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蛻變：論柯姆·托賓《布魯克林》中愛爾蘭女  
性移民的經驗與成長

“Something close to glamour”: Immigration, Irishness and  
Female Bildungsroman in Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*

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國立政治大學英國語文學系碩士班

碩士論文提要

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論文提要內容：

愛爾蘭作家柯姆·托賓以刻畫其角色身處大環境下的孤寂及沉默著稱，無論是與家庭疏離、被異性戀霸權社會排斥、或是因移民找不到歸屬的他者們都是其關懷的族群。在《布魯克林》中，托賓描繪了身為國際移民的女主角艾莉絲·雷西必須在祖國—愛爾蘭及移民國—美國間做選擇的掙扎。許多評論家認為其小說結尾揭露了作為一個移民的命運：再也無法被祖國真正接納而只能被迫離開。但將《布魯克林》視為一部移民女性成長小說，我認為即便艾莉絲的家（國）對她始終有很強的拉力，但她最終選擇回到美國的決定是一個主動的且對她個人自我成長、實現更好的選擇。

本論文將分為三個部分，以分析作為一個英雌，艾莉絲最終的決定為何正向及自願的。第一部份，我認為艾莉絲的才華及天賦是被其貧困且封閉的家鄉所埋沒的，唯有踏上旅途她才能發展其天賦。第二部份著重在移民至美國後，經歷過一連串的挑戰、困境的艾莉絲如何抓住了蛻變的機會；然而，因為她移民身分及對家的依戀使其成長無法圓滿。第三部份分析為何蛻變後的艾莉絲在短暫拜訪故鄉後，即使在備受關注及認可的甜美誘惑下仍勇敢選擇回到美國開創自己的人生。

關鍵字：柯姆·托賓、《布魯克林》、女性成長小說、跨國女性移民、自我實現

## Abstract

Colm Tóibín is one of the most renowned contemporary Irish novelists. Tóibín's writing style is known for describing the solitude and the silence of his characters. In his oeuvre, some of his characters are distant from their family; others are excluded from the heterosexual society; still others are stuck in an ambivalent space between two opposite worlds. In his sixth work, *Brooklyn*, Eilis Lacey, the transnational heroine, struggles to make a decision between two opposite worlds, her homeland, Ireland and the hostland, America.

This thesis attempts to argue that in Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn*, as a transnational female migrant who is suspended between two incompatible worlds, Eilis Lacey's final decision to go back to her adoptive land is actually a voluntary and better choice for her self-fulfillment, even though she is still pulled to her homeland, Ireland. The thesis is divided into three parts.

In the first part, analyzing *Brooklyn* as a contemporary Female Bildungsroman, I argue that Eilis needs to leave her hometown to get her chances to show her talent and potential, which are crippled by the economic slump and the closed, conservative environment of her hometown. In the second part, after immigrating to Brooklyn, Eilis seizes the chance to transform after undergoing a series of challenges and adventures; however, her transnational migrant identity becomes an obstacle for her to settle down and to complete her transformation there. In the last part, for her self-development and her future of more possibilities, Eilis, in the end, bravely makes up her mind to return to Brooklyn while giving up the relatively familiar and stable life in her hometown in spite of its strong pull to her always.

Keywords: Colm Tóibín, *Brooklyn*, Female Bildungsroman, Transnational Female Migrant, Self-fulfillment

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Colm Tóibín, one of the most renowned contemporary Irish novelists, was born in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, Ireland in 1955. After graduating from University College Dublin in 1975, Tóibín headed for Barcelona, Spain to teach English. This experience became the inspiration of his first novel, *The South*. Its heroine, Katherine Proctor, abandons her family in Ireland for Barcelona, determined to be a painter there. Back to Ireland, Tóibín once worked as a journalist, an editor, and even a travel writer who has inhabited various places and countries.

Tóibín's writing style is known for his inscription on the silence and the solitude of his characters, which has been majorly influenced by two literary precursors, Henry James and Ernest Hemingway, especially by Henry James (D'Erasmio 165). Tóibín's fifth novel, *The Master*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize and received the International Dublin Literary Award, fictionalizes James's inner world and struggles vividly. Even though surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the crowd, Tóibín's protagonists are alienated from the world due to their unspeakable pain and struggles. Besides, both his childhood experiences and his own homosexuality have influenced his writing styles and topics as well. Family, therefore, usually twins with estrangement as a distinguished theme in Tóibín's works. In his oeuvre, the remote, dysfunctional and incommunicable parent-child relationship could be observed easily. In *The Blackwater Lightship*, his another shortlisted work for the Booker Prize, it sharply describes a discordant family. Besides, Tóibín's homosexuality also has had him keep a keen eye on the sexual minorities' struggles in a conservative and heteronormative society as Ireland. In 2011, Tóibín was awarded with the Irish PEN award. As the award presented, he was called "a champion of minorities" by Arts Council director Mary Cloake since he has

been trying “to the forefront in establishing a distinctive place for gay people within Irish society” (qtd. in Boland). Most of his characters could be seen as dislocated subjects who belong nowhere. Some of them are distant from their family; others are excluded from the heterosexual society; still others are stuck in an ambivalent space between two opposite worlds such as Eilis Lacey, the heroine of *Brooklyn*. *Brooklyn* was published in 2009 and won the Costa Novel Award in the same year. Moreover, it could be considered Tóibín’s masterpiece since it not only became a *New York Times* bestseller but also was adapted into an Oscar-nominated movie in 2015.

Eilis Lacey, a young woman who is good at numbers and has learned about bookkeeping, struggles to find a proper job in her hometown, Enniscorthy, Ireland in the 1950s. After their three brothers left for London for more job opportunities, her sister, Rose, supports Eilis and their mother by herself. Eilis only gets a part-time job at a local grocery store owned by the snobbish spinster, Miss Kelly. Rose devises a solution: She arranges to send Eilis to America with the assistance of an Irish priest, Father Flood, who plans to find her a decent job and a place to lodge. Even though Eilis is reluctant to leave her home, she understands that there is no future for her here. Hence, she agrees to make this long trip across the Atlantic. Luckily, with the help of her sophisticated roommate, Georgina, Eilis makes through the miserable time on board and gets ready to enter into “the land of the free and the brave” (Tóibín 49).

Upon arriving at Brooklyn, Eilis moves into a boarding house owned by an Irish lady, Mrs. Kehoe, with several other female lodgers. Father Flood arranges for her to work as a sales assistant at a department store called Bartocci’s. For Eilis, however, the change and the homesickness are overwhelming. To keep her busy and distract from her loneliness, Father Flood enrolls her in a bookkeeping evening class in Brooklyn College.

At one of the dances Father Flood hosts, she meets a young man, Tony Fiorello, an



Italian American. Tony is kind, humorous, and earnest, making Eilis willing to share everything with him openly too. Their relationship is getting more serious gradually. However, since she hasn't decided to settle down in Brooklyn, Eilis always feels embarrassed and tries to avoid replying while Tony drops hints about their future. While Eilis feels ready for her hopeful second year in Brooklyn, she receives a piece of nightmarish news that Rose passed away in her sleep. In the following days, Eilis struggles to make a decision between staying in Brooklyn and returning home to keep her mother company. In the meantime, overwhelmingly sad and lonely, Eilis takes Tony into her basement bedroom secretly. They end up having sex. Afterwards, Eilis decides to go back to Ireland to accompany her lonely mother for a month. Tony respects her decision, but he asks her to marry him before she goes as a promise to come back. Hesitant at first, Eilis then agrees. The two get married secretly.

After returning to Ireland, Eilis finds it's difficult to readjust to life in Enniscorthy. Her mother seems not to be interested in her life in Brooklyn, trying to find ways to make her stay instead. To escape from the tension with her mother, Eilis spends time with Nancy, George, and her new affluent admirer, Jim Farrell, who owns a bar and has a position in town. Soon, she and Jim develop a relationship. Therefore, everyone in town is excited about the future about Eilis and Jim since no one knows that she's already gotten married in America. After Nancy's wedding, Eilis still puts off buying a ticket back to America. Finally, Miss Kelly calls Eilis to her store and tells her that Mrs. Kehoe is her cousin, and they keep in touch. She explains that she told Mrs. Kehoe that Eilis has started seeing Jim and implies that Mrs. Kehoe told her something about Tony. After knowing that, Eilis leaves the grocery store and buys a ticket back to Brooklyn in a rush. In the end, she eventually confesses to her mother that she's married to a man in Brooklyn. The next morning, she leaves a letter at Jim's door explaining that she has to leave, and sets off for America again.

"There are no antagonists in this novel, no psychodramas, no angst. There is only the

sound of a young woman slowly and deliberately stepping into herself, learning to make and stand behind her choices, finding herself able to withstand hardship,” Pam Houston comments (“The Irresistibles: Lyrical, Luscious Reads”). *Brooklyn* could be read as a Female Bildungsroman. It delineates both the physical and the mental transformation of the heroine, Eilis Lacey, from an obedient and passive Irish country girl into a brave, independent, and capable woman in Brooklyn. Like most heroines, Eilis needs to learn how to become mature and make decisions between obeying the patriarchal social conventions and following her own will. However, Eilis’s migrant identity further makes her stand out from other heroines in most coming-of-age novels. As a transnational young female migrant, Eilis faces the dilemma to find her home and belonging to settle down and to thrive. Thus, *Brooklyn* broadens the frontier of the traditional Bildungsroman as it also tackles the transnational setting.

In the meantime, by analyzing *Brooklyn* within the frame of Female Bildungsroman, it could provide a new perspective on dealing with the trickiest part of the novel – the ending. On the surface, in the end, Eilis seems to be forced to go back to Brooklyn because she is afraid that the news of her secret marriage would be exposed. However, as many critics have argued, the ending has proved that it’s actually more intricate than it seems to be. Therefore, by analyzing her as a heroine of a contemporary transnational Female Bildungsroman, this thesis aims to argue that in Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*, as a transnational female migrant suspended between two incompatible worlds, Eilis Lacey’s final decision to go back to her adopted land is actually a voluntary and better choice for her self-fulfillment, even though she is still pulled to her homeland, Ireland.

## Literature Review

As a contemporary writer, not many critiques have been published on Colm Tóibín’s works. However, thanks to both his great contribution to contemporary Irish literature and his

numerous literary awards, Tóibín still gets a certain amount of critical attention and interest. Some critics prefer to analyze how Tóibín, through his socially marginalized protagonists, reveals those untold truth, memories and histories buried under Irish official discourses. When it comes to *Brooklyn*, as I mentioned in the introduction, most critics puzzle over its perplexing ending by analyzing different elements in the novel.

In “(M)Others from the Motherland in Edna O’Brien’s *The Light of Evening* and Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*, ” Marisol Morales-Ladrón points out that one of the distinctive features in contemporary Irish literature is its inseparability with the history of migration after the Great Famine. Many contemporary Irish writers have shown their interests in revisiting or revising this history. Some of them put more emphasis on the Irish female emigrants’ individual experiences such as Edna O’Brien and Colm Tóibín. Therefore, Morales Ladrón argues that, in both O’Brien’s *The Light of Evening* and Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*, the female emigrants fail to achieve promising futures either in their hostlands or in their homeland, Ireland, because of the complicated bond with their mothers, which also reflects their conflicting relationship with Ireland (Morales-Ladrón 280).

Morales-Ladrón observes that, in Tóibín’s *Brooklyn*, to earn her living, Eilis has to position herself as an object lacking agency either in her hometown or in Brooklyn. She leaves home for Brooklyn reluctantly because it’s a better future her mother and sister plan for her. Likewise, she is forced to give up her prosperous life, which she has earned in Brooklyn, because of her duty as a daughter to go home to keep her lonely mother’s company. After arriving at Enniscorthy, Eilis seems to get another chance to live a bright life in her hometown. However, under the obligation as a wife, she needs to return to the US again. As a woman cheating on her husband, she won’t be accommodated by the community. Besides, Morales-Ladrón points out that Eilis’s distant relationship with her mother also implies the complex relationship between her and the motherland. As a passive agent of her

own destiny, Eilis is trapped by the motherland (Morales-Ladrón 288). She needs to perform her duty when her mother(land) is in need. While she isn't needed or violates the social mores and rules, however, she is rejected. Thus, the author concludes, for these female emigrants, they would be stuck in-between the familiar homeland and the unfamiliar hostland forever. Their destinies are controlled by their mothers, societies, and motherlands. They never belong to their motherland, but cannot escape from it either (Morales-Ladrón 289).

Ellen McWilliams, in "The Refusenik Returnee and Reluctant Emigrant in Colm Tóibín's *The South and Brooklyn*," writes that, according to Breda Gray, the returnees, who return home for visits would show their strong desire for acceptance; on the contrary, from the stayers' perspective, they are the outsiders instead of part of the community (qtd. in McWilliams 157). In both *The South and Brooklyn*, Tóibín depicts the two heroines, as the returnees, are reluctant to return to or unable to stay in Ireland respectively (McWilliams 159).

