statistically significant falls in general, and that disciplinary changes show overall declines in sociology and applied linguistics (representing soft applied fields) and rises in biology and electrical engineering (representing hard sciences). These results, as states by Hyland, may be due to the more interdisciplinary nature of disciplines, the push towards collaborative research, the influence of external funders and commercial sponsors and the closer connections between career progress and publishing in an extremely competitive market (p. 105).

The most salient significance of the study is its ‘diachrony’. As we know, synchrony and diachrony are complementary perspectives on language use but research on language use has almost overwhelmingly focused on the synchronic state rather than the diachronic processes.⁷ It is also the case of study on metadiscourse and academic interaction. In this sense, the current study is a vital extension to the previous researches which are mere static description and analysis of disciplinary metadiscourse. How disciplinary academic writing changes is ‘important to our understanding of current practices, both in providing an awareness of how we got to where we are and in offering insights into the relationship between language and its contexts of use’.⁸

Entry Five

Cao, Feng and Guangwei Hu, ‘Interactive Metadiscourse in Research Articles: A Comparative Study of Paradigmatic and Disciplinary Influences’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 66 (2014), 15-31 <DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2014.02.007>

The study draws on Hyland’s interpersonal model of metadiscourse⁹ to examine paradigmatic and disciplinary influences on the use of interactive metadiscourse in the post-method sections of 120 research articles (RAs). These RAs are across three disciplines in the soft fields (applied linguistics, education and psychology) and two research paradigms (quantitative and qualitative research) (p. 15). Within each discipline,

⁷ Ken Hyland and Feng Jiang, “‘In This Paper We Suggest’: Changing Patterns of Disciplinary Metadiscourse”, *English for Specific Purposes*, 51 (2018), pp. 18-30 (p. 18) <DOI: 10.1016/j.esp.2018.02.001>.

⁸ Hyland and Jiang, p. 18.

⁹ Ken Hyland, *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 49.

Part One: A critically annotated bibliography on a provisional project of your choosing or of research into a particular theoretical position.

the authors focus on a subfield: language teaching and learning in applied linguistics, learning and instructional science in education, and counseling and clinical research in psychology (p. 19). By examining types of interactive metadiscourse in this corpus, Cao and Hu found evidence of paradigm-specific and discipline-specific influences on the use of interactive metadiscourse in academic writing. They interpret the cross-paradigmatic differences with reference to the (post)positivist and the constructivist epistemologies that dominate different paradigms and account for the cross-disciplinary differences in terms of the knowledge-knower structures that prevail in the disciplines (p. 29).

In fact, extant researches have offered robust evidence of disciplinary variation in the use of metadiscourse. What makes the study of Hu and Cao novel in this regard is their consideration of discoursal and rhetorical variation across subfields in a certain discipline. By focusing on a single subfield in each discipline, they try to avoid the oversimplification of viewing writing practices only at the disciplinary level. But on the other hand, as the authors admit, this may limit the generalizability of the findings since they 'may not be generalizable to other subfields of the three disciplines' (p. 14). This may remain a paradox until more further researches include more disciplines and subfields to enlarge the analytical scope. As for the paradigmatic part, in contrast to the growing body of investigation on disciplinary variation, researches into the use of interactional metadiscourse across different paradigms remain scarce. Hence, the study is leading edge in this regard.

Entry Six

Hu, Guangwei and Feng Cao, 'Disciplinary and Paradigmatic Influences on Interactional Metadiscourse in Research Articles', *English for Specific Purposes*, 39 (2015), 12-25 <DOI: 10.1016/j.esp.2015.03.002>

Similar to the one in 2014,¹⁰ the current article reports a comparative study of disciplinary and paradigmatic influences on metadiscourse in research articles (RAs), but this time in the interactional dimension. The analytical model is again drawn from

¹⁰ Feng Cao and Guangwei Hu, 'Interactive Metadiscourse in Research Articles: A Comparative Study of Paradigmatic and Disciplinary Influences', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 66 (2014), pp. 15-31 <DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2014.02.007>.

Part One: A critically annotated bibliography on a provisional project of your choosing or of research into a particular theoretical position.

Hyland's interpersonal model of academic metadiscourse¹¹. The corpus is still the post-method sections of 120 RAs across three disciplines and two research paradigms. Statistical analysis show that in cross-disciplinary perspective, the three disciplines vary significantly in the use of certain types/subtypes of interactional metadiscourse. In cross-paradigmatic perspective, the quantitative RAs made more frequent use of the main types of interactional metadiscourse than the qualitative RAs. Besides, Hu and Cao examine 'each coded instance of interactional metadiscourse in its context' (p. 16) and identify salient patterns of using metadiscoursal resources across the disciplines and the paradigms.

Through the current study and the one in 2014,¹² the authors try to view the paradigmatic and disciplinary influences on the use of metadiscourse in a complementary way, first in the interactive dimension and then in the interactional dimension, which are the two main categories in Hyland's metadiscourse model.¹³ But it is a pity that both studies do not incorporate in-depth qualitative methods such as interviewing insiders from specific discourse communities, which may offer valuable perceptions of rhetorical conventions in their fields. This might be viewed as a methodological limitation.

Indeed, metadiscourse has been a heated topic of research with great space to explore. From the annotated bibliography in this realm, we can see a process of accumulating evidence in different disciplines, cultures, genres, periods of time, groups of native/non-native speakers or novice/expert academics. During the process, we attain more and more sound understanding of the role of metadiscourse and how it is influenced by different variables and epistemologies.

¹¹ Ken Hyland, *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing* (London: Continuum, 2005). p. 49.

