

Oppression and Awakening: Female Body Writing in *A Stroke of Good Fortune*

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Abstract

A *Stroke of Good Fortune* is one of many short stories by the famous American Southern female writer Flannery O'Connor. However, many critics have paid little attention to this short story and the body of the heroine "Ruby". Based on this, the author combines the body-related theories and analyzes the physical dilemma and fertility anxiety faced by women represented by Ruby in the novel from the perspective of feminism. This paper aims to analyze the physical oppression women face from traditional ideas, patriarchal society and capitalist system, and point out the issues of abortion rights and reproductive freedom. It expresses O'Connor's sympathy and humanistic concern for the tragic fate of women, and shows her thinking on how women can get rid of the physical predicament and fertility anxiety.

Keywords

Flannery O'Connor; *A Stroke of Good Fortune*; female body writing; body dilemma.

1. Introduction

Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964) was a prominent Catholic writer from the American South, and a pivotal author in the history of 20th-century Southern American literature. O'Connor was known for her short stories, and her *Complete Short Stories*, which won the National Book Award in 1972, includes such masterpieces as *A Good Man is Hard to Find* and *Good Country People*. However, *A Stroke of Good Fortune* is an easily overlooked short story. While most of the women in O'Connor's works face problems in their relationship with patriarchal and marital power at home, and she seldom talks about the identity constraints or existential dilemmas brought about by women's own physiological structure, in *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, O'Connor focuses on the portrayal of a "mother-to-be" who is unable to grasp the right to reproductive freedom for various reasons, which also deserves to be further explored.

As scholar Deng Yan said, when various scholars continue to study O'Connor's novels in depth, they can further see the implied world in her novels-putting women on the stage, and their fate and plight become the focus of attention. The multiple dilemmas faced by Ruby, the heroine of *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, are a good illustration of O'Connor's own thoughts on women's destiny and dilemmas.

Scholars at home and abroad mainly interpret this novel from the perspectives of feminism, gender relations, and O'Connor's own views of women, etc. Meanwhile, some scholars, combined with the theory of reader-response theory, mainly focus on the meaning of the existence of the villainous character Hill in the novel, and some scholars regard *A Stroke of Good Fortune* as a novel with comedic meanings. From the current research situation at home and abroad, few scholars have studied the novel with the body theory, so this paper will analyze the physical oppression and persecution of the women represented by Ruby in the novel in the patriarchal social environment from the feminist perspective with the help of the body theory, and discuss the physical dilemmas and reproductive anxiety faced by women in the context of the southern historical and cultural backgrounds.

A Stroke of Good Fortune focuses on the reluctance of the heroine, Ruby, to accept the fact that she is pregnant. As a short story, despite its limited length, time span and spatial displacement, O'Connor skillfully selects a series of physical changes felt by Ruby in the process of climbing floors, including breathlessness, dizziness and dizziness, etc., and at the same time also depicts the process of Ruby's psychological changes from refusing to admit her pregnancy to accepting it slowly and helplessly on a psychological level. Ruby is a woman in a patriarchal society who suffers from physical oppression and persecution and faces problems of reproductive freedom and abortion rights due to the differences in the biological structure of men and women, traditional ideology, and social hierarchy and socio-economic structure.

2. Bound in Space: the Trapped Body

Marxist literary criticism theory holds that the body of need, the body of production, and the body of aesthetics are the three ways of body study. Human need is the manifestation of human physical existence, the affirmation of the flesh and blood reality of human beings; at the same time, human need is also the embodiment of human nature. (Zhang Jinfeng 2019:31) As an individual, there are certain needs, both in physical and psychological aspects, and no one can do anything without at the same time doing something for his own need and for the organ of that need. (Marx, Engels 1966:286) In other words, one can only be called a real person if one's needs are fulfilled, and this explains that "man is not merely a natural being, but a natural being with needs as a human being" (Marx, Engels, 1966: 32).

