

On Sontag's *Lady from the Sea* from the Perspective of Feminism Narrative Tension and Subject Reconstruction

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Abstract

From the feminist perspective, this paper deeply analyzes the reconstruction of narrative tension subject in Susan Sontag's adaptation of *The Lady from the Sea*. Firstly, this paper combs the feminist research in drama, and analyzes the gender gaze from multiple narrative perspectives, the discipline of women under spatial narrative, and the transformation of narrative perspectives between value judgment and aesthetic standards from the perspective of feminist narratology. At the same time, with the innovative use of female narrative voice, the work realizes the subject reconstruction from "being stared at" to "staring at". By analyzing the open ending of Sontag's adaptation, it emphasizes the exploration of free will and the challenge to traditional ethics, and strengthens the post-modern characteristics of the works. *The Lady from the Sea* not only criticizes the unconscious oppression of patriarchy, but also echoes the spirit of the times of women's awakening through artistic forms, and becomes a classic text to explore the nature of human freedom.

Keywords

Feminism; Narrative Tension; Subject Reconstruction; Susan Sontag; *The Lady from the Sea*.

1. Introduction

Susan Sontag is a famous American writer, critic and thinker, who is famous for his sharp cultural criticism and pioneering literary experiments. Her comments deeply analyze the relationship between artistic form and ideological expression, and reveal the philosophical implication and social metaphor behind her works from a cross-disciplinary perspective. Sontag's narrative innovation in Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* is a double breakthrough in form and theme. Formally, she adopts dual narrative perspectives, spatial narrative and individual and collective narrative voices, which endows female characters with real discourse power and constructs a subversive narrative power structure. The narrative style is even more inseparable from the Camp sensibility put forward by Sontag in *Notes on Camp*. Thematically, Sontag transcends the simple gender opposition and interprets "freedom" as a more universal survival dilemma: Ellida's desire for the ocean is not only women's resistance to bondage, but also human's eternal pursuit of the unknown and absolute freedom. This paper takes Sontag's *The Lady from the Sea* as the research object, combs the feminist drama, and then analyzes the narrative tension, deep logic and value turn contained in the script from the feminist perspective.

2. Feminist Research in Drama

Literary works repeatedly affirm women's self and independent spirit, and dilute the role of "male" in the form of marginalization and ungrateful people, which makes feminism rise to the level of spiritual symbol and narrative subject and realizes the vivid interpretation of "feminism". Before the explosive appearance of feminist drama in 1960s and 1970s, Ibsen had

put "women's self-awakening" in the spotlight. Ibsen provided two archetypes of female subjectivity: Nora finished the physical cutting of patriarchal space by "running away", while Ellida realized the psychological transfer of sovereignty by "staying". In *A Doll's House*, Haier Mao's patriarchal house was shaped into a "toy house", and Nora completed her first claim to the "outside world" with the closing of the door at the end of the play. In *Lady from the Sea*, it reappears in a more complicated form. Johnston's return is only a "ghost-like" visit, but it forces Ellida to make a choice between "sea" and "land". The two works provide a prototype device for all feminist dramas that can be rewritten, disassembled and reversed repeatedly. Susan Sontag's "Lady at Sea" is adapted from Ibsen's play of the same name, with the theme of love, in which there are two important male characters, one is the present husband Wangel, and the other is the former lover-Johnston. I made a promise of love to Ellida ten years ago, but I haven't heard from her for ten years, and she is regarded as a "stranger" again, which will push the drama to a climax.

Drama is like a mirror, which reflects all aspects of society. As a form of drama based on feminist theory, feminist drama always pays attention to women's living conditions and gender equality, and is committed to "finding self-image reconstruction and expressing their physical and self-desires." [1] Through its unique narrative style, role shaping and theme expression, it strongly challenges the stereotype of women and the structure of unequal gender power in traditional drama.