In the section of *Brooklyn*, McWilliams analyzes how the Eilis's identity is refashioned in the hostland, and how this new Eilis brings influences on her hometown. McWilliams points out, before leaving for Brooklyn, Eilis is like Joyce's passive, timid Eveline or Austen's Fanny Price (173). After arriving in the adopted land, as a female immigrant, Eilis has to become independent. On the other hand, through using Avtar Brah's "diaspora space," which emphasizes the interactions among different diasporic groups instead of those between the majority and the minority (qtd. in McWilliams 177), McWilliams examines how Eilis, as an Irish female immigrant, shapes her own selfhood in the 1950s New York (177). While she gets along with her incongruous fellow Irish and Irish-American lodgers, Eilis's Irishness is influenced and becomes fluid and changing. Furthermore, because of her job in the department store, Eilis learns to interact with various ethnic customers. Her identity has gradually been constructed in the process simultaneously. Therefore, the experiences in

America transform Eilis into the witty, smart Elizabeth Bennet on her return to her homeland. McWilliams, however, argues the returnee appears as a disturbing figure who not only disorders the community but also causes himself/herself to feel more alienated (156). Thus, even though Eilis's new American identity makes her the center of attention, it disrupts the community's organized and conservative atmosphere. Moreover, her new glamour is ignored by her mother and makes their mother-daughter relationship tense. Therefore, McWilliams concludes that Eilis's decision to go back to Brooklyn results from her unacceptance of her hometown, and she would be suspended between the two worlds forever as a migrant (183).

In "The Tie That Bind: A Portrait of the Irish Immigrant as a Young Woman in Colm Tóibín's *Brooklyn*," Laura Elena Savu contends, in *Brooklyn*, the definition of home changes from a concrete geographical place to an abstract and "constant negotiation of the boundaries between Ireland and America, past and present, public history and individual memory" (251). As a young female migrant, Eilis endeavors to find her own place in the new world while she still has a bond with the old one. Savu associates this memorable characteristic of Eilis with "what Kathleen Steward calls ordinary affects, which are surging capacities to affect and be affected" (251). Because Eilis is easy to be affected by the people and environments surrounding her, the attachment and attention to her loved ones become the points of pressure in Eilis's life. Hence, while the strong tie with her significant others helps her overcome the difficult emotional situations in her journeys, it actually is an obstacle to building her new life at the same time. Not only to lighten her family's burden but also to please them, Eilis leaves for Brooklyn involuntarily. Indeed, the strong attachment to her family prompts her to embark on this transatlantic journey with bravery. In Brooklyn, the sense of loss caused by homesickness is replaced with the happiness which Tony gives her. Moreover, different ethnic people and immigrants she's encountered in Brooklyn also reconfigure her meaning of home. Nevertheless, her attachment to her family forces her to give up her auspicious future

in Brooklyn and then go back to Enniscorthy after her sister's death. Likewise, her secret marriage to Tony hinders her from living the life she has dreamt of since she immigrated to America. Apparently, various people and relationships on both sides of the Atlantic pressure Eilis into one way of her life or another. Owing to her strong bonds with these two incompatible spaces, Eilis's self would always be torn and split. In comparison with most heroes in the immigrant fictions, Eilis doesn't abandon her home(land) completely after her immigration. On the contrary, Savu suggests Eilis will never overcome her homesickness, and her new life in America will always be haunted by her old Irish experiences. In other words, due to all these journeys, for Eilis, the notion of home is ambiguous and complicated rather than static and distinct (271).

In "Home and Belonging among Irish Migrants: Transnational versus Placed Identities in *The Light of Evening* and *Brooklyn: A Novel*," Eve Walsh Stoddard writes that Ireland has been known for its migration culture. For the indigene, the emigrants, and the immigrants, the definition of Irishness is not a definite and unified one. According to Mac Éinrí, there are three types of Irishness (qtd. in Stoddard 148). The first one emphasizes the connection with a specific place. The following one is based on ancestry. The last one is a transnational one, which embraces multi-culture and differences. In this essay, Stoddard argues that both female protagonists in the two novels prove the seemingly cosmopolitan Irishness of the Irish emigrants is actually overshadowed by Freudian uncanny, which confuses their perceptions of home and belonging (150).

Stoddard claims, in *Brooklyn*, Eilis's Irishness stems from her blood in the beginning. Her sense of Irishness has become a cosmopolitan one as the story develops. However, this cosmopolitan Irishness is an uncanny one. Being a migrant, the condition of her Irishness is both transnational and parochial (Stoddard 154). Eilis's American experiences make the locus of her home shifted and raise a cosmopolitan consciousness. It also causes Ireland to become

a place both familiar and unfamiliar. Ostensibly, Eilis's Irishness has transcended the geographical boundaries. However, Ireland is a nation "with both intense ties to local and an extensive network of overseas relations" (Stoddard 152). Thus, the Irishness is, under the surface, parochial for an emigrant as Eilis. Her life is still under the surveillance of Irish authorities overseas, such as Father Flood and Mrs. Kehoe. Besides, the author proposes another point, her return to Enniscorthy, to prove this uncanny cosmopolitan Irishness. Her emergence becomes what Freud calls "the return of repressed". It reminds those staying in Ireland of their painful histories or terrible living conditions which force lots of young Irish to have no choice but to leave their homes. She would no longer be viewed as a part of her hometown after her emigration. Her struggle for either staying at her hometown or going back to Brooklyn shows her ambivalence about home and belongings. Stoddard concludes, for the emigrants, "[e]ach place is both *Heimlich* and *unheimlich*, home and strange"; namely, home could be everywhere but nowhere simultaneously (165).

Jose Carregal-Romero analyzes how Tóibín, as a historical revisionist, subverts the conservative Irish Nationalist definition of family through his description of alternative forms of family in his works in "Colm Tóibín and Post-Nationalist Ireland: Redefining Family Through Alterity" (2). In the 1990s, Ireland was labeled as post-nationalist because it underwent modernization and a series of drastic transformations such as legal and economic changes. These rapid transformations also had influences on its contemporary literature and writers, including Colm Tóibín. As a post-nationalist writer, Tóibín took a side with revisionist historian Roy Foster, and he suggested that the way to examine either past or present Ireland should be ambiguous, pluralist, and all-inclusive (Carregal-Romero 2). To explain how Tóibín reconfigured the definition of family within the revisionist and post-nationalist context, Carregal-Romero uses Jeffrey Nelson's Alterity. According to Nelson, alterity refers to "any gap in the nation's self-definition which becomes a privileged site for



locating ethical resistance and for a political re-articulation of national and subjective identity” (qtd. in Carregal-Romero 2). Those gaps are the hidden and diverse representations, which are rejected by official discourses.

In traditional patriarchal Ireland, a family has been seen as an institution under the system of hetero-sexual marriage. Especially for a woman, being “the angel in the house” becomes her priority over her personal fulfillment. Besides, the notion of family has been considered an ideal place of unconditional love, and the bonds among its members are unbreakable. Nevertheless, Carregal-Romero summarizes that, in Tóibín’s novels, these traditional families tend to be dysfunctional and conflicting (4). Most main characters of his novels are the socially marginalized, like housewives, unmarried young mothers, and homosexual people, who are neglected by Irish authorities. For them, family is not the place where provides unconditional love but a social institute where family members are under the surveillance of society. Instead, they find love and a sense of belonging in an alternative family outside. For example, in *The Blackwater Lightship*, Paul and Francois, a gay couple, replace Declan’s natural parents, to offer the love and emotional support he needs. Through inscribing these characters and their relationships, Tóibín deconstructs the role of a family as a social and political institution which is regulated by laws, mores, and Catholicism in traditional Ireland. Carregal-Romero concludes that Tóibín not only refuses to accept the official genealogical discourses but also redefines that the concept of family is fluid and determined by context (8). With his emphasis on the minor and deconstruction of the notion of family, Tóibín elucidates his revisionist perception of Ireland, where it is full of diversity and ambivalence.

## **Methodology**

The critics and their arguments above provide me with useful and valuable insights into the novel and the author; however, some of their points give room for further discussion.



Most of them conclude that the heroine's final decision is a passive and forced decision since they mainly analyze Eilis's as a migrant and discuss the novel as a representative of the Irish Diaspora. Indeed, Eilis's migrant identity makes her vacillate between her homeland and the hostland. However, as a transnational female migrant, the process and the outcome of her transformation and development deserve more critical attention. Moreover, they should be the essential elements while we attempt to figure out the reasons behind her decision. Thus, by studying this novel as a contemporary Female Bildungsroman and combining it with Diaspora Studies and Transnationalism, this thesis tries to prove that, as a transnational female migrant, Eilis's final decision to go back to Brooklyn is actually a subconsciously active and correct one for her personal development.

The Bildungsroman, the novel of transformation, according to Oxford Online English Dictionary, is a genre of the novel that "has its main theme the formative years or spiritual education of one person" ("Bildungsroman"). Namely, it portrays the process of a protagonist's development and transformation physically or mentally; moreover, his/her development is inseparable from social integration. However, in "The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century," Joannou indicates that "The coming-of-age journey in the classical Bildungsroman is based on the assumption of the male self as the universal self" (202). Bildungsroman is traditionally seen as a genre mainly concerned with male adventure and legend. With the feminist critical intervention, the Bildungsroman centered on developments of heroines started to get more critical attention. Moreover, some critics claim that Female Bildungsroman has its own distinctive tradition and features.

In *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, Abel, Hirsch, and Langland reexamine the generic definition. They suggest that a woman's relation to a society is different from her male counterpart (Abel et al. 5). Moreover, they emphasize that "the theorists used to assume the constraints from society are equal, but it's actually much severer

and narrower to women. They couldn't have aspiration" (Abel et al. 6). In classical female coming-of-age fictions, unlike their male counterparts, the heroines are seldom enabled to take on adventures independently and gain promising positions in society in public.

Moreover, compared to those of the heroes, the spiritual development and the inner voices of the heroines are more accentuated because of the prohibition from public experiences (Abel et al. 9). It's easy to observe that the writers used the techniques of stream of consciousness or inner monologue to display the heroines' thoughts in the Female Bildungsroman. In most classic works of the Victorian Female Bildungsroman, they reveal the predicament of women in general at that time, especially their lack of agency to control their own money, marriage, and future. The heroines struggle to escape from this plight. However, in the Victorian Female Bildungsroman, those heroines who win perfect and successful endings usually choose to comply with the social expectations even though they have gained more freedom and autonomy, such as getting married to be a housewife and a mother. On the contrary, as being demonstrated by Rachel's death in Woolf's *Voyage In*, when the heroine's Bildung makes them reluctant to obey the social norms, their growth leads them to destruction.

As for the heroines of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Female Bildungsroman, they would refuse to be confined in heterosexual marriages and in domestic areas. Moreover, due to the constantly rapid social changes, the contemporary Female Bildungsroman has also manifested the importance of diversity and of individuality. Thus, particular emphases are placed on how the heroines engage in various careers, embrace different sexualities, and fulfill individual dreams. Even though, like the heroines in the traditional Bildungsroman, they also show their eagerness, hesitation, and difficulties to develop under patriarchal domination, the contemporary heroines would keep fighting against social expectations to accomplish their own self-fulfillment. Thus, these modern heroines broaden the definition of the Bildungsroman. They illustrate that the so-called meaningful self-development not only is

limited to the heroes finding promising, suitable positions in society after a series of adventures, but also embraces those heroines continuing to explore, to define themselves, and not to yield to patriarchal oppression and restrictions.

As a contemporary Female Bildungsroman, *Brooklyn* shares some traits. Eilis not only displays the characteristics of the modern heroines but shows her unique features as a transnational female migrant. A female character in the Bildungsroman has already faced more restrictions; however, a transnational female must face more challenges and insecurity because she is stuck between two cultures and nations. Hence, it's crucial to understand the traits and characteristics of the transnational migrants, female ones especially, at first.

Transnationalism focuses on activities that cross state boundaries, such as ideas, information, money, and people. When it comes to people who are across the boundaries, the transnational migrants have drawn critical attention. As claimed by Fouron and Glick-Schiller, transnational migration means “a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country” (qtd. in Upegui-Hernandez 2005). It's worth noting that the transnational migrants are simultaneously affected by multiple, sometimes even incompatible realities or perspectives because of their continual connection with both the homeland and the hostland. However, as Upegui-Hernandez points out that, in traditional Transnational Studies, scholars paid more attention to the outcomes of how the immigrants are assimilated, acculturated, or integrated into the hostland; besides, others focus on how transnational migration has influenced the sending country (2012). In most Transnational Studies, the subjects are always male; transnational female migrants and their contribution are neglected. Being female immigrants, they must face some harsher and more constraining challenges in the host country. Nevertheless, in comparison with the oppressive and unpromising life in the homeland, those challenges could

provide them with more room for positive development.

Through examining the letters they sent home, Harris concludes some common themes and situations Irish female immigrants face in America. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, even they wrote about the dangers they might face there, most Irish female migrants still decided to settle in cities and worked as domestic workers in America. Harris discovered they were happy with their jobs because they got higher wages, learnt American culture easily and had more free time (173). Financially independent, these Irish women also found out that marriage was different from that at home. While women in Ireland got married with the obligations under their family and the Catholic Church, the female immigrants could enjoy romances or refuse the pursuers they didn't like freely (Harris 180). Moreover, different from their male counterparts, the transnational female migrants tended to maintain reciprocal relationships with their families (Harris 177). They were more willing to remit back home or even sponsor their family members, especially sisters, to immigrate to America for brighter futures. These themes which the Irish female migrants shared proved that the host country provides more chances for them to be freer and more independent.

