

Female Consciousness by Stream of Consciousness— *Analysis of Bernice Bobs Her Hair*

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In his short story *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, Fitzgerald gives readers a vivid expression of the budding female consciousness of the heroine Bernice by the way of stream-of-consciousness. In this short story, he depicts the heroine's inner world through a rich-layered description of the heroine's dream, in which the satisfaction and joy of an adolescent girl's first success in social intercourse is fully expressed by means of stream of consciousness. At the same time, the description reflects the awakening and experience of the heroine's female consciousness, which is just at its embryonic stage.

Keywords: *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, stream of consciousness, female consciousness

Introduction of *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*

Bernice Bobs Her Hair is one of the most well-known short stories written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, who is famous for vivid description of intense conflict in characters' thought and emotion.

The plot of *Bernice Bobs Her Hair* is not sophisticated, but enough to strike a chord among young girl readers, for the theme of this short story is closely related to their lives and psychology.

Bernice was a born-rich young girl, who had been taught to be an obedient lady by her parents. In a summer, she came to her aunt's home for holiday. What went beyond her imagination was that she discovered, soon after her arrival, that she was not popular in her cousin Marjorie's circle. What's worst was that boys seemed not interested in her at all. Even her cousin Marjorie did not like her, who looked like a boring vase, a dull doll.

After struggling for a long time, Bernice decided to ask her cousin Marjorie for help. She was humble enough to satisfy Marjorie; she agreed to provide suggestion and help at last. After a few days' hard work, and her deliberate rehearsal, Bernice finally succeeded in making herself popular and attractive in boys' eyes. She was so happy and overwhelmed by her first success in intercommunication that she even smiled in her dream.

However, the success came together with its side influence: Warren, the faithful admirer of Marjorie, began to please Bernice, which was driving Marjorie crazy. Out of anger or envy, Marjorie publicly said that Bernice had said she was going to bob her hair, which was in fact just a secret between Marjorie and Bernice, an excuse to help Bernice to win boys' attention, and which Bernice did not mean to put into action at all.

Driven by face, Bernice had to bob her favorite long hair to keep herself free of telling a lie. Although bobbing long hair herself, Bernice assigned her loss of hair to her cousin Marjorie, who seemed like an undeclared enemy at the moment. As a revenge, Bernice bobbed Marjorie's hair at night when Marjorie was in

a sound sleep. After revenge, Bernice packed up her things and left her aunt's home, carrying a complex feeling.

Literature Review

On the topic of *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, discussion usually has been focused on the decay of the traditional value and morality in America in the post-war times. In 2009, Ye Yaqin and Zhou Xin in the Foreign Language College of Jiangnan University have published their paper entitled: "The Social and Moral Situation Reflected in *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*". In Ye's and Zhou's opinion, many of the F. Scott Fitzgerald's works are permeated with profound moral thinking and criticism from different angles. In his another piece of work, *This Side of Paradise* is a dense and appropriate depiction of the ethos of the American economic boom after WWI, a vivid record of the Bohemian life and anxiety of the younger generation, and a profound revelation of the many features of the traditional cultural patterns and ethical standards that have been shaken and transformed into the modern model (Wu, 2002, p. 136). In his famous masterpiece *The Great Gatsby*, the whole theme is based on the tragic story of Gatsby's pursuit of American dream, Daisy's passionate pursuit of money and pleasure, and her eventual disillusionment, deeply critical of the essence of American dream, denouncing the moral decay and corruption that pervades American society, extolling the dedication of man to the pursuit of his ideals, and underscoring some irrefutable value of human existence (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 188). In *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald describes the conflicts between the parties in a lopsided love triangle, reflecting the fact that in a materialistic society where money worship is prevalent, the contrast between man's sincerity, his good nature and his devotion to the pursuit of lofty ideals, his spirit, and the distorted and morbid hedonistic outlook on life and the social reality of life's corruption and moral decay (2002, p. 208). The short story *Bernice Bobs Her Hair* also displays F. Scott Fitzgerald moral thinking and criticism. In *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, Fitzgerald describes the "cruel and dramatic tragicomedy" of the 1820s social scene for young people (Fitzgerald, 2005, p. 3). It deeply reflects the distorted social moral value orientation of that era on the destruction of human conscience. Under the provocation of realistic vanity and morbid morality, the simple and simple life desire conflicts sharply with the social environment, and finally has to give in.

On the topic of Fitzgerald, many scholars, home and abroad, have already done a lot of research. In 2021, during Nov. 2nd to 6th, The International Symposium on "The Contributions of Katherine, Stein, Fitzgerald and Hemingway to Modernism" was held in Beijing. More than 20 academics from American, Hong Kong, and Chinese universities have conducted detailed and in-depth discussions to clarify Fitzgerald's place in the modernist literature.