As a real person, Ruby has the right to choose the place where her body is located, which is one of her needs as a human being, but even the most basic needs for survival are not met by Ruby, and the reasons behind this include the physical constraints and oppression of women by the male-dominated society represented by her husband, Hill. The relationship between the body and space is the focus of the phenomenology of perception and the theory suggests that the body is the subject of perception, not consciousness, and this theory further states that our behavior is not simply governed by consciousness, meaning that behavior is not only produced by consciousness, but the body also possesses the ability to intend (Ying Zhang 2017:12). That is, the desires of the body itself influence the behavior of the subject. Ruby has been subjected to absolute control of bodily space and living space from Hill throughout her years of marriage. At the beginning of the novel, O'Connor writes that Ruby has a distinct feeling that "they were going to move. Bill Hill couldn't hold off much longer" (O'Connor 1976: 42). Ruby lived downtown with her husband, and on a normal day she had to walk eight blocks to get to the main shopping street and even further to the supermarket. "She hadn't made any complaints for five years much but now with her health at stake as young as she was" (43). Ruby has asked Hill to move from the city center where she now lives to a residential neighborhood so that it would be easier for her to acquire everyday items, but Hill has been procrastinating and ignoring Ruby's physical needs. Analyzed from the perspective of the phenomenology of perception, Ruby's body is the subject of her perception, Ruby just wants to satisfy her basic bodily desires, but has been repeatedly ignored by Hill, in other words, Hill has absolute control over Ruby's bodily space and living space. The renowned sociologist John O'Neill categorizes the human body into five forms: the world body, the social body, the political body, the consumer body and the medical body in his work *Five Bodies: Re-figuring Relationships*. He holds that from birth to death, much of what we do is simply to maintain the instrumental body in order that we may thereby pursue what we desire (O'Neill 1999: 96). O'Neill argues that human beings need food, drink, clean air, rest, shelter, clothing, and a certain standard of social health and safety to keep future generations going from generation to generation. From O'Neill's parsing of the human body of interaction and the body of consumption, it is easy to conclude that Ruby's desire to move to a residential neighborhood is simply a desire to satisfy

her most basic bodily desires, whereas Hill, as the center of power in the family that oppresses Ruby, has been ignoring Ruby's basic bodily needs. In addition to not being able to satisfy the basic needs of her own body, Ruby even oppresses her own body to satisfy the needs of others in the family, including Hill as well as Ruby's brother, Ralph. Similarly, the novel opens with Ruby coming home from a shopping trip, complaining about "Collards, collards" (41)! As a woman, Ruby does not have a job, her status is that of a housewife, so her biggest task is to take care of her husband, and her brother, Rufus, who has just returned from the war. Kale is exactly what Rufus wants to eat, and even though Ruby doesn't want to eat kale, she has to travel across a few blocks to the grocery shop in the heat to buy it. As a woman who does not even want to admit when she looks in the mirror and sees spots on her face, Ruby is also very concerned about her physical appearance and has to make herself look like this for her "worthless" (O'Connor 2) brother. Therefore, Ruby does not receive basic respect in this family, and suffers from physical oppression and mental torture all the time.

Secondly, O'Connor places most of the spatial context of the novel in a stairwell, mainly depicting Ruby dragging her heavy body step by step upwards, and this stairwell, with its connotations of closure, oppression, cage, and bondage, is precisely the "liminal space" from which Ruby cannot escape no matter how hard she tries (Bhabha 1994: 5). As O'Connor writes, "the steps were a thin black rent in the middle of the house" (42), and the entire stairwell is in a state of darkness or narrowness, reminiscent of the places where people's bodies are disciplined "prisons". Foucault suggests that the modern system of punishment of the body is milder compared to the ancient one, and that the process of disciplining is that of turning the body into a tame instrument by arranging the spatial distribution of the individual's body and through corrective training of the body. (Zhang Jinfeng 2019: 72) For Foucault, the so-called disciplines are those which make possible the subtle control of the workings of the body, which perpetuate the obedience of the forces of the body, and which impose on these forces a docile and useful relationship. (Foucault 1999:161). When Ruby gets married, she has to leave her hometown of Pitman and follow Hill to live in the city, where she has no choice about where her body is located. This is Hill's disciplining of Ruby's body as the center of power in the family, except that this disciplining is carried out in a seemingly very gentle way, and the result of the disciplining is that Ruby takes on the role of a woman who serves the family, takes care of the family's living, and furthermore, becomes a useful body that is subservient to the production and needs of capitalism (Zhang 72). In summary, from a spatial perspective, Ruby's body encounters the dual dilemma of bodily space and living space. Obviously, O'Connor's attention to the female body in *A Stroke of Good Fortune* is no longer limited to the spatially trapped body. Further, Ruby, the heroine, gradually loses the subjective status of her body and turns into a controlled object, losing more rights over her body.