¹² Cao and Hu.

¹³ Hyland, p. 49.

Critique One

Jacques Derrida on Deconstruction

Invented by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*,¹ ‘deconstruction’ is a term that emerged in the context of the dominance of structuralism. Derrida takes an anti-structuralist gesture by stating that ‘structures were to be undone, decomposed, and desedimented (all types of structures, linguistic, “logocentric”, “phonocentric”, socio-institutional, political, cultural, and above all from the start philosophical)’.² For Derrida, the dismantling of structures is not a negative operation. Rather than destroying, deconstruction is both for the understanding and revelation of the structuralist limitations and for offering a basis for reconstruction. With its rebellious attitude towards the longstanding logocentrism in the Western metaphysics, Derrida’s deconstruction presents itself with the constructiveness in philosophical views, thus providing us with new ways of thinking.

1. Philosophical views

Traditional western philosophy presumes that there exist an inherent and invariable *logos* which functions as the *centre*. It is the fundamental of the world and ultimately determines the nature and development of everything. Derrida regards the western philosophy’s craving for a centre as *logocentrism*. But in his view of deconstruction, such centre is nothing more than a theoretical illusion.

Derrida admits that we could not be totally free from our habit of thinking about things in a logocentric way, and what we could do is to *decentre* any transcendental concept and thus make ourselves open to various new ways. According to Derrida, the centre is the core which organizes and commands a certain kind of structure. It encompasses everything within the structure without itself being a part of that structure. In other words, the centre of a structure lies in other things, or we may say *others*. Since others are fundamentally infinite, the position of the centre is not fixed, but flowing without certainty in the difference between the structure and other structures.

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 40th Anniversary edn. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

² David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, *Derrida And Différance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1985), p.2.

Part Two: Critiques of two of the theories or particular theorists engaged with in the main body of the module.

By attaching importance to decentring, Derrida manages to dissolve the definite boundary of binary oppositions, which is highly praised by structuralists who believe that language is constructed by the signifier and the signified systematically. To deconstruct the traditional recognition of the signifier and the signified, we have to take the risk of 'erasing difference in the self-identity of a signified reducing its signifier into itself or, amounting to the same thing, simply expelling its signifier outside itself'.³ When the relation between the signifier and the signified is erased, they will play free in a web of meaning, thus bringing 'différance'. In this way, the binary oppositions are placed in the domain of meaning and related to each other through the trace of meaning in various ways, and their definite boundary is dissolved in this process of tracing.⁴

The logocentric order of the superiority of the presence and the inferiority of the absence is also broken in decentring. As Derrida states, the signifier is always mistaken as the sign because of its presence – 'all names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence'.⁵ Meaning is represented by the present signifiers. However, the signified meaning can never be represented perfectly by the signifier. Therefore, the presence is the presentation of the absent meaning that can never be represented. The absence is repeated in the presence, but it can never be present. In this sense, the absence is represented by the repetition of the present signs. When the presence and absence are related in the same web of meaning, the superiority and inferiority regulated by logocentrism are dissolved because the binary oppositions are the representations of the original meaning which contains both sides.

For Derrida, it is not enough to deconstruct the way traditional philosophy work and then stop there. Deconstruction indicates the value of the force of non-centre, but this is not equal to the suggestion that the concept of the centre is unimportant. In fact, Derrida is aware of the importance of the centre, and he focuses on describing and transforming it. 'Centre goes together with structure'.⁶ Derrida's centre of non-presence aims to deconstruct the metaphysical centres and structures in western philosophy and further serves to his reformulation of the structure. His deconstruction

³ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 355.

⁴ Ibid, p. 275.

⁵ Ibid, p. 353.

⁶ Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 16.

Part Two: Critiques of two of the theories or particular theorists engaged with in the main body of the module.

exposes a close, frozen, centered, and oppressive concept of the structure and then presents a new conception of open, noncentred, dynamic structurality with *différance* as its functional centre.

2. Values as new ways of thinking

In the first place, deconstruction offers a new way of critical and innovative thinking. By deconstruction, Derrida helps to keep ‘unrelenting and uncompromising vigilance in the face of all unquestioned certainties, assurances, self-evidences, dogmatisms, and creeds’.⁷ In this sense, Derrida’s deconstruction is ‘a certain experience of the emancipatory promise’,⁸ a promise of ideological emancipation. The world today is bursting with updating information, which has greatly changed the old system of knowledge into a seeming whole with disintegrated pieces. Under such circumstances, logocentric and metaphysical philosophical views have limitations in explaining the new social and cultural phenomena. Derrida’s deconstruction represents the effort of postmodern philosophies through reconsidering the relationship between human beings and the world in the context of multicultural and information society. Our mind should not be confined by external powers such as theories or authorities, and this critical thinking is the direct and indispensable lead for innovation.

Besides, Derrida’s logic of supplement and *différance* marks a way of dialectical thinking. Supplement has the function of reversing the binary opposites or transforming the supplement into the origin, and *différance*, with its double value of temporization to differ and spacing to defer, displays the universal interdependence and the constant motion of the meaning of signs. In light of this, we take a perspective that an entity can be regarded as a contradictory whole with its inner opposites capable of being transformed mutually. The deconstruction of an entity does not proceed by arbitrary subversion, but by the meticulous sorting out of warring forces of signification within the entity. For example, if we tear down something in a deconstructive reading, we destroy the domination of one way of signifying over another rather than the text. In this sense, a deconstructive reading is one mode that interprets the specificity of a text’s

⁷ Rodolphe Gasché, *Views and Interviews: On Deconstruction in America* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, Publishers, 2006), p. 2.

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 74.