Stream of Consciousness in *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*

"Consciousness is not a connection of fragments, but a continuous flow. There is nothing more natural than a river or a stream of water to describe it" (James, 1892, p. 57). The concept of stream of consciousness here emphasizes not only the fluidity and continuity of thought, but also its supertemporality and superspatiality, which refers to the freedom from the bondage of time and space. Because consciousness is purely subjective, free from the constraints of objective reality, it makes both the present and the past in the feeling inseparable.

In *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, as Bernice realized that she was not wanted by the males, she thought to herself: "Women are loved because they possess a mysterious femininity, which is often mentioned, but never

explicitly demonstrated” (Fitzgerald, 2005, p. 101). It was precisely that because she did not understand what this femininity is, and how to acquire it, Bernice “vaguely feel some pain”. This pain is easily felt by each woman of the same age, who is equally reserved and timid, for the author’s subtle psychological capture of the common psychology of the females in the world.

The most typical example of the stream of consciousness is the description of Bernice’s state after successful communication:

She had bought the red dress herself, though she had never liked it herself until Marjorie had pulled it out of the trunk, and it was her own voice that spoke the beautiful words, it was her own lips that sent those sweet smiles. Marjorie was a good girl—a little vain, though—good evening—so many good boys—Warren—what was his name—”. (Fitzgerald, 2005, p. 102)

Here, a little messy but a lot of layers, the thinking of a person from excitement gradually turning into sleeping, was shown incisively and vividly. And a girl’s pride and joy from the first intercommunication success was shown clearly, as if she had contact with the mysterious “femininity”, although not deep enough. After all, a girl’s desire for approval from boys has been satisfied for the first time, which is worth happiness.

Female Consciousness in *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*

It has been recognized that female consciousness refers to women’s experience and awakening of their own value, as well as paying attention to women’s living conditions, examining women’s psychological feelings, and expressing women’s life experience. In Wang Sufang’s idea (2005), the establishment and development of female subject consciousness generally go through three stages: the period of being ignorant, the period of awakening/growing up, and the period of maturity.

In the ignorant period, women are in a state of self-loss, inferiority complex, willing to be a supporting role, shaping themselves according to man’s design, slow response to social change, submerging themselves in traditional ideas, no clear direction of efforts.

In the period of awakening/growing up, women pursue experience of self-personality independence in contradiction with the experience of subject consciousness, which makes them doubt their pursuit. They have strong self-esteem inside and struggle against pressure outside. In the mixture of traditional and modern sense, they look for the self-significance of life, when social recognition and their soul are in contradiction. They have a strong desire to realize their self-worth, but they cannot keep a balance between the traditional and realistic ideas, so they can only take in the traditional concept with compromise both hesitantly and glutinously.

In the period of maturity, women are more conscious of their own characteristics as women and social position. They are willing to pursue their own independent development.

Bernice’s female consciousness is in the stage of transition from the ignorant period to the awakening period. As soon as she was born, Bernice was guided by her mother to be a lady and conform to the requirements of the patriarchal society. When she came to Marjorie’s house, this idea was in conflict with the reality of the young world, and her deep feminine consciousness began to flourish.

With the help of Marjorie, Bernice gradually broke away from the image set by the traditional doctrine. Although quite different from before, it satisfies her strong desire to realize her feminine value. This does not mean that she was aware of the constraints from the patriarchal society at that time, because her desire for recognition from boys has relationship with gender roles set by the patriarchal society.

The female consciousness does not only mean to break away from the male-dominated society, but also include examining women's psychology and emotion as well as the feeling to own value in society. And this, spurred on by Marjorie, began to develop rapidly in Bernice's consciousness, becoming increasingly superior to her originally well-behaved style.

On the night of her first successful social encounter, Bernice was thrilled. What the writer shows here by means of stream-of-consciousness is a female who is extremely excited and happy because she breaks the tradition, realizes herself, and satisfies the psychological and emotional needs.

However, it is not easy to keep balance between tradition and reality, since jealousy is a natural part of all human nature. Seeing that Bernice's charm had captured her suitor, Marjorie could not help feeling resentful, and publicly debunked Bernice's trick, driving Bernice to bob her hair. While some readers would blame Marjorie for her envy, it's nice to ask: How many girls would be able to let it go? So this is a realistic approach for a young female, accurately and reasonably.

Bernice was forced to cut off her beloved long hair, which was so sad that she required some balancing, so she secretly cut off her cousin's braids and went home overnight. Brave enough to revenge, but afraid to get further hurt, she ran away. This is ridiculous, but Bernice is only an immature little girl. Despite her immaturity, she does already possess all the characteristics of female consciousness, which advances uncertainly in constant doubt and perplexity.

Fitzgerald brilliantly shows the gradual awakening and development of the female consciousness of Bernice, the sweet and sorrowful feeling that lingers in the hearts of the females when they first enter society, as well as the struggle between desire for sharing and fear of losing the secret in the stream of consciousness description incisively and vividly, which arouse readers' strong resonance.

Conclusion

Bernice BOBS Her Hair by Fitzgerald, with the perfect help of stream-of-consciousness, shows the process of awakening and growing of the young girl Bernice's female consciousness, which thanks to the writer's great ability of writing.

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