

5. The Unconscious Feminine: A psychoanalytic Reading of Eileen's Internal Struggles and Feminist Revolt in Ottessa Moshfegh's *Eileen*

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Abstract

This study analyzes Ottessa Moshfegh's *Eileen* through a psychoanalytic lens, combining Freudian and Jungian theories to explore the protagonist Eileen Dunlop's internal conflicts, repressions, and feminist awakening. The study delves into Eileen's psychological trajectory from passivity and self-loathing toward a nascent sense of autonomy and self-realization. Central to this analysis are Eileen's unresolved attachments—particularly to her absent mother—her rejection of traditional femininity, and the repression of her desires. Rebecca, a bold and subversive female figure, serves as both catalyst and mirror for Eileen's transformation, challenging normative gender roles and prompting Eileen to confront her own buried impulses. Through this dynamic, the study argues that Eileen's evolution is not merely personal but emblematic of a broader feminist resistance. The findings reveal that Eileen's psychological development mirrors a symbolic recovery of the unconscious feminine, which facilitates her liberation from patriarchal constraints. Her eventual escape from a toxic domestic space and repressive identity marks a subversive act of self-authorship and psychic renewal. By merging psychoanalysis with feminist literary critique, this research positions *Eileen* as a narrative of emancipation wherein psychological confrontation becomes a mode of resistance and transformation.

Keywords: *Eileen*, psychoanalysis, unconscious feminine, internal struggles, feminist revolt

Introduction

The novel *Eileen* has been written by Ottessa Moshfegh, an American writer, known for her novels and short stories which feature introspective and isolated protagonists. Her famous novel other than *Eileen* is *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, and her famous novella is *McGlue*.

Ottessa Moshfegh's *Eileen* is a psychologically complex and unsettling tale about a young lady stuck in a hopeless and depressing life. The protagonist Eileen, who battles intense self-loathing and a strong desire to improve her life, is shown in the book in a dark and compelling way. After losing her mother years ago, Eileen lives alone in an ancient house with her alcoholic father. Her sister lives in a different town. She works at a juvenile prison and spends most of her time there. Eileen may appear to be a typical woman on the outside, but she is secretly battling strong emotions and social influences that undermine her sense of self.

Moshfegh creates a sophisticated feminist tale in *Eileen* that challenges conventional ideas of female identity, attractiveness, and morality via Eileen's internal conflict and final act of disobedience. The unconscious feminine—the suppressed, frequently socially undesirable impulses, anxieties, and identities that mold Eileen's psyche—is the main subject of this study, which analyzes Eileen through psychoanalytic and feminist lens. This paper studies the internal struggles of the protagonist by analyzing how Moshfegh challenges conventional female stereotypes and the conventional representation of women in literature. This study also advances feminist literary criticism.

Eileen's uprising is not explicitly political; rather, it arises from her psychological disintegration and her final choice to leave the oppressive limits of her surroundings. This small act of defiance calls into question the dichotomy between passivity and agency and encourages a reconsideration of what feminist action looks like, especially when it comes to women's inner life. The Freudian concept of the "uncanny" in feminine desire—where the familiar (attraction, longing) becomes distant and perverted under restraint—is highlighted by Eileen's sexual inhibition as well as her obsession with filth and decay. Eileen struggles with both her wants and the stigma that society places on possessing them.

The main aim of this study is to explore how Moshfegh presents Eileen's inner struggles to shed light on broader issues like women's experiences, resistance, and power. Through feminist psychoanalytic ideas, this study attempts to show how society tries to shape and limit Eileen, pushing her into specific roles. While the story starts with Eileen feeling trapped and powerless, her growing inner conflict slowly drives her to rebel—both against society and her own view of herself. On a deeper level, Eileen's story can be seen as a symbol of women's fight for freedom in a world controlled by men. Although the novel seems to focus on a troubled woman dealing with her harsh reality, dreaming of escape, and facing difficult emotional truths, it ultimately reveals how these struggles shape her identity.

This study looks into Eileen's inner world which is shaped by her imagination, guilt, desires, and suppressed feelings, to reveal not only her personal mental struggles but also the restrictions forced on her by a male-dominated society. The study attempts to address the following research objectives: To examine how Ottessa Moshfegh employs psychoanalytic and feminist frameworks to portray the unconscious feminine through Eileen's psychological turmoil; to analyze how the dissonance between Eileen's external conformity and internal fantasies reveals a latent desire for liberation and self-actualization; and to explore how Eileen's thoughts and inner struggles show her quiet resistance to the rules and expectations placed on women by a male-dominated society.

Literature Review

Ottessa Moshfegh's *Eileen* (2015) is a novel that resists simple categorization. It has been described as a psychological thriller, a character study, a feminist text, and a dark, anti-heroic narrative that unsettles readers with its raw depiction of repression, desire, and emotional decay. The novel's first-person retrospective narration, unreliable protagonist, and bleak aesthetic have attracted critical interest from various theoretical approaches.