Part Two: Critiques of two of the theories or particular theorists engaged with in the main body of the module.

crucial difference from itself. In this way, we manage to analyze the inner contradictions and relations, and to carry out the process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

3. Conclusion

In all, by challenging logocentrism, Derrida has conducted a campaign of decentring and dissolving the definite boundaries between binary oppositions. As Derrida puts, 'Deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all. It does not settle for methodical procedures, it opens up a passageway. It marches ahead and leaves a trail.'⁹ Derrida does not intend to lay down rules for people, so it might be better to regard his philosophical views as a new world outlook or an insight into problems rather than as prescriptions for operation.

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⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other', in *Reading De Man Reading*, eds. by Lindsey Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 25-65 (p. 42).

Critique Two

Simone de Beauvoir on Existentialist Feminism

Existentialism was born in France after World War II and quickly swept across the Western world. Beauvoir, as a theorist greatly influenced by Sartre in philosophical thoughts, puts forward the existentialist feminist theory in her work *The Second Sex*.¹ In this masterpiece, Beauvoir systematically elaborates her existentialist feminist ideas and ethics, manifesting that existentialist concepts can apply to the analysis and research of the situation of women.

Beauvoir's philosophical ideas in *The Second Sex* are inspired by Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre and others, with Sartre having the greatest influence. Therefore, the critique aims to present how Beauvoir inherits and develops Sartre's existentialism and how she emphasizes declining 'the Other' identity through transcendence in the existentialist feminist theory, which greatly influences feminist theories afterwards.

1. Inheritance and development of Sartre's existentialism

In the first place, Beauvoir indicates that there is no so-called 'eternal femininity' based on Sartre's principle of 'existence precedes essence'.² According to this principle, man first exists in the world, then encounters himself, and afterwards defines himself. In other words, there is no fixed human nature; it is man himself who creates his own existence through his actions. Therefore, existence comes first, and man's own actions form the essence. It is the same case with femininity. Those so-called 'feminine myths' that have enslaved and distorted feminine images are created just for the males' own needs to make females subordinate to them.

Second, Beauvoir develops Sartre's concept of 'the self' from discussing individual issues to the relationship between men and women. In Sartre's theory, the self is divided into two types: 'in-itself' and 'for-itself'. In-itself is an eternal and absolute existence, a concrete and accidental objective self. For-itself is a process with space for development and perfection, and is a transcendent, creative and future-

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).

² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (New Haven, NT: Yale University Press, 2007), p.55.

Part Two: Critiques of two of the theories or particular theorists engaged with in the main body of the module.

oriented self.³ For-itself depends on in-itself, and the former is always in the process of self-realization and self-planning. In Sartre's view, there is always a conflicting relationship between the self and the Other. The Other is an existent object which is different from things. His existence poses a threat to any others because he is a free object. In his staring, he might turn the self into an object. In this case, there are only two ways for the self to be free from the gaze of the Other: one is to be the Other's object; the other is to make the Other be your object and then manipulate him. Everyone sees himself as a subject and the Other as his own object. For-itself, as a transcendent, creative and future-oriented self, regulates itself by making sure that it is not the Other.

Beauvoir uses existentialism to explain women's living conditions. She believes that women have the urge to be for-itself but are fixed in the in-itself position, forced to be the Other, while men are in the position of the self. The reality of women proves that women are defined by the perspective of the male as subject. Women are not their own legislators, and they have no rights to choose and decide their own destiny, but they are given legislation, choices and decisions by men. At the same time, Beauvoir points out that because of their own deficiencies and limitations, such as their willingness to become male accomplices and become dependents, women become beings with immanence. Furthermore, women have always been in a state of diaspora. They have never united to fight. These all make women lack the ability to pursue independence and freedom.

2. Transcendence as a way of declining to be the Other

Although women are reduced into the Other, Beauvoir affirms women's identity as an independent individual. From her point of view, women have 'the power to choose between the assertion of her transcendence and her alienation as Object'.⁴ Both men and women have their responsibility to provide themselves with the meaning of their existence. In this sense, women should exist as subjects who are equivalent to men, and they should try to prove themselves through *transcendence* in terms of self-consciousness, economic independence and ideological transformation. Based on this,

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* (New York, NY: Washington Square Press, 1992).

⁴ Beauvoir, p. 76.

Part Two: Critiques of two of the theories or particular theorists engaged with in the main body of the module.

women can have free choice to design her own life, and then further to realize her own self-value.

To begin with, self-consciousness is the top priority for women to achieve transcendence. Women tend to immerse in the oppression from man. In this way, they can have a man to depend on, and man can give her a steady and stable life. Women may not do any constructive activities, but at the same, they do not need to shoulder any responsibilities. But as contended by Beauvoir, woman 'must believe herself his equal and be so in concrete fact; she must engage in her enterprises with the same decisiveness'.⁵ Female should acknowledge her same equality as male. Only when they hold the consciousness that they are equal with male, can they come to realize that they are treated unfairly and begins to strive for the equality that she should be endowed with.

Besides, it is necessary that women become economically independent. In the patriarchal society, women's freedom and dominant status are deprived of men. Their economic reliance on men is inevitable. Under such circumstances, women choose to get financial support from men to maintain their survival, but it turns out that women end up losing their voice. In Beauvoir's view, it is necessary that 'the economic evolution of woman's condition be accomplished'.⁶ Therefore, to change their subordinate status and to get the real emancipation from men, women should seek for economic independence, which is instrumental in the eradication of the subordinate or unequal relationship between men and women.