In 1960s and 1970s, with the vigorous development of feminist movement, female artists began to express their criticism of gender inequality and the pursuit of female subjectivity through drama, and the works of female playwrights gradually entered the mainstream stage. Moliere's *The Woman Scholar* exposes the plight of intellectual women with satirical brushwork, while playwrights such as Churchill directly refer to "women's independent struggle" [2] as the core power of drama. By the 1980s, the works of this period showed distinct rhetorical strategies, witnessed the maturity of feminist drama, and many representative playwrights and works emerged. Caryl Churchill's *The Best Woman* vividly depicts the rebellious spirit after the awakening of women's subjectivity, which not only has a far-reaching influence in the drama world, but also won international recognition for female playwrights. Marsha Norman's *Good Night, Mother* develops existential philosophy through mother-daughter dialogue, and rewrites family relations, "rethinking women, starting from every form and stage of her body". [3] I have been thinking about the dilemma of women's subjective self-construction.

In the 1990s, postmodern feminist drama showed more diversified features in the form of creation and discussion of topics. The "Test" series of Berlin SheShePop Troupe, which was established in Berlin in 1998, incorporated audience participation into the performance and exposed the absurdity of gender discipline through impromptu interaction. The "laboratory theater" mode created by him realizes the "visualization of gender differences" proposed by Warhol. [4] The theoretical conception of the "other" situation revealed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* provides a core proposition for feminist drama. Among them, there is a famous assertion that "women are not born, but acquired" [5], which directly inspired the post-modern drama creation such as Sarah Ruhl's *Orlando*, deconstructed physiological determinism and fixed gender identity through the gender flow of the protagonist spanning 300 years. This creative practice confirms Lucy Irigaray's theoretical proposition: female drama should not simply copy male narrative, but should establish an "expression system based on female characteristics" [6].

These feminist dramas present women's plight and demands to the audience through artistic forms, and focus the public's attention on gender inequality, which not only causes women to think about their own identity, but also urges men to reflect on gender political discourse. When women get rid of their dependence on opposites, they turn to explore and reshape their inner selves. This theme is highly compatible with Sontag's *The Lady from the Sea*. Through Ellida's

choice and self-exploration, the work deeply discusses the problems of women's social role identification, self-realization and free choice in the 20th century, which has formed a cross-time echo with the contemporary feminist movement. Feminist drama has taken an important step on the road of female subject construction by deconstructing patriarchy, breaking gender stereotypes and striving for female discourse rights.

3. The Narrative Tension from the Feminist Perspective

Literary creation, as the product of the author's personal creation system, always bears the creator's subjective value judgment and ideological position. As Luigi Fowler said, "As long as there are opposing and interrelated forces, impulses or meanings, there is tension." [7] This creative feature makes the work an important medium to connect the author and the reader. "Through the work, the personal value system and subjective consciousness are reflected, and a bridge to convey value judgment, emotional system and cognitive feelings is set up between the author and the reader." [8]. From the perspective of narratology, literary works often have a dominant creative perspective, which plays a dominant role in other narrative elements in the works. Especially in the framework of feminist narratology, the choice of narrative perspective contains profound ideological connotation, which provides an important starting point for us to understand Sontag's adaptation of *Lady from the Sea*. In the 20th century, women are trying to break away from the shackles of traditional family roles and social concepts. They are no longer satisfied with playing the role of traditional housewives, but want to get rid of their subordinate position as "the second sex" and "the other", strive for comprehensive civil rights and social equality, and pursue personal career development and self-realization. In this era context, Sontag's adaptation of *The Lady from the Sea* is bound to incorporate her unique understanding of feminism and deep thinking on the plight of women's survival.

3.1. Gender Gaze from Multiple Narrative Perspectives

The narrative perspective and ideology are complicated. When different groups judge literary works, they often use intuition to analyze and judge, and sometimes they are not in the same perspective as the narrator. Li Jianjun, a scholar in China, pointed out in the study of novel rhetoric that both perspective and focus are issues that indicate "who is watching". [9] This choice of perspective not only determines the way of information presentation, but also implies a specific value judgment and power relationship. When different groups interpret the text based on their respective positions, there will often be a dislocation of the perspective of "who is watching" and "who is watching", which just reveals the ideological tension behind the narrative. Sontag's carefully constructed multi-perspective narrative in *The Lady from the Sea* has become an excellent carrier to show the plight of women's survival. Through the ingenious transformation of perspective, the image of Ellida presents a complex and polysemous appearance under the gaze of different subjects. Although the perspective of characters will change the way facts are presented, it will not change the facts themselves. This narrative strategy not only increases the interpretation space of the text, but also profoundly reflects Sontag's multi-dimensional thinking on female identity.

