



The Construction of Female Otherness in Brooklyn (2015): A Simone de Beauvoir Analysis

Serlita Rindiani^{1*}, Ahmad Juma Khatib Nur Ali²

¹⁻² English Literature, Universitas Gunadarma, Indonesia

*Author Correspondence: serlitarindiani31@gmail.com

Abstract. Films not only function as a form of entertainment but also reflect social values and gender relations within society. One of the recurring issues represented in films is the positioning of women as secondary subjects under patriarchal structures. This study aims to analyze the representation of woman as the Other experienced by Eilis Lacey in *Brooklyn* (2015) using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method with documentation techniques. The collected data were analyzed based on Beauvoir's concept of woman as the Other. The findings reveal four forms of women's otherness represented in the film, namely dependency on others, social control and economic limitations, appearance-based judgment and social control and external influence. These findings indicate that Eilis's identity and life decisions are influenced by patriarchal values and external expectations that position her as a secondary subject. However, the film also portrays her gradual development toward greater autonomy, demonstrating her ability to challenge social pressures and assert her own identity. This study contributes to feminist film criticism by providing a deeper understanding of how the concept of woman as the Other is represented in cinematic narratives and by encouraging critical awareness of gender representation in contemporary films.

Keywords: Brooklyn; Existentialist Feminism; Gender Representation; Simone de Beauvoir; Woman as the Other.

1. INTRODUCTION

Films are more than just entertainment, they are cultural products that often reflect and reinforce social values, including norms about gender. Although awareness of gender equality has grown in recent years, many films still portray women in subordinate or secondary roles, often shaped by patriarchal perspectives. Hooks (2000) argues that patriarchal ideology continues to influence how women are perceived and treated in society. Similarly, Tong (2009) explains that social institutions often preserve traditional expectations about women's roles and responsibilities. Therefore, analyzing how women are represented in films remains important for understanding how gender relations are constructed and maintained in contemporary society.

A useful framework for this analysis is Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. In her influential work *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1953) explains that women have historically been placed in the position of the "Other," while men are considered the primary and universal subjects. This means that women are often defined through their relationships with others such as wives, mothers, or daughters rather than through their own independent identity. Beauvoir further argues that this condition is not a natural fact but a social construction that limits women's freedom and opportunities. The concept of woman as the other is therefore valuable for examining how films portray female characters within patriarchal structures.

Several recent studies have used Beauvoir's theory to analyze women's representation in films and literary works. For example, (Adella et al. 2025) studied the Indonesian series *Gadis Kretek* and found that female characters struggle to achieve autonomy while facing various patriarchal restrictions. Similarly, (Triyani, Choironi, and Rahmawati 2023) showed how the protagonist in *Wadjda* challenges social limitations imposed by her patriarchal environment. Other studies have focused more on identity and subjectivity. Shabilla and Azwar (2025) explored *A Normal Woman* and found that women's identities are often shaped by stereotypes and social expectations. Putri and Rusdiarti (2026) examined the adaptation of *Gadis Kretek* and concluded that female subjectivity is frequently constructed from external, male-oriented perspectives. (Nacita, Kumalasari, and Rokhmah 2026) also demonstrated, through *Marlina The Murderer in Four Acts*, how patriarchal discourse systematically positions women as subordinate subjects.

From these previous studies, the current understanding can be summarized as follows: most research on women's representation through Beauvoir's lens has examined how female characters are constrained by their immediate families, local communities, or national cultural norms. Scholars have primarily focused on women's struggles for freedom and self-realization within single, localized settings. However, this understanding has an important gap. It does not adequately address how the experience of migration or cultural displacement affects women's position as the "Other." Immigrant women often face a double marginalization they are not only restricted by patriarchal values but also alienated by geographical and cultural dislocation. Since few studies have explored this intersection, examining a film about an immigrant woman offers a fresh and necessary perspective.

Brooklyn (2015), directed by John Crowley, is a suitable film for this investigation. It tells the story of Eilis Lacey, a young Irish woman who moves to the United States in the 1950s to seek a better future. Throughout the film, she deals with expectations from her family in Ireland and the pressures of adapting to American society, while also navigating romantic relationships that often define her identity through others. Her experience of living between two cultures makes her a perpetual outsider, which fits Beauvoir's concept of the Other. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of Woman as the Other through the character of Eilis Lacey in *Brooklyn* (2015) using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist perspective. Through this analysis, the study seeks to contribute to feminist film criticism, particularly in understanding how migration and cultural displacement shape the representation of female otherness in cinematic narratives.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existentialist Feminism

Existentialist feminism is one of the major approaches in feminist theory that examines women's position within social and cultural structures. This perspective was developed by Simone de Beauvoir, who combined existentialist philosophy with feminist thought to explain women's oppression in patriarchal societies. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (1953) argues that women are not naturally inferior to men. Rather, their subordinate status is produced through social and cultural constructions that restrict their freedom and opportunities for self-determination. Influenced by existentialist philosophy, Beauvoir emphasizes that every individual possesses the ability to make choices and create meaning in life. However, women often face social barriers that limit their ability to exercise such freedom.

