

Motherhood Is Lost, Exile Is Born: A Desperate and Critical Look into William Trevor's Novel, Felicia's Journey

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Abstract: During their early times the women have experienced both cultural and social discriminations. These bad omens, step by step, have provided the traumatic sense for the women, either to deny themselves or to have the sense of not integrating with others. Moreover; if they decide to integrate, they are retarded by the society. William Trevor's novel, Felicia's journey, expatiates on the life of young Irish girl who has been entrapped in a bad social condition, which the life of enjoyment has been circumscribed by the environmental hostilities. Furthermore; her lack of having a good mother adds more to this bitter condition that she has no sense of belongings. Thus drawing on the reading of self-exile, the novel which is discussed in this article goes on to explore the marginalization of the Irish woman with her people around and more importantly, within Irish and English society.

Keywords: Exile, Abandonment, Motherhood, Cultural and Social Discrimination

INTRODUCTION

During the history cultural and social discriminations have made lots of problems for women. Also lack of a good mother can make this problem double. Mothers as good supporters, especially for girls, can impede any disasters that come to their children. One of the biggest problems that children suffer is the sense of exile. It causes as the child has no mother to make her familiar with values of life, thus, she feels dislocated and she thinks that she has no sense of belonging.

The present study sheds lights on the characters that how they have been afflicted with lots of the problems and how they try to solve or at least deal with them. Although Felicia, as the main character, tries hard but she fails as she has no one as her supporter. She is alone and till the end of the novel she suffers from her sense of exile.

Statement of the Problem

William Trevor's novel, Felicia's journey, acts as a justification for loneliness of members. The members that cannot accustom themselves to their environment and the people who are around and if they try to fix themselves up with them, they will fail. The term is commonly but negatively used to associate with race. It means that the novel focuses on Trevor's special concern with characters, specially, the Irish women and exile that she receives both in hands of her family and her people who are around and somehow they try to bash her life. The clime that she was born and the clime she wants to be also provide her the disastrous loneliness that make her life as a hell. Therefore, the present study conducts an investigation into the influence of people and environment on the characters, especially, the young girl whose life, identity and her reputation as a girl has been smirched. And although in

the course of novel her progress is vividly shown in different spaces that she wants to adjust, it comes to nothing as it leads only to her marginalization in both Irish and England society.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Michael Parker [1] believes that the novel shows a period of momentous change in the relationships between Ireland and Britain. It reflects the individuals' bad fate in the political, economic, and cultural narratives and histories of their places of origin. He also assumes that the novel depicts character's lack of prospects and quality of her life stand as an indictment of successive Irish governments since Independence, all of which failed to provide adequate employment and hope for generations of their young. He, furthermore, goes on and believes that in Trevor's novels, as in Dickens's fictions, it is frequently the young that have borne most, the traumatic experiences in childhood scarring the rest of their lives (p. 98-99). Clearly, these great shocks are shown in the character of the young girl that she is depicted as a place which is alone and also refers to her character that she cannot accustom herself to any conditions since they are her enemies and to her final decision, she must take the life of loneliness. Much in the same way Constanza Del Río-Álvaro [2], has cited in his work that Dolores

Mackenna says that the writer of the novel is from Ireland which

"is a rural and small town, a bleak place where people endure life rather than live it; a place of loneliness, frustration and undramatic suffering. Timeless, except in its details, its moral climate remains constant whether its people live in the 1940s or the 1990s" (p. 2).

Del Río-Álvarez believes that Trevor in his work uses naturalistic and realistic external detail as a tool to illuminate psychological and ethical scenarios and write “of human situations, in which characters move towards a revelation or epiphany which is moral, spiritual or social”(p. 3), and to a great extent, he pinpoints on keywords in his work as “silence,” “exile,” and “cunning” that build his authorial strategies.

According to Denis Sampson [6] since so many of Trevor's characters are consciously or unconsciously engaged in "cover up," in preserving "secrets," it would seem that the artist's gaze is fixed on that parental state of endurance and painful honesty. The circumstances, in which that marriage survived, during Trevor's formation, were the bleak economic and cultural conditions of provincial Ireland in the thirties and forties; the joyless truth of the marriage mirrored the repressed, unadorned life of the time. He goes on and recapitulates the Trevor's characters by revealing their inner lives in a plain, endlessly nuanced and ambiguous style, and this may also reflect an aspect of the wider culture absorbed in childhood(p. 282). Ellen McWilliams [3], draws on historical and social scientific studies of Irish women and emigration as a means of properly situating Trevor's novel in relation to larger discourses of migration in an Irish context. He believes that the novel demonstrates a keen sensitivity to the very real social and cultural conditions that underpinned the migration of Irish women from Ireland to England in the 1980s and early 1990s (p.237). Furthermore, he believes that the novel draws on feminist theoretical and historical work on domestic space, and examine the interaction of space and history in two key sites of experience in the novel: Felicia's father's house – a mausoleum of the Irish political past – and the ‘Englishman's castle’ of the murderous Mr Hilditch who, after a chance encounter, plots to ensnare Felicia. It will look, in detail, at how domestic interiors in the novel reflect larger political and historical discourses and provide a frame of reference for the dilemmas faced by Felicia as an Irish woman at home and in England.