Besides, Diaspora Studies, which Gabriel Shaffer suggests as the “study of networks created by ethnic groups which transcend the territorial state,” (qtd. in Gray 8) would also be beneficial to analyze the transnational Female Bildungsroman. Emigration is an unpalatable topic in Irish history, especially Irish women's migration. In *Women and the Irish Diaspora*, Breda Gray also points out that even though those female migrants seem to be liberated from the confines of the conservative homeland, the act of emigration actually shows their loyalty to their families by remittance (2). However, while lots of young Irish women emigrated, the Catholic Church designated emigration to the UK or the US as a threat to women's moral well-being, religion, and nation (Ryan qtd. in Gray 24). These female emigrants were seen as the degrading figures by the authorities in their homeland regardless of their original good

intentions. On the other hand, some of the contemporary Irish female migrants are capable women who leave for another land voluntarily to pursue better work opportunities, sexual freedom, and personal development. However, when they return to the motherland, they are viewed as the “other” of Irish femininity since they depart from the traditional Irish stoic, passive and enduring femininity (Gray 59). Being immigrants usually does make it difficult for them to find ideal work or positions in the adopted lands, which seemingly suggests the formative process is unfinished. Nevertheless, for the transnational female migrants, it’s still a better opportunity to experience the process of transformation in the hostland, which they couldn’t have in the homeland. In *Brooklyn*, as a transnational female migrant, Eilis Lacey similarly suffers from all these not only difficulties and struggles, but she also wins opportunities and growth most transnational female migrants would experience.

### **Chapter Organization**

Since the novel is narrated chronologically, I will analyze Eilis’s transformation based on the linear development of the plot to prove my arguments. In Chapter 2, I would focus on analyzing Eilis’s growth in Ireland and her first transatlantic journey. Before embarking on her journey, like most heroines in the female Bildungsroman, the immature Eilis is naturally keen-sighted but timid and submissive because she is confined to an unfavorable circumstance. Even being sharp at numbers and having learned bookkeeping, Eilis could only find a part-time job at a grocery shop on Sundays. Thus, in her family, she couldn’t share the burden of maintaining the household with her siblings, but depended on the money given by her admirable sister, Rose. Unable to support herself, Eilis could only act as a social outsider, witnessing her economically independent sister to take part in various social activities. As for her part-time job, Eilis shows her keen observation on people when she sees how her arrogant boss, Miss Kelly, treats customers from different social classes with different attitudes. However, she is too timid to speak for underprivileged customers. When it comes to her own

future, she is not ambitious, but thinking of living an ordinary life as most Irish women in the town. However, because of her talent for dealing with numbers, her sister arranges for Eilis to immigrate to the US with the assistance of an Irish Father. As a common technique of the Female Bildungsroman, the author also uses many inner monologues to reveal Eilis's fear and unwillingness to leave for Brooklyn. Nevertheless, like most Irish female emigrants, she accepts the plan submissively since she is aware that it's the best choice for her family. After starting on her journey of transformation and independence, however, Eilis almost fails in her first challenges on the ship because of her timidity and naivety.

Through examining the different aspects of her new life, Chapter 3 mainly discusses how, as a female immigrant, Eilis transforms into a capable, independent, and ambitious woman in the US, "the land of the free and the brave" (Tóibín 49). Being a modern transnational heroine, Eilis needs to undergo a series of trials to find her own position in an exotic land. Firstly, while working as a sales assistant in a department store, Eilis is promising to work in the office in the future as long as she dedicates herself to progress. Thus, Eilis finally shows her ambition for career achievement, and her good academic performance in bookkeeping in the night college boosts her sense of achievement too. As a naïve Irish girl from a homogenous small town, Eilis is ignorant about the complex histories and relationships among different ethnic groups in Brooklyn. However, this becomes an advantage for her to learn how to get along with different Diasporic groups personally without biases, and to experience new cultures willingly. Thirdly, her relationship with her Italian-American boyfriend, Tony, has influences on Eilis's maturation. Born into a blue-collar Italian family, Tony, similarly shares an American Dream with Eilis. They both believe that they can have promising futures there as long as they are capable and hard-working. Besides, due to her relationship with Tony and her financial independence, Eilis could finally have different recreations such as seeing the latest movies, going to the beaches and baseball

games, which were impossible for her to experience if she chose to stay in Ireland. However, her development hasn't been considered fulfilled here. Even though she has had some noticeable transformations, she is not ready to settle herself down in Brooklyn since her migration is out of love and sacrifice for her family. Eilis's growth seems to be suspended because she couldn't decide where, between her homeland and the hostland, the destination for her future and belonging would be.

Therefore, in the fourth chapter, I would like to pay much attention to how Eilis struggles to make a decision between staying at her hometown and going back to Brooklyn, and why she eventually decides to leave for the US again. Different from the old timid herself, the new Eilis, who has undergone different trials in Brooklyn, carries "something close to glamour" back home after her sister's sudden death (Tóibín 227). This glamour appears to make her become the new attraction in the town. She shows her capability of bookkeeping, and it wins her a work opportunity as a bookkeeper, which she hasn't achieved while she was in Brooklyn yet. Like most heroes and heroines of the coming-of-age novels, Eilis is also stuck in a love triangle and needs to choose between Tony and Jim, her new wealthy and prestigious pursuer in the hometown. Most importantly, her new achievements make Eilis earn her mother's recognition, which would also be helpful to mend their previous distant mother-daughter relationship. As a girl who once lived in her successful sister's shadow, it's the first time for her to make her mother proud of her. The sweetness and familiarity make her prefer not to go through the difficulties and challenges in Brooklyn again.

However, there are some details that could prove that Eilis is aware that her new life is built on her migrant experience and sadly her sister's death. Without both Rose's death and her American certificate in bookkeeping, it's impossible for her to get her dream job in her hometown. Eilis actually shows her acknowledgment of it. Likewise, Eilis's new American



glamour makes her desirable and the center of attention, which makes Jim Farrell notice her as a candidate for a perfect match. However, as McWilliams points out, a returnee is usually a center of attraction which also means he/she is, in fact, is a disturbing figure who will disorder the community (McWilliams 156), Eilis's return could destroy the balance of the hierarchy of the town. Therefore, as a returnee who can't be classified, it's hard for Eilis to be accepted. Moreover, different from the heroes/heroines in the classic Bildungsroman, Eilis shows her reluctance to choose her significant other merely based on who can provide her with a better future or stable living conditions. As an experienced transnational female, Eilis knows Jim is conservative (Tóibín 242). Eilis also clearly knows it's impossible for Jim to degrade himself and for his respectful family to accept a woman who got married secretly in the US. At first glance, Eilis's final decision to return to Brooklyn is a sudden one since she is afraid that her secret marriage would get exposed. However, it's persuasive to believe that her decision is reasonable and good for her future self-development.



## Chapter Two

### The Wallflower Heroine and Her Reluctant Voyage

Bildungsroman is a genre of novels focusing on the mental and/or physical transformation of a hero/heroine. However, if the protagonist always stays at or is confined to the same place, it's impossible for him/her to break through and to transform. Whether scheduled or unpredictable, voluntary or reluctant, journeys and adventures are always inseparable from the hero/heroine's development. In *Brooklyn*, as a price to pay, Eilis Lacey needs to leave her hometown, Enniscorthy, to get her chances to show her talent and to fulfill her potential, which are sabotaged by the economic slump and the closed, conservative environment of her hometown.

The economic recession in Ireland not only makes Eilis financially dependent but also deprives her of her autonomy. While the atmosphere and the job opportunities seemed to be promising and optimistic after the national independence, the Irish society and its economy were actually influenced by the global economic depression (Meaney et al. 106). "Women's employment [in Ireland] stagnated or declined from the 1920s to the 1980s" (Meaney et al. 106). Moreover, in the 1950s, while the *Irish Press* posted a series of articles teaching the young Irish to find a job, Cullinane, in "Any Jobs Going? Career Advice in Post-War Ireland", points out that the employment was highly gendered; moreover, "the number of occupations covered that were geared towards women was minimal and concentrated in traditional 'feminine' spheres of work such as hairdressing, millinery, dressmaking and waitressing" (Cullinane). In other words, in the 1950s Ireland, the percentage of women who got professional or high-status jobs was much less than that of their male counterparts. In *Brooklyn*, the heroine, Eilis, who lives in Enniscorthy, a small Irish rural town, is in the same predicament with other contemporary women. Eilis cannot find a decent or high-status job

even though she has gifts for dealing with numbers and has taken the introductory bookkeeping course. Eilis knows “there [is], at least for the moment, no work for anyone in Enniscorthy, no matter what their qualifications” (Tóibín 11). She is unable to afford her own living but get part-time work at Miss Kelly’s grocery shop in her hometown. With the humble salary paid by stingy Miss Kelly, Eilis is fully aware that she couldn’t make a contribution to her family. Thus, unlike her beautiful and capable sister, Rose, who not only supports the family but also acquires a reputation by joining the local golf club, Eilis tends to be a social outsider to observe others, especially Rose, silently. Since she couldn’t afford that kind of colorful social life, she could only examine silently and closely how her sister wears stylishly, carries a new bag and applies the makeup in the mirror for the upcoming meeting with the members of the golf club (Tóibín 3). In contrast with Rose, without her own money, Eilis withdraws herself from social activities. She only goes to a parish dance to keep her friend’s company and makes no effort with her outfit and appearance (Tóibín 16).

Integration with society is also a key factor to the development of the hero/heroine in a coming-of-age novel. However, restricted by meager income, Eilis’s chances to integrate into society by taking part in different social activities is taken away simultaneously. Due to her lack of financial independence and social interactions with others, Eilis doesn’t own the subjectivity of her own life or future but again is an outsider seeing how others manipulate her life. She herself is only able to remain silent about others’ decisions about her fate because she doesn’t have the capital, money, to make her own decisions. Even though she knows that the offer is not fair and Miss Kelly is hard to please, Eilis has no other choice but to accept it silently (Tóibín 6). Likewise, when Rose and her mother discuss about the plan to send her to America with Father Flood, Eilis is alienated from them and her own destiny. She feels “like a child when the doctor would come to the house, her mother listening with cowed respect” (Tóibín 23). Like a sick child, financially dependent Eilis is also a child who is

powerless to control her life, letting the authority and the adults make the best choice for her.

“Oh, the whole town, anyone who is anyone, comes into the shop and I hear everything” (Tóibín 5). Miss Kelly’s words not only inform Eilis about the reason to hire her but also illustrate the society is close and even confined in her hometown. There’s no secret in her hometown; a person’s condition or behavior is under another person’s watch. Thus, aside from her financial predicament, the conservative environment of her hometown also impeded Eilis’s personal development; thus, she becomes timid and unambitious. According to the scholars, the heroines’ inner monologues are intentionally inscribed because they are prohibited from public experiences, which is the common trait shared by the heroines of *Female Bildungsroman* (Abel et al. 9). Similarly, rather than speaking out her mind for herself or others, Eilis keeps the thoughts in her mind and struggles by herself. At work, when she notices Miss Kelly is snobbish and snarky to those who are not sharp or are from a lower social class, she couldn’t stand up for them (Tóibín 14). However, her silence doesn’t mean her indifference to the outside world. On the contrary, because of her powerlessness, she tends to be an outsider and an observer of the world. She keeps a keen eye on people and things around her. While feeling pity for those unprivileged customers, Eilis in reality realizes “that there was no other shop in the town that was as well-stocked as Miss Kelly’s and open on a Sunday morning, but she also had a sense that people came here out of habit and they did not mind waiting, they enjoyed the crush and the crowd” (Tóibín 14). Her inner voice clearly illustrates her knowledge about how hierarchic and unchanging her hometown is. Miss Kelly’s well-stocked grocery and its exclusivity opened on Sundays miniature the Irish hierarchical society. It serves people from different classes with different levels of commodities and varying attitudes. However, even though those from the lower social class are mistreated and need to wait, they go to the shop regularly and even enjoy it. This phenomenon shows how those people living there are used to this kind of fixed and

conservative society without thinking of making changes. Thus, under this unchanging environment, even if Eilis does part-time work, it couldn't bring positive influences on Eilis's personal development.

"Eilis had always presumed that she would live in the town all her life, as her mother had done, knowing everyone, having the same friend and neighbours, the same routines in the same streets" (Tóibín 27). This traditional small town also confines Eilis's thoughts about her future. She has no ambition for leaving for another country to pursue a better life, but is ready to be part of this invariable and endless cycle of hierarchy. Moreover, being an Irish woman growing under this conservative patriarchal society, Eilis is fully aware of her duty as a woman; that is, to get married and to have children after giving up her own job (Tóibín 28). For Eilis, who has never stepped out of this conventional and homogenous town, it's impossible to challenge this kind of social norm. Therefore, instead of regarding her sister's plan to send her to Brooklyn as a good chance for her growth, for Eilis, it's actually more like a punishment for not getting a decent job in town but working miserably at Miss Kelly's. Because she feels guilty about being a burden to her family, she is too timid and unconfident to express her true feelings and turn down the proposal.

Carregal-Romero suggests that "Tóibín does not present his character's future emigration to New York as an act of freedom or emancipation. Instead, her departure is viewed as an almost inevitable situation that brings enforced displacement" (134). Instead of feeling emancipated, this upcoming journey brings her tremendous pain, which she couldn't tell anyone. To atone for her crimes, Eilis forces herself to embark on this unknown adventure to a foreign land and makes up her mind to keep her pain and struggles to herself. Thus, under her seeming excitement and anticipation, her fear and worries for the unknown and the unfamiliar are repressed in her mind. "The thought came unbidden into her mind that she would be happier if it [her suitcase] were opened by another person who could keep the

clothes and shoes and wear them every day [...] would be better if they were for someone else, she [thinks], someone like her, someone the same age and size [...]" (Tóibín 29). In order to repress her true thoughts forcibly, Eilis leads her self to be split. She wishes she could be divided into two; one could keep her old life with her mother and Rose in the hometown, and the other, who is identical to her, could do penance for her in Brooklyn. Consequently, this double could make her escape from this cruel reality.