Psychoanalytic Frameworks in Eileen

Psychoanalysis is a literary approach that is associated with human psychology and employs a psychological perspective. Many factors impact the fundamental presumptions of literary psychology study. In his book, Sigmund Freud first presented psychoanalysis, whose primary focus and theoretical underpinnings included the analysis of unconscious cognitive processes, embracing the confrontation and conquering theory, and an understanding of significance of Oedipus complex and sexuality (Carter 70).

Wellek and Warren describe the psychology of literature as the application of psychological principles to analyze literary characters and authors (82). Yimer similarly notes that literature imagines people through fiction, while psychology studies real human behavior—making the intersection fertile ground for analysis (159).

Freudian Psychoanalysis and Repression

Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly his concepts of repression and the unconscious, offer a compelling lens for interpreting Eileen. According to Freud, repression is the mind's mechanism for banishing distressing thoughts or desires from consciousness (Freud 152).

These repressed thoughts do not vanish; instead, they manifest indirectly, influencing behavior through compulsions, dreams, or slips of the tongue. In *Eileen*, the title character exhibits textbook signs of repression: she appears withdrawn, emotionally numb, and compulsive in her habits, while her internal narrative reveals buried sexual desires, violent fantasies, and obsessions that frequently contradict her outward demeanor. Freud clarified in his psychoanalytical theory that critics who study psychoanalysis must deal with works that are the product of a poet's wonder and imagination, this is extremely important, for the poet in the process of creating literary works, in addition to focusing on the poet's thoughts (Aras 252).

One of the most jarring examples of repressed desire in the novel is Eileen's imagined romantic scenario involving being raped by an idealized man—Randy, her co-worker. Such a fantasy, though deeply unsettling, illustrates Freud's claim that repressed sexuality can take distorted and unhealthy forms. Eileen's fantasy is not a genuine desire for violation but rather a psychological displacement of her unmet needs for affection, control, and validation. Her feelings of worthlessness are so pervasive that she envisions intimacy only through subjugation—a narrative rooted in internalized misogyny and self-punishment.

Eileen's relationship with her alcoholic father also aligns with Freudian insights. Her father is emotionally abusive and dependent, forcing Eileen into the role of caregiver and prison warden within her own home. The absence of a mother figure and the dysfunctional paternal bond contribute to Eileen's neurotic identity. Freud's Oedipal framework, which highlights the child's early familial attachments and conflicts, helps explain Eileen's stunted development. Her resentment, guilt, and sexual confusion stem, in part, from these early unresolved familial dynamics.

Jungian Concepts: The Shadow and Individuation

While Freud offers a model of inner conflict driven by sexuality and repression, Carl Jung provides a broader conceptual framework in which identity is shaped by the tension between the conscious ego and the unconscious self. Jung's ideas of the shadow, anima, and individuation are particularly relevant to Eileen. The shadow, which contains the rejected aspects of the self, is visible in Eileen's hostility toward her body and intrusive thoughts. Rebecca, by contrast, represents the anima or repressed feminine ideal that challenges Eileen to confront and integrate her fragmented self (Feist 104, Jung 151).

“The shadow refers to the unconscious repository of traits one does not wish to acknowledge—often primitive or socially unacceptable impulses” (Jung 146). Eileen's shadow manifests in

her intrusive thoughts, compulsive actions, and self-loathing. Her disgust for her own body, her envy toward Rebecca, and her fantasies of violence suggest a psyche fractured by repression and denial. Jung argues that confronting the shadow is essential for psychological growth, a process Eileen begins, however minimally, by the novel's end (Humbert 28).

Rebecca acts as a mirror or archetypal anima, representing the idealized feminine aspects of Eileen's psyche that she cannot express. Rebecca's confidence, charisma, and unpredictability challenge Eileen's passive identity and catalyze her self-reflection. Jung's process of individuation—the psychological integration of the self—seems to begin in Eileen when she chooses to flee her environment and create a new identity. Though morally ambiguous, her departure represents a break from stagnation and repression.

What Jungian psychology refers to as individuation is its overarching objective. Individualization is the act of forming and differentiating oneself from other persons via psychological integration (Jung 171). This is typically referred to as the individuation process based on the psychological interpretation of individuation as a process. The process of becoming yourself as a whole is what Feist refers to as the individuation process (Feist 609). It is the process by which an individual becomes their own self or achieves self-realization, which leads them to the psychological individual, the united whole, and acceptance of their individuality. According to Jung's theory, the human mind is one and entire, but most people are unable to reunite all of its components, and they use imagination and dreams to do so (Daniels 2).

The personal unconscious comes next, which encompasses all conscious experiences that a certain person has but has forgotten, disregarded, or experienced subconsciously. Since every person is diverse and unique, their experiences often develop their personal unconscious. In this unconsciousness, some images are usually simple to remember, others are challenging, and some are outside the realm of awareness (Feist 104). Complexity is the result of the own unconscious.

