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Brian Moore: An Ambassador of Feminism

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Abstract

The present research paper explores the significance of Brian Moore as an angel of feminism through the study of his portrayal of female characters with special context of Irish novels in the 20th century Ireland. He is grown up in a Catholic family. He is one of his parent's nine children. This paper studies his depiction of women characters with special context to the novels *The Feast of Lupercal* and *Lies of Silence*. He has raised the true voice of women of contemporary society at Belfast in Ireland through his fiction. *The Feast of Lupercalis* the story of a Catholic school teacher, Diarmuid Devine and his girlfriend a Protestant girl, Una Clarke. She is the main female character in this novel. She has been exploited mentally and physically by her ex-boyfriend Michael who was a married man. Later she meets Diarmuid Devine who plays with her emotions and leaves her due to Catholic restrictions. Moore in his next novel *Lies of Silence* (1990) presents the struggle among the Catholicism, the Protestantism and political uncertainty in Belfast. The main characters in this novel are Michael Dillon and his wife Moira Dillon. Moira Dillon is an innocent, beautiful and well educated unemployed woman. Her husband deceives her and wants to divorce her. She accepts the reality of life and emerges as liberal, bold and patriotic. This paper brings out Brian Moore's true ability to reveal the world of women through his Irish fiction.

Keywords- Catholicism, Protestantism, Feminism, Patriotic, Humanitarian

Introduction

Brian Moore, an Irish Canadian novelist, was born in Belfast, Ireland, on 25th August, 1921. He was the fourth son among nine children of his parents. Out of nine children there were six

The Creative Launcher

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Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

sisters. His father, James Brian Moore, was a surgeon at the Mater Hospital at Belfast in Ireland. His mother, Eileen McFadden, was originally from Donegal. She was a nurse by profession. He grew up in a Catholic family and consequently, admitted in a Catholic school, St. Malachy's college where as Patricia Craig well said, "The rote-learning and regimentation, the practice of knocking knowledge into boys' heads by whacking them on the palms of their hands, the endless intoning of prayers and precepts" (Craig58) did not influence to Brian Moore. When he was only fifteen years old, his father had left the world.

The present research paper throws light on Brian Moore's feministic approach through the study of female characters in his fiction with special reference to his Irish novels in the 20th century Ireland. He has composed twenty novels throughout his writing career including female centered novels. The highest authority of the Catholic Church over society has described women, as subordinate to men. Their roles are considered as house wives who take care of their husbands and children as well as a means of sexual fulfillment for their husbands. The constitution of 1937 defines women as property of their husbands. Yvonne Galligan is apt to assert in his work entitled *Women and Politics and Contemporary Ireland: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, about the conditions of Irish women:

Traditionally, Irish families were large and marriage was a significant social and religious ceremony. A strict adherence to the rules of the Roman Catholic Church, which forbade family planning, along with a public policy which made the provision of contraceptives illegal, resulted in families having six or more children. (26)

No woman has any rights to claim for divorce from her husband because it has been considered illegal till the end of 20th century. The Catholic Church has been strictly against the petition of divorce by any woman except in case of domestic violence against a woman. And no abortions are permitted in the Catholic society in Northern Ireland. There have been some major movements by feminist activists as well as by women writers for the equal rights of women as compared to men. Such was the scenario of contemporary society in Northern Ireland. Moore has minute observation of women psychology which is reflected in his works. He has six sisters and he has better understanding with all of them. He has given special attention to women characters in his novels. Here the present paper is an honest attempt to explore his importance as an ambassador of feminism through his Irish fiction with special context to his two novels *The Feast of Lupercal* and *Lies of Silence*.

Brian Moore has raised the voice of all class of women who have been struggling for the identity crisis due to gender biasness, conventions and voice against the patriarchal system of the contemporary society in 1950s' Northern Ireland, especially Belfast. At this time society has been divided into two ideologies; Protestantism and Catholicism. The followers of Protestantism have been against the ideologies of those of Catholicism. Protestantism is liberal and humanitarian while Catholicism is rather orthodox and governed by strict rules and regulations. Brian Moore becomes fed up with the religious dogmas and he

The Creative Launcher

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Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

has no faith in religion. Later he has immigrated to Canada to North America and he has lived there respectively till the end of his life. He has portrayed Irish life through his works or it is seen somehow in the background of most of his novels.

The novels which are discussed here from feministic point of view are *The Feast of Lupercal* and *Lies of Silence*. These novels have Irish background or theme of Irish ambience. Brian Moore has presented such women protagonists who have been suppressed by means of power, politics and Catholic dogmas for a long time in the history of Ireland. The women characters in these novels are reserved, hopeful, sad and submissive and some of them are rebellious and self-dependent. They deal with Irish society and represent the contemporary issues of the society. The main themes of these novels are Catholicism, crisis of gender identity and double standard of the Catholic churches.