When presenting the marriage relationship between Ellida and Wangel, Sontag adopted a clever technique of dual narrative perspectives, profoundly revealing the essence of this marriage relationship and the social power structure behind it. In the first act, through Wangel's monologue, the marriage scene under the gaze of men is shown. Wangel described that after her parents died, Ellida had "no choice". [10] "You know what young girls are like, full of dreams and expectations for the future." [10], but deluded herself into believing that "she accepted me voluntarily" [10]. This ambivalence clearly shows the thinking inertia of objectifying women in patriarchal society-men will rationalize their dominant position even if they realize the unequal rights. When the narrative perspective shifts to Ellida, marriage is described as follows: "You

bought me" and "You gave me a refuge, only a safe place." [10] This transformation of perspective realizes the power reversal from "being stared at" to "staring at", and cuts open the true thoughts of men like a scalpel. "She has no choice." [10] Behind that is the unequal status and economic conditions between Ellida and Wangel. Beauvoir's classic exposition in *"The Second Sex"* profoundly reveals this phenomenon: "A man's luck lies in having to embark on a hard but reliable road; Women's misfortune lies in being tempted to the easy road and not being asked to make progress." [5] This paper accurately presents the subordinate position of women and their difficult situation of establishing themselves under the patriarchal discourse mechanism. After her father's death, Ellida lost her financial resources and had to get married, but as a widower, Wangel had full choice, because the profession of doctor brought him a certain social status, while women at that time were not allowed to have a job. Therefore, this marriage is essentially an unequal transaction of gender rights: in the social structure where women lack independent living conditions, marriage has become a "survival strategy" that Ellida is forced to adopt.

Multi-perspective narration not only deconstructs the marriage contradiction, but also reveals the social root of Ellida's spiritual crisis. The inequality of social status between the two before marriage continues to affect the relationship after marriage. As the daughter of the tower keeper, Ellida's past life was inseparable from the ocean. But for the infatuation with the sea, "people in the village don't understand her." [10] What's more, the stepdaughter Hilda's rejection attitude towards her "maybe one day she will drown" and "God knows why my father insisted on taking her home, and she will never be a member of our family" [10], so that she is also isolated within the family. In this depressed environment, Ellida can only maintain her self-identity through fantasy. When she tries to share her yearning for the ocean with Wangel, Wangel thinks that painting should be cultivated as a hobby, and even pathological her wife's abnormal behavior, thinking that "ordinary medicine can't help her." [10]. Ellida needs to evolve. These multiple negative stares from her husband, stepdaughter and the community together constitute a spiritual cage for oppressing Ellida, which constantly aggravates her isolation from the people around her and her self-isolation. Also as the "other" in the patriarchal society, Eustacia in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*—considered as an accessory of men, undertakes the female obligations stipulated by the secular world, but, like Ellida, tries to break through the shackles of social discipline. It is worth noting that although Wangel never expressed any dissatisfaction or rejection, he never understood his wife's spiritual appeal and wanted to "cure" Ellida's abnormality. Here, Sontag skillfully deepens this theme through biological metaphor. Ellida believes that human beings evolved from marine life but "degraded" the viability of the ocean. Wangel regards this as evolution, while Arnholm is content with living on land. The deep meaning of this cognitive difference is that Arnholm and Wangel, as vested interests, have decent jobs and social status on land and naturally agree with the existing order. Ellida, on the other hand, is simplified as the symbolic existence of "Wangel's wife", and its main value has been systematically eliminated. More critically, Wangel's discourse strategy of pathologizing his wife's spiritual appeal into a "disease" just exposes the most hidden and stubborn crux of patriarchal ideology—the dominator often fails to realize the existence of the dominant relationship, and it is even more difficult to truly understand the subject appeal of the dominated. This unconscious symbolic violence is more destructive than open oppression, because it internalizes the oppressive relationship into the self-awareness of the dominated, thus becoming the most insurmountable obstacle on the road to gender liberation.