As a keen observer for her own life and others, Eilis is fully conscious that immigrating to the US and concealing her feelings are the best things that she could do for her family. From Father Flood's promise that "in the United States, there would be plenty of work for someone like you and with good pay," (Tóibín 22) and her sister's and mother's silences as acquiescence to the proposal, Eilis understands she needs to earn a fortune to make a contribution to her family. However, not only for Eilis but also for her family, it's a painful and challenging decision. Since Eilis's three brothers have already left for England to earn livings, Eilis has avoided mentioning them in front of her mother. When it comes to her imminent departure, the awkward silence among them descends from time to time. When her mother tells one of their neighbors that "'it will kill me when she goes' [...]" Her face wore a dark strained look that Eilis [has] not seen since the months after their father died" (Tóibín 28), Eilis compares her mother's gravely look caused by her emigration to that resulted from her father's death. According to Stoddard, due to the Irish ineradicably painful history of emigration after the Great Famine, "Freud's concept of the uncanny is evoked in the association between emigration and living death" (161). One key factor of Freudian uncanny is the blur of the boundary. Eilis blurs the boundary between emigration and death. Indeed, for her mother, her emigrant kids are like the living dead, whom she lost or will lose for good despite the fact that they are still alive. "There was, she [thinks], enough sadness in the house, maybe even more than she realized. She would try as best she could not to add to it" (Tóibín

31). Therefore, she doesn't "allow herself to conclude that she [does] not want to go" and "would do everything she could for them [her family] by pretending at all times that she [is] filled with excitement at the great adventure on which she was ready to embark" (Tóibín 29, 31). Sharp at observing the situation, Eilis knows that remaining silent on her thoughts is what she could do for her family. Besides, as a living dead, her last wish is to make her family remember her smile. Due to the social restrictions and familial obligation, Eilis lacks ambition and self-agency to determine her own future. Instead, she follows others' decisions for her passively; moreover, she forces herself to repress her pain and thoughts for her beloved ones.

The silence in Eilis's house actually echoes the collective silence on the painful truth of emigration (Stoddard 153). Eilis mentions that "it [is] part of the life of the town" (Tóibín 24). Every day, in Ireland, someone's kids or siblings are forced to leave for better lives for themselves and for, more importantly, their families. Unable to give them bright futures and ample job opportunities, the stayers could only say goodbyes to their kids silently and reluctantly. It's worth noting that "[t]hroughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, for every eight males leaving, ten females departed" (Kennedy qtd. in Meaney et al. 106). To our surprise, the numbers of female migrants are more than male ones on average. In *Women and the Irish Diaspora*, Gray elucidates the reasons why Irish women determine to emigrate:

Women have left Ireland in search of life opportunities, sexual liberation and career advancement, to give birth and to have abortions, as a means of personal survival and of contributing to the survival of their families in Ireland. They have emigrated to escape difficult family circumstances, heterosexism, Catholicism and the intense familiarities and surveillances that have marked Irish society. [...] They have left

voluntarily and involuntarily, by chance and because others were leaving. (1)

In *Brooklyn*, it's easy to tell that Eilis's emigration is out of a desire to support her family, and it's an involuntary one. However, this forced emigration does give her chances to escape from the conservative environment and the rigid social hierarchy in her hometown. Moreover, leaving is helpful for her self-fulfillment.

Like most heroes and heroines going on adventures, Eilis has to depart from her familiar and closed environment to transform. Indeed, during her first transatlantic journey, Eilis still shows her shyness, self-doubt, and her ignorance of the outside world, which make her first adventure miserable and almost failed at first. As a rookie, she knows nothing about the tips on board. When her sophisticated roommate, Georgina, warns her that "it's going to one of those nights, one of the worst" (Tóibín 40), Eilis fails to realize the implication for the disasters coming with the rough sea state. Therefore, due to her inexperience, she still has her dinner at the third-class dining room and is surprised how few the diners are (Tóibín 40). Besides, when she finds out the shared bathroom is locked from the other side, she naively believes that they are using the bathroom and keeping waiting outside (Tóibín 41). However, no matter how long she has been waiting outside or knocking on the door, no one answers. She hopes that "Georgina would come. Georgina, she [thinks], would know what to do, as would Rose, or indeed Miss Kelly, whose face came into her mind for one brief moment. But she [has] no idea what to do" (Tóibín 41). Being a dependent and unsociable girl from a simple rural town, timid Eilis doesn't believe in herself or tries to address the problem by herself. Instead, as in the town, others would decide her life or future for her, she again wants to resort to experienced others to fix the problem for her.

Because of her lack of confidence, the thought that this trip is her punishment for her keeps haunting her as well. While suffering from the severe seasickness, Eilis thinks it's her



fault causing her to undergo the illness, the helplessness and the malice of her neighbors (Tóibín 44). It's her penalty for accomplishing nothing in her hometown. Nevertheless, clever and keen-sighted, Eilis actually has the potential to deal with the problems by herself during this trip. She is aware that she needs to be as self-possessed as her sister to make herself be heard. When she tries to ask a porter to do her a favor at the port of Liverpool, she finds out herself "thanking him in a tone that Rose might have used, a tone warm and private but also slightly distant though not shy either, a tone used by a woman in full possession of herself. It was something she could not have done in the town or in a place where any of her family might have seen her" (Tóibín 32-33). For Eilis, having a brilliant sister like Rose is a double-edged sword. Rose could have solved the problems for her and been her role model. On the other side, Rose's glamor, in fact, overshadows Eilis. Under Rose's protection, the only role Eilis could play is the shy and helpless little sister. Moreover, growing up in a closed and traditional town in Ireland, it's impossible for her to change her fixed personality and characteristics, which have been rooted in her family's and friend's mind. After leaving her capable sister and escaping from the confined environment, Eilis finally could step out her first step of development.

Tóibín uses a pitiful but humorous way to describe how Eilis suffers from seasickness. Struggling against the symptoms of nausea, Eilis is forced to perform her flexibility and ability to manage crises without any assistance. Since she is hopeless to tackle the problem of the locked bathroom by herself, she uses her wit and adaptability to cope with her emergency of stooling and vomiting. Because she has noticed that there is a small alcove where a bucket and some mops are put there earlier, she realizes that "since she [has] met no one, then, if she were lucky, no one would see her now as she [goes] to the alcove on the right" (Tóibín 43). Thanks to the bucket and the mops, Eilis finally finds a way to relieve herself. Despite being awkward and hilarious, it could be seen as the first time that Eilis resolves a crisis by herself.

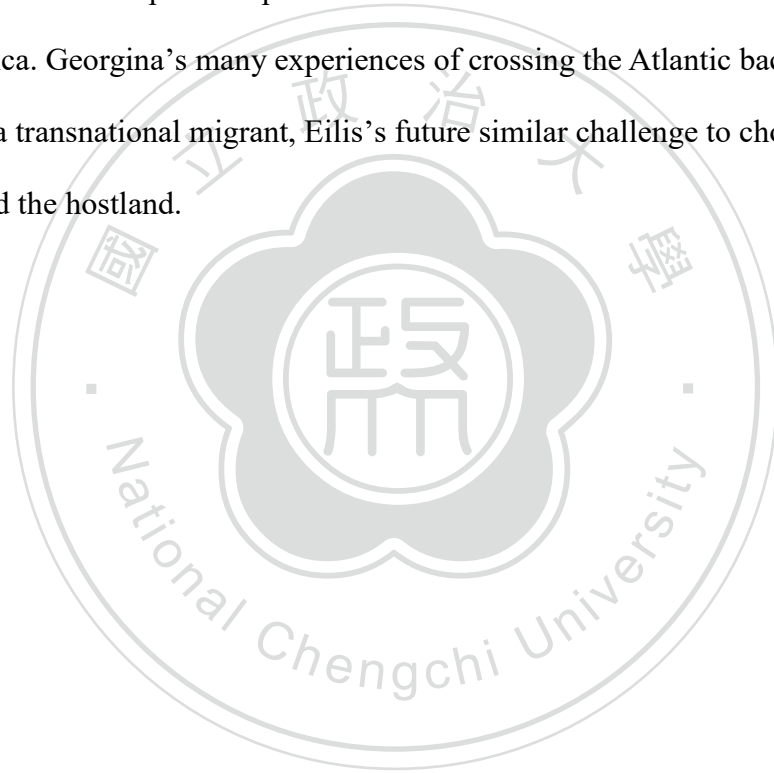


Likewise, without anyone's help, the reason why seldom people went to the dining room and why the neighbors looked the bathroom down on her by this painful experience (Tóibín 43). This experience proves that Eilis is more capable of solving the problems alone than she used to think.

Since the Bildungsroman is also known as the apprenticeship novel, a mentor usually plays a crucial role during the hero/heroine's growth and transformation. In a work of the traditional Victorian Female Bildungsroman, the mentoring position is usually taken by male characters. Nevertheless, as a contemporary coming-of-age novel, in *Brooklyn*, especially on Eilis's first voyage, her mentor teaching her how to survive on rough seas and go through the American customs is a female; that is her roommate, Georgina. "Immensely poised and glamorous," Georgina is like the double of Rose. However, different from Rose, who would consider all possibilities for Eilis in advance, Georgina lets Eilis make her own decisions. Instead of joining the first-class passengers with Georgina, Eilis chooses to stay in the room alone which causes her following sufferings (Tóibín 40). Georgina's absence is like a trial to examine whether Eilis could deal with the difficulties alone. After Eilis narrowly passes her first challenge, Georgina shows up. She not only comforts Eilis but also teaches her more effective and sophisticated ways to solve problems. She orders Eilis that she consume nothing but water, which is the best way to avoid nausea; besides, she shows Eilis the way to open the locked door simply with a nail file and to negotiate with those annoying neighbors (Tóibín 45-47).

As an experienced migrant, Georgina easily finds out Eilis's problem of looking frightened and ignorant. To help Eilis enter "the land of the free and the brave," Georgina teaches Eilis how to look more confident and does her makeup (Tóibín 49-50). Compared to the old self who doesn't pay attention to her appearance in her hometown, Eilis is surprised at how good-looking she is and even thinks that "she would like to know how to put make-up

on properly herself in the way Rose knew and Georgina knew. It would be much easier, she imagine[s], to go out among people she [doesn't] know, maybe people she would never see again, if she could like this" (Tóibín 50). With Georgina's assistance, it's the first time that Eilis has anticipation of her following unknown journey. In that foreign but free place, Eilis could get rid of the old timid self that everyone in her small hometown knows, developing to be a confident and composed woman. More interestingly, aside from being Eilis's mentor, Georgina, who is returning back to America from her visit to her family in England, is a character that signals Eilis's possible positive transformation as a transnational female migrant in America. Georgina's many experiences of crossing the Atlantic back and forth also foreshadows, as a transnational migrant, Eilis's future similar challenge to choose between her homeland and the hostland.



### Chapter Three

#### **“Something She had not Expected”: A Series of Trials and Eilis’s Transformation**

New York, as Kasinitz and Waters point out, is one of the continuous gateways, which has been an immigrant gateway for more than a century in the US, and “in such cities, the immigrant population is often highly diverse, as migrants who entered at different times were often from different regions” (94). With more job opportunities, highly developed social infrastructure, globally dominant culture and fashion, various leisure activities, and much friendlier rules and acts of immigration, New York is an ideal destination for foreign immigrants always. According to Connolly’s and Daly’s studies, “between 1951 and 1961, ten per cent of total departures went to the USA and over half of them were women” (qtd. in Meaney et al. 107). Even though most of those Irish female immigrants chose to work as domestic servants, similar to what they did in Ireland, America provided them with higher salaries, better living conditions, and bright futures (Meaney et al. 108). Moreover, in contrast to their male counterparts, Irish women moved into white-collar work more quickly; for those smart and ambitious Irish female immigrants, they preferred to work as nurses or teachers in the hostland (McCaffrey 83). In *Brooklyn*, Eilis similarly seizes the chance to transform into a capable, ambitious, and self-possessed woman after undergoing a series of challenges and adventures in this exotic but promising land; however, her migrant identity becomes an obstacle for her to complete her transformation there.

As a female immigrant, the first big challenge for Eilis to overcome is her homesickness and her fear of the unfamiliar and the unknown in this foreign place. Like what she thought before leaving for Brooklyn, her migration is a penance. Therefore, when she just arrives in Brooklyn, her body and heart are spilt. Despite the fact that she is supposed to be freer physically in Brooklyn, where it’s more developed and open than her hometown, Eilis’s

homesickness and dread have her think that she is trapped in a strange land. Although she considers that she has tried her best there, she feels that “there [is] nothing she could do. It [is] as though she [has] been locked away” (Tóibín 67). Additionally, Eilis “still [has] not found bread anywhere that she like[s] and even the tea and the milk taste[s] strange. The butter [has] a flavor she [doesn’t] like either, it taste[s] almost of grease” (Tóibín 57). With her great sadness and homesickness, Eilis can’t help but compare everything in America with those in her hometown and refuses to get used to them, which makes her penance more arduous.