3. The Betrayal by Husbands and the Loss of Reproductive Freedom

Throughout history, women have been faced with the issue of reproductive freedom. Because of the differences in the physiological structure of men and women, and because of a thousand years of stereotyped traditional thinking, most women have been assigned the important task of carrying on the family line and reproducing heirs, but very few have given first consideration to whether or not they are willing to bear children, which is a restriction and confinement of women's right to procreate and even of their human rights.

Throughout the history of the reproductive rights issue in the United States, there have been many voices fighting for women's reproductive freedom; in the 1870s, feminists in the United States launched the first campaign for reproductive rights in Western history, and in the first half of the twentieth century, feminists in the United States launched a second surge in the reproductive rights movement, during which time a prominent birth control leader, Margaret

Sanger (1879-1966), the founder of the Planned Parenthood movement in the United States, is also considered the originator of the term "birth control". The first birth control clinic in the United States was founded by Margaret Sanger in October 1916 in Brooklyn, New York. The clinic's purpose was to educate American women about contraception and to introduce the use of contraceptives, such as uterine caps. (Qinhua He 2009: 2) Although this movement had a certain impact in the United States at that time, the U.S. government at that time still did not support the legalization of abortion and reproductive freedom for women.

This is also reflected in *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, published in the 1950s, where Ruby did not intend to have children, but her husband, Hill, deliberately fumbles with his contraception, "he would never slip up" (51), a line that reflects the fact that Ruby has total trust in her husband, but the truth is harsh and also it is Ruby's husband, whom she fully trusts, who personally pushes her step by step into the abyss of her dilemma. "Bill Hill's been taking care of that for five years! That aren't going to happen to me!" (50) This passage is a conversation between Ruby and her neighbor Laverne after she realizes that she might actually be pregnant. We see that it has been Hill who has been taking steps to avoid Ruby getting pregnant for all these years and now that Ruby is actually pregnant, coupled with the fact that Hill "maybe more happy lately" (44), and the reason for this is self-evident. O'Connor portrays Hill as a betrayer who is selfish, authoritarian, heartless and cold. And Hill's individualistic outlook also plays a huge part in getting Ruby to bear his own offspring through deceitful means. Some scholars believe that the view of women's reproductive freedom involves many aspects, including the right to foetal life, women's right to life, women's right to procreate and so on, and the ideological roots of women's view of reproductive freedom lie in the values of western utilitarianism, individualism, liberalism and so on. Under the influence of individual liberalism, Ruby does not want to have children, and she has been making appropriate contraceptive measures for this purpose, but in the end, she still loses her right to reproductive freedom, and a large part of the reason for this comes from Hill's bottomless satisfaction of his own individualistic values. In Hill's eyes, Ruby is his own appendage, so Ruby's body, including the body's fatness, thinness, fertility or not, these decisions are in Hill's hands. As the text details, "She was wild and fat and beautiful and not too fat because Bill Hill liked her that way." (44). As Ruby's body goes out of shape after her pregnancy, she did not think firstly about whether she likes her body or not, but that it is good to be fatter because Hill likes her that way. This shows that the physical dilemma Ruby is in is not only the loss of her right to reproductive freedom, but even the beauty of her physical form is a desire to satisfy Hill's preferences. Therefore, in this battle of individualism between Ruby and Hill, Ruby is ultimately the loser.

