

A Teenager's Discovery in Growth

Themes from Doris Lessing's Work "Through the Tunnel"

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author analyzes the short story "Through the Tunnel" and presents the following points through a close reading of the text. The author studies Lessing's works on growing up to enrich domestic research on Doris Lessing and provide a deeper understanding of Lessing's profound humanitarian sentiments. At the same time, it draws readers' and society's attention and consideration to the problem of growing up, which has specific practical significance.

"Through the Tunnel" describe an unforgettable beach vacation; during this holiday, boy Jerry has experienced a tremendous external obstacle - not only to learn diving, which is similar to other boys across the bottom of a rock cave but to face growing up with the need to experience the inner struggle, to overcome the little boy's cowardice and rebellious and unyielding arrogant. These are the processes of self-discovery, self-confusion, and self-precipitation that the young must experience in their personal growth. It is a period of self-discovery during the formative years of adolescence that involves both external struggles to overcome difficulties and internal challenges to form an individual's character. Whether this critical period can be successfully and safely passed will play a decisive role in the health of a person's humanity.

Keywords: Doris Lessing; Outward struggles against difficulties; Inward struggles leading to personal growth; Self-discovery in growth

1. INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing has been hailed as one of Britain's greatest female writers since Woolf. Lessing has written in her more than 70 years of writing, including famous pieces like *The Grass is Singing*, *The Golden Notebook*. She has written more than 20 novels, 11 short stories, eight non-fiction, four plays, poems. In 2007, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for her suspicion, enthusiasm, and epic women experience. "Through the Tunnel" is one of her short stories [1].

In the 1950s, Doris Lessing's works were translated into China. Still, due to the unique atmosphere and ideological influence of the specific historical period, there was a lack of research on this writer and her works. It was only after the 1990s that the works of this British writer gradually attracted the attention of Chinese scholars, and her criticism and research have been formally launched since then [2]. After more than 20 years of development, the domestic academic

community has made specific achievements and progress in the field of Doris Lessing's innovative research, forming several concentrated research sections, including thematic criticism, feminist criticism, religious philosophy criticism, and formal research criticism [3]. The study of Lessing and her work from a feminist perspective is the most current research in China. The study of the art form of *The Golden Notebook* has also become an essential aspect of Lessing's research in China. *The Golden Notebook* is the most crucial work of Lessing and the most artistically influential work among her novels. Although researchers have focused their attention on Lessing's entire oeuvre, studies in this area are still scattered compared to the study of *The Golden Notebook*.

"Through the Tunnel," published in 1955, was another of Lessing's midlife hits. Growth is a timeless topic in human history and naturally included in Lessing's writing [4]. The author believes that a study of Lessing's writing on growing up will enrich the study of

Doris Lessing in China and give readers a deeper understanding of Lessing's profound humanitarian sentiments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Review of the studies abroad

The academic research on Lessing in the British and American critics began in the 1960s, and there have been many monographs and essays, which have been very fruitful. The early studies were introductions and overviews of the writer's works and creations, notably Paul Schlueter's "The Novels of Doris Lessing," a comprehensive evaluation of Lessing's ten novels published at that time, which mainly focuses on Lessing's creations from the perspective of themes and is of pioneering significance [5]. Moreover, with their scholarly acumen, early researchers recognized the artistic value of *The Golden Notebook* and provided a detailed overview of Lessing's early work. The study emphasizes the influence of Lessing's upbringing on her writing [6].

The 1970s was a period of significant development in foreign studies of Lessing, and a number of essential works appeared. The perspectives and approaches of researchers were diverse, applying not only feminist theory but also spatial theory, narratology, and cultural studies to the study of Lessing's works. Part of the reason for the popularity of Lessing's work in the United States is that the feminist ideas in Lessing's work were in line with the feminist movement of the time. In addition, the postmodernist style of her work and the realism of her subject matter, and the realism of her subject matter were not only a good fit for the American feminist movement of the time but also the postmodernist style of her work.

From the 1980s onward, the research gradually intensified, turning to the study of Lessing's artistic style and writing techniques, the themes and philosophical ideas of Lessing's works, as well as the particular studies of his short stories and space novels. In recent years, the studies have been different from those of the past, examining more the overall style of Lessing's work, placing Lessing in a historical perspective, and deepening the discussion on women and freedom.