Furthermore, there should be an ideological transformation for a new social system. Beauvoir has noted that,

If the little girl were brought up from the first with the same demands and rewards, the same severity and the same freedom with their brother, the meanings of the castration complex and of the Oedipus complex would be profoundly modified.⁷

Women's miserable situation is not born with but formed by the society and its ideology. It is the totally different ways of cultivation between men and women at the beginning that shape their different processes of development. This produces eternal femininity

⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 655.

⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 595.

⁷ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 682.

Part Two: Critiques of two of the theories or particular theorists engaged with in the main body of the module.

that describes only women, and masculinity only men. If there is no difference between the two genders, such words specified for each gender respectively is nonexistent. Men have control over ideology in the patriarchal society. They compile a series of systems in terms of religion, law and morality that stipulate suitable behavior and rules for women. Only by transforming the original unfair stipulations can a new female image come up.

3. Conclusion

Beauvoir proposes feminist existentialism under the great influence of Sartre's philosophical views. In her view, man is never satisfied with the current existence and tries to find new goals to surpass himself. And they can freely make their own choice to create himself and explore the relationship between himself and the outside world. Therefore, men are positive and self-righteous. But women are not free and are forced to serve as the role of the Other in the patriarchal society – they become an object and they do not form a large-scale resistance to unfair treatment from men. To decline the status of being the Other, women should pursue transcendence in self-consciousness, economic independence and ideological transformation.

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Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

Awakening and Resistance: Female Characters Trying to Get Rid of

‘the Other’ identity in Flannery O’Connor’s Short Stories

1. Introduction

Flannery O’Connor’s achievement in the short story makes her one of the most important writers in American literature. At first, most critics and readers believe that the themes of O’Connor’s short stories are confined to the original sin and the mystery of grace and redemption. Some scholars like Drake claims that O’Connor is a writer who has only ‘one story to tell’ and that her short stories are limited in themes.¹ But as time goes by, more and more studies of O’Connor have been developing from perspectives such as southern culture, grotesque ideas and characters, and political attitude in non-political texts.²

Some scholars notice that ‘there remains a need to bridge the gap between southern literary studies and mainstream feminist criticism, which has generally neglected O’Connor’s works’.³ Feminist readings of O’Connor’s works became more and more popular after her death in 1964, and many critics consider gender one of the main ‘areas of dispute’ in O’Connor’s works.⁴ Some researchers indicate that O’Connor agrees with defining femaleness under southern patriarchy. For example, Prown believes that O’Connor chooses to ‘bury her female self beneath layers of masculinist forms and conventions’ in order to adapt to a male-dominated world.⁵ Similarly, Gordon indicates that O’Connor’s education and religious background led her to the alliance with the masculinist modern tradition.⁶ Babinec discusses O’Connor’s depiction of mother-daughter relationships and explores her general presentation of women. In

¹ Robert Drake, *Flannery O’Connor: A Critical Essay* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), p. 17.

² See, for example, in the perspective of southern culture, Ralph C. Wood, *Flannery O’Connor and the Christ-Haunted South* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004); in the perspective of grotesque ideas and characters, Carol Shloss, *Flannery O’Connor’s Dark Comedies: The Limits of Inference* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2011); in the perspective of politics, Jon Lance Bacon, *Flannery O’Connor and Cold War Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³ Katherine Hemple Prown, *Revising Flannery O’Connor: Southern Literary Culture and the Problem of Female Authorship* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001), p. 29.

⁴ Marshall Bruce Gentry, *Flannery O’Connor’s Religion of the Grotesque* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), p. 58.

⁵ Prown, p. 161.

⁶ Sarah Gordon, *Flannery O’Connor: The Obedient Imagination* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), p. 16.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

Babinec's view, O'Connor appears uninterested in feminism or gender; her 'dominant and abusive man' and 'obsessive and controlling women' seem to 'indicate that she believes in inherent male and female incompleteness'.⁷ Similarly, Smith claims that O'Connor's stories 'should be taken as commentaries upon the impossibility of a woman of this society successfully negotiating her way through a patriarchal power structure'.⁸

On the other hand, some critics believe that O'Connor is much more subversive in her descriptions of female oppression and identity than previously granted. They contend that in spite of O'Connor's loyalty to a patriarchal church and culture, she may actually turn out to be a feminist. For example, one of the earliest feminist responses to O'Connor's works is from Westling, who explains that many short stories of O'Connor are 'concerned with the issues of feminine identity and authority'.⁹ Donahoo suggests that O'Connor's works are more feminist than has often been assumed. He finds that O'Connor's female characters often seem 'victims of the feminine mystique rather than the victims of the author's misogyny'.¹⁰ Similarly, Spivey asserts that 'in spite of believing that the church was the world's greatest force in liberating women, O'Connor was in fact a certain kind of feminist in viewpoint'.¹¹ Taking social background into consideration, Wray examines the rebellion of women in O'Connor's short story, believing that her writing is 'an overt, quite conscious rebellion against the Southern patriarchy that dictated these constraint and limitations'.¹²

To sum up, whether criticized or confirmed in the feminist readings of her works, O'Connor is deeply involved in the gender issue already. In *The Complete Stories*, a collection of her short stories, the female characters are unique and vivid. No wonder Walker puts that 'It was for her description of southern white women that I appreciate

⁷ Lisa S. Babinec, 'Cyclical Patterns of Domination and Manipulation in Flannery O'Connor's Mother-Daughter Relationships', *The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin*, 19 (1990), 9-29 (p. 9) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26670105>> [accessed 28 November 2020].

⁸ Peter A. Smith, 'Flannery O'Connor's Empowered Women', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 26 (1994), 35-47 (p. 46) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20078095>> [accessed 28 November 2020].