At the end of the novel, O'Connor keeps referring to the words "bottom of the stairwell" and "darkness" (51), where the bottom of the stairwell has something in common with the endless abyss. O'Connor spends a great deal of time describing Ruby's journey upwards from the bottom of the stairwell, which in fact maps Ruby's struggle against her destiny of becoming a traditional mother. People around Ruby think that she should obey the destiny of heaven and have children, but Ruby is unwilling to conform to the traditional concept of becoming a traditional mother who exudes motherly love and sacrifices herself. More importantly, under the influence of liberalism, Ruby prefers to become a free woman as advocated by Margaret Sanger: she has the right to enjoy the freedom of reproduction, the right to dominate her own body, and the right to decide whether or not she will become a mother. At the same time, the author argues that the stairwell in the novel is a "circular" space, and as the text states, Ruby shouts into the stairwell and her "a long wail that widened and echoed as it went down" (51). And this alludes to the fact that the tragedy that happened to Ruby in this way will happen again to their next generation if Ruby reproduces against her will, and the tragedy of women keeps on going. Just like Ruby, who is in the darkness at the moment, although she has climbed upwards with every ounce of strength in her body, no matter how high up the steps she climbs,

“Good Fortune, Baby” (51) will “echoed along all the levels of the cavern,” (52) like seamless poisonous gas. And it makes us think about how “good luck” is good luck for men or society, but not for women. As written in the text, after the death of Hartley’s father, her mother refers to Hartley as “Little Mister Good Fortune” (44), believing that Hartley’s father had left her with good luck. This suggests that many women of the time and became products of a patriarchal society, with few women like Ruby bravely fighting for reproductive freedom and independence of thought. Near the end of the novel, the mischievous Hartley appears again. This time the scene in which Hartley appears is a confrontation with Mr. Giggs with a toy gun, followed by a run up and down the stairwell. Hartley’s “charging chipmunk face crashed into her and rocketed through her head” (51). This scene of Hartley running towards Ruby also hints at the situation Ruby may face later on, that is, the birth and rearing of a child as mischievous as Hartley’s, the whole person revolving around the family children as well as her husband, the complete loss of physical freedom and independence of consciousness, and becoming a puppet under the pressure of male power.

O’Connor did not inform readers of Ruby’s ending at the end of the novel, and many scholars have different opinions. In the author’s opinion, the end of the novel is O’Connor’s own thinking, and also a question she left for people: how should women get rid of such a dilemma and avoid such a tragedy from happening again? Just as the women represented by Ruby, their self-consciousness has begun to awaken, and they begin to think about the significance of their existence as women, which is that women are not the subordinates of men, nor are they the tools of procreation in the traditional sense. They have the right to control their own bodies, and they also have a complete and independent personality. With the emancipation and social development, more and more women began to fight for their reproductive freedom, and in the 1960s and 1970s, a new feminist movement emerged with the slogan of “reproductive rights” and the central aim of birth control, as well as the realization of women’s own reproductive autonomy and freedom of abortion, and this movement achieved unprecedented success. The movement achieved an unprecedented victory (He Qinhuo 2009: 2). At that time, there were still many opposing voices in American society, for example, anti-abortion forces, mainly Catholics, Protestant right-wingers, and conservatives, formed organizations such as the American Right to Life Committee and the American Life League. Women are faced with multiple difficulties from the family, society and the State on the road to reproductive freedom, so it will take generations of women to continue to struggle for the real realization of reproductive freedom.

4. Violation of Reproductive Will and Senial of the Right to Abortion

Just like Ruby, many women, despite their awakened self-consciousness and their courageous pursuit of the right to reproductive freedom for themselves, are still caught in the body’s dilemma as a result of a variety of factors: getting pregnant against their will and being unable to legally abort their pregnancies. Foucault, in his later book *Histoire de la sexualité* (1976—1984), shows that the body, as a site where power is inscribed, is subject to discipline and punishment from the macro-power represented by the state apparatus, but is not immune to the penetration and implementation of micro-power from everyday life, knowledge, and institutions. At a more detailed level, we can understand macro-power as the laws and policies introduced by the State, and micro-power as patriarchal and marital power at the family level, both of which regulate the body in *A Stroke of Good Fortune*.

The first step is to analyze the issue of women’s right to abortion in the United States in the mid-twentieth century at the macro level. Each country has different views on women’s right to abortion and has introduced relevant laws and policies. Some scholars classify the issue of women’s right to abortion in the context of state intervention into three broad models: the

state-permissive model, the state-permissive model, and the state-permissive model with restrictions. Among them, “the state-permissive model is centered on the protection of foetal life and human dignity, where the state recognizes foetal life as an independent, constitutionally protected legal interest and denies the pregnant woman’s right to self-determination, and the pregnant woman can only carry out an abortion if she receives permission from the state” (Wang Guisong 2007, 143). In contrast, the United States of America in the mid-twentieth century had a state licensing model for women’s right to abortion.