According to Schultz and Schultz, complexity is the focal point of feelings, memories, perception and wants within individual's unconscious mind, that is arranged according to certain motivations (90). Jung posits that the collective unconscious is the most significant structure of personality. Jung further argues that the collective unconscious is a psychological potential that is inherited from every species' ancestor and retains the effect of their experiences (Feist104). Jung maintains that the collective unconsciousness plan is a purest aspect of man's

mind that is innate, manifests uniformly in every person (Davydov and Skorbatyuk 23). Jung adds that the human complex is included by the collective unconscious. Personal unconscious complexity is coherent collection of emotions-attracting feelings, memories, sensations, viewpoints, and ideas (Davydov and Skorbatyuk 15).

Feminist Literary Criticism

Internalized Misogyny and Female Alienation

Feminist readings of *Eileen* emphasize how patriarchy shapes women's inner lives, especially through internalized misogyny. Eileen despises her body, feels ashamed of her desires, and devalues her own worth. Delvi Wahyuni's study on the novel asserts that "misogyny takes the shape of self-judgment", particularly in Eileen's obsessive evaluation of her body and behaviors (Wahyuni 71). This perspective reflects Sandra Bartky's concept of the "internalized gaze", where women constantly monitor themselves through the imagined scrutiny of others.

From the outset, Eileen narrates her appearance in stark, dehumanizing terms: "I looked like nothing special" (Moshfegh 1). This simple yet potent line captures her psychological state—a young woman who feels invisible, undeserving, and grotesque. Her fantasies of disappearing or becoming someone else reflect her desire to shed the identity imposed upon her by society.

Alya Septia Larassati and Delvi Wahyuni extend this argument by examining how the characters in the novel enact ideological interpellation, wherein individuals internalize societal values unconsciously (Larassati and Wahyuni 74). Eileen's hyper-awareness of social roles, particularly regarding femininity, reveals her struggle to reconcile personal identity with patriarchal norms. She judges herself according to these norms and punishes herself for failing to conform.

Kristeva's Abjection and the Female Body

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, as explored in *Powers of Horror*, provides another rich interpretive lens for Eileen's story. Abjection is the psychological process of casting off what is seen as dirty, taboo, or threatening to the self—often associated with the body, bodily fluids, and death (Kristeva 4). Eileen's descriptions of her own body are filled with images of decay, filth, and physical unease. Her fixation on acne, thinness, body odor, and digestive issues exemplifies her abjection of the feminine self.

Kristeva's theory argues that abjection does not fully erase the unwanted object—it hovers on the border of consciousness. In *Eileen*, this manifests in the oscillation between repulsion and curiosity. When she smells her fingers after scratching herself, she is not simply acting out of curiosity, but revealing the tension between body and mind, self and other (McAfee 35).

Rebecca represents the inverse of abjection: polished, composed, and glamorous. Eileen's simultaneous attraction to and fear of Rebecca reflects this dynamic. Rebecca is what Eileen has abjected—what she cannot be, but cannot look away from. This interplay deepens the psychological realism of the novel and suggests that Eileen's struggle is not just personal but culturally inscribed (McAfee 37).

Narrative Structure and Literary Techniques

Unreliable Narration and Memory

The retrospective narration of Eileen adds layers of complexity to its psychological and feminist themes. The story is told by an older Eileen looking back at her younger self, providing both proximity and distance. This temporal split allows for irony, critique, and reflection, but also introduces narrative unreliability. Readers must constantly question the accuracy and motive behind Eileen's retelling.

Scholars argue that this dual voice—young Eileen and older Eileen—reveals the fragmentation of self across time. The narrator is not fully reconciled with her past, nor is she entirely different. This split invites analysis through trauma theory, which posits that traumatic events resist coherent narration and are often processed retroactively.

Language and Tone

Moshfegh's prose has received widespread praise for its precision, dark wit, and unflinching detail. Eileen's voice is clinical and grotesque, often describing bodily functions, death, and violence in matter-of-fact terms. This stylistic choice aligns with the novel's themes of repression and disassociation. Her tone is emotionally flat yet charged with discomfort, a reflection of her psychological detachment.

Critics have noted that the novel's language serves to resist idealization of the female narrator. Porochista Khakpour writes that Eileen's voice feels "authentically grotesque and disturbingly

intimate”, placing the reader in a position of both voyeur and participant. This narrative discomfort is deliberate—it exposes the reader to a feminine psyche without sanitization.

Delvi Wahyuni’s study offers a significant psychoanalytic and feminist reading of Eileen, highlighting the protagonist’s self-loathing and internalized misogyny. Wahyuni writes that misogyny in Eileen manifests as self-judgment and self-objectification, contributing to Eileen’s closed and conflicted persona (Wahyuni 71).

As a caregiver to her alcoholic father, Eileen feels trapped and powerless, expressing her alienation through harsh self-criticism: “I looked like nothing special” (Moshfegh 1). Wahyuni argues that this line reflects Eileen’s deep-seated self-hatred and lack of self-worth (71). Her shame over her body and physical appearance—evident in her descriptions of acne scars, thin frame, and awkward movements—serves as an indicator of internalized patriarchal beauty standards (72).

Cultural and Institutional Contexts

Gender, Caregiving, and Labor

Set in a small Massachusetts town in the 1960s, Eileen portrays a cultural environment defined by gender roles and repression. Eileen’s life revolves around domestic labor and emotional caregiving for her father, who is verbally abusive and mentally unstable. Her job at the boys’ prison mirrors her domestic prison—both institutions are governed by authority, surveillance, and emotional containment.