According to Glick Schiller et al., “in the past immigrants were forced to abandon, forget, or deny their ties to home” (51). To show their loyalty and determination in the hostland, those immigrants needed to forget and abandon their home(land)s completely. Similarly, determined to focus on her life and work in the hostland, Eilis tries to repress her longing to return home in the daytime. However, as Freudian uncanny, unless she truly overcomes her fear and homesickness, the repressed would always return subconsciously. The dread of the unfamiliar and the pain of losing her family and her old life, which she tries hard not to think about, come back to her in her dreams often. In one of her dreams, she is one of those silent kids who committed some crimes or caused trouble and is sentenced to be taken away from her family (Tóibín 67). This dream reflects her subconsciously strong belief that she was forced to be away from her family because her financial dependence is a trouble to them. As a result, this immigrant life always reminds Eilis of the crime which she should atone. This unspeakable sense of guilt makes her more alienated from the supposedly liberal world outside. In another dream, she was flying back home in a hot-air balloon (Tóibín 67), which illustrates her heart still belongs to her hometown.

To relieve her pain, she could only resort to writing letters to make her feel like home. Therefore, instead of making a real connection with people in the hostland, she prefers to

write down everything she has observed about Brooklyn faithfully in the letters to her family. Equally, receiving the letters from her family and imagining their lives in the hometown appear to be the breath of life to her. However, those letters can never be the useful and ultimate solution. On the contrary, the letters actually make her alienated from her family as well. The letters, in fact, embody the gap gradually broadening between the migrants and their family members in the homeland. No matter how hard they try to describe their lives in the hostlands vividly, the migrants can't surmount the obstacles caused by the physical distances to let their family members experience their lives and difficulties personally and thoroughly. Hence, instead of telling them about their struggles and pain, the migrants often filter the topics of their letters deliberately. Seán Ó Dubhda points out that "bad or shameful news was rarely written, instead it was brought home by word of mouth" and the three common topics of those letters about America are: "First, a beautiful country, no matter what's said, for those who are able to earn their bread. Second, the land of liberty. Third, The land of the free" (qtd. in Meaney et al. 121). Likewise, in *Brooklyn*, when Eilis replies to her mother's and sister's letters, she "would put nothing in about how she [spent] the last two days. She would try to put those two days behind her" (Tóibín 76). Rather than telling them how inadaptable she has been and how suffered from homesickness, she is reluctant to shatter their illusion that it's easy to hit the jackpot in America. Thus, alienated from both her loved ones in homeland physically and from the real life in hostland emotionally, she truly becomes "nobody here. It was not just that she ha[s] no friends and family; it [is] rather that she [is] a ghost in this room, in the street on the way to work, on the shop floor. Nothing mean[s] anything" (Tóibín 67). Like most heroes/heroines, to transform, Eilis has to leave her comfort zone and forces herself to conquer her fear and sadness in this foreign place without family or friends from her hometown coming to her rescue.

Growing up in a closed small town, Eilis knows almost everyone and everything that

happened in her hometown. The interpersonal relationship is relatively simple there. However, Brooklyn, as what Miss Bartocci, Eilis's new boss said on her first day of work, is a place "change[s] every day, new people arrive and they could Jewish or Irish or Polish or even coloured" (Tóibín 59). Thus, another big challenge for Eilis is dealing with the complicated interpersonal relationship in this bigger and ever-changing place. As a female immigrant, the first task for her is to get along with other lodgers, all of whom have Irish roots. However, unlike those growing from the same environment with her, these female lodgers are from different parts of Ireland or the second generation of Irish immigrants. Thus, the boarding house is an embodiment of the diversity and heterogeneity of America. It's a place where various cultures and thoughts collide with or integrate with one another. Even though Eilis once tried to avoid making conversation or having arguments with other lodgers, it's impossible for her to escape from the power struggles not only among the girls of different parties but also between the landlady and the lodgers in the boarding house. Initially, Eilis attempted to adopt the same strategy as what she had done in her hometown; that is, to be a silent outsider or an observer to all the conflicts and comments even though she hated them. When other lodgers couldn't stop giving her advice or making criticisms or comments on her, she wondered in mind that "how long it would go on for, and was trying to let them know how little appreciated their interested was by smiling faintly at them when they spoke or, a few times, especially in the morning, by looking at them vacantly as though she did not understand a word they said" (Tóibín 58).

Nevertheless, different from the conditions in her hometown, it didn't work to strike back with silence or with negative, passive attitudes. On the contrary, without her family or friends who would make decisions for her out of good intentions, Eilis's passivity and silence would only make her manipulated by others in Brooklyn, where everyone cares more about their self-interests and profits, which they could get from others. In the boarding house, her

shrewd and experienced landlady, Mrs. Kehoe, catches this weakness and frequently uses it to manipulate Eilis. When Miss Keegan is going to move out, Mrs. Kehoe decides to move Eilis into that room, which is in the basement but is the best room in the house. This decision actually makes her relationship with the other lodgers tenser (Tóibín 99-103). More keen-sighted after learning experiences from the migrant life, Eilis realizes that “all of them [the other lodgers] had conspired to frighten her in revenge for her being installed in Miss Keegan’s room to believing that Mrs. Kehoe had placed her there not because she favoured her but because she thought she was the least likely to protest” (Tóibín 103). Neither Mrs. Kehoe’s decision nor Miss McAdam’s warning about the stalker is sincere or from the bottoms of their hearts; instead, they actually take advantage of her silence and obedience.

Outside the boarding house, what awaits Eilis is a more complicated society, which consists of various ethnic groups. By describing the classmates in Eilis’s bookkeeping night class, Tóibín also elaborately presents the difficulties to identify people from different racial groups in the US. “Some of Jews wore skullcaps and many more of them appear to wear glasses than did the Italians” (Tóibín 79). In the 1950s Brooklyn, the stereotypes for different diasporic groups couldn’t work because all of them have been interacting with each other and making new changes and diversities. Again, because she is from a closed and homogeneous small town in Ireland, Eilis is ignorant about the differences and histories among various diasporic groups in Brooklyn. The most prominent example is her ignorance about the history of the Holocaust and the Jewish diaspora after World War II. When the owner of the bookstore, which Mr. Rosenblum, one of her instructors, recommends, agitatedly complains about what Nazis had done to the Jews, Eilis doesn’t know what the owner talks about but asks some questions out of ignorance (Tóibín pp. 119-120). Ireland has kept a neutral attitude toward international relations since the 1930s, especially during World War II. In White and Riley’s “Irish Neutrality in World War II,” they review different scholars’ opinions on Irish



neutrality. “[N]eutrality was the best option for Ireland’s rural culture, which de Valera had insisted was morally superior, and would give Ireland her best chances for survival” (Wills qtd. in White and Riley 147). Wills further explains, to protect its own cultures and citizens from the influences and information that would make them support either side in World War II, the Irish government developed a policy of censorship (qtd. in White and Riley 147). Isolated from the chaos and troubles caused by the war, Ireland indeed protected its own people, culture, and independency. However, it concurrently caused its citizens to be ignorant about and to be cut off from the outside world, just like Eilis in *Brooklyn*. Thus, when she immigrates to Brooklyn, an open and multiracial city, her ignorance is an obstacle that Eilis should overcome if she wants to tackle the more complex interpersonal relationship well there.

Besides, Tóibín tactfully chooses a sales assistant in a department store as Eilis’s job in Brooklyn not only since it’s one of the most common jobs for Irish female immigrants but also since it’s a possible job to interact with various ethnic groups at that time. Those prevailing department stores could be seen as one of the most powerful symbols in “the Golden Age of American Capitalism,” which started from 1945 to the early 1970s. Because of the success of mass production, mass sales in department stores became the main marketing strategy in the 1950s America. Therefore, the fashionable and exquisite clothing, stockings, and underwear as the most prominent examples, could be sold at lower prices on the sales of the department stores. Moreover, with the start of the civil right movements and the pass of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, the restrictions against racial minorities, such as black people and Asian, Eastern European immigrants, seemingly started to be lifted. As Miss Bartocci claims that “we [the department store] treat everyone the same. We welcome every single person who comes into this store. They all have money to spend,” (Tóibín 59) money seems to replace race to become the determinant to judge and to classify a



person in this Consumerist country. As a sales assistant, Eilis does experience the frenzy of the Bartocci's Famous Nylon Sale to serve women from different races. Of these experiences, being chosen to serve black women with the other girl should be the most unneglectable one. On the surface, selling the colored stocking for black women puts their idea of treating everyone equally into practice. However, the ideology of racial segregation hasn't been abolished under the surface. When Miss Fortini, Eilis's supervisor, warns Eilis and the other girl that "You two are going to be polite to anyone who comes into this store, coloured or white [...] But the Red Fox stockings will be apart away from other normal stockings, [...] and your job is to pretend that it's no big deal" (Tóibín 110). The separation of the stockings for black women from those for women of other ethnic groups exposes the truth that black women hasn't been seen as the same as other women even if they seem to deserve the same rights. They are excluded from the majority still. In addition, when the employees need to be told to pretend it's a no big deal, it means it's actually a big deal which is not normal at all in their minds. In *Brooklyn*, it's easy to observe that, for those merchants, the reason why they sell commodities to the racial minorities is not that they really value the importance of racial equality, but that they use it as a strategy to overmatch their opponents. Likewise, being a naïve migrant worker, to some extent, Eilis also once suffered from racial discrimination in the workplace in the beginning. When the other girl asks the reason why she and Eilis are chosen to serve the black women, Eilis naively responds that maybe it's because they both are nice and friendly; however, the girl poignantly points out that "you're Irish, that makes you different" (Tóibín 110). Her Irish migrant identity, which is often seen as more submissive and impoverished among the diasporic groups, makes her become easy prey for the job that others are reluctant to do. Besides, as her silence and passivity are exploited by Mrs. Kehoe, her personal obedience and ignorance about the histories outside Ireland also become the reason she was once taken advantage of by the employer.

Being a heroine of a contemporary Female Bildungsroman, Eilis does require to overcome many obstacles to develop in a patriarchal society as well. Moreover, as for a transnational Bildungsroman, it further focuses on a hero's or a heroine's "mobility between two worlds as well as the problematic of quest for identity" between these two worlds (Thiao 15). Therefore, as a transnational heroine, Eilis has to not only deal with the problems a woman will meet but also handle the difficulties a migrant will meet. Owing to these difficulties and problems, Eilis's immigrant life is apparently more challenging and miserable. Moreover, how, like other transnational heroes/heroines, to establish her identity while crossing the national boundaries between the homeland and the foreign setting is another main point of this transnational Bildungsroman. However, those problems and difficulties which a transnational heroine will face become the turning point for Eilis to be better in fact. Without anyone who would dogmatically make decisions for her, Eilis herself is forced to resolve the problems and overcome difficulties to survive in this strange place. Simultaneously, these experiences and difficulties help Eilis to transform into a more experienced and more confident woman.

Different from her old self, Eilis shows her ambition and desire to achieve great success at work since she knows a bright future awaits her, and since she experiences a sense of accomplishment in her excellent academic performance in the hostland. According to the report, these female Irish immigrants could find job opportunities, get promotions and even better jobs easily in the United States (Meaney et al. 108). In *Brooklyn*, like her predecessors and fellow immigrants, Eilis is also promised to get a better future in America. On her first day of work, Father Flood asks Eilis to take a glance at those people who work in the office, telling her that "a lot of them started like [her], on the shop floor. And they did night classes and studied and now they're in the office. Some of them are actual accountants, fully qualified" (Tóibín 60). In this promisedland, as long as the immigrants are willing to put lots

of effort into improving themselves, their futures would be promising, which would never be achieved in their sluggish Irish hometowns. Besides, even though Eilis's homesickness makes her feel alienated from the world outside, it turns out to be a stepping stone for her development. Influenced by her homesickness, Eilis couldn't focus on her work, which is noticed by her supervisor. Remembering her purpose to come to America clearly, Eilis again shows her flexibility and resolves this crisis by her own wit and perseverance. Thus, to keep her job in the Bartocci's, Eilis tries her best to answer her supervisor shortly and smartly to arouse her sympathy. After ensuring that she wouldn't get fired, she is "almost proud of herself how she manage[s] Miss Fortini [...] and she believe[s] she ha[s] achieved that much and it [gives] her a feeling of satisfaction that appeal[s] to melt into her sadness, or float on its surface, distracting her, as least for now, from the worst part of it" (Tóibín 73-74). Unwilling to let others control or affect her future as before, Eilis, for the first time, performs her own agency to defend and protect her future, and further gains a sense of achievement from it, which also surprisingly weakens the pain of homesickness.