The legal system of abortion in the United States has evolved in a tortuous manner, and the influences behind the legal system are complex, including political, religious and feminist factors. The Christian religion, which is widely believed in Western countries, has a long history of condemning abortion. The Catholic Church has always considered human-made abortion to be a criminal offence and has advocated that the government should legislate against this crime. By 1910, every state in the United States, except Kentucky, had made abortion a felony. Until the middle of the 19th century, most states in the United States followed the original English common law and used the fetal movement principle as the standard for determining the nature of the act of abortion. After the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic Church maintained its position of strictly prohibiting abortion. A turning point in U.S. abortion law came in 1973 with the *Roe v. Wade* decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Texas Penal Code’s restriction on the right to abortion violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which contains the “right of a woman to determine the termination of her pregnancy”. The decision that the Texas penal code’s restriction on the right to abortion violates the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which includes “a woman’s right to decide to terminate her pregnancy”, is of great significance because it is tantamount to recognizing the legalization of abortion. Since 1976, Democrats and Republicans have publicly stated their opposing positions on abortion, with Democrats choosing to support the legalization of abortion and Republicans opposing it (Wang 2019: 81).

In the mid-twentieth century, the South of the United States was ruled by the Republican Party, and the thirty-fourth President of the United States, Dwight David Eisenhower, was a Republican, so it can be deduced that Ruby was faced with a situation in which abortion had not been legalized, and she herself, who had already become pregnant, did not want to have a child. In this case, the law, as a means of maintaining order in the state, has become a means of preserving a patriarchal society. According to Jack Balkin, a renowned constitutionalist, the Fourteenth Amendment explicitly prohibits the following types of unequal treatment legislation. Firstly, unjustifiable distinctions between citizens; secondly, class legislation; thirdly, caste legislation; and fourthly, legislation that selectively restricts or denies citizenship rights, thus treating some people as second-class citizens (Jack M. Balkin 2007: 24). Balkin argues that laws that criminalize abortion impose adverse burdens on women rather than men. Firstly, such laws go against women’s self-will as individuals, ignore women’s ability to withstand the risks of pregnancy and childbirth, and even further threaten women’s health in the medically underdeveloped era of the 1960s and 1970s. Secondly, the criminalization of abortion further exacerbates women’s subordinate status as “second citizens”. Women, as the material bearers of pregnancy and childbirth, are required to bear more of the responsibility of child-rearing, and naturally, women’s opportunities to participate in socio-economic creation have been greatly reduced. As a result, the law has become a means and a tool to maintain a patriarchal society, making women mothers in the traditional sense of the word, and subordinate in social status, which undoubtedly aggravates the class-legislation attributes of the law. Not only that, restricting abortion is actually a manifestation of the state government using public power to force women to give birth. As Professor Reva Siegel, a feminist constitutionalist at Yale University, has argued, restrictive regulations on abortion are gender-based regulations, i.e., the use of public power to force women to bear children (Reva B. Siegel

1992: 44). In summary, women, as the inherently weaker party in society, were subjected to physical regulations from the state authorities, and in the context of the time, the law also became a means of sustaining a patriarchal society. Admittedly, Ruby was just one of the women who suffered physical oppression in the American South in the mid-20th century, suffering from Hill's betrayal and being forced to become pregnant against the backdrop of the inability to establish the right to reproductive freedom. At the same time, the law at the time did not allow her to have an abortion, and thus Ruby was once again in a physical predicament, losing her right to terminate her pregnancy.