Tong (2009) explains that existentialist feminism focuses on women's struggle to transcend the limitations imposed by patriarchal society. As women are not regarded as autonomous beings, they are often overlooked by society within a patriarchal culture and are therefore seen as needing someone to represent or accompany them (Rondiaty, Martini, and Komariya 2025). Women should not be confined by socially constructed roles but should be able to define themselves through their own decisions and actions, because when men dominate decision-making, women lose their subjectivity and become trapped in what Beauvoir termed *immanence* that is, a state in which women are denied the opportunity to play an active role in their own lives (Zahra'ni and Prasjo 2026). A woman's empowerment is always linked to the role of men in her life. Women are never the subjects, even in their own lives (Maritdza and Martini 2024). Similarly, (Hooks 2000) argues that patriarchal ideology shapes social perceptions of women and influences the ways women understand themselves. As a result, women frequently experience restrictions that hinder the development of autonomous identities and equal participation in society. Therefore, women as part of the individual also have the right to make decisions about their lives (Damanik, Daulay, and Iskandar 2023). These perspectives support Beauvoir's central argument that women's subordinate position is socially constructed and maintained through unequal power relations rather than determined by biology. Therefore, existentialist feminism provides an important framework for understanding how women negotiate freedom, identity, and existence within patriarchal societies.

Woman as the Other

One of Beauvoir's most influential concepts is *Woman as the Other*. Beauvoir, (1953) argues that men have historically been regarded as the essential and universal subjects, where as women have been positioned as the "Other." As Beauvoir (1953, p. 16) famously states, "He

is the Subject, he is the Absolute she is the Other.” The feminist movement emerged as a rebellion against the dominance of men in the public sphere, while women were only in the domestic sphere. Women’s recognition of how certain classes, cultures, and historical periods create the definition of women (Syam, Nensilanti, and Hajrah 2021), and the feminist movement not only focuses on the problems facing women, but also seeks to uncover the root causes of gender inequality and encourage transformed that benefits everyone regardless of gender (Pienrasmi et al. 2024). This statement emphasizes that women are not seen as independent beings but are defined in relation to men. As a consequence, women are frequently defined through their relationships with others such as wives, mothers, or daughters rather than through their own identities and experiences. This unequal relationship places women in a secondary position and limits their ability to function as autonomous individuals.

According to Beauvoir (1953), the process of othering occurs when women are evaluated through external expectations and social norms that regulate their roles, behavior, and life choices. Women are often expected to conform to standards established by patriarchal society instead of being recognized as independent subjects. Women must rise from uncertainty and feel helpless due to the influence of social and cultural norms, and dare to organize their lives according to their own will (Nurdilah and Irma 2025). Consequently, women’s identities become dependent on how they are perceived by others rather than on their own self-definition. It was found that a form of gender injustice in the form of discrimination and biological conditions in women in society was found. However, it was also found that there was a form of resistance in the form of rejecting women as others rather than in their own definition (Ridwan, Nensilanti, and Reski Aulia Hamid 2024). Supporting this view, (Hooks 2000) argues that patriarchal culture frequently normalizes unequal gender relations, making women’s subordinate status appear natural and acceptable within society.

The position of women as the Other may be reflected in various forms of social experiences. Women often experience dependency on others when important decisions and opportunities are determined by external authorities rather than personal autonomy. Otherness can also appear through social and economic limitations that restrict women’s freedom to pursue their aspirations. In addition, women are frequently subjected to appearance-based judgment, where physical attributes receive greater attention than personal abilities or achievements. Furthermore, social expectations and external pressures may influence women’s choices and behaviors, reinforcing their position as secondary subjects within patriarchal structures. These forms of otherness provide a useful framework for examining how women’s identities are constructed and represented in cultural texts.