Additionally, Father Flood enrolls Eilis in a bookkeeping night class in Brooklyn College to distract Eilis from her homesickness and to help her get an office job (Tóibín 75). However, in exchange for helping her, Father Flood asks Eilis to wipe away her tears (Tóibín 78). Thus, to develop and to achieve the goals, holding back her tears and being braver are the prices the heroine is required to pay. The bookkeeping class is definitely a crucial experience for her to win a better job position. To fulfill this goal, Eilis becomes more active and ambitious for her academic performance. Therefore, instead of passively waiting for someone to give her answers, she "determine[s] to sit in front row and approach [the instructor] the very second he finish[es] the speaking. [...] she ha[s] never come across anyone like him" (Tóibín 113). To her surprise, she is no longer the timid old Eilis anymore; she "ha[s] become, without too much effort or hesitation, almost poised" (Tóibín 114)

because she has learned to be brave and determined as a sales assistant. Her endeavor and talents for numbers make her obtain good grades in all of her first-year exams; she even starts to expect to look for a better job when she will be a qualified bookkeeper in one year (Tóibín 155-156). This sense of accomplishment and expectations free her from the self-isolation caused by the homesickness. She is no longer a ghost wandering in a strange land for her family's sake, but a promising young transnational heroine who tries to find the suitable position and the true meaning and of her life in the hostland, where a place is full of possibilities.

While Eilis's ignorance of coping with the more complex interpersonal relationship is a big challenge for her in Brooklyn, it also demonstrates her potential to interact with people from different places and cultures sincerely. Hence, due to her job as a sales assistant in a department store, Eilis has more chances to interact with and to learn from these different ethnic groups and judge them from her personal experiences, instead of being blinded by biases and prejudice. While others avoid having contacts with those black women, Eilis observes two black women and considers that "despite the fact that they [are] middle-aged [...] they [are] glamorous and [have] taken great care with their appearance, their hair perfect, their clothes beautiful" (Tóibín 111-112). Certainly, she is aware of others' strange and cold attitudes toward those black women and of the differences of skin color between her and them; however, when she serves them personally, she thinks highly of them because of their exquisite tastes and behaviors. Furthermore, different from the old Eilis, who couldn't speak for herself or for those lower-class customers in Miss Kelly's, Eilis transforms into a brave heroine who would, on the basis of her personal experience, fight for others in Brooklyn after learning that it will be a weak point if she remains silent here. When her racist fellow lodgers imply that black women would carry viruses and germs into the Bartocci's, Eilis defends those black customers and replies that "they are very nice, and some of them

have beautiful clothes” (Tóibín 117). Despite confronting her fellow lodgers would make the atmosphere in the house tenser, Eilis no longer chooses to hide her thoughts in mind but to do the right thing, which makes her “suddenly [feel] brave” (Tóibín 117). Similarly, Eilis “firmly close[s] the door in their face” while other lodgers conspire to ostracize the newest girl, Dolores, because they despise her for cleaning the boarding house to pay the rent (Tóibín 122). Eilis refuses to be manipulated by them since she clearly knows what kind of people her fellow lodgers are. Thus, with her experiences of handling different situations and interacting with various kinds of people in Brooklyn, Eilis finally learns the importance of either speaking up her mind to show her confidence and autonomy or being taken advantage by others in this complex city.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah suggests that “as such, all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common ‘we’” (184). The diaspora is not homogeneous. Even if they were used to be seen as the minority collectively by the majority in a diasporic space, all diasporic groups are not assimilated into the mainstream culture completely. On the contrary, they interact and fuse with different diaspora groups while preserving their distinct cultures and histories. Similarly, in *Brooklyn*, Eilis’s Irishness becomes a transnational one when she interacts with people from diverse diasporic groups, especially her Italian American boyfriend, Tony. In the 1950s Brooklyn, Irish and Italian were two major diasporic groups; the conflicts between them were continuing. In *Brooklyn*, through the conflicts between the Irish cops and Tony’s brothers and Eilis’s lodgers’ reluctance to let Italian men take part in the Irish dances, the author also displays the complex relationship between the two groups. Through Eilis’s interaction with Tony’s family, it’s not hard to observe the culture shocks and differences between them and to witness the real situations of an ordinary Italian working-class migrant family. However, Eilis’s open-mindedness and Tony’s extroverted and sincere

personalities resolve the potential conflicts. As the second generation of Italian immigrants, Tony not only lets Eilis learn some Italian food, etiquette, and culture, but also leads her to experience contemporary American cultures. Differing from her snobbish and conservative Irish fellow lodgers, Eilis is willing to experience new things. More importantly, she has learnt a lesson from her previous experience at the bookstore; that is, refraining herself from replying something impolite or silly because of her ignorance about other racial groups. Thus, even though she couldn't identify the Italian dishes made by Tony's mother, Eilis politely tells his mother that they are delicious and tries not to imply that it's also strange for her (Tóibín 149).

Aside from Italian cultures, it's inevitable for Eilis to experience American cultures and popular leisure activities with Tony, such as the frenzy caused by the Brooklyn Dodgers, the trend for couples to go to beaches in the Rhode Island, and the popularity of Hollywood movies. Besides Tony's influences on her, when her migrant life is getting meaningful and on track, Eilis herself also shows her desire to integrate into American cultures and trends. At one of the dances held by Father Flood, Eilis notices how her fashionable and sociable fellow lodgers, Diana and Petty, and their friends become the center of the spotlight (Tóibín 109). Eilis is eager to "[give] anything now to have been with them, dressed like them, to be glamorous herself" (Tóibín 108), and she is determined that "she would buy something, even just new shoes, which would make her feel more like the girls she [has] seen dancing" (Tóibín 109). She is no longer the timid girl who was not interested in her own appearance and social activities in her hometown. With the financial independence and sense of achievement in the hostland, she becomes more confident and bolder to seek for attention and recognition from others. From these experiences, Eilis's migrant life is not the atonement for her incapability in the hometown any longer. It "[has] much more than she had imagined she would have when she arrived in Brooklyn first" (Tóibín 156). Brooklyn offers her

opportunities to perform her self-agency, to make decisions for herself, and to learn to survive in a multicultural society.

According to Fournon and Glick-Schiller, transnational migration means “a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country” (qtd. in Upegui-Hernandez 2005). Similarly, because of her female transnational migrant identity, Eilis’s Irishness, as mentioned before, is turned into a transnational one because of interacting with other cultures and customs in the hostland. At the beginning of *Brooklyn*, Eilis’s Irishness is purely out of her ancestry and her inhabitation. However, while Eilis merges with other cultures, her Irishness becomes her identification with Irish cultures and her connections with her homeland, Ireland. Thus, Eilis doesn’t abandon the Irish cultures and traits or let herself be totally assimilated into the mainstream culture. Instead, while being open to learning something new, Eilis has never forgotten to compare it with that in Ireland. When Tony passionately talks about his excitement at the upcoming baseball games, Eilis couldn’t help to link Tony’s enthusiasm for baseball with her father and brothers’ love for hurling in Ireland (Tóibín 162). When she goes to the beach with Tony, likewise, she compares the sea in America and that in Ireland (Tóibín 159).

Nevertheless, her transnational Irishness and still strong attachment to her home(land) are actually the biggest challenges for her. Even though she has experienced a lot of transformation and breakthroughs there, she is not ready to cut off her connections with her family in Ireland to make America her home. Thus, when Tony frankly expresses his love to her or hints at their future together, she is always frightened and tries to avoid him (Tóibín 143). This kind of struggle to choose between the familiarity in the homeland and the life made by herself is manifested by Eilis’s reaction to the news of her sister’s sudden death especially. All of a sudden, “it change[s] everything Eilis [thinks] about her time in Brooklyn;

it [makes] everything that [has] happened to her seem small” (Tóibín 177). Because of Rose’s death, Eilis’s purpose of immigrating to America, to lighten her sister’s burden and then make contributions to her family, can never be fulfilled. All the achievements she has made in Brooklyn seem to be meaningless and helpless again. For Eilis, despite the fact that she does have a brighter future in America, she is still the girl who “[belongs] somewhere else, a place that he [Tony] could never know” at that time (Tóibín 184). Thus, as the dilemma most transnational heroes/heroines would face, Eilis couldn’t decide her place to settle between the two worlds either. Her home(land) is still a strong pull to keep Eilis away from continuing or even completing her transformation in the hostland.





## Chapter Four

### The Homeward Journey: Sweet Illusions and Eilis's Epiphany

Since Twentieth Century, researchers have identified that “some women returned for a short stay while the ‘self-dowered’ woman settled permanently” in their motherlands (O’grada and Walsh qtd. in Meaney et al 123). These female returnees who decided to settle down in their hometowns again because they had saved their money and had reached their goals (Meaney et al. 125). As the result of it, they tend to choose to retire in their hometown. However, because she hasn’t achieved her personal goals, Eilis is still struggling to make a decision between her homeland and the adopted land. For her self-development and her future of more possibilities, Eilis, in the end, bravely and actively makes up her mind to return to Brooklyn while giving up the relatively familiar, sweet, and stable life in her hometown as a returnee.

While finding that it’s hard to readjust to the life in the hometown initially, Eilis is seemingly getting pulled strongly by the familiarity and some unexpected sweetness and success there later, which make her decision to go or to stay become more complicated and indecisive.

In the first part of *Brooklyn*, Eilis has already pointed out the uniqueness of America as a migrant destination because “no one who went to America missed home. Instead, they were happy there and proud” (Tóibín 24). Thus, Eilis is aware that “going to America [is] different from just taking the boat to England; America might be further away and so utterly foreign in its systems and its matters, yet it ha[s] an almost compensating glamour attached to it. [...] ha[s] an element of romance that she and Rose [are] fully alert to” (Tóibín 32). This passage also implies the Irish people’s sweet fantasy about the promising and different lifestyles that

those immigrants are going to have in America, which compensates for the pain of being apart from their families. The study shows the fashion and trend in America have hit not only the European Continent but also Ireland from the Twentieth Century (Meaney et al. 130). Besides, of those packages from their migrant family members, those sent from the US were usually regarded as more precious treasures which demonstrate they were “nicer than anything at home” (Meaney et al. 119). Influenced by their illusions about the modern, glamorous and prosperous lives in America, those stayers also project their fantasies on those returnees from America. Similarly, Eilis’s new American style also makes her become the center of attraction. When she accompanies her mother to the church, people “comment on Eilis’s beautiful clothes, her sophisticated hairstyle and her suntan” (Tóibín 212). Her attractive and fashionable clothes also symbolize her new American identity. As her best friend once told her that “in your American clothes you look different,” (Tóibín 230) putting on these clothes brought back from America, in those stayers’ eyes, Eilis seems to transform into the representation of a new American woman, who is more appealing and self-determined. Baptized by both living in a more complicated city and experiencing the latest American pop cultures and trends, Eilis turns into a new superstar in her hometown. On her way to the beach with her friends in her hometown, Eilis realizes that “if this had been years ago, she would have worried during the entire journey from Enniscorthy about her swimsuit and its style [...], or what George and Jim would think of her. But now, however, that she [is] still suntanned from the boat and from her trips to Coney Island with Tony, she felt oddly confident as she walk[s] down the strand” (Tóibín 215). In contrast to the old Eilis, who had no self-esteem because of her financial dependence, new Eilis enjoys having others’ attention and is also aware that she is more confident under her new American clothes and identity.

In addition to gaining more attention, with the new glamorous appearance and identity, Eilis wins herself not only an unexpected job opportunity but a prestigious admirer. Thanks to

both her sister's death and the scarcity of the American bookkeeping certificate, Eilis seems to be able to make her dream, which she hasn't been able to achieve in Brooklyn, come true in her hometown. On that day to work part time for her sister's employer, Eilis finally gets a chance to perform her talents and to put what she has learned in Brooklyn College into practice. Instead of doubting herself, Eilis thinks that she is able to work out a system and complete the task of dealing with each employee's salary in two hours confidently (Tóibín 218-219). Undoubtedly, her excellent performance receives the boss's recognition afterward. The factory owner, Mr. Brown, will offer Eilis her sister's old job as a bookkeeper if she chooses to stay in Enniscorthy in the future (Tóibín 229). When she was in Brooklyn, Eilis "has been dreaming about as she had stood on the shop floor in Bartocci's, seeing the office workers walking in and out as she was telling customers that the Sepian and Coffee-coloured stockings were for light skin and the Red Fox for the darker, or as she had sat listening to the lectures and preparing for the exams in Brooklyn College" (Tóibín 219). Her unwillingness to be satisfied with working on the shop floor and her ambition for getting an office job, which is caused by her desire for self-improvement in the hostland, shows her differences from the timid girl whose life and future had been decided by others passively before leaving home. Thus, the great sense of achievement of completing the task in time and the possibility to gain her ideal job in her hometown give Eilis a sharp pull.

Her new American glamour is also like Cinderella's Gown, which makes her catch the attention of a prince, Jim Farrell, in town. In a closed hierarchical society, it's nearly impossible to have cross-class couples. Eilis remembered that "everyone in the town had been surprised when George began going out with Nancy, whose brothers would never have played rugby in their lives, and presumed it was because Nancy was so good-looking and had such good manners"(Tóibín 227). For Nancy Byrne, whose family "ha[s] only one room downstairs, which is served as a kitchen, dining room and sitting room" (Tóibín 7), she has

never been seen as a good match to date and even be engaged with George Sheridan, who is from a bourgeois family in town. To make herself someone worth of a husband from a higher class, Eilis also notices Nancy has put efforts to refine herself and to play her future role as Mrs. Sheridan “that would count for something in the town” well (Tóibín 227). Like Nancy, Eilis is also from a humble family. Before she headed for Brooklyn, she and Nancy met George and Jim Farrell, whose family runs a bar in town, once in a dance; however, Jim Farrell was rude to her openly because she thought that “she came from a family, and did not own anything in the town” (Tóibín 227). However, after returning from America, Eilis’s migrant identity has also raised her socioeconomic status. Both the ability to make fortunes by herself in America and her broadened experiences of the world let Eilis stand out from those ordinary girls in her hometown. As an heir to a bar from the upper class, Jim Farrell clearly knows that he needs a spouse who is sophisticated and can win social approval. Thus, since Jim Farrell noticed her return, he has seized every chance to go out with Eilis and the couple (Tóibín 222). From an unremarkable wallflower whom no one paid attention to in the past to the center of attention attracting a noble suitor who was once cold-eyed on her, Eilis definitely enjoys the contemporary rich and colorful social life, which she would not experience if she hadn’t migrated to America. When she once dined at a hotel’s restaurant with Nancy, George, and Jim, she “observed other diners glancing over at them as though they were the most important people in the restaurant” (Tóibín 227). As a returnee from America, Eilis is no longer the social outsider who dared not speak for herself and others but belongs to the important and influential upper class. Additionally, the vanity and the pride gratified by this new social status is what she couldn’t enjoy as one of those ordinary migrant workers in the adopted land. Thus, it becomes a factor for her hard to decide between her hometown and the hostland too.