Depiction of Una Clarke in the Feast of Lupercal

Brian Moore's *The Feast of Lupercal* was published in 1957. It deals with the subject of a bachelor school teacher's sexual instability and misfortune of a main woman character. The setting of this novel is also Belfast where Diarmuid Devine fights against sexual meagerness. He is a Catholic school teacher obsessed with a Protestant girl, Una Clarke. His Childhood Catholic dogmas restrict him to accomplish his desires. The central female protagonist, Una Clarke, becomes the victim of injustice due to the religious and patriarchal order of contemporary society in the 20th century Ireland. Brian Moore has presented the real image of all women through Una Clarke at Belfast in Ireland. The present paper explores the author's depiction of woman psychology and how she emerges stronger than male character at the end of the story.

Diarmuid Devine is a master of English at Ardath School. His life is deeply governed by Catholic principles. This novel reveals the psychological turmoil of Devine and his mental troubles due to mortal sin of falling in love with Una Clarke. Here it is worth to discover the psychological exploitation of Una Clarke on the name of social dogmas and strict Catholic regulations.

This is also a story of a girl Una Clark who is honest. She does not want to keep Devine in dark about his friend Moloney's deal with her last night as she tells him in *The Feast of Lupercal*, "He said there is a part vacant, but you don't know yet. I don't like this way of doing things" (45). She does not tell anything lie about herself to Devine At the same time she does not pass any quick judgment about Devine's friend who met her last night as she states about him, "Well, ah, I suppose he's not a bad fellow" (48). It shows that she is judicious and patient. Further she also reveals him about her past life affair with Michael who has deceives her by concealing that he is already a married man. As she told Devine, "Last summer when I was on holiday in Greystones, I fell in love with a man. He's an accountant, a friend of my cousin's. The trouble is, he's married" (71). He promised her that he would

The Creative Launcher

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Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

divorce his wife but in reality later he left her. This shows her honesty and straightforwardness.

She is also unconfident and shy as she is seen in the school play. She is helped by Devine to act in the play at the Church. She is the main female protagonist of the novel who influences the lives of other characters especially Devine who starts loving her. As the story grows, she believes in moving ahead in spite of past bitter experiences. She also falls in love with Devine as she speaks to him, "I might even be in love with you" (137). Both of them feel happy together and have many meetings at some hotel and enjoy drink and dance. Her uncle takes objection against her meeting with Devine but she does not care and revolts against her uncle as she says him, "I want to fight against what life's doing to me, and you're afraid to" (188). This shows her boldness and revolting nature. As Jo is also appropriate to claim about her, "Even Una Clarke's appearance is rebellious, young and boyish" (O'Donoghue 56).

The news of their affair spread among staff members and higher authority of the management. Further Devine realizes that he is going to commit mortal sin with her and he wants to do it. His Catholic upbringing checks him to do so and he decides to withdraw himself. But it becomes too late for Una Clarke because she has deeply fallen in love with him. She wants to marry him. She does not give up and tries to convince him that they should marry as he has made promise to her earlier. But Devine rejects her proposal of marriage. Instead of her kind and generosity, she faces troubles and hostile situations.

Una Clarke is also a good human being. She never forgets to express her gratitude towards any person whosoever has helped her. Her lover, Devine, always inspires her and motivates her and for this she thanks him, "Thanks for everything Dev. Good night" (*The Feast of Luperca* 109). It is examined that Devine is responsible for what has happened with her. Still she is grateful towards him. Thus it is found that she emerges optimistic instead of her refusal twice by her ex-lover Michael as well as by present lover Devine.

The present work studies how a woman goes through the mental and physical crisis due to the social and religious restrictions of the Catholic governed society. Here Diarmuid Devine who becomes an instrument of religious and social order has spoiled the life of Una Clarke. At last it is concluded that the social rules and regulations prevent a woman to fulfill her desires as it is seen through the denial of her by Devine due to his failure of commitment that he has made with her. Thus the present research paper examines the complete characteristics of Una Clarke who is modern, honest, bold, rebellious and optimistic.

Depiction of Moira Dillon in Lies of Silence

The next novel examined here from female perspective is *Lies of Silence* (1990). This is one of the best later Irish novels of Brian Moore. Its main theme is the conflict between the Catholicism and the Protestantism and political instability in Belfast in 20th century. Its sub-themes are private crisis and public problems. The main characters are Michael Dillon, his wife Moira Dillon, besides minor characters Andrea Baxter, and Michael's Catholic parents.

The Creative Launcher

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Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

The main purpose of the author is to present the politicization of the religion and the tussle between the two sects. There is crisis of moral choices for the individuals as it is seen in case of the male character for taking the right decision that leads misfortune to the female protagonist.

It is found how a young hotel manager named Michael Dillon reacts against the organized order of the society and the Catholic doctrines which restrict him to make better choices for his betterment. It is obvious from the story that he disobeys his Catholic parents and decides to divorce Moira Dillon and wishes to settle with a Canadian girl, Andrea Baxter. The incident of terrorists in his house has changed his destiny and leads him to the tragic end. He thinks that there is no God, but at the same time he finds that his life is out of control.