Film

Film serves as an important medium for representing social realities and cultural ideologies. Giannetti (2013) explains that films reflect human experiences through characterization, narrative structure, dialogue, and visual representation. A film is a short story that is shown in the form of images and sounds that are packaged in such a way with camera play, editing techniques and scenarios. The film moves quickly and alternately so that it provides continuous visuals (Qadriani et al. 2022). This inherent capacity renders film an especially pertinent site for analyzing the representation of women's bodies a line of inquiry that carries considerable weight, given its inextricable link to the construction of beauty standards and the social pressures confronting women, particularly as manifested in popular Indonesian film (Permatasari, Amilia, and Suaedi 2024). However, despite legal and social advances across various regions, the depiction of women in film and mass media remains tethered to traditional stereotypes, an excessive focus on physical appearance, and positioning within subordinate frameworks (Artanti, Adistya, and Mustofa 2025).

Therefore, films can be examined as cultural texts that reveal how social values and power relations are constructed and maintained. Through the representation of characters and their experiences, films provide insights into the ways gender relations operate within society. This understanding supports the use of film as an object of analysis in feminist cultural studies, where Beauvoir's concept of Woman as the Other can be employed to examine how patriarchal structures are visually and narratively constructed on screen.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with documentation techniques to analyze the representation of Woman as the Other in *Brooklyn* (2015). Qualitative research focuses on understanding and interpreting social phenomena through descriptive data rather than numerical measurement (Ali, 2018). This approach supports the objective of the study, which is to examine how the concept of Woman as the Other is represented through the experiences of Eilis Lacey as the main character in the film.

The primary data source of this study was *Brooklyn* (2015), directed by John Crowley. The data consisted of dialogues, monologues, and narrative expressions that reflect women's position as the Other. To collect the data, the researcher repeatedly watched the film and carefully observed scenes related to the experiences of Eilis Lacey. Relevant dialogues and narrative expressions were identified, recorded, and classified according to their relationship with the concept of woman as the Other.

In addition, this study employed library research by reviewing books, journal, articles, and previous studies related to existentialist feminism and women's representation in film. These sources provided the theoretical foundation for the analysis. The collected data were interpreted using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory, particularly the concept of Woman as the Other proposed in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir (1953). The analysis was then conducted by examining how social expectations of Eilis Lacey as the Other throughout the film.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research were obtained through documentation techniques, specifically by analyzing dialogues, narrations, and verbal expressions in *Brooklyn* (2015). The analysis focused on identifying the representation of Woman as the Other as experienced by the main character, Eilis Lacey.

Table 1. Representation of Woman as the Other in *Brooklyn* (2015)

No	Forms of Woman as the Other	Number of data
1	Dependency on Others	1
2	Social and Economic Limitation	1
3	Appearance-Based Judgment	1
4	Social control and External Influence	1
Total data		4

As shown in Table 1, the representation of Woman as the Other in *Brooklyn* (2015) manifest through four forms of experience encountered by Eilis Lacey. These forms correspond to the indicators derived from Beauvoir's (1953) concept of otherness, namely dependency on others, social and economic limitations, appearance-based judgment, and social control and external influence. Collectively, these findings choices are shaped by external factors rather than autonomous self-determination.

Dependency on Others



Eilis: "Father flood in New York arranged it. Rose used to play golf with him. He sponsored me. And he found me a job and got me a visa."

Context: Eilis talking to Miss Kelly, the owner of the shop she works, to inform her that she got a new job in New York.
(03:24-03:31)

The dialogue shows that Eilis's opportunity to migrate to America is largely made possible through the assistance of Ftaher Flood. Her employment, accommodation, and travel arrangements are facilitated by another individual who possesses greater authority and resources. As a result, Eilis's future is not entirely determined by her own actions but is strongly influenced by external support.

Beuvoir (1953) argues that women are often positioned as dependnet individuals whose opportunities and decisions are mediated by others. Instead of acting as autonomous subjects, women frequently occupy a secondary position in which their lives are shaped through relationships with more powerful figures. The dialogue reflects this condition because Eilis relies on Father Flood to access opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to her. Therefore, Eilis's dependence onexternal assistance represents one form of Woman as the Other in the film.

Social and Economic Limitations (Sub judul level 2)



Rose: "But I cant't buy you a future. I can't buy you the kind of life you need."

Context: Rose tells Eilis that she cannot provide the future or the kind of life that Eilis needs.
(07:39-07:41)

This statement reflects the limited opportunities available to Eilis in Ireland. The dialogue indicates that economic and socisl circumstances restrict her ability to pursue better future within her hometown. Consequently, migration becomes an alternative pathway toward achieving greater opportunities and personal development.