Feminist critics highlight how caregiving roles often trap women in cycles of dependency and self-neglect. Eileen’s sense of duty to her father prevents her from pursuing independence. These dynamic underscores the emotional labor that is disproportionately placed on women and is frequently undervalued in society.

Rebecca as Catalyst

Rebecca is central not only to the plot’s turning point but also to Eileen’s psychological shift. She represents freedom, confidence, and transgression. Eileen’s feelings toward Rebecca oscillate between admiration, desire, envy, and fear. Their relationship does not culminate in romance but in complicity—Rebecca enlists Eileen in a crime that forces her to confront her limits (Wahyuni 72).

This event catalyzes Eileen's eventual escape. While her departure is morally ambiguous, it marks the first act of agency in her life. Rebecca's influence pushes Eileen beyond repression, forcing her to accept the complexity of her inner world.

Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative, interpretative technique based on literary psychoanalysis and feminist philosophy. The primary data analysis method used in this study was qualitative textual analysis, which draws from feminist critique and psychoanalytic literary theory. Using close reading as the major textual analysis approach, the study delves into the psychological and emotional environment of the protagonist, Eileen, using Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva's theoretical frameworks. Freud's concepts of repression and the unconscious were employed to reveal the latent desires and psychological tensions beneath Eileen's seemingly passive behavior, while Kristeva's theory of abjection is used to investigate the bodily, emotional, and societal forces that shape Eileen's conflicted sense of self and her aversion to femininity.

The study mainly looked on how Eileen's inner mind connects with social norms, making it possible to examine how hidden desires and cultural expectations come together to create a kind of inner oppression—and, eventually, lead to a form of feminist rebellion. Textual analysis was done by exploring the psychological and feminist aspects of the protagonist, with particular attention paid to her inner thoughts, fantasies, recollections, and relationships with other people. Scenes featuring Eileen's relationship with her father, her perception of her body, her emotions of shame and desire, and her changing dynamic with Rebecca were all given particular emphasis.

Analysis and Discussion

Portrayal of Unconscious Feminine Through Eileen's Psychological Struggles

Moshfegh mainly uses Eileen's interiority—her erratic, sinister, and even bizarre stream of thought—to examine the unconscious feminine. According to psychoanalysis, the aspects of feminine identity that are suppressed, hidden, or ignored because of social expectations are referred to as the “unconscious feminine”. These suppressed urges and fears are stored in Eileen's head, which shows a severely damaged person. She alternates between sexual

suppression and unsettling desires, between wanting to be seen and wanting to be invisible. Her self-inflicted emotional hunger, her concern with her bowel motions, and her loathing with her own body all point to a profound internal battle fueled by guilt, shame, and desire.

In addition to being manifestations of poor self-esteem, Eileen's beliefs about her body and sexuality also reflect a deeper detachment from her feminine identity, which was imposed by her emotionally abusive father as well as the oppressive New England environment of the 1960s. Her feminine unconscious shows itself in poisonous and covert ways because she lacks the resources and room to freely explore who she is. Classic Freudian psychodynamic tensions, particularly those pertaining to the mother body and the fractured self, are echoed by her need for retribution, her voyeuristic interest with others, and her concern with purity (both moral and physical). She says:

I looked like a girl you'd expect to see on city bus, reading some clothbound book from the library about plants or geography, perhaps wearing a net over my light brown hair. You might take me for a nursing student or a typist, a note the nervous hands, a foot tapping, bitten lip. I looked like nothing special (Moshfegh 1).

Eileen's internalized sentiments of invisibility, inadequacy, and alienation are highlighted by her description of herself as "nothing special". These feelings stand in stark contrast to her wish to be recognized, respected, and transformed. Her inner turmoil and hidden cravings, a crucial manifestation of the unconscious feminine, are concealed by her self-deprecating exterior character. The contrast between Eileen's outward compliance and self-effacement and her inner turmoil and escape fantasies is used by Moshfegh to highlight the contradiction between her actions and her inner desires. She says:

I was young and fine, average, I guess. But at the same time, I thought I was the worst - ugly, disgusting, unfit for the world. In such a state it seemed ridiculous to call attention to myself. I rarely wore jewelry, never perfume, and I didn't paint my nails (Moshfegh 8).

This quote, reflects Eileen's inner agony and the unconscious feminine fight, and also highlights the stark contrast between her external demeanor and her inward self-loathing. On the inside, she is tormented with guilt, loathing, and a broken sense of identity created by patriarchal norms of femininity, despite her outward appearance of being commonplace and plain. She rejects traditional feminine roles by not wearing jewelry, perfume, or nail paint, but her rejection stems from internalized hatred and repression rather than empowerment. Moshfeigh utilizes this conflict to show how Eileen's unconscious feminine is twisted and suppressed, which feeds her illusions of metamorphosis and escape as a way to restore a lost or undeserving self: "I was thin, my figure was jagged, my movements pointy and hesitant, my posture" (Moshfeigh 8).