“[Eilis] suddenly realize[s] that she had seldom been alone with her [mother] before, she

had always had Rose to stand between her and her mother, Rose who would have plenty to say to both of them, questions to ask, comments to make and opinions to offer” (Tóibín 205). Without Rose as a mediator, how to get along with her mother becomes another problem after going back home. In comparison with her relationship with Rose, Eilis’s relationship with her mother is as distant and rigid as her mother’s letters, which “were short and there was no news in [them]” (Tóibín 65). As the contents of her letters, Eilis’s mother prefers to conceal her real thoughts in her mind and keeps some distances with Eilis. Similarly, Eilis also tends to choose to hide her opinions. Thus, it’s difficult for them to be frank and intimate with each other easily. Her plans to impress her mother with her American gifts, experiences, and outstanding academic performances end up alienating her from her mother more and making the atmosphere in the house more suffocating. On the day Eilis received the news of Rose’s death, she had a phone call with her grieving mother. During the conversation, her mother finally got her pain off her chest in despair: “[W]hen your daddy died that I shouldn’t cry too much because I had you and Rose and the boys and when the boys left I said the same and when you left I had Rose, but I have no one at all now, Eily, I have no one” (Tóibín 174). Eilis’s mother, a traditional Irish woman, is confined to her role as a wife and a mother to take care of her family; however, she is unable to earn a living for her family by herself. Therefore, after her husband’s death, the only thing she could do is free her children from barren Ireland to find opportunities abroad unwillingly; her own sadness and fear of being abandoned have to be buried in mind. What Eilis’s mother wants is not the feats that would remind her of her powerlessness to keep her child at home and of the possibilities of Eilis’s departure again but a daughter who can keep her company and settle down in the hometown. Since Eilis came back home, her mother has tried her best to keep Eilis staying in Ireland. Before Eilis herself was informed, her mother had answered for Eilis to attend Nancy’s wedding, which is after her planned day of departure (Tóibín 210), and had said yes to Rose’s

old company that she would take that part-time job for her (Tóibín 216).

In spite of noticing her mother's scheme to make her stay, Eilis knows that it's more important to cope with the tension between them and to make her mother accept her at the moment. Thus, when she saw, because of the part-time job she was offered, there was a smile of satisfaction on her mother's face, Eilis finally breathes a sigh of relief (Tóibín 217). Similarly, her mother can't help hiding her happiness and satisfaction when she finds that Eilis has caught a good match, Jim Farrell, who would provide Eilis with a satisfying and stable life in town. When they talk about the Farrells, her mother comments that "it [the Farrells' house] is one of the nicest houses in the town. The two rooms upstairs have double doors between them and I remember even years ago people used to comment on how large it was. [...] And Jim is getting whole place" (Tóibín 231). Besides, on the day of Nancy's wedding, Eilis knows that her mother would be satisfied with letting the news that she and Eilis are collected by Jim Farrell spread (Tóibín 235). As long as Eilis gets married to Jim, she will have a prosperous future, which would not only allow her to stay in the hometown but no need to worry about the money to take care of her mother and family. As a younger sister who once lived in the shadow of her successful and outstanding sister, Eilis has a chance to make her mother proud of her for the first time. She is able to make a contribution to her family as well as elevate the family's social status as an upper class. Earning her mother's recognition makes her more difficult to go back to her difficult migrant life, which is like "an ordeal with strange people, strange accents, and strange streets" (Tóibín 232).

Instead of fulfilling her ambition in Brooklyn, Eilis turns out to be able to achieve it in her hometown, where the environment is friendlier and more familiar for her. If she is able to complete the goal of contributing to her family and having a better life in the hometown, it will be a fundamental question for her whether it's necessary to leave for Brooklyn again. Thus, this question becomes a tug of war in her mind, which makes her torn again. "It made

her feel strangely as though she were two people, one who had battled against two cold winters and many hard days in Brooklyn and fallen in love there, and the other who was her mother's daughter, the Eilis whom everyone knew, or thought they knew" (Tóibín 218). Subconsciously, Eilis has never forgotten the self who had gone through difficulties and had made a meaningful life by herself. On the other hand, indeed, her life would be easier as her mother's daughter, whom everyone knows, in her hometown. However, as the excerpt implied, Eilis is no longer that Eilis "they thought they knew;" instead, due to her American experiences, she transforms into someone more than they've presumed. Consequently, some details actually demonstrate that her final decision to return to Brooklyn is a choice she made based on careful consideration.

First, Eilis is aware that she is viewed as her sister's double or even her ghost after Rose's death. As her mother demands that she wear "sensible clothes. Nothing too American now," her fashionable American dress as well as her new characters shaped by her American life are disapproved by her mother (Tóibín 216). Moreover, her mother even forces Eilis to take in her sister's old clothes while Eilis refuses to do that and asserts that she has her own clothes (Tóibín 213). Like her American dresses could be read as her American identity, her sister's old clothes symbolize the life that her sister used to have. What Eilis's mother wants is a daughter who can replace Rose's role and duty rather than a daughter who has her different thoughts and personalities because of her migrant experiences. On the morning of the day to do the part-time job, for Eilis, "it [is] hard not to think that she [is] Rose's ghost, being fed and spoken to in the same way at the same time by her mother, having her clothes admired using the same words as were used with Rose, and then setting out briskly for work" (218). Similarly, when Mr. Brown tries to offer Eilis her sister's old job, he also mentions that "we [are] no surprised, of course, you being Rose's sister" (Tóibín 229). Under her glamorous American appearance, what they pay more attention to is not her own capability



or potential but her identity as Rose's sister. Not only others can't help but compare her with Rose, but Eilis herself "ha[s] to stop herself walking with Rose's elegant, determined walk, and move more slowly" (Tóibín 218). Since she had been considering Rose her role model, Eilis herself needs try hard not to copy Rose's elegance and confidence or to become another Rose when she finally gets a chance. However, being a female migrant who has overcome many difficulties, Eilis, in fact, refuses to be her sister's shadow, ghost or lose her own agency in the innermost recesses of one's heart. Clearly knowing the significance of speaking up for herself from her American experiences, Eilis doesn't obey her mother's instruction to accept her sister's old clothes but defends her own clothes, which simultaneously represents her new identities developed in America. Moreover, even though it's difficult for Eilis not to intimate Rose's behaviors, Eilis realizes that she should have herself stop to proceed at her own pace.

As for her migrant identity, it's also a double-edged sword. Indeed, it crowns Eilis the center of attraction and wins her a wealthy pursuer and an excellent job opportunity. On the other hand, for McWilliams, in "The Refusenik Returnee and Reluctant Emigrant in Colm Tóibín's *The South and Brooklyn*," "the returnee emerges as an unsettling presence because the influences she carries with her risk disturbing the status quo" (156). In other words, even though the returnees could bring back some novel ideas, different cultures, and great assets, it doesn't mean that every stayer appreciates them. For those people, the returnees are the presences emerging to disrupt their inherent stable cultures, systems, and societies. In *Reading the Irish Woman*, Meaney et al. also provide an example:

Micheal MacEnri of Bangor Erris in County Mayo, was hostile towards all returned Americans; 'they were the great swanks ... with all their money and jewelry.' He reserved his greatest invective for the 'girls' who came home as 'great swanks and



finding all the faults ... with everything and everybody ... I'm telling you they took men here after spending their time in America, that they would not get lookin at before they went to America'. (124)

For those conservative stayers in Ireland, those female returnees from America with the luxurious accessories and money made by themselves are not accorded with the definition of Irish femininity, which emphasizes its “stoic, passive and enduring traits” (Gray 59). Instead, they represent the bold, flamboyant, but not practical American consumerism. In *Brooklyn*, likewise, in Enniscorthy, a small and conservative town, the traditional hierarchy is still as unshakable as the time before Eilis immigrated to America. After coming back home, Eilis is conscious of how small and closed her hometown is as well. As everyone in the town knew she was bright but unemployed before her departure, “the whole town knows [she’s] here” from America (Tóibín 216). Thus, she decides to tell none of her friends in her hometown about her secret marriage because she knows “if she told them, she would soon find that one of their mothers would mention to her mother that Eilis had a boyfriend in New York” (Tóibín 211). There is no secret in her hometown; either every word she said or everything she did is watched under this locked environment. For instance, her love affair with Jim Farrell is under the whole town’s supervision. Some, as her neighbours, watch it happening sneakily and silently (Tóibín 235); others, as Nancy’s mother, express their concern and curiosity directly (Tóibín 238); still others, as Miss Kelly, see Eilis as a threat to the stable hierarchy in the town.

Without the returnees, people are happy with their own places in society and show no desire to change their social status. However, when those migrants return, with their abundant capital, they are easy to improve their own social status and shake the whole

social structure. For those conventional upper class or the bourgeois, it's a threat to their class and the whole hierarchical structure. To eradicate the threat, Miss Kelly, who has property in town, asks Eilis to come to her grocery shop and implies that she knows both her affair with Jim from her client and her secret marriage in Brooklyn from Mrs. Kehoe, who happens to be her cousin (Tóibín 244-245). It seems to be apparent that Eilis is forced to make the decision to go back to America because of Miss Kelly's intimidation. However, it actually makes Eilis awakened from the sweet dream that her hometown is also a free and promising place when Miss Kelly tells her that "this world, as the man says, is a small place" (Tóibín 245). Afterwards, Eilis asks whether it's the graveyard her mother refers to when she says "it's a lonely old place" (Tóibín 247). After her conversation with Miss Kelly, Eilis realizes not only the graveyard but also her hometown, even the whole Ireland, are isolated and conservative. There's no place for her, a migrant who has been unable to be classified to any of the fixed social classes, to find a suitable place to keep growing and developing.

The love triangle among Eilis, Tony, and Jim also become a key factor influencing her final decision. A love triangle is a common element used in a Bildungsroman; in a traditional Bildungsroman, a hero would rather choose a woman who could help him to achieve a better or suitable socioeconomic status. However, contemporary Female Bildungsroman puts more emphasis on the heroines' self-development: to pursue different careers, to identify their own sexuality, and to experience different lives. Thus, seeking a partner who can provide her with a stable living condition or higher social status is no longer the priority for a contemporary heroine; she needs a partner who respects her development and is willing to improve himself with her together. At Nancy's wedding, Eilis seems to see the phantoms which are "all three of them – Tony, Jim, her mother – as figures whom she could only damage, as innocent people

surrounded by light and clarity, and circling around them was herself, dark, uncertain” (Tóibín 237). For Eilis, both Tony and Jim are innocent and have their respective merits, which causes her to become hesitant and uncertain which one is her Mr. Right.

Under his proud and inarticulate appearance, Eilis finds out that Jim is handsome, smart, and more dignified than Tony. Undoubtedly, if she chooses Jim, her future will be stable and comfortable as her mother has expected. Jim’s privileged background, nevertheless, is a flaw. Born into a family of the upper class, Jim Farrell always manages to create a polite but solemn public image to protect the prestige of his family. Besides, as the only child whose parents run a business in the town, it’s unnecessary for him to leave his hometown to earn a living. Thus, being the only heir to his family business, Jim Farrell is also confined to the small, rigid Irish town and has never gotten a chance to broaden his horizons abroad. For Eilis, who has gained lots of experiences and knowledge from her migrant identity, she clearly knows that “he [is] someone who ha[s] never lived outside of the town. His innocence and his politeness, both of which made him nice to be with, would actually be, she think[s], limitations, especially if something as unheard of and out of question” (Tóibín 236). Eilis also acknowledges that “he [is] conservative. He like[s] his position in the town, and it matter[s] to him that he run[s] a respectable pub and [comes] from a respectable family” (Tóibín 242). It’s impossible for Jim to do anything to degrade his family; hence, Eilis knows that even if she divorces with Tony, Jim will never accept her to shame his honorable family. Besides, since he cares about his social position, he won’t break social conventions or norms to undermine his social position. If Eilis gets married to Jim Farrell, she will be ordered to obey the norms and conventions as an Irish upper-class woman too. Indeed, her social status would be improved, but her chances to refine herself would be exploited as the price.