3.2. The Narrative Perspective Transformation of Value Judgment and Aesthetic Standards

Sontag's aesthetic standards tend to be avant-garde and experimental, and he thinks that the form of art is higher than the content. This is particularly evident in her drama creation. She

brings the wisdom of prose writing into drama creation. Stylized words break the traditional form of drama, but they meet her avant-garde aesthetic standards. Sontag adopted a multi-dimensional perspective and personalized narrative method, and adopted an open ending, which strengthened the post-modern characteristics: fragmentation, no center and no shape. In Sontag's adaptation of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*, although Ellida finally returned to her husband, she dreamed of turning around and jumping into the sea directly, or killing her husband and then jumping into the sea. There was always a voice in her heart asking if her choice was correct. This kind of ending ended in the air, which showed Ellida's exploration of free will and challenge to traditional ethics, and transformed the value judgment of the original work.

The overall narrative style can not be separated from the Camp sensibility put forward by Sontag in *Notes on Camp*. Camp sensibility is a pure aesthetic, relaxed and pleasant sensibility, which is connected with postmodern art, opposes art bearing morality, and pays attention to artistic aesthetics and aesthetic pleasure. Camp sensibility has a special love for unnatural things, techniques and exaggeration. "The visual characteristics that distinguish Camp from other exaggerations-seduction and drama." [11] This aesthetic taste emphasizes style rather than content, and tends to regard the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. This sensibility is reflected in Sontag's works as the exploration of new sensibility. At the beginning of "*The Lady from the Sea*", a legend about seals was told: people will become seals after they voluntarily throw themselves into the sea and drown. On the twelfth night of each year, seals will take off their seals' skins and dance and play on the beach in human form until dawn before they can return to the sea. When the boy heard this, he stole the seal skin of the most beautiful girl and forced her to become his wife. However, one day when the boy forgot to take the key to the box that locked the seal skin, the girl put on her seal skin again and left.

The legend of the seal itself is a story full of drama and exaggeration. In the whole drama, it is like the epitome of the hero's story-if marriage is a forced union, then if you have the opportunity to leave, do you choose to leave? People voluntarily throw themselves into the sea to become seals, and seals take off their skins and dance in human form. These are supernatural and exaggerated elements, which are in line with Camp's pursuit of exaggeration and drama. The image of the seal man in the story breaks the boundary between human beings and animals and challenges the traditional human image and natural order, which echoes the challenge to traditional aesthetics in Camp's style. The boy stole the seal skin and forced the seal girl to be his wife. The element of the seal skin can be regarded as a decoration. In Camp style, decoration and superficiality are often emphasized. At the same time, the image should be understood as quotation marks. The seal skin is the protective cover of the seal girl and a symbol of their identity.

The seal girl decisively returned to the sea at the first opportunity, abandoned the identity of wife and mother on land, and was completely free from identity restrictions in action. She did not succumb to the status quo after becoming a wife and mother, and resigned to stay on land, showing more masculine characteristics: free and easy and decisive. "Feminized men or masculine women are one of the greatest images of Camp's sensibility," [11] which subverts the traditional patriarchal authority and traditional moral concepts in behavior, and embodies Camp's challenge to the traditional gender norms. In the story, the seal girl's final departure after being forced to become a human wife is a kind of "victory of aesthetics over morality" [11], it satirizes the immoral means of men in marriage, and adopts an unconventional coping mode, treating the marriage events in the traditional concept in a seemingly joking and frivolous way, which embodies the victory of irony over tragedy. These applications of Camp's sensibility reflect her pioneering exploration of art form and content and her challenge to traditional aesthetic standards.

4. The Subjectivity Reconstruction of Female Narrative under the Double Discipline

By combining mythological archetypes, female narrative voices and non-traditional drama forms, Sontag not only reconstructs female subjectivity, but also reveals the collusion between language and power. In traditional mythology, Odysseus is the narrative subject and Siren is the "monster" to be told.[12] Sontag transformed Siren from the projection of patriarchal fear into "the prototype of women's self-empowerment" by means of Ellida. Siren's songs no longer point to the death of others, but to the life of self; Her island space is no longer a death trap, but a generation field of female subjectivity; Her amphibious body is no longer a monster symbol, but the potential to continue to cross the border. The value of *The Lady from the Sea* lies in that it transforms women's struggle in the patriarchal society into an art form, so that those voices that are obscured by the mainstream narrative can be heard. This narrative innovation is not only a contemporary interpretation of Ibsen's original works, but also a profound revelation of women's survival dilemma.