As a Catholic writer with a strong religious influence, O'Connor was supposed to be against the practice of "abortion". However, O'Connor was also a female writer, so she naturally empathized with the plight of women. Some scholars have argued that O'Connor's view of women is not feminist in the traditional sense; rather than emphasizing women's rights, she takes women as an integral part of society, and analyses and explores their identities and destinies (Deng Yan 2018: 51). In the case of Ruby, the woman she portrays, under this dilemma, where should Ruby go and what should be her fate? As a woman who does not want to give birth, Ruby is bent on denying the facts and deceiving herself when she discovers that her physical features begin to show signs of pregnancy, which is in fact a manifestation of her evasion of reality. Because in the social context of the time, abortion is not recognized by the state power, so she can't have an abortion, but if she is forced to have a baby, it is against Ruby's own will. This is the dilemma faced by women in the mid-twentieth century in O'Connor's works, and it is also a problem that O'Connor himself pondered. Therefore, for women at that time, they could not exercise their right to abortion due to the abortion system at the state level and the religious concepts and ideas, which was the physical regulation of women at the macro level of power of the state. As an individual who wants to be a complete person, Ruby is not only physically oppressed by the state, but also by her husband's power in the family. Ruby's husband is the center of power in the family and Ruby trusts him immensely, but it is not until Ruby notices that Hill has been inexplicably happier lately that she realizes that her husband may have betrayed her. But now Ruby has been caught in a dilemma, she does not want to have children because she believes that once she does, she will no longer be complete and will since become a traditional mother like her mother and sister; but on the other hand, she is already pregnant, and the social environment as well as the medical condition at that time do not allow her to have an abortion. Added to this, the fact that her own husband was trying to get her pregnant, all these factors pushed Ruby into the abyss. Thus, from the point of view of the state authorities, as well as the social and religious influences of the time, American women in the mid-twentieth century were faced with the problem of not being able to have an abortion of their own free will, not being able to have full control over their own bodies, and, furthermore, the freedom of thought, which was a part of their bodies, was also forbidden.

5. Women in Spiritual Dilemmas

From the beginning, Ruby is unable to choose the location of her body, to the gradual loss of her right to reproductive freedom and abortion, she is caught in a physical dilemma, and ultimately, she is imprisoned and caught in an ideological dilemma. As it is written at the end of the novel, "Then she recognized the feeling again", only that "It was as if it were not in her stomach", "It was as if it were out nowhere in nothing, out nowhere" (52). The author argues that Ruby first feels the pain in her stomach, the physical body, but later this pain is transferred to somewhere unknown. Here O'Connor leaves a Narrative gap (Donald E. Hardy 2005: 363), and here Ruby's pain has shifted from the physical body sensation to the psychological mind dilemma. The reasons for Ruby's current situation are also complex, and in general can be interpreted from

the following two aspects: firstly, the socio-political background of the United States at that time; and secondly, the socio-economic system of the United States at that time.

The socio-political context of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, when McCarthyism was prevalent in the United States, it is important to note that McCarthyism was marked by clear “sexual overtones”, often directed at American women (Lois Banner 1987:225). In addition, from the time human society entered slavery and feudalism to the capitalist system, women have always been in a position of domination and subjugation. Although the rise and development of capitalism has provided mankind with a new continent in which all aspects of society can be coordinated and reorganized, it has still inevitably inherited and retained “most of the ideologies conducive to social domination” (Yanni Zhao 2014: 1) from the traditional system. Specifically, in the traditional Western ideology, the male is always the dominant force within the family, while the female is the subordinate under the absolute power of the male. In the context of American society in the mid-20th century, although the status of women had changed during World War I and World War II, overall, the traditional notion of family-oriented women still prevailed at that time. A good example of this is Ruby in *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, which opens with a description of Ruby returning home from a shopping trip, an act that suggests that Ruby was a typical American “housewife” at the time. “She was too tired to take her arms from around it or to straighten up” (41). “Physical powerlessness” is both a reflection of the lack of power of the body itself as an entity, and on the other hand, it also implies that Ruby, as a woman, had no political voice and a lower social status than men in the social context of the time. Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *Le Deuxième Sexe*, refers to the existence of women as the “other” in capitalist society. When women take child-bearing and child-rearing and the continuation of the species as their mission, they are no longer a complete and independent individual. When women accept the shackles given to them by men and become objects to be conquered by men, they become the “other” in the true sense of society, and at this time, the significance of women’s existence is no longer to realize their own value, but to carry on the family’s legacy. At this point, the purpose of women’s existence is no longer to realize their own value, but to carry on the family line and continue life, or to become the object of male subjugation, and to become a woman in the traditional sense of the word - to do the washing and cooking, and to take care of the household.