⁹ Louise Westling, *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 149.

¹⁰ Robert Donahoo, 'O'Connor and the Feminine Mystique: "The Limitations That Reality Imposed"', in *On the Subject of the Feminist Business: Re-Reading Flannery O'Connor*, ed. by Teresa Caruso (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), pp. 9-28 (p. 24).

¹¹ Ted R. Spivey, *Flannery O'Connor: The Woman, the Thinker, the Visionary* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), p. 29.

¹² Virginia Wray, 'Flannery O'Connor's Struggle with Patriarchal Culture', in *On the Subject of the Feminist Business: Re-Reading Flannery O'Connor*, ed. by Teresa Caruso (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), pp. 29-40 (p. 29).

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

her work first'.¹³ Some of the female characters in O'Connor's short stories become widowed and must raise their children independently; others have husbands but are ignored or dominated by these men; still others are the new images of the females who are courageous enough to disobey orders from male family members. This essay, concerned with the awakening and resistance of the female characters in O'Connor's short stories, tries to analyze three representative female characters who try to get rid of the Other identity in the story of 'A View of the Woods', 'The Packer's Back' and 'A Stroke of Good Fortune', and to interpret their life and choices in the patriarchal society from the perspective of existentialist feminism.

2. The Other in existentialist feminism

Based on Sartre's existentialism, existentialist feminist Beauvoir puts forward the concept of the Other, which refers to those who have no or have lost self-consciousness, being under the control of other people or environment.¹⁴ Living as objects all the time, these people have lost their subjective personality and have been alienated. When it comes to different genders, Beauvoir states,

humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relatively to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being [...] she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential.¹⁵

In this sense, man plays the role of the self, or subject, whereas woman plays the object, or the Other. Man is essential, powerful and transcendent, whereas woman is inessential, fragile and dominated. As we can see, in the male-dominated social system, the concept of the Other is introduced by Beauvoir for the critique of patriarchy, in which woman is constructed as the subordinate to man. Beauvoir's primary thought is that men oppress women by regarding them in every perspective as the Other, which is defined with reference to men. Therefore, to discuss the status and characteristics of the Other is to analyze the identity of woman.

¹³ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), p. 45.

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).

¹⁵ Beauvoir, p. 15.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

In the first place, woman as the Other is immanent. Beauvoir uses 'immanence' to describe the realm for women: a closed domain where they are interior, passive, inflexible and confined to themselves. While 'transcendence' designates the realm for men: an open-up universe where they are superior, active, productive and reaching outward into the external world. Everyone's life should allow the interplay of such forces as immanence and transcendence, but for a long time, man has been denying woman the transcendent role.

Besides, woman as the Other is alienated. To maintain their superior status, men have alienated women into an inferior environment. Beauvoir clearly points out that the alienation of women is the result of the male-centered society, rather than a natural outcome. The alienation is not women's own choice. It is the situation in which they stay makes choices for them.

Furthermore, woman as the Other has the characteristic of anaclisis. In a patriarchal society, women become men's dependent. When she is a little girl, she is taken as her father's property. It is her father's will to decide how her life will go on, including her marriage. After married, she becomes her husband's private estate. While getting older, her son is her support. Those who have not given birth to a son are always considered pathetic. Beauvoir points out that in order to ensure their absolute control of women, men set laws and rules in terms of economy and culture to restrain women in the oppressed situation. As a result, it is man's advantage to take risks, whereas woman is confined in domestic life.

As we can see, due to the long-term subordinate status, the Other identity subtly rooted in the hearts of women. But at the same time, Beauvoir suggests that there is no such thing as eternal femininity. As far as Beauvoir is concerned, the presence of women precedes the essence of women. The femininity is imposed on women by the patriarchal society. She declares,

I shall place woman in a world of values and give her behavior a dimension of liberty. I believe that she has the power to choose between the assertion of her transcendence and her alienation as object.¹⁶

¹⁶ Beauvoir, p. 76.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

Ultimately, Beauvoir's research on women's destiny aims to help women achieve freedom and equality. In her view, the image of a woman depends on her own choice. Women do have different physiological characteristics with men, but this is only an objective existence and should not and cannot be used as a criterion for the essence of women. They do not have the so-called innate or immutable nature. Their status and future depend on their choice rather than inherently doomed. Woman should be considered as a subject to act and she can build reciprocal relationships with man. In short, to achieve women's freedom is not to reject their gender, but to seek equality with men.

3. Females characters in O'Connor's short stories

In her short stories, O'Connor provides the readers with a vivid and picturesque portrait of the southern women in the collapse of the old South and the development of the modern world. The essay, aiming to analyze the awakening female characters who try to get rid of the Other identity in the turbulent period of southern society, selects three characters from O'Connor's short stories: Mary Fortune Pitts in 'A View of the Woods', Sarah Ruth Cates in 'Parker's Back' and Ruby Hill in 'A Stroke of Good Fortune'. By exploring the actions and ideas of the three representative female characters, we can better understand O'Connor's view on women's struggle with the Other identity.