Eileen describes her slender, angular body and hesitating motions, demonstrating how her outward appearance reflects her inner frailty and mental strain. Repression and discomfort in her own body, a crucial component of the unconscious feminine that Moshfeigh examines throughout the book, influence her sense of herself. Although she gives the world the impression of being aloof, rigid, and nearly ghostly, on the inside she struggles with strong emotions and longs for change and independence. This sharp discrepancy between her appearance and emotions highlights the novel's examination of the divided self and the hidden feminine psyche:

I looked like nothing special. It's easy for me to imagine this girl, a strange, young and mousy version of me, carrying an anonymous leather purse or eating from a small package of peanuts, rolling each one between her gloved fingers, sucking in her cheeks, staring anxiously out the window (Moshfeigh 8).

She sees her earlier self as "strange" and "mousy", almost like a different, unknown person, this comment demonstrates Eileen's profound feeling of self-alienation and poor self-worth. Her detachment and compulsive self-observation are evident in the meticulous, even clinical, scrutiny of her own behavior, such as handling peanuts and sucking in her cheeks. By characterizing herself as "nothing special", she is exposing internalized sentiments of inadequacy and invisibility that have been formed by her suppressed identity and cultural expectations. This scene encapsulates her psychological loneliness and establishes the

framework for her want to break free from the limitations of her existence and the identity she feels imprisoned in.

Eileen says: “And he never once said “Hello”, or “How are you, Miss Dunlop?” I was invisible. I was furniture” (Moshfegh 18). These utterances highlight Eileen’s intense feelings of emotional neglect and invisibility, especially in regard to male authority figures. Eileen conveys how she feels objectified and dehumanized by referring to herself as “furniture”—present but invisible, devoid of identity or meaning. This is a reflection of her internalized notion that she is not deserving of respect or care, which was influenced by her own trauma as well as the larger cultural erasure of women’s inner existence. The unconscious feminine fight for visibility, voice, and selfhood is reinforced by the absence of fundamental acknowledgment, which furthers her psychological solitude. She says:

No one had ever tried to rape me, after all. I’d always believed that my first time would be by force. Of course, I hoped to be raped by only the most soulful, gentle, handsome of men, somebody who was secretly in love with me-Randy, ideally (Moshfegh 27).

Deep psychological distress and a skewed internalization of gender and desire are revealed by Eileen’s unsettling fantasy of being raped by a “soulful, gentle” man like Randy. The unconscious feminine in conflict is reflected in this; her desire for approval and connection is entwined with violent, self-deprecating fantasies that are influenced by loneliness, suppression, and a lack of healthy interaction. Her socially invisible image is in stark contrast to her inner world, which is full of dark, unresolved desires, despite her quiet, submissive demeanor in daily life. By using this contrast, Moshfegh draws attention to the intricacy of the feminine psyche, which is influenced by internalized misogyny, pain, and longing in these words:

My death mask didn’t seem to perturb her at all. It always peeved me when my flames wax met with good cheer, good manners. Didn’t she know I was a monster, a creep, a crone? How dare she mock me with courtesy when I deserved to be greeted with disgust and dismay? (Moshfegh 42).

Eileen's allusion to her "death mask" demonstrates her attempt to create an image intended to repel others by adopting a physical character that reflects her emotional pain and self-loathing. She is irritated by the contradiction between her preferred image of herself as a hideous, unlovable person and their kind reactions, which emphasizes the intense psychological tension between her need for self-punishment and her need for human connection. This scene reveals the unconscious feminine at work—her covert desire for approval concealed behind an alienating façade. The protagonist's shattered identity and the intricacy of her inner world, where guilt, longing, and self-disrespect coexist, are depicted by Moshfegh through this tension: "I was a shoplifter, a pervert, you might say, and a liar, of course, but nobody knew that" (Moshfegh 84).

By emphasizing the sharp contrast between Eileen's socially produced exterior and her concealed inner self, which is a major component of her psychological suffering, this remark effectively responds to the issue. Although she dresses like her mother and wears a lifeless "death mask" to project an image of being quiet, unassuming, and even decent, she really engages in actions she views as disgraceful, such as stealing, lying, and having twisted thoughts. Her unconscious feminine personality, molded by suppression, guilt, and internal conflict under social standards, is reflected in these covert behaviors. Moshfegh emphasizes how the unconscious feminine is repressed and deformed within Eileen by using this division to highlight how her exterior conceals intense psychological issues and unspoken desires: "I looked like a shy and gentle soul from afar, and sometimes I wished I was one. But I cursed and blushed and broke out in sweats quite often" (Moshfegh 11).

From a distance, Eileen appears to be a "shy and gentle soul", reflecting the kind of passive, acceptable feminine image society expects. However, her inner self is full of anxiety, anger, and shame—she curses, sweats, and loses control. This tension between how she looks and how she feels inside reflects her unconscious feminine conflict, where her repressed emotions and desires do not align with the persona she performs. Moshfegh uses this inner-outer split to explore how Eileen's identity is shaped by repression, making her fantasies of escape a way to free herself from the false image she's forced to maintain.