4.1. Remodeling the Value of Women in Narrative Space

In literary works, space is not only the carrier of plot unfolding and meaning generation, but also an important dimension to reveal the subject characteristics, intersubjectivity and power operation mechanism of characters. Space itself is not class-oriented, but when it is endowed with power and the connotation of discourse, there is a grade difference. And "the exclusiveness of space itself and the innate separation boundary"[13]The transformation of space often means the change of rights. This dialectical relationship between space and rights is vividly displayed in literary works through the corresponding relationship between geographical space and the psychological and physical changes of characters. The difference of space possession reflects the existence state of individuals, and "the language of space is always a part of narrative discourse and can become the main center of the strength and significance of narrative works"[14] Susan Sontag pays special attention to the multiple construction of space in *The Lady from the Sea*, which not only depicts the material existence of space in detail, but also endows it with rich metaphorical functions to help construct female identity, which reflects Sontag's understanding of the role of narrative space.

Siren's hybrid body (bird man or fish man) implies "amphibious existence": he can breathe in the water and be close to the sky. Ellida's situation is also an "amphibious" dilemma: she needs land identity to maintain social visibility, but she also misses the sea. In "Lady at Sea", from the overall environment, all the plots take place outdoors-the veranda or the open space in front of the house, leaving the indoor space of the house. The house is a symbol of family and identity, and Ellida's subconscious escape shows that she has never fully recognized the ethical identity of "Mrs. Wangel". In the family space, it is more like an accessory of Wangel. The identity of Ellida's wife often leads her to be bound by family ethics, and her free will is often bound by rational will. Under the pull of both parties, her spirit is destroyed, and she can't establish her self-awareness. Only when she is out of the space that binds her, can she pursue her true self in the sea. So the ocean has become a place for her to stay for a long time, which is her self-space separated from her marriage ethics identity and becomes her "second space" to explore freedom, but the short-term comfort brought by the ocean is not a long-term antidote. "Dull days, boring days, carp in the pond, slowly die in salty water. Wandering from the sea, the boundless sea of freedom. Wet and stuck here, he tried to grab my tail. "[10]The sharp contrast between poetic language and depressing reality constitutes a sharp irony. The image of carp tail here echoes the seal skin in the second act, forming an image chain between land and sea, which can be regarded as a modern rewriting of Siren-every time the seal skin is stolen and the carp tail is caught, the female body is "domesticated" and "scaled" by land ethics. The spatial

opposition between the sea and the land actually symbolizes the opposition between primitive natural wildness and social family responsibility. Ellida entered the land from the ocean, and the identity conflict caused by this spatial transformation is the root cause of her mental crisis. Space becomes a power tool for disciplining women here. When women try to break through the existing social mechanism, they will face the double punishment of family and social space, which will lead to the double loss of physical and mental power.

In the ninth act, through the closed space image of the pond, the survival dilemma of women in the patriarchal structure is further deepened. Sontag uses the same image "carp" to construct two female characters, Brett and Ellida, showing the two sides of women's situation. "Call me Miss Carp"[10] "Like carp in a pond. They are so close to the fjord that flocks of wild fish come in and out there. But poor docile domestic fish farming can never join in." [10] The pond implies the town and home where Brett lives. This closed artificial water area is just like the living space defined by patriarchy for women. Wild fish freely enter and leave the fjord, while domestic carp are permanently isolated, which shows that men can freely explore the world, while women are bound to established roles. "I think it must be spectacular outside. I have never been anywhere." [10] As a young woman who longs for independence, Brett has infinite vision for the future, but Arnholm turns it into the bait of marriage. "Imagine that you are free to enter a strange world without worrying about the future or worrying about your livelihood." [10] Arnholm seems to be putting herself in Brett's shoes to think about the future in an extremely serious tone, but in fact, she moves women from one discipline space (family of origin) to another discipline space (marriage). This kind of speech exposes the deception of patriarchal logic: marriage is packaged as liberation, but it is actually a more hidden cage. At this point, Sontag has completed a subtle narrative cycle, which is a mirror image of the situation in which Wangel proposed to Ellida ten years ago, which not only reveals the repetitiveness of the patriarchal marriage model, but also highlights the systematicness of this oppression mechanism, and Ellida's predicament has predicted the "illusion" of this freedom.