In this way he cites from Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt, “Throughout his career, William Trevor has written sympathetically of women who, despite their varied national and economic backgrounds, suffer the injustice of living in male dominated societies. Women's names provide the titles for several of his novels and many of his short stories; women characters function as the central intelligence in many other works (p. 238).

Outline

William Trevor was a novelist and short-story writer who was born in the Republic of Ireland on 24 May, 1928. During his early life due to his father's work, he moved to different places and as the result of that he attended variety of schools as St. Columba's

College. While he was spending his time there, he became familiar with Oisín Kelly who, later, learnt him about art and the way of becoming an artist. In 1954 he migrated to England, and this sense of migration changed his mood and made him prepared for what would have to come over him. During this time his ability in writing bloomed that he published lots of books. By publishing these books he got not only awards and high prizes but also he found this capability to amaze his critics by mastering a kind of form which was uncanny. Thus through his special techniques he could penetrate in to the mind of his characters and understood their motivations and their fears.

Although many of Trevor's early works were set in rundown, post-second-world-war London, his other works during the mid-1970s focus on his native Ireland, particularly the tensions between the Anglo-Irish gentry and the Catholic population. He was a moralist, as a result he possessed a dry wit and a sense of macabre and he always felt sorry and sympathy for the suffering that he had created in his characters. In all of his works he divides the people in to two groups, the predators and prey. He also showed that the human condition is marked by secrecy, shame, deceit, blindness and cruelty, and that evil not only exists but also can be understood. Two important subjects in his mind, which are also shown in his books and involves around the lives of women, are “*sexuality*,” and “*loneliness*.” He believes that women are victimized and they have to live in dour conditions. In his new novel, "Felicia's Journey," which won the 1994 Sunday Express Book Trevor includes a lot of themes by creating a probable but an infinitely pathetic portrait of a monster.

The novel "Felicia's Journey" depicts the life of an unmarried poor Irish girl who has crossed the Irish Sea though she has tolerated lots of difficulties, pains and sufferings. As an orphan and brokenhearted girl in the industrial English Midlands, Felicia has to search for the young man who has got her pregnant before he disappears. Having been deceived and raped by rogues in her life, one her boyfriend and the other one a strange man whom she gets help from, she is now devastated and against her wish her heart suffers from empty promises. However, she is not submitted and is ready to drag along this way even with difficulty in order to save both herself and the child in her womb, but with her possessions stuffed into two shopping bags and with every passing day, her tiny store of money diminishes and she gradually loses her sense of resistance. As her hopes die, she becomes increasingly vulnerable. She is a weakling now and becomes disappointed and limps around lamely. Later she encounters a man who seems to be an emotional cripple.

This man she meets is Mr. Hilditch who thinks and talks in platitudes and takes great satisfaction in his job as catering manager of a factory. Mr. Hilditch is a

man of stultifying banality, respectability and mediocrity who spends his Sunday afternoons visiting stately homes and engaging strangers in the sort of mindless chat. He is a kind of guy who directs his attention on the hapless and miserable Felicia. Once before he had relation with lots of girls but he could not preserve his amicability with them. Mr. Hilditch has obviously accustomed to doing these kinds of things and it may come back to the time that he was a child and he was not loved by his mom; accordingly it is his negative capability that he does not know how to adjust himself with the outside world. At the first sight when he meets Felicia, he does not try to befriend Felicia because he thinks that he may risk frightening her off. In other words his sense of sadism for his first time of acquaintance soothes but instead he allows her to glimpse the possibility that he might help her, and then, secure in the knowledge that sooner or later she will come to him, he waits. What she's unaware of, like the reader, is that Hilditch's kindness comes with an enormous cost. It is not clear what the cost will be, but it's fairly certain that it will be awful. The truth is that Hilditch exults over his memory that he has created for himself; this memory is not about the collection of life girls but the wave that comes to his mind and remembers him the time that he used them and then put an end to their lives. He remembers one of his dependents once comes to him for help but instead of giving a lending hand, he kills her to keep her with him. Therefore; by figuring him out before he realizes, Felicia manages to escape Hilditch. During her time with him, she also befriends people at the local Salvation Army who know that Hilditch is a friend of hers. He is so terrified of being discovered, then he kills himself. Because she manages to escape Hilditch, this feels like it might be kind of an upbeat ending for Felicia, but it's really not. Out of necessity, her escape means she has nothing but the clothes on her back and because she has no money, she is completely frustrated and she winds up living on the streets and begging for a living.