In *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, O’Connor creates several images of the Other, including Ruby’s mother, her sister, Miss Laverne and Mrs. Lolita. Ruby’s mother is a “traditional mother” in the true sense of the word, and it can be said that she has fully embraced the role of motherhood in the traditional mindset, becoming the “other” in the eyes of Beauvoir, whose value is the children that she has dedicated her life to raising. However, in Ruby’s eyes, her mother is a birthing machine, and “with each child, the mother becomes more emaciated” (3). From Ruby’s mother’s experience, it seems that giving birth to children does not bring much benefit to women; on the contrary, women’s bodies undergo radical changes as a result of giving birth, not only the physical structure of the body changes, but also the personal consciousness and independent thinking that is a part of the body is also affected. Ever since Ruby’s mother became a traditionally-minded woman, she has devoted her life to her children, and if Ruby were to comply with the wishes of those around her and accept the role of becoming a traditional woman, it would also mean that she would have to sacrifice herself and dedicate herself to her family, and in Ruby’s case, she is unable to love other people and is unwilling to dedicate herself to her family. Instead of becoming comrades in arms in the fight for women’s rights, their neighbors, Mrs. Lolita and Miss Laverne, who are also in the female camp, become tools in the defense of the patriarchal society, subconsciously transmitting the ideological concepts of the male-dominated society to Ruby, which brings Ruby both physical and ideological oppressions. After reading Ruby’s palm, Madam Zoleeda grimaces and says to Ruby, “it will bring you a stroke of good fortune!” (42)! In Madam Zoleeda’s eyes, Ruby’s pregnancy is

a sign of good luck, and we can see that Madam Zoleeda has a positive attitude towards female pregnancy, but behind this attitude lies her submission to male power and her renunciation of the right to freedom of her own body. Like Ruby's mother, Madam Zoleeda is submissive to the development of male creativity and turns herself into an "Other" who proves the value of male existence. The other is Ruby's neighborhood friend, Miss Laverne, who also plays an important role in accelerating Ruby's recognition of the fact that she is pregnant. "Not just your ankles," Laverne said, "you're swollen all over" (50). Laverne, as a single woman who has not experienced marriage, let alone the problem of reproductive anxiety that Ruby faces, is reasonably more deserving of the right and awareness of bodily freedom, but this is not the case. Through the attitude that Laverne displays towards Ruby's pregnancy, it can be concluded that Laverne is also heavily influenced by traditional thinking, in which she believes that as a woman, having children is a rightful thing to do, and that being a mother is a very rewarding thing to be happy about. This we can infer from her dialogue with Ruby, where Laverne, when confronted with Ruby's strenuous denial of her pregnancy, comically jumps around the room, exclaiming in a very happy tone "Put them all together, they spell MOTHER! MOTHER!" (49)! From this description, it can be concluded that Laverne, who is also a woman, does not empathize with Ruby, but rather persuades Ruby to accept the role of a traditional mother under the subtle influence of traditional ideas. Several of the female characters analyzed above are heavily influenced by the traditional idea that it is natural for women to bear and raise children, and this is also closely related to the socio-political context of the time.

The second thing that needs to be emphasized is the economic system of American society in the 1940s to 1960s. At that time, the United States was in the process of developing a capitalist economic system, and American women were under the oppression of capitalist patriarchy. The concept of capitalist patriarchy was introduced in the theory of Marxist feminism, which argues that women become vulnerable when they are not in the labor market, have no income and are dependent on men. In *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, several of O'Connor's female characters fall victim to and fall prey to the capitalist patriarchy. Ruby's mother has spent her entire life contributing to her family, giving birth to eight children and becoming a complete reproductive machine. Not only that, Ruby's two sisters, who both have been married for four years "with four children apiece." (43), these women have not only paid for their families with their own bodily labor, they have also sacrificed their own self-thought and sense of independence, which are part of their own bodies. However, under the capitalist patriarchy, few people really recognize the great effort women put into their families and the sacrifices they make. Due to biological differences, women have always been engaged in easier domestic labor such as cleaning and sewing, while men have been engaged in productive labor that produces direct social benefits outside the home. With the further development of the social means of production, the social status of men under the capitalist system has become higher and higher, creating more and more economic value and social benefits, while women are still engaged in domestic labor that is laborious and painstaking, but with no direct economic benefits. In the long run, the division of labor between men and women became clearer and clearer, and society took it for granted that women should raise their children and take care of the household. This is exactly what Beauvoir refers to as the second nature of women in her book *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir talks about that it is the whole of civilization that determines this so-called feminine person, between the male and the eunuch (Simone de Beauvoir 1998: 322). In the time of Ruby and the other female characters in the novel, "civilization" in this context refers to the social concepts of male superiority and female dominance that have developed under the capitalist economic system.