Sontag creatively reconstructed the binary tension of "sea-land" in Siren mythology by writing about the spatial confrontation between ponds and fjords. She turned this ancient myth into a modern criticism of women's dilemma in the 19th century: the patriarchal system not only confined women's bodies through physical space, but also made women internalize the cage into a normal state of existence through ideological discipline. Brett's limited confession ("I want to leave here, I have never been anywhere"). [10] It echoes with Ellida's persistent desire for the ocean, and reflects the paradox of women's existence in the 19th century—they can hardly adapt to the "pond" defined by the patriarchal society, and they can't really reach the "ocean" symbolizing freedom. This spatial narrative transcends the simple binary opposition and presents the complexity of women's liberation: real freedom is not transferred from one physical space to another, but the power discipline mechanism behind the space should be completely deconstructed. Sontag is profound in that she not only criticizes the social reality that women must depend on men for survival resources, but also further asks: when the existing resistance path (such as space escape) and compromise strategy are difficult to achieve personality independence, what is the possibility of women's liberation? Perhaps the answer lies in the unspoken dimension of Siren's myth—that song, which refuses to be defined by any space and echoes beyond the boundary forever, symbolizes the possibility of transcending the double confinement of physics and spirit. This kind of writing not only keeps the sharpness of criticism, but also reserves the poetic imagination space for the reconstruction of female subjectivity.

4.2. The Reconstruction of the Subject under the Female Narrative "Voice"

From the perspective of feminist narratology, Sontag's innovative use of narrative voice in *Lady from the Sea* has profound gender political implications. Susan Lancer thinks that "voice" has

gender significance, and divides the narrative voices in female narratives into three categories: the "different story narrators" who are not story participants, the "same story narrators" who participate in the story and the "inner story narrators" who tell nested stories.[15] It is worth noting that narrative voice "combined with feminist political discussion" is the "gender politics" behind the deconstruction of narrative voice.[15] Key dimensions of xii. Sontag gave Ellida a personal narrative voice as a "narrator of the same story", and took the folk songs sung by Brett and Hilda as a collective narrative voice as a "narrator of the inner story". Through the dual discourse system, Siren's songs were changed from "inducing others to destroy"[16] was rewritten as "calling for self-rebirth", which realized the change of voice from "the danger of objectification" to "the opportunity of subjectivity"

From the perspective of creative subject, Sontag's complex experience in multiple social identities has deeply influenced his creation. In shaping the image of Ellida, Sontag shows the spiritual dilemma of women in marriage through her inner monologue. In the monologue, Ellida said that Wangel told her that "honesty is the foundation of a healthy relationship".[10] Wangel's words seem rational, but they expose the hypocrisy of patriarchal discourse: when Ellida expresses herself frankly, she is dismissed as "cold-blooded"; Only when it plays the listener in silence can it be accepted. This contradiction reveals the alienation of women in marriage, and they must hide their true desires through "persona", which means "the mask of actors" in its original meaning[17], suggesting the performance of gender roles. Ellida tried to wear his wife's identity mask, but her subconscious always yearned for the sea and freedom. This longing was expressed as an existential anxiety. "I don't know if that is what I want ... I only know that it is something huge and profound, which will eventually engulf me completely ..."[10], further echoing the unknown and destructive represented by the ocean in Siren mythology. Her struggle is not only personal, but also a metaphor for the general situation of women under patriarchy: they are allowed to "speak" but must conform to the established script; Longing for freedom, but self-doubt because of social discipline. In the fifteenth act, the former lover "Johnston" came to the door as a stranger, saying that he would take her away, and "leaving" planted a seed. At the climax of the drama, Wangel proposed "You are free, I will give you the freedom you want"[10], seemingly retrogressive, actually implies deeper control. At first, Ellida subconsciously refuted "You said that people like me will not be free", and after repeatedly confirming this to Wangel, she issued a relaxed "I am free"[10], she thought she was free to leave, and after discovering that her husband did it out of love, "I can even choose you." [10] Although Ellida has the initiative to choose independently, she still can't escape the dilemma between ideal and reality. Whether she chooses to stay with Fanggeer or leave with strangers, Ellida gives up her self-identity and exploration of freedom. Ellida finally chose to stay, but she had a violent fantasy of "hitting him on the head with a stone and then jumping into the sea". [10] Just as Siren's singing has never really disappeared ... What will be the ending, and whether Arida has the courage to "Nora run away", Sontag deliberately keeps openness and leaves it to each audience to choose. At the end of the play, Wangel called Ellida's peaceful state of completely letting go of the sea "adaptation" and "evolution". [10] However, this evaluation is full of irony. Is the so-called "evolution" the adaptation of women to land and family, or the completion of female domestication in patriarchal society? This result is thought-provoking, but also reflects Sontag's profound understanding of the female subject and dialectical thinking on the relationship between the two sexes.