From the 1990s to the present, there has been a decline in foreign studies of Lessing. The number of foreign studies on Lessing has decreased, and the number of papers and monographs has significantly reduced. The number of papers and monographs has decreased significantly. The most important research focuses on the shift in the artistic style of Lessing's novels and the Sufism in his works [7].

2.2. Review of the studies in China

The translation of Doris Lessing in China began in the 1950s, but her research did not begin until the 1980s, and it was only in the 1990s that more attention was paid to Lessing in the domestic academic community. After she won the Nobel Prize for Literature, the study of Lessing from various perspectives was developed as never before, and fruitful results were achieved. The research on Lessing from multiple perspectives has been developed and achieved fruitful results. Domestic research on Lessing is mainly carried out from the following aspects:

1. Thematic research. It is a primary focus of domestic research on Lessing. The early representative scholar is Li Fu Xiang. His essay "Politics and Women's Themes in Doris Lessing's Writing" is based on the following themes: *The Grass is Singing*, *Children of Violence Series*, and *Science Fiction*, aiming to argue for the political themes in Lessing's works [8].

The political theme in Lessing's work is also examined in *The Golden Notebook* and *The Diary of Jane Somers* as examples to explain the women's theme and analyze Lessing's exploration of the destiny of women's lives is highly instructive.

2. Feminist and ecofeminist perspectives. Feminist studies are represented by Xia Qiong, who discusses feminism in *The Golden Notebook*. An in-depth analysis and study of feminism in *The Golden Notebook* and Lessing's view of female freedom is enlightening [9]. In terms of ecofeminism, Yang Shihu and Ma Yilin's "The Grass is Singing in an Ecofeminist Perspective," which adopts an ecofeminist perspective, examines the relationship between man and nature, between the sexes, and between women and their gender in *The Grass is Singing* from both environmental and gender perspectives [10].

3. Colonial Consciousness and Trauma Studies. A representative example is Tao Shuqin's "Writing Colonialism in the Postcolonial Era: A Study of Doris Lessing's Space Novels," in which she argues that Lessing portrays a positive image of the colonial empire, glorifies colonialism, and expresses an understanding and affirmation of colonial activities. She argues that Lessing's "space novels" portray positive images of colonial empires, glorify colonialism, and express an understanding and affirmation of colonial activities while also revealing his colonialist ideology [11].

Studies on Doris Lessing's writing about growing up are a relatively neglected area of research, with only a few articles on it. In Lessing's wide range of subjects and varied styles of literature, the theme of growing up may not be so prominent, and few researchers have studied it from the perspective of growing up for a long time. In many of Lessing's novels, characters' growth

seems to be an internal thread that runs through the work and Lessing's creative work. Whether it is the early works *The Grass is Sing*, *The Children of Violence Series*, *The Golden Notebook*, the late work *The Fifth Child*, or some short stories; there are clear traces of growth.

2.3. Definition of Bildungsroman

Before we begin to discuss the story through the Tunnel, we need to learn something about Bildungsroman, which is used in this story. As a literary genre, it first appeared in Germany, meaning "to shape," "to develop," and "to grow [12][13]." While the definition of "bildungsroman" is still debated in the academic, it is generally accepted that "Bildungsroman shows a young protagonist who experiences some kind of traumatic event and changes his or her worldview, or his or her personality, or both; It takes him out of his innocence and eventually leads him to a natural and complex adult world [14].

The typical Bildungsroman traces the progress of a juvenile person toward self-understanding and a way of social responsibility. Usually, the protagonist may be a sensitive and talented young man who encounters various issues and makes many false starts before accomplishing his goals. The Bildungsroman focuses on one central character who undergoes a crucial transformation; additionally, the novel's scope is restricted as a rule as a result of the protagonist's life before his self-awakening begins and when finding his place in society remains unknown. Structurally, the Bildungsroman generally emphasizes dialogue over plot development, thereby keeping the reader's attention squarely on the expansion of the hero or heroine's character.

3. SUMMARY AND COMMENTS ON THE STORY

The story begins on the primary day of the vacation of a young English boy associated with his mother in an unrevealed location. Jerry is an 11-year-old boy. He follows his mother to the seaside for a vacation. On their way to the "safe" beach where they always go, Jerry looks longingly at a "wilder" beach where he would like to play. Nevertheless, when he accidentally meets a group of local boys, young Jerry is traumatized when his desire to swim with the boys is rejected.