According to Beauvoir (1953) , women frequently encounter social conditions that limit their ability to exercise freedom and determine their own futures. Structural barriers often reinforce women's dependence on wxternal opportunities and prevent them from fully developing as autonomous individuals. In Eilis's case, social and economic constraints significantly influence her decision to leave Ireland. These limitations position her within a situation where external circumstances play a major role in shaping her future.

Appearance-Based Judgment



Mrs. Kehoe: "Eilis, from the look of you, you have greasy skin. Is that right? What do you do about that?"

Eilis: "Just... well, I wash it, Mrs Kehoe, with soap."

Context: Mrs. Kehoe comments on Eilis's facial condition. (17:57-18:08)

The dialogue demonstrates how Eilis is evaluated based on her physical appearance. Mrs. Kehoe's attention is directed toward Eilis's facial condition rather than her personal qualities, abilities, or achievements. By commenting on Eilis's skin and questioning how she manages it, Mrs. Kehoe implicitly applies social expectations regarding female appearance. The interaction suggests that a woman's physical appearance becomes an important aspect through which she is assessed and perceived by others.

According to Beauvoir (1953), women are often treated as objects of observation and judgment rather than autonomous individuals. Their value is frequently associated with physical appearance and conformity to social standards of femininity. In this dialogue, Eilis becomes the object of evaluation as attention is focused on her appearance rather than her identity or capabilities. Therefore, the dialogue reflects the representation of Woman as the Other through appearance-based judgment, where women are viewed according to external expectations rather than their own individuality.

Social control and External Influence



Eilis: "I'd forgotten what this town is like. What were you planning Miss Kelly? Keep me away from Jim? Stop me from going back to America? Perhaps you didn't even know."

Context: Eilis confronts Miss Kelly after the shopkeeper reveals her knowledge of Eilis's secret marriage. (01:36:06-01:36:25)

The dialogue reflects Eilis's growing awareness of the social pressures surrounding her personal life. By questioning Miss Kelly's intentions, Eilis expresses her dissatisfaction with the way other people become involved in decisions that should belong to her alone. Her words suggest that the community's expectations and assumptions have the potential to influence her future, particularly regarding her relationship and her decision to return to America. The scene portrays a social environment in which individual choices are closely observed and often subjected to public judgment.

From Beauvoir's perspective, women frequently encounter forms of social regulation that limit their ability to act as fully autonomous individuals. Beauvoir (1953) argues that women are often defined through the expectations of others and are encouraged to conform to socially accepted roles. In this scene, Eilis recognizes that external opinions may shape how her choices are perceived by the community. Her confrontation with Miss Kelly demonstrates an attempt to reject those pressures and affirms her own authority over her life. Therefore, the dialogue illustrates how social expectations contribute to the construction of women as the Other, while also revealing Eilis's effort to assert her independence.

Discussion

The findings reveal that Woman as the Other in *Brooklyn* (2015) is represented through dependency on others, social and economic limitations, appearance-based judgment, and social control and external influence. These forms demonstrate that Eilis Lacey frequently experiences situations in which her identity and life choices are influenced by external factors rather than solely by her own autonomy.

The findings support Beauvoir's (1953) argument that women are often positioned as secondary subjects whose existence is defined through external perspective. Throughout the film, Eilis encounters various social expectations, economic conditions, and cultural pressures that shape her experiences and decisions. Although she gradually gains greater independence, the process of othering remains visible in the social structures surrounding her.

The study contributes to feminist film criticism by demonstrating the relevance of Beauvoir's concept of Woman as the Other in analyzing women's representation in film. The findings provide a deeper understanding of how female characters experience dependency, limitation, objectification, and social control within everyday social contexts. Practically, the study encourages audiences to critically examine gender representation in films and to recognize how social expectations may contribute to the marginalization of women in society.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study examined the representation of woman as the Other in *Brooklyn* (2015) using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism theory. The findings indicate that Eilis Lacey experiences four forms of otherness: dependency on others, social and economic limitation, appearance-based judgment, and social control and external influence. These forms demonstrate that Eilis's identity and life decisions are frequently influenced by patriarchal values and external expectations rather than by complete personal autonomy. Nevertheless, the film also portrays Eilis's gradual development toward becoming more self-determined, suggesting that women are capable of challenging the social structures that position them as the Other.

This study is limited to the analysis of the concept of woman as the Other as represented by the main character in a single film. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all films or to broader representations of women in different cultural contexts. Future researchers are encouraged to examine other literary or cinematic works using Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory or to combine it with other feminist perspectives in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's representation. It is also recommended that future studies explore different female characters, cultural settings, or contemporary films to enrich discussions of gender representation and women's experiences in society.

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