"But I think I really wore her clothes to mask myself, as though if I walked around in such a costume, nobody would really see me" (Moshfegh 59). In this quote, Eileen uses her mother's clothing as a masquerade to conceal who she really is from the outside world. She constructs a socially acceptable external character by donning them as a "costume", which conceals her

inner conflicts, wants, and guilt. This quotation demonstrates the mental anguish that Eileen goes through as well as the discrepancy between her inner and outer selves. Through this act of masking, Moshfegh demonstrates how Eileen's unconscious feminine—her suppressed identity and desires—is hidden under layers of performance, mirroring her deeper yearning for emotional escape and invisibility.

Eileen says: “I looked so boring, lifeless, immune and unaffected, but in truth I was always furious, seething, my thoughts racing, my mind like a killer's” (Moshfegh 11). This remark highlights the stark difference between Eileen's public persona and her private life. She seems calm, uninteresting, and aloof on the surface, but on the inside, she is filled with anger and violent, sinister ideas. Her mental anguish and the suppression of feelings that society considers inappropriate for women to display are reflected in this. Through Eileen's split self—the socially produced façade of a placid lady concealing the chaotic, violent reality underneath, as well as her hidden wants and illusions of transformation—this passage illustrates how Moshfegh investigates the unconscious feminine.

This word, propensity, was not in my day-to-day vocabulary back then, and it was awkward to say it, and I worried Rebecca would see through my attempt to sound smart and laugh at me (Moshfegh 81).

Here, Eileen's self-conscious choice of the word “propensity” reveals her intense psychological stress and worry over coming across as intellectual or collected in Rebecca's presence. The brittle fabrication of her external persona—someone attempting to appear more intelligent, sophisticated, or attention-worthy—is revealed by her dread of being “seen through”. Eileen struggles on the inside between being herself and the person she appears to be, plagued by worry and self-doubt. Moshfegh's depiction of the unconscious feminine, in which Eileen's suppressed identity and aspirations simmer under a socially performed exterior, heavily relies on this internal struggle.

“Rebecca nodded gravely. “I see. Your father's keeper. Saving him from himself”” (Moshfegh 149).

“Saving others, I corrected her. I didn't want Rebecca to see me as a martyr. I wanted to be a hero” (Moshfegh 149).

Eileen's correction of Rebecca, from being a "martyr" to a "hero", highlights her inner desire for a more empowering identity than the passive, self-sacrificing role she feels forced into. Her psychological conflict between the more forceful, transforming position she secretly longs for and the anticipated one of being obedient, compassionate, and self-effacing is reflected in her yearning to be viewed as a hero rather than a martyr. The tension at the heart of Eileen's psychological struggle is shown by this contrast between her mental desires and her external, socially manufactured character, which is a crucial examination of the unconscious feminine.

Eileen's Internal Experiences of Feminist Resistance Against Patriarchal Norms

Oppressive patriarchal systems influence Eileen's life: a cold, judgmental society that prescribes how a woman should act; an abusive, alcoholic father who continuously criticizes her; and a job at a juvenile detention facility that upholds hierarchy and control. On the outside, Eileen seems submissive and obedient, but on the inside, she is rebellious. Her opposition is psychological, emotional, and symbolic rather than overt or political. She does not settle with societal norms, in the novel it is shown that she even never makes any efforts to look pretty or make her, self-presentable. She usually never cleans herself, like not taking showers or brushing her teeth, she does not even wear any perfume. Eileen has wild fantasies of escape and freedom, which also serves as means of resistance.

It is a reluctance to stay stuck in a world characterized by self-loathing, emotional numbness, and masculine dominance. Even if that becoming is ambiguous and ethically nuanced, it is nonetheless an act of becoming. Moshfegh illustrates that for some women, just leaving is the most courageous thing they can do, challenging the notion that resistance must be honorable or clean. Eileen exemplifies feminist resistance through the silent, untidy declaration of one's right to live according to her own conditions, rather than by slogans or solidarity.

And back then this was fifty years ago-I was a prude. Just look at me. I wore heavy wool skirts that fell past my knees, thick stockings. I always buttoned my jackets and blouses as high as they could go (Moshfegh 8).

The above lines highlight how Eileen complied with social norms of feminine modesty by recalling her constrictive wardrobe, which included fully buttoned clothing, thick stockings, and long skirts. But by considering this in a detached or ironic manner, she quietly challenges

those very conventions. Her admission that she is a “prude” shows that she is conscious of the social pressure placed on women to be modest and conservative. As Eileen starts to doubt and disassociate herself from the patriarchal norms that had influenced her identity and actions, her internal struggle and ultimately self-awareness represent a type of feminist resistance.

Here is how I spend my days now; I live in a beautiful place. I sleep in a beautiful bed. I eat beautiful food. I go for walks through beautiful places. I care for people deeply. At night my bed is full of love, because I alone am in it. I cry easily, from pain and pleasure, and I don't apologize for that. In the mornings I step outside and I'm thankful for another day. It took me many years to arrive at such a life. When I was twenty-four, the most I wanted was a cramped afternoon among strangers, or to dawdle down a sidewalk without my father waiting for me, to be safe someplace far away, to be home somewhere (Moshfegh 164).