3.1 Resistance to the male elders' dictatorship

Mary Fortune Pitts in 'A View of the Woods'

Women's vital attempt to pursue what they really desire is through resisting the patriarchy and making their own judgment. In 'A View of the Woods', the nine-years-old Mary Fortune Pitts is the victim of the combat between her grandfather, Mark Fortune and her father, Pitts. There is no family love between the father-in-law and the son-in-law but interest issues and increasing hatred: the father-in-law keeps selling off pieces of his property to outsiders, which in the son-in-law's view, should have been left or at least sold to his family.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

‘Both men use Mary to antagonize the other’.¹⁷ For Mark, Mary is the only family member for whom ‘he had any respect’ because she shares similar appearances and personality with himself and has ‘to a singular degree, his intelligence, his strong will, and his push and drive’.¹⁸ Mark loves the small replica of himself so much and always watches over her carefully in case she should run into danger; Mary has become an emotional anchor for him to some extent. For Pitts, Mary is at first a punching bag for him to vent his resentment towards Mark. For one thing, Pitts, as well as other family members, assumes that it is Mary who puts Mark to sell his property; for another, Pitts knows that it is a sweet revenge on Mark by means of beating the only family member that he is fond of. Pitts also regards his daughter as a bargaining chip in any interest talks with Mark. When Mark threatens him that he will be driven out of the place if he beats Mary, he will strike back and intimidate that ‘Put me off and you put her off too. Go right ahead. She’s mine to whip and I’ll whip her every day of the year if it suits me’.¹⁹

It is difficult for Mary to reconcile the desires of Mark and the demands of Pittses. She has already learnt that she can never satisfy everyone that is related to her, and she confronts the similar dilemma with other women that she is suspended between ‘an ideal of selflessness’ and the truth of her own ‘agency and needs’.²⁰ She has tried when Mark forces her to choose her side. Mary insists in a ‘loud and positive and belligerent’ voice, ‘I’m Mary-Fortune-Pitts’, which implies that she still wants to protect both her relationship with Mark and that with Pitts.²¹ On the one hand, she is a Fortune; she enjoys staying with Mark most of the time and is never angry with the old man for long until their last fight. On the other hand, she is a Pitts; she cares about the well-being of the Pittses and will never betray her father even though he beats her a lot.

Actually, Mary is a girl who knows her own mind. ‘She didn’t move an inch. She had a habit of his of not hearing what she didn’t want to hear’.²² Considering both Mark’s and the Pittses’ ideas, Mary restrains her own feelings as well as experiences, and endures mental stress caused by her grandfather and physical injury caused by her

¹⁷ Connie Ann Kirk, *Critical Companion to Flannery O'Connor* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2008), p. 124.

¹⁸ O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), p. 336.

¹⁹ O'Connor, p. 336.

²⁰ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 138.

²¹ O'Connor, p. 351.

²² O'Connor, p. 339.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

father for so long. At last, Mary's long-oppressed anger outpours when Mark insists on selling the lawn where the Pittses children play and they can see the road and the view of the woods. Unlike Mark, who only regards the land as a commodity, Mary views it 'a living being with whom to enter into relation' and cannot stand it being 'used or destroyed at pleasure'.²³ Mary realizes that she can gain nothing no matter how hard she tries to restrain her feelings and how much she has sacrificed for her family. The tragedy happens when Mark is trying to regain Mary's respect by beating her like her father does and Mary is angry with his decision of selling the lawn and pushing her to violate her own will to accept and support his idea.

The grandfather and the granddaughter come to blows in the woods. When her grandfather claims that he is going to whip her, Mary says, 'Nobody has ever beat me [...] and if anybody tries it, I'll kill him'.²⁴ She used to say the same words to Mark when she denied her father's violence to her; she told lies at that time, but she is serious this time. She strikes Mark madly, and speaks for herself for the first time, 'You been whipped [...] by me [...] and I'm PURE Pitts'.²⁵ She used to be powerless to resist her father's violence and her grandfather's dictatorship, but now she rises up against her grandfather who threatens to whip her – she chooses to fight for her own will and that of the Pittses. To some extent, Mary, Mark and even the woods are damnable 'while the true Christ laughs far off in the alien heavens, in the ultimate abyss'.²⁶ The grandfather's oppression collapses, and Mary's rebellion also ends up with tragedy – Mary is killed by the wild old man and the latter dies of exhaustion or a mental breakdown.

Mary is one of O'Connor's charming, rebellious and feminist characters. At first, she is a silent victim of the men's interest combat and makes sacrifice to maintain the seemingly peaceful relationships; later, she gradually realizes what she wants but she still chooses to keep silent and endure her families; and at last, she breaks out and strikes back at the end of her forbearance. As suggested by Beauvoir, 'Simply from the fact that liberty in woman is still abstract and empty, she can exercise it only in revolt, which

²³ Timothy R. Vande Brake, 'Thinking Like a Tree: The Land Ethic in O'Connor's "a View of the Woods"', *Flannery O'Connor Review*, 9 (2011), 19-35 (p. 26) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26671208>> [accessed 20 November 2020]

²⁴ O'Connor, p. 354.

²⁵ O'Connor, p. 355.

²⁶ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *Modern Critical Views: Flannery O'Connor*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York, NY: Infobase Publishing, 2009), p. 6.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

is the only road open to those who have no opportunity of doing anything constructive'.²⁷ Although Mary's rebellion ends up in failure, she manages to inflict a heavy blow on her grandfather, a representative of male elders' dictatorship, and shows her will to articulate her independent ideas and get rid of the Other identity.

3.2 Resistance to the traditional husband-wife relationship

Sarah Ruth Cates in 'Parker's Back'

In the story of 'Parker's Back', Parker's wife Sarah Ruth reveals women's success in opposing the traditional female docile image, defining themselves, gaining more authority and being more powerful than her husband. Instead of blindly obeying her gloomy husband, Sarah is devoted to 'her own set of convictions and values with little or no sign of softening them for anyone'.²⁸

Before they get married, Parker has apparently noticed this common but different girl. After Parker visits Sarah three times, Sarah falls in love with Parker and not long after that she agrees to 'take a ride in his truck'.²⁹ But she refuses Parker's suggestion of lying down together in the back of the truck by stating that 'not until after we married'.³⁰ And when Parker continues to reach for her, she thrusts him away with such force that the door of the truck comes off and Parker falls down on the ground. With this tough attitude, Sarah shows her own characteristics as a girl who has independent ideas.