In the twelfth act, folk songs intervene in the narrative in the form of "noisy silence", which not only externalizes the role emotion, but also constitutes a metaphorical comment on the main plot, showing the innovation of Sontag's narrative experiment. "Good luck to you two, my two babies, because I will never see you again." [10]. In this ballad about elopement, lovers who have been away for seven years find themselves again, and women choose to leave their husbands and children. The plot forms a kind of "Siren-style polyphony" with the legend of seal-sealing

people in the play: it is both like narration and chorus, which externalizes the repressed feelings of Ellida and allows Brett and Hilda to speak on behalf of women through collective narrative voice. Sontag used folk songs to restore Siren's "fatal singing" to the narrative energy of "female collective experience", thus disassembling the patriarchal equation of "female voice equals danger". It not only expresses the struggle against fate, but also an elegy for freedom, and conveys a deep silence and meditation. This silence reflects the emotional entanglement between Ellida and Wangel and Johnston, as well as her inner conflict and struggle, which provides the audience with a deep perspective to understand the role psychology and social environment. The nonlinear narration of folk songs breaks the time and space limitation of traditional drama, and makes the repressed memories of Ellida (such as the longing for Johnston) emerge in a poetic way. This narrative innovation not only deconstructs the male-dominated linear history, but also re-expresses the female experience in a fragmented and surreal form, just as Siren's singing finally penetrated the waves of reason and realized its subversive artistic power. When women try to speak in their own voice, they must simultaneously fight against the double dilemma of being stigmatized by myths and marginalized by narrative mechanisms. The value of "*The Lady from the Sea*" lies in that it sublimates this struggle process into art and provides an open thinking space for the discussion of female subjectivity.

5. Conclusion

By portraying Ellida and Brett, *The Lady from the Sea* shows the marginal situation of women in the family, and strongly criticizes the dominant mode of patriarchal society. August Bebel once asserted: "If there is no independence and equality between the two sexes, then the liberation of mankind is impossible." The relationship between men and women is the most basic relationship in human society. Under the background of social change promoted by the industrial revolution in the 20th century, the unique value of the drama lies in that it transcends the simple gender opposition and turns to pay attention to the structural dilemma faced by women and the unconscious oppression of men at the center of power. The creator deliberately embodies the spiritual demands of women in society and forms a brand-new narrative expression. It not only reflects the social reality of the awakening of women's subjective consciousness, but also transcends the traditional gender narrative in the artistic level. Through the self-exploration of female characters, the transformation of narrative perspective, spatial narrative and the use of narrative voice, Sontag's profound understanding of female subjects and dialectical thinking on gender relations are reflected. These elements together constitute the core of feminist thought in Sontag's works, which shows her profound understanding and expression of women's freedom spirit.

At the same time, the achievement of this work also means that the current society is evolving towards a comprehensive and free development trend. Compared with the past "absurd" and "illusory" themes, *Lady from the Sea* represents the value orientation that has approached the modern society to a certain extent. Sontag's creation makes *Lady from the Sea* an eternal text to explore the nature of human freedom, which provides a new perspective for understanding the relationship between men and women.

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