O'Neill also shows in his argument that "the body is both the source of social/economic success and the means by which that success is recognized." (O'Neill 1999: 107) In a capitalist economic system, the higher the socio-economic participation, the higher the body recognition and the

higher the natural social status. “Economists have surmised that women assume a kind of cryptoservant (hidden servant) role in the management of household consumption. They have either noticed (or not noticed at all) the prominent image of the housewife (cryptoservant) in advertising. But in their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) statistics, women’s production and services within the household are not counted” (O’Neill 1999: 104). As women have always been laborers within the household, the fruits of their physical labor are ignored by the capitalist system, and the men who create the direct economy in society and the economy treat women as “invisible servants”, which is also a form of physical oppression of women. Therefore, as members of society who are not directly involved in the social economy, women do not have a voice in the capitalist economic system, so they have no social power, and their bodies are naturally out of their control. At the same time, Foucault also places great emphasis on the comprehensive regulation of the body by power relations. Many critics have used Foucault’s theory of the body to explain issues related to women’s physical oppression. “Foucault argues that gender is not an intrinsic or natural attribute of the body, but a product of specific power relations” (Hu Keqing 2010: 141), and many feminists have borrowed Foucault’s theoretical perspectives and frameworks as a way of analyzing the reasons why women’s lives are so monotonous and impoverished and why women’s identities are confined to the boundaries of what is traditionally culturally determined. and why women confine their identities to the boundaries determined by traditional culture. The fact that women are victims of physical oppression is a reflection of their lack of voice in social power relations. In addition, Canadian feminist theorists M. Benston and P. Morton published an important argument in 1969 about the root causes of women’s subordination in capitalist societies, which are “economic” or “material” in nature, which can be attributed to women’s unpaid domestic labor within the family unit. In other words, housewives like Ruby in the capitalist society, the physical labor they put in is completely ignored by the society, while men, as the social force directly involved in the capitalist economy, have the power of social discourse. This also means that women, represented by Ruby, actually suffer from physical oppression and persecution under the capitalist economic system, and are even more undecided when it comes to deciding whether or not to procreate on their own.

In brief, what can women do to change this? According to the socialist feminist school of thought, in capitalist societies, the four structures of production, reproduction, sexuality and child-rearing, which are bound together in the family, are interdependent within the family unit and form the material basis of women’s oppression. In such a situation, only the overthrow of the capitalist system and the transformation of the patriarchal mentality can lead to the true emancipation of women. Juliette Michel is one of the most important representatives of socialist feminism. She argued that “in the modern bourgeois family, ‘women’ have three functions, sexual, reproductive and socializing, all of which are moderated by the function of production, precisely, this family structure is ultimately determined by the economy” (Closer 1966: 11). And Galbraith, the famous American economist, writes in his book that “the productive function of the male has been greatly reduced in the modern family, and he calls for the opportunity to continue to promote the independence of women; and to achieve that, women must have at their disposal a wage earned from the market” (Galbraith, 1973: 253). Similarly, Marxists, including Engels, argued that since women suffered unfairly under capitalist private ownership, women should transform their domestic labor into labor in social production, so that they could realize their own value in socialized production and achieve economic and social equality with men.

6. Conclusion

As a female writer, O'Connor empathizes with the plight of women and expresses her deep thoughts and concerns about the situation of women in her writing. In *A Stroke of Good Fortune*, women are deeply oppressed by traditional thinking, patriarchal society and capitalist economic system, and they are in deep bodily difficulties and reproductive anxiety, as well as facing the problems of abortion rights and reproductive freedom. This paper analyzes the female characters in *A Stroke of Good Fortune* from a feminist perspective with the help of body theory, expressing O'Connor's thoughts on the plight of women's bodies, her criticism of the oppression of women's bodies by traditional ideas, patriarchal society and capitalist economic system, and her support for women's awakening of self-consciousness and independence.

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