Parker and Sarah's marriage does not change Sarah but makes Parker gloomier than ever. Parker never gives up 'defeating' Sarah to obtain her approval and admiration. Every time Parker feels uneasy and dissatisfied, he will get a tattoo painted on his body.³¹ As time goes by, he has had his body all covered with tattoos besides his back so that Sarah calls him 'a walking panner-rammer'.³² Parker wishes that his wife can have a better sense and enjoy the tattoos, which may imply her approval with him. Sarah, however, regards it as 'a good way to make an idiot of himself'.³³ Living in a

²⁷ Beauvoir, p. 594.

²⁸ Kirk, p. 100.

²⁹ O'Connor, p. 518.

³⁰ O'Connor, p. 518.

³¹ Kirk, p. 99.

³² O'Connor, p. 519.

³³ O'Connor, p. 518.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

patriarchal society, Parker has the deep-rooted idea that a woman should be docile to her husband. He struggles all the time to control his wife, but Sarah has the ability and wisdom to resist.

Failing to impress Sarah with his tattoos, Parker turns to boast his charm as a man. He picks out the shortcomings of his wife so as to build his powerful position in front of her. He even threatens Sarah that he has a love affair with his boss, but he does not receive the expected reactions from his wife – Sarah connects it with the sin and warns Parker instead of showing envy. During the courtship and after their marriage, Sarah never does anything that violates her upbringing, and maintains the dignity of a devout believer, which imperceptibly increases Parker's anxiety.

Although Parker tried everything to resist religion, he is gradually influenced by Sarah and he decides to put a tattoo of God on his back. It is a way to escape from his uneasy feeling as well as an attempt to surprise his wife. Parker's desire to have his back tattooed is overwhelming – 'as urgent as it might be for him to get a tattoo, it was just as urgent to get exactly the right one to bring Sarah Ruth to heel'.³⁴ He leaves home one night without telling her where he is going, only 'imagining how Sarah Ruth would be struck speechless'.³⁵ When choosing to tattoo the face of Christ, he attempts to please Sarah rather than to dominate her.³⁶ However, it turns out that the new tattoo does not please Sarah as he has planned, instead, she is irritated Parker's behavior seriously hits her bottom line. She fights against it, screaming 'Idolatry! [...] I can put up with lies and vanity but I don't want no idolater in this house!'.³⁷ She thrashes him across the shoulders with the broom. In the end, Sarah finds Parker 'leaning against the tree, crying like a baby'³⁸ – she destroys her husband's last effort to retrieve his superiority and authority as a husband over her.

Sarah's resistance to traditional husband-wife relationship reveals O'Connor's concern for women's living conditions and their attempts to get rid of the Other identity. In a male-dominated world, women are likely stick to their stipulated and idealized duties and narrowly define themselves so that they lack chance to make free choices.

³⁴ O'Connor, p. 518.

³⁵ O'Connor, p. 525.

³⁶ Davis J. Leigh, 'Suffering and the Sacred in Flannery O'Connor's Short Stories', *Renascence*, 65 (2013), 365-379 (p. 375) <DOI: 10.5840/renascence201365523>.

³⁷ O'Connor, p. 529.

³⁸ O'Connor, p. 529.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

But the image of Sarah suggests a positive movement to women's positions at home from being dominated by their husbands to gaining control over their husbands. Sarah is aware of the necessity to take her own will and needs into consideration before she decide to sacrifice. She is not willing to be influenced by extrinsic factors and follow her husband blindly, and she defends her freedom of making her own judgment and taking action. Sometimes Sarah is silent, but her silence does not mean obedience but a way to show her own free will. In all, Sarah sets an example for females to earn their independency and struggle for their own voice in the relationship between husband and wife, which suggests a bright future for females' movement of getting rid of the Other identity and earning their freedom and power.

3.3 Resistance to the traditional mother-son relationship

Ruby Hill in 'A Stroke of Good Fortune'

As indicated by Beauvoir, 'Woman is doomed to the continuation of the species and the care of the home – that is to say, to immanence'.³⁹ But Ruby in 'A Stroke of Good Fortune' tries to escape the demands of a traditional woman. She sees the 'feminine heritage' and 'biological destiny' as 'death-in-life'.⁴⁰ She hopes to avoid ruining her life with motherhood.

Ruby was born in a big family with eight children, and she witnesses the miserable life of her mother, sisters and neighbours messed up by children. She thinks of herself in comparison with her mother: she is happy with her being 'warm and fat and beautiful and not too fat'⁴¹ and finds it horrifying that her mother looks 'like a puckered-up old yellow apple' at the same age.⁴² Besides the price of beauty, she deems it fruitless to raise a child: those children turn out to be nobody at all but only get their mother 'deader with every one of them'.⁴³ For example, her brother, Rufus, causes extreme pain to his mother when he was born, but only makes his mother 'into an old woman'⁴⁴ and is 'good for absolutely nothing' at last.⁴⁵ Her neighbour's posthumous son Hartley

³⁹ Beauvoir, p. 419.

⁴⁰ Louise Westling, 'Flannery O'Connor's Mothers and Daughters', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 (1978), 510-522 (p. 515) <DOI: 10.2307/441199>.

⁴¹ O'Connor, p. 99.

⁴² O'Connor, p. 97.

⁴³ O'Connor, p. 97.