In this introspective section, the elder Eileen talks of a life that was molded by emotional freedom, independence, and self-acceptance—qualities she once desired but was unable to achieve as a young woman because of personal repression and patriarchal restrictions. Her transformation from a repressed, self-loathing young woman to one who values independence, emotional expression, and solitude exemplifies a potent feminist resistance. Eileen's metamorphosis demonstrates her liberation from the conventions that formerly governed her identity and conduct by rejecting stereotypical female roles that were oriented on pleasing others or being defined by relationships.

Although I was generally paranoid about how I smelled-if my sweat stank, if my breath was as bad as my mouth tasted-I never wore perfume, and I always preferred the scentless soaps and lotions (Moshfegh 24).

Eileen's silent opposition to the patriarchal ideals of femininity—that women should be aesthetically good, well-groomed, and acceptable to others—is demonstrated by her compulsive attention to her body odor and her unwillingness to use perfume or scented cosmetics. Eileen rejects the performative elements of femininity by eschewing perfume and

using scentless soaps, not because she is self-assured but rather because she finds it repulsive to be scrutinized or assessed based only on her looks or fragrance.

Even if it is motivated by psychological anguish rather than overt rebellion, this conduct, which is subtle and stems from self-loathing, represents an internal, confused type of feminist resistance—a refusal to participate in conventional beauty standards. Moshfegh utilizes this to highlight the deeper repercussions of living under repressive gender standards by demonstrating how Eileen’s inner experience questions the roles that are expected of women.

“Poor Eileen”, he said sarcastically when I walked through the door. He was very contemptuous of me, found me pathetic and unattractive and had no qualms about saying so. My father's demands that I do his bidding like a maid, a servant, were constant. But I was not the kind of girl to say no to anyone. “All right”, I said. My father grunted and puffed on the short butt of his cigar” (Moshfegh 7).

The above excerpt illustrates how Eileen’s identity has been molded by her patriarchal home, which normalizes gendered slavery and emotional abuse. The idea that women should be obedient, selfless, and subservient is reinforced by her father’s derisive and domineering actions. It is clear how thoroughly Eileen has absorbed these patriarchal standards when she acknowledges that she is “not the kind of girl to say no” on an interior level. Nonetheless, Moshfegh permits Eileen’s voice to question the very systems that once silenced her by recounting this experience from a position of reflection and criticism, obliquely suggesting a feminist resistance growing within of her. “I am not one of those women who try to make people happy all the time. I’m not that strategic” (Moshfegh 11).

Eileen’s rejection of conventional feminine roles—which demand that women be kind, agreeable, and selfless for the sake of others—is evident in this comment. Eileen disassociates herself from the socially conditioned conduct that is frequently demanded of women in patriarchal societies by declaring that she does not attempt to please others or act strategically. She refuses to change who she is in order to appease other people, even if this resistance is motivated more by resentment or disengagement than by empowerment. Eileen’s internal rejection to carry out the emotional work that women are sometimes expected to undertake is reflected in this remark, which is a subtle example of feminist resistance.

Eileen says: “I wore lipstick not to be fashionable, but because my bare lips were the same color as my nipples” (Moshfegh 18). This quotation demonstrates Eileen’s discomfiture with her own appearance and how she covers up her natural lip color with lipstick to conceal what she perceives to be an embarrassing or improper aspect rather than to appeal to or impress others. Instead of adhering to conventional notions of beauty, Eileen utilizes cosmetics to conceal rather than to enhance her appearance. Her behavior reveals a confused internal opposition to patriarchal standards that need women to be aesthetically beautiful. She challenges the notion that a woman's looks should exist for public approval by employing cosmetic items to conceal oneself from being seen rather than to comply.

Eileen remarks: “It was easy to hide behind the dull face I wore, moping around. I really thought I had everybody fooled” (Moshfegh 11). Since Eileen purposefully puts on a “dull face” to conceal her actual feelings and internal conflict, this remark highlights her sense of control over her appearance. By “moping around”, she puts on a front of indifference and inactivity, leading people to believe she is just quiet and uninteresting. Even while it is an act of self-concealment, this mask also symbolizes her intense emotional suppression and desire to stay hidden, implying that she feels safer behind a façade. Eileen’s desire to control how the outside world sees her, despite being mired in her own internal battle, is reflected in her idea that she has “everyone fooled”.

Rebecca Saint John’s face that day had no makeup on it that I could detect, and yet she looked impeccable, fresh faced, a natural beauty. Her hair was long and thick, the color of brass, coarse and, I noted gratefully, in need of a hardy brushing. Her skin was sort of golden colored, and her face was round and full with strong cheekbones, a small rosebud mouth, thin eyebrows and unusually blond eyelashes. Her eyes were an odd shade of blue. There was something manufactured about that color. It was a shade of blue like a swimming pool in an ad for a tropical getaway. It was the color of mouthwash, toothpaste, toilet cleaner (Moshfegh 65).