Analysis

The novel Felicia's journey by Trevor, which is considered as the most significant among his other ones, forebodes the injustice and loneliness that women in every society must tolerate. Furthermore, the writer of the book goes on and tries to reveal that the women's condition also results from both cultural and social condition, which gives the reader awareness about the women, especially Felicia, who has afflicted in a bad condition even during her own time. The first element which has to be elucidated on is the *"lost motherhood"*. As it has been quoted in O'Reilly's book [4], Morrison, the black writer, believes that the mother should provide preservation, nurturance, cultural bearing, and healing which are figured out as mother's duty all are essential for the empowerment of children. The challenge for Morrison's mothers therefore, is not how to combine motherhood and work, but rather how, in

the face of racism and sexism, to best provide the *"Motherwork"* both in and outside the home. Morrison believes that what a mother can do is to provide a Homeplace for her children, because it heals many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. However, since the mothers are absent, because they have some social problems as divorce, death, and incarceration they cannot nurture their children, which later may lead to a disastrous life for their children (p.16-23).

From the beginning of the novel it has been clear that Felicia lives in her own world. She has the sense of reclusiveness and loneliness, since she has no mother to teach her the way of life. In other words, her mother is absent so she is deprived of knowing about the value of life. Her father is also not so useful in bringing her up. Thus during the time that she was at home, the environment of the house was not so warm to her so it provided another step for her failure. As Bell Hooks [5] believes, "home place is the one site where one faces humanization and at the same time resists..." (p.42). Thus home provides not only individual identity but also the way of behaving with others.

In order to stick to the main character of the novel to know more about her, we get the bottom of her anxiety when she is alone; she needs somebody to comfort her and to make her enjoy the modern life, which has disturbed her. To her the modern world brings nothing and life is absurd. And what makes this life a little bit blooming for her is her decision in finding a boyfriend, but unfortunately their relationship ends up in his cheating; she becomes pregnant and now her boyfriend is away.

Here Trevor tries to show in details that his people in their modern world are suffering painfully but the amount of this suffering is different from one person to another one. Felicia is an inexperienced girl and she lives in a society that woman are abused and left alone and since she has no mother, it deepens the condition more for her frustration. To add more; the lack of responsibility adds the fuel to the fire. When the characters in the novel shun from their responsibilities, this lack of responsibilities cause a lot problems and from their problems their sufferings see the light of day. Thus, there is no wonder that in that kind of society which everybody is alone and do not take the responsibilities, the unpleasant future will be approaching. Since Felicia does not sense her father's and mother's sympathy, her would-be boyfriend has the same approach that makes him has no sympathy toward his girlfriend and the future born child. Finally as Felicia moves a step forward from her home, she gets more and more frustrated.

Felicia's wrong decision in choosing an unwanted boyfriend has afflicted her with psychological problems and now as a fallen woman, she wants to go and find him. Searching for the boyfriend is a kind of

disturbance and shows that the character suffers from the lack of love and it triggers no surprise that during her trip, this time she comes across another person, Mr. Hilditch, a man that he has no good relationship with other women. He is a kind of sinister guy who wants to destroy her life more than her boyfriend.

Trevor this time wants to say that emotion and love in the modern world is so important and if people live in a society that deprives them from their real love, they resort to everybody. It is here that when she searches for her real love and fails, she soon submits and substitutes her love for Mr. Hilditch. This kind of substitution also gives her calmness.

Not only does Felicia suffer from loneliness and lack of love but also all the characters. Even Mr. Hilditch is a person who lives alone and he takes pleasure in killing the women. During his childhood his mother didn't pay attention to him and as a grown-up boy, he doesn't know how to behave others. At first he wants to spell over this girl to bring her to his house then decides to kill her but suddenly he repents and wants to find a companion to himself. When he finally knows that she is pregnant, he lets her go.

It is true that modern world brings loneliness and lack of compassion. Trevor understands it and wants his people to confront with it seriously. He wants to inculcate to women to take care after their children well and smother them with passion. Lack of love brings no sense and makes people enjoy from traumatizing and disturbing other people. Since he, like Felicia, had not been paid attention to, he somehow suffers his life that it is difficult for him to understand. He even does not want to take the responsibility and as soon as he knows that Felicia is heavy with a child, he does not prevent her from going and spare his love for her and her child. Also Felicia who has been suppressed lots of times does not try to take the responsibility to try to free him from his trauma he has been afflicted with years and years. To her final decision as she understands that she cannot get along with her substitute love, she wants to search again for her first love once more time.

Till the end of the novel she bears to be alone and feels the sense of exile with the hope to find her boyfriend and make up the warm center of family again so she goes on searching for her boyfriend but when she knows that she cannot find him, first of all she aborts her child because she knows that if she gives birth to her child, she may not be successful in bringing her up as once her mother couldn't do, second if she comes to this world, she, like Felicia, has no identity as she has to go from one place to other places to find a calm place for living that she unfortunately cannot. Therefore, at the end of the novel she decides to abort her child and spends her life as a beggar.

CONCLUSION

The William Trevor's novel, Felicia's journey shows the disastrous life of different characters, especially the young girl who has no mother and from the beginning of her life she suffers most psychologically. She lives with her father but because she also doesn't get any support from him she has to deal with lots of problems. One of these problems is the sense of exile and abandonment. She is pregnant, dislocated and has no identity. Finally these problems leave her in the world of isolation which it equals with her failure.

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