⁴⁴ O'Connor, p. 97.

⁴⁵ O'Connor, p. 96.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

Gilfeet is so naughty and annoying that Ruby quite sympathizes with Hartley's mother who has to raise him alone and regards him as a fortune. The existence of these children repeatedly reminds Ruby that children are the source of a woman's misery; conceiving and nurturing children means nothing to a woman but consumption and torture.

Ruby has the ambition to be something more than her mother, sisters and neighbours who are exhausted by their children. Unlike her sisters who marry men from around and follow their mother's path, she marries a foreigner and moves to live in the city. With the hope of a good life, she refuses the arrival of an unexpected child for fear that it may ruin everything. She would rather suffer from some severe diseases than pregnancy, but all her female comrades fail to notice her anxiety and even exacerbate it. For them, the gestation for a baby is one of a woman's primary missions during her life, and they tend to consider it optimistically and fail to take a woman's own will into consideration. Besides, Ruby knows that her husband must have been indulged in the joy of the baby's coming.

Ruby is constantly refusing to believe that she has become pregnant. She cheats herself by comforting herself that she is just becoming fat. Believing that 'she was the only one in her family who had been different, who had had any get',⁴⁶ She keeps telling herself that 'you're too young to bust your gears' even though she has been feeling really run down.⁴⁷ All the clues suggest Ruby's pregnancy, but she keeps denying her condition. Haunted by the physical discomfort, her husband's betrayal, her female comrades' impotence, and the fear and trouble caused by a child, Ruby feels her 'face drawn puckered' and she becomes as worn-out as her mother was at the age of thirty-four.⁴⁸ Finally, she has to accept the fact that she is pregnant and will soon share her mother's fate. The palmist's prophecy of 'a stroke of good fortune' appears ironic now. The short story ends with the echoes 'Good Fortune, Baby' leering in the stairwell,⁴⁹ which is believed to represent O'Connor's 'heavily ironic and perhaps even ambivalent attitude toward Ruby's situation'.⁵⁰

Ruby's rejection of bearing a child reflects her protection of her own rights in that she does not see herself as a willing mother after all. Although pregnancy is

⁴⁶ O'Connor, p. 96.

⁴⁷ O'Connor, p. 97.

⁴⁸ O'Connor, p. 106.

⁴⁹ O'Connor, p. 107.

⁵⁰ Westling, 'Flannery O'Connor's Mothers and Daughters', p. 515.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

undoubtedly a good fortune for most women both in the Christ culture and in the secular world, Ruby deviates from this norm and evades her female destiny.⁵¹ She claims the right to meet her real needs and rejects what she is 'doomed' to accept although she realizes that she has been already a victim of what she always fights against. Readers can easily find the ironic meaning in the title – 'a good fortune' might be a disaster for Ruby, a woman with her own will and pursuit.

It is not clear what eventually happened to Ruby: she might be responsible for herself and choose to have abortion; or she might come to terms with her female destiny and becomes a miserable mother. O'Connor never makes moral judgment in her stories, instead, she describes a dilemma and leaves it to both her characters and readers. Ruby's sense of the cost of reproduction is an overt resistance to the sentimental stereotypes of motherhood. Although Ruby's ultimate fate does not avoid women's destiny, her reaction to the pregnancy can uphold her as a new image of an awakening woman who try to get rid of her conventional role.

4. Conclusion

Most of O'Connor's short stories are written after the World War II, when women living in the American south experienced a great change in traditional values. As the Feminist Movement was in vogue, women began to reflect on their identities and the patriarchal rules that has dominated the society for thousands of years. As a female writer with a strong sense of responsibility, O'Connor shows intense concerns for the Other identity of women by presenting their confinement and resistance.

In O'Connor's short stories, female characters like Mary, Ruby and Sarah are representative of new female images in different perspectives – the resistance to the male elder's dictatorship, the resistance to the traditional husband-wife relationship and the resistance to the traditional mother-son relationship. Mary, an oppressed girl in 'A View of the Woods', has her own attitude and ways of dealing with conflicts instead of blindly following the male elders of her family. Sarah in 'Packer's Back' is full of strength, action and self-confidence. Ruby in 'A Stroke of Good Fortune' denies her destiny of being a mother. These characters are free and powerful in varying degrees,

⁵¹ Westling, p. 516.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

but they all betray the conventional image of female, who is supposed to be the Other – gentle, dependent and obedient.

O'Connor shows her subversion of the patriarchal society through these female characters. Although she never professes that she is a feminist, her choice of subjects and her depiction of female characters' interpersonal relationships and their psychology all reveal her outlook on women's self-development in a subtle way. Despite the fact that the endings for these female characters are unsatisfactory to some extent, their struggling against the Other identity shows O'Connor's sympathy and expectation of women. As far as O'Connor is concerned, the extent of women's liberation depends largely on the degree of female independent consciousness and awareness of inequality. In accordance with existentialist feminism, it is vital that women develop their self-reliance and self-realization, just as Beauvoir puts,

from woman's point of view I shall describe the world in which women must live; and thus, we shall be able to envisage the difficulties in their way as, endeavoring to make their escape from the sphere hitherto assigned them, they aspire to full membership in the human race.⁵²

Women have to get rid of the idea that they are mindless, passive and helpless the Other. They should be endowed with the freedom to reject the notion that obedience, marriage and pregnancy are a woman's final goal. Besides, it is necessary that they make full use of their nature to work for the benefit of others and fulfill her own potentialities at the same time. Only by carrying out these items on their liberation agenda can women get rid of the Other identity and achieve their development.

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⁵² Beauvoir, p. 28.

Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

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Part Three: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice.

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