The above passage perfectly expresses Eileen’s deep, mixed feelings of distrust, jealousy, and respect for Rebecca. Although she praises Rebecca’s inherent beauty and charm, she also criticizes it, drawing parallels between her characteristics and manufactured goods like toothpaste and toilet cleaner. Eileen’s discomfiture with conventional feminine standards is

reflected in this mixture of curiosity and hatred. This demonstrates how Eileen challenges patriarchal beauty standards on an internal level—not by outright rejecting them, but by analyzing and doubting the worth and sincerity of women who conform to them. A critical, yet divided, position toward the demands society places on women’s looks is shown by her inner experience.

I wanted to be understood and respected, you might say, yet I still felt that I might be punished if I expressed my real feelings. I had no idea how trivial my shameful thoughts and feelings really were (Moshfegh 134).

Eileen’s internal struggle between her need for approval and her fear of being judged or punished for expressing her actual feelings is revealed in the quotation. Our patriarchal society that instructs women to hide or repress their emotions and keep their cool, in every situation, no matter what type of effect it has on women, is reflected in this dread. We can see Eileen, quietly resisting such societal norms, she ultimately discovers that her sentiments are not as bad as she had thought.

Conclusion

This paper has examined *Eileen* by Ottessa Moshfegh through a psychoanalytic framework, combining Freudian and Jungian perspectives to uncover the psychological depth and feminist undertones embedded in the narrative. By focusing on Eileen Dunlop’s inner life—her repressions, fantasies, anxieties, and emotional ruptures—the study has illuminated how the novel functions as both a psychological case study and a subtle narrative of feminist resistance. The protagonist’s journey from passive self-loathing to a nascent form of self-realization is not linear or heroic in a traditional sense; rather, it is fragmented, messy, and psychologically charged, revealing the complex ways in which women internalize, negotiate, and eventually resist patriarchal control.

Central to this analysis is the role of Eileen’s psychological repression, particularly her unresolved relationship with her absent mother and her rejection of conventional femininity. These emotional disconnections manifest as a fractured identity, wherein Eileen clings to external conformity while her inner world teems with violent fantasies and sexual confusion.

In this way, the dissonance between her public self and private psyche reveals a buried desire for transformation. Eileen's fantasies, while grotesque at times, serve as psychic projections of her desire for escape, autonomy, and agency—desires that are continually repressed by both internalized norms and a suffocating domestic environment.

Rebecca's arrival in the narrative serves as the novel's pivotal moment. As a confident and subversive woman who defies traditional gender roles, Rebecca not only destabilizes Eileen's worldview but also functions as a symbolic mirror reflecting the possibilities of feminine power and rebellion. Their relationship, though short-lived, becomes the crucible in which Eileen's psychic transformation is catalyzed. Rebecca's influence forces Eileen to confront her own complicity in patriarchal systems, and ultimately, to act in a way that breaks the cycle of repression and submission. Her decision to flee—though morally ambiguous and ethically complex—becomes a radical assertion of her agency.

The findings of this study suggest that Eileen's journey is representative of a broader feminist narrative, one in which psychological confrontation serves as a means of liberation. Drawing from Jung's notion of the "unconscious feminine" and Freud's theories of repression and desire, the research reveals that Eileen's evolution is not just an individual psychological event, but a metaphor for the feminist struggle to reclaim suppressed aspects of the self in the face of systemic control. Her eventual departure from her father's house, and by extension from the psychological prison of patriarchal expectation, marks a symbolic rebirth—a moment of psychic renewal and self-authorship.

The novel *Eileen* by Ottessa Moshfegh concludes by providing a thorough examination of the intricate psychological dynamics that propel the protagonist from emotional suppression to self-releasing. When viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, particularly with concepts from Freud and Jung, the work highlights the fierce conflict between Eileen's suppressed urges and the rigid societal norms that surround her. An internal conflict influenced by patriarchal control is hinted at by her early repression, especially in reference to her body and relationship with her father. But the appearance of Rebecca, who serves as a mirror and a catalyst, causes Eileen to have a sort of feminist awakening, forcing her to confront and ultimately accept a stronger, autonomous version of womanhood.

When Eileen engages in a violent act, signifying her liberation from internal constraints and outside influences, this psychological and feminist metamorphosis reaches its zenith. She rebels against the patriarchal standards that molded her identity and her former self, leading to

a radical reinterpretation of femininity that prioritizes individual agency and choice over traditional gender roles. As a compelling tale of female rebellion and mental independence, Moshfegh's book not only depicts a woman's internal conflict between repressed desires and society's constricting expectations. Because of Eileen's quest to discover her latent feminine strength, the novel is an essential examination of both individual and collective liberty and represents a major step toward women's empowerment.

To conclude, *Eileen* is a novel that resists easy categorization. It is not merely a psychological thriller or a character study; it is a meditation on the female psyche under duress, and the quiet, subversive ways women resist erasure. Through the interplay of psychoanalysis and feminist theory, this study has argued that Moshfegh's novel offers a powerful narrative of emancipation, one in which psychological struggle is both the symptom and the solution to living under patriarchal domination.

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