Furthermore, Jerry wants to go to this "wilder" beach with his mother, for he does not want to upset his mother. The following day, he asks to travel down to the wild, rocky beach and permission. The mother goes away to her beach, worrying whether she is an honest parent and obtaining the balance right between tenderness and independence.

Jerry practiced swimming and tried to cross the Tunnel alone. Although the process is not a smooth, dangerous adventure, let Jerry's body and mind through a brutal test. At last, he achieved his goal and realized his wish.

Everyone in the process of growing up will be affected by some people, they or positive or negative impact and enrich our life, affect our development trajectory, these people are our growth guide. In "Through the Tunnel," there are two guides for Jerry's growth: the upbeat guide -- his mother and the negative guide -- the boys [15]. When a tourist is trying to please them and become one with them, the local boys return the innocent heart with indifference and indifference, regardless of whether the simple little boy can bear the trauma. Maybe the boys did not mean to do this, it was just their normal behavior, but it certainly set off a storm in Jerry's heart. In front of his self-esteem and dignity, Jerry has gone through a severe physical and spiritual test. Although Jerry finally proves his worth, the group of English boys plays a leading negative role in Jerry's life path.

The upbeat guide should be regarded as the mother. Jerry's mother does not say much, but the mother guides Jerry at every critical moment from the beginning of the novel. The mother is not an authoritarian dictator but an equal partner and guides in the development of her children. She does not nag, nor does she interfere with her son's decisions. Instead, she provides the necessary encouragement, adequate help, and appropriate guidance at critical moments. It is in this way that Jerry is able to venture through the tunnel and grow independently. In both Jerry to stay in a "safe" beach and go to the question of "gulf" rocky coastlines, Jerry found himself abandoned entirely or is it the last jerry proud to report back to the mother he can stay in water for at least three minutes when the mother is at a crucial moment in his son pointing directions. The mother does not like many parents, simple rudely rejected son want to go to the "gulf" rocky coastlines, she asks Jerry why he wants to get diving glasses, finds his son face of blood after the break into a furious rage, but with the spring breeze, the rain care in every son wander into a powerful spiritual motivation, and adversity. She is the upbeat guide for Jerry's growth and safe return.

When jerry arrives at the wild beach, he goes for a swim and is ready to check his mother on her beach from afar. He notices some native boys on a headland higher than him and that they wave at one another. They dive into the ocean successively, and jerry is affected by them. Eventually, the boys attack and do not come back up for a prolonged time till they emerge from the opposite aspect of dark rock and respiratory deeply. Jerry dives right down to see what is there and finds a giant black rock wall and understands that the boys have swum through some hole in it to the opposite aspect.

The boys take one hundred sixty seconds to travel through the rock, and also the boys getaway, departure jerry experiencing failure and crying.

Jerry asks his mother for a few spectacles and determines to repeat the effort of the boys. He finds the outlet, so he begins active, holding his breath, creating his nose bleed, and exhausting himself. Kraut determines to travel "through the tunnel" the day before they leave vacation and continues to exercise his lungs. He spares no effort on the end of the world, and though it is arduous, he manages it. Jerry returns home, exhausted and having suffered vast epistaxis. The mother notices that his appearance is somewhat "strained" however determines not to worry. As Jerry announces how long he will keep underwater, the mother tells him not to do it and is prepared for a "battle of wills" however Jerry offers in, finding it not vital to travel to his wild beach currently that he has passed through the tunnel.

The act of Jerry swimming through the tunnel has the symbolic meaning of a growth ritual. Growing up means moving from the familiar world of childhood to the unfamiliar world of adulthood. Lessing uses two contrasting scenes to represent two different worlds metaphorically. The brightly colored, crowded, and safe beach symbolizes Jerry's childhood's simple and peaceful world. At the same time, the unknown rocky cove that Jerry aspires to is mysterious, heavy, and cold, and it is the complex and dangerous world of adulthood that Jerry is about to enter. Lessing describes the reality of the harsh living conditions of the young group to the extreme: the unfamiliar seashore, the encounter with indifferent locals, the mental devastation and blow forced Jerry to explore alone, the dangerous underwater tunnels, the heart-wrenching adventure process, the death-like victory, Lessing makes Jerry's struggle with fate on the edge of the vast ocean infinitely more complex. She is a powerful portrayal of Jerry's effort to grow up. Lessing uses this imagery to reflect the reader's concern