This novel has also the autobiographical elements which the author himself has experienced in his youth. As Jo O' Donoghue is apt to state, "With this novel Moore returns to the elemental theme of his early novels- What will the individual do when faced with a crisis? – and deals in quite a different way from ever before with the topics of institutional religion and personal belief" (O'Donoghue xix). Further it is revealed that the main female character, Moira Dillon, becomes the victim of her husband's actions. She is beautiful, innocent and well educated. She is unemployed but a caring house wife. Usually men take advantage of her goodness and even her husband cheats her. She is Catholic but believes in liberalism and modernism.

As the plot progresses, it is found that Michael and his wife Moira Dillon are held hostage by IRA terrorists in their house and their target is to blast the main area near hotel where lot of people move. They horrify and torture them physically. They keep Moira in their custody as a security against fulfillment of their demands through Michael. Now he has alternatives whether to save lives of several people or his wife. At the same time he has other thought of settling with his secretary Andrea Baxtor in London. Then he informs about the incident to the police and puts his wife in danger. Then she is physically tortured by the militants. She does not surrender before them and fights against them and has escaped herself anyhow. This shows her quality of bravery and judiciousness.

This paper highlights such qualities of her which make her distinct from other female characters of Moore's earlier novel like Judith Hearne. Instead of personal crisis in her life, she deals with the terrorist efficiently and dares to report the entire incident on the TV show for the sake of her country. As it is evident in *Lies of Silence* when Peg Wilton tells Michael Dillon about her decision, "Well she's decided to tell exactly what happened to both of you that evening. I think it's really brave of her, don't you?" (161). This shows that she is patriotic, bold and selfless.

There is a political instability in Northern Ireland in first half of the 20th century. She tells a journalist that Michael has seen the face of one of the militants. Moira Dillon knows that she has put herself and her husband in danger by her decision of interview on television

The Creative Launcher

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Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

about the terrorists' incident against them. Her husband tries to convince her not to do so but she is adamant at her decision. Even her father in law praises her decision as he tells his son about it, "But, Michael, do you think it's wise to be telling it to the whole world the way she is?" (172) He asserts that she is loyal and patriotic to the country.

Further Moira Dillon knows her husband's illegal affair with his secretary. Though she loves her husband a lot but she agrees to divorce him because he has kept her in dark by hiding his relation with other woman. She accepts the bitter truth of life and she is positive towards life. Instead of being tall, beautiful and powerful, she has been victim of men. Men always have taken benefits of her innocence. Her husband becomes very late to understand her when he decides to quit her. He realizes that she has been his victim. She emerges as a tragic figure due to crisis in her personal life. She felt herself lonely and disappointed due to her husband's disloyalty towards her.

Moira Dillon is like other common woman who has beauty consciousness. It is obvious when she expresses death wish on her wedding day to Michael, "I'm going to die young when men still want me" (74). This reveals her beauty concern but she keeps men away from her. She always finds that no one may understand her. She becomes destructive due to troubles in her married life. Michael understands her at the end of the story when he describes her courage, "She fought them alone, running out of the house . . . until her rage fell, like mercury in a thermometer" (105). This shows her will power and resistance against adverse situations unless she gets defeated.

The essential trait of her personality is to find out sense out of nonsense. When Moira and her husband were at risk, she determined to assert for the peace of the country and desired to be a martyr and peacemaker. She also has grudges against her husband as she complains him, "You don't care whether I have a brain or not, you don't know me, you don't want to know what makes me tick" (137). Here her impassioned protest is quite justified. Thus it can be briefed that Moira Dillon, in spite of being Catholic, is liberal, modern, brave and optimistic. Brian Moore in this novel presents Moira Dillon as the victim of socio-political and religious ambience of 1930's and 1940's Belfast. She has gone through mental and physical troubles due to patriarchal system of the society. There is also a minor female character of Michael's lover Andrea Baxter who is selfish and who has no concern of problems of others and public concerns.

Conclusion

The present research paper is an honest attempt to explore the feministic approach of Brian Moore through women protagonists in these novels and to highlight the importance of Moore as an ambassador of feminism in the 20th century Ireland besides being an American and Canadian novelist of the same era. It is found that his fictions have different backgrounds, locations and different time, for example, Irish, Canadian and North America as well as other locations like Britain, France, and Germany. But this paper specially deals with

The Creative Launcher

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Vol. IV & Issue I (April- 2019)

Irish background novels to highlight the mastery of Moore's portrayal women characters that represent the reality of actual world of women at Belfast in Ireland. Thus it can be concluded that Brian Moore has successfully presented characters of Una Clarke, in *The Feast of Lupercal*, and Moira Dillon in *Lies of Silence*, who represent the real voice of a global woman of all time.

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