In comparison with Jim, who possesses dignity and calmness, Tony is boyish,

genuine, and passionate. More importantly, as the second generation of Italian working-class immigrants, he couldn't enhance Eilis's social status, but he could build a better future with her. In the 1950s, Long Island became the boomtown, where lots of people in New York moved to develop and to seek more opportunities. Based on this historical event, in *Brooklyn*, Tony and his brothers also want to seize this chance and plan to move to Long Island. In his plan, Tony and his brothers would form a construction company, and they would build five houses on their plot: one for his parents, three for sale, and the last one is for Tony and Eilis, where they can "plan it themselves" if she lives in Long Island with him (Tóibín 167). Because of their migrant identities, Tony shares the same belief with Eilis. He is willing to work hard to fulfill his American Dream: making a fortune and having a much better life with his bare hands. While her affection for Jim may be influenced by his social position and public recognition, Eilis's relationship with Tony is confirmed after many tests and challenges. Being a good observer, Eilis has examined Tony objectively several times to clarify her own feelings to Tony. Through many different occasions and events, Eilis notices the different sides of Tony, who doesn't merely try to please her or impress her but has his own passion and goals.

Her feeling about their first sex also embodies the importance of Tony's presence in her life. "It was not only pain and the shock but the idea that she could not control him, that his penis was pushing into her than she wanted it to go. With each thrust it seemed to move further into her until she was sure it was going to injure something inside her" (Tóibín 185). As his penis thrusting into her body, Tony also penetrates in her life in a way she couldn't control. Tony's presence disturbs her from her original plan to focus on her goal to make sacrifices for her family in the strange land; he makes her life in Brooklyn more meaningful and makes the place becomes like home for her. Hence, it

makes her painful to make decisions between her homeland and her own home with Tony in the hostland. Eilis's decision to marry Tony as a promise before returning home to accompany her mother for one month (Tóibín 196). It seems that Tony forces her to agree to marry him secretly; however, she has already decided to keep building her promising future in Brooklyn before Tony's proposal. Eilis informs Father Flood in person that she is going back home for one month to visit her mother as long as the Bartocci's would let her have unpaid leave, and she promises that she would come back to work on the shop floor until an office job comes up (Tóibín 193). After meeting Father Flood, Eilis realizes that "it became a plan, something that she was determined to do" (Tóibín 194). While she fully understands her duty as a daughter to keep her mother's company, Eilis is determined to continue to develop herself in the hostland. Consequently, having a better life with Tony is also included. Instead of being forced, Eilis's agreement on marrying Tony shows her agency to make plans for her own future and marriage.

In Harris' "'Come You all Courageously': Irish Women in America", from the letters written by Irish female immigrants in America, she also concludes that, for those female migrants, "their access to cash income made them more able to control their own fates and determine the course of their lives, altering gender relations between immigrant men and women. Marriage and family formation were now subject to a different set of rules" (180). Compared to women in Ireland who are forced to get married under familial or Catholic obligations, these transnational female migrants have more freedom and agency to make decisions for themselves because of the opportunities to develop themselves in America. When Eilis is pulled by the sweetness and familiarity of her hometown, she worries that "once she and Tony [are] married she would stay at home, cleaning the house and preparing food and shopping and then having children and

looking after them as well [...] maybe she could do the bookkeeping for the company that Tony [is] going to set up with his brothers” (Tóibín 220). In fact, it’s more possible for Eilis to pursue her goal as a bookkeeper after getting married to Tony; on the contrary, if she chooses Jim and her hometown, she is likely to be asked to conform to the social norms to be an obedient wife and mother. According to Meaney et al., “most American married women continued to work in the home but from the 1920s to 1960s more worked in the paid public sphere” (110). When traditional Irish women were asked to stay at home to look after their families, the married women in America had chances to work and to pursue their career achievements outside.

Therefore, Eilis’s decision between Jim and Tony is not only about choosing someone with whom she wants to spend the rest of her life but also about deciding what kind of future and life she wants to have. Her decision to return back to America and Tony demonstrates that she is willing to create her own future and keep developing herself with a man who shares the same belief.

Indeed, when she gets used to the life and is seduced by those sweetness and seeming achievements in her hometown, her immigrant life becomes “a sort of fantasy, something she couldn’t match with the time she [is] spending at home” (Tóibín 217). However, as she is reluctant to be a replacement for her deceased sister, Eilis never forgets the self who has won over two cruel winters in a strange land and her ability to make a colorful life by herself there. She couldn’t forget her arduous life there because what Brooklyn and the experiences there provide her is not a fantasy but real opportunities to become better. The most obvious evidence is receiving complete and useful education in Brooklyn. Even though she had taken the basic courses on bookkeeping in Ireland before leaving for Brooklyn, it’s useless to help her for getting a full job in her hometown. On the contrary, as most female migrants who can get promotions or better job opportunities after pursuing education in America, Eilis is

assured to get promoted due to her excellent academic performance. Likewise, it's the American education that makes her desirable when she returns to her hometown. Without receiving education in Brooklyn and the American certificate in bookkeeping, she wouldn't get the offer of her sister's old job.

Becoming financial independent is another point to prove that she is getting better because of her life in America. Rather than being at someone's mercy, making money by herself represents that she has the power to control and to make decisions for her own life. While Eilis was at home and financially dependent on her sister, most things of her life were decided by her sister. Rose would leave her some money for watching a movie, buy clothes and shoes she needed for her. She dared not to waste the money her sister gave her on the recreation; therefore, she told her friend that she planned not go to the dances anymore without her own money (Tóibín 8). In contrast, earning money by herself makes Eilis able to re-gain her self-agency. She could spend her money on enjoying various recreational activities in America, such as attending dances, enjoying the latest movies, and going to amusement parks. She is able to decide and buy clothes she wants with her own money. While she has a patron who would pay tuition for her, Eilis also has "saved some money, and will be able to pay [her] tuition the second year" (Tóibín 156). Owing to her financial independence, Eilis has the capitals to design her own life and to improve herself. Additionally, her interaction with her family is no longer one-way, but mutual. With her own money, for the first time, she could prepare Christmas gifts for her mother, sister, and brothers (Tóibín 82). She is no longer the one only receiving her family's assistances, but is able to make real contributions to her family finally.

Both education and financial independence do make her living condition better; they are beneficial to her mental development as well. Her characteristics and personality have some positive changes. She becomes a confident and self-possessed woman who knows what she

wants and pursues for a better life after getting proper education and having financial independence. Because of her confidence and faith in herself, she becomes a braver woman who dares to express herself and stand out for others. Being able to participate in different social activities and to interact with various people more broadens her horizons too. She is no longer the old Eilis who thought it's normal that a woman should devote herself to the family after marriage, but an ambitious woman who is still eager to pursue her self-achievement after getting married. Thanks to all these positive changes her American experiences has brought her, Eilis could transform from a wallflower to a goddess admired and pursued by the upper class in her hometown. However, because of her experiences of getting along with people from various ethnic groups, Eilis sharpens her ability to understand how closed and conservative hometown is quickly and thoroughly. Therefore, compared with staying at her hometown, returning back to America is truly helpful for her growth and self-fulfillment physically and mentally.



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

As a transnational female migrant, Eilis's migrant identity makes her likely to keep her connection with both two incompatible places forever. In *The Voyage In*, the authors also indicate that compared with their male counterparts, "the girls are partially continuous with their mothers" (Abel et al 11). The heroes in the classic Bildungsroman always try to separate themselves from their mothers. On the contrary, the heroines tend to connect to the mother figures and loved ones during their growth even if they are apart from their families. Hence, Eilis's inseparable attachment to her home(land) doesn't signify that her development shaped in the hostland is failed or regressed. Therefore, this thesis contends that Eilis's decision to choose Brooklyn, the hostland, as her final destination is an active and self-determining choice while she still has a connection with her home(land) as a transnational Bildungsroman heroine.

Born in a conservative Irish rural town in the 1950s, Eilis is like a diamond which is deeply buried in an old and barren land. Due to its economic depression, Eilis couldn't find a proper place or position in her hometown to make her talents and intelligence shine; on the contrary, she could only be an unobtrusive ore whom no one cares about her will or true thoughts because of her financial dependence. Passively accepting her role as the unattractive ore, Eilis could only be an outsider of the world and her own destiny. Nevertheless, although she keeps silent on things that happened outside, we could feel her strong, sometimes even conflicting emotions in her inner monologues, which actually exhibit her acute observation and awareness of the outside world. All Eilis needs is a stage to be polished and to glow. While her America-bound adventure is an unwilling one, she wins a chance to have her abilities be refined and to stand out on the other side of the Atlantic at the same time. From

the sail across the Atlantic, it's clear for us to witness her potential and flexibility to deal with the difficulties without others' assistance. Moreover, her hard work paid off; her roommate turns into her mentor to teach her how to cope with thorny problems and to give her advice as an immigrant to America. After leaving her confining hometown, Eilis, this ore, finally gets the opportunity to be polished and starts to show her sheen.

Nevertheless, being a timid and dependent girl from a small Irish town, it's hard for Eilis to get used to her immigrant life at first. Not only the simple relationship in her hometown but also her tendency to remain silent in public made Eilis hard to make real connections with the comparatively complex and multi-cultural society in Brooklyn at first. Thus, Eilis was usually taken advantage of by others there. Additionally, owing to its democratic policies, Ireland made its citizens, such as Eilis, away from the conflicts among foreign countries. Eilis's ignorance similarly led her to be alienated from the real world. Instead of enjoying the freedom in Brooklyn, Eilis once confined her own soul in her homesickness and resorted to writing letters to her family to relieve her pain. Unfortunately, this remedy didn't work but made her more estranged from them since she couldn't tell them her pain and true feelings, which would worry them and shelter their illusions about dreamy America, in the letters. Because she was alienated from the real world, Eilis's brilliance was still buried and unseen. However, in a place which is free and full of possibilities, the homesickness changes into a catalyst to enhance the speed of Eilis's polishing and development with Father Flood's help. Taking the bookkeeping night course not only distracts her from the homesickness but also offers her a stage to show her gifts and efforts. With the sense of achievement gained from her good academic performances, Eilis, for the first time, shows her ambition to control her life and make decisions for her future. Her splendor finally gets the chance to be seen.

Besides, her naivety about the various histories and cultures of different diasporic groups in Brooklyn ends up becoming an advantage, making her willing to learn about them

from her personal interactions with those people. Her Italian-root boyfriend, Tony, is the best example. By getting along with Tony, Eilis learns more about both the Italian cultures and the American cultures and fashion at that time. Due to these experiences, she frees herself from the prison of homesickness and worthlessness. Not for her family, Eilis finally hopes to make a life for her own growth and achievement in Brooklyn. However, being a transnational female migrant, who tends to keep the connections with both her motherland and the hostland, it's difficult for Eilis to be ready to keep being refined and shining in the hostland.

After transforming into a shining diamond in the hostland, Eilis becomes the center of attention on her return to her hometown. Her new shine attracts not only a wealthy admirer but a vacant position of bookkeeping left after the death of her sister. These are what she couldn't achieve when she was in America, which becomes a greater pull to her to choose to stay. Her mother is the only one that doesn't appreciate her new American glamour. Therefore, while she realizes her mother's approval and recognition of her possible promising future in the hometown, Eilis becomes more indecisive about her destination to settle down.

Nevertheless, learning from her migrant experiences, Eilis clearly senses that she is too shiny to stay in this still small and fixed town. The confidence and subjectivity which she has gained in America would be dull and hidden once again as long as she is seen as her sister's double or successor. Besides, as a woman who has been married in America, she is aware that neither Jim nor the society would accept or understand that even if she wants to get divorced. To prevent the returnees, like Eilis, from destroying the unmovable hierarchy with the wealth and cultures they brought back from their hostlands, the local upper class would find ways to get rid of them, just like what Miss Kelly tries to do. Ostensibly, Eilis is frightened away because of Miss Kelly's threat. In fact, the truth dawns on her that her hometown is always an old and inflexible place. If Eilis tries to fit in the cultures and traditions of her hometown, her chances to develop herself or her potential would be withdrawn as when she hasn't left for

Brooklyn. She would only be asked to be the one to follow all the norms and traditions silently again.

“She has gone back to Brooklyn,’ her mother would say. [...] Eilis imagined the years ahead, these words [...] would come to mean more and more to herself” (Tóibín 251). Even though her home(land) would always be a strong pull to her, this passage demonstrates that Eilis knows that her final decision to depart for the hostland again would be a meaningful decision for herself in the future. She doesn’t need to be someone’s shadow or replacement in the hostland; instead, she could build her own life and keep developing and shining there. Even though her identity as a transnational heroine won’t guarantee her a fixed or promising future in the hostland, it provides Eilis with chances to continue to explore, pursue her goals, and develop herself as most heroines in the contemporary Female Bildungsroman.

Through examining *Brooklyn* as a contemporary Female Bildungsroman, especially a transnational one, this thesis hopes to explain the intricate ending of the novel from another aspect. Not only her migrant identity but also her role as a heroine of a contemporary Female Bildungsroman is an essential factor in analyzing the ending. As many scholars have proposed, Eilis, being a migrant, leaves for Brooklyn again because she couldn’t be really accepted by her motherland. However, viewing her as a transnational heroine, I found that her decision is a positive one because she could be on a stage where she could truly perform her potential and keep chasing her goals in the adopted land while having a connection with her motherland. With the acceleration of globalization, more people become the transnational migrants who have connections with multiple countries and cultures. Likewise, there are and will be more literary works to portray the lives of these transnational migrants. Therefore, by this thesis, I hope to provide some helpful resources and helpful information, especially about transnational female migrants, to help other scholars to analyze this kind of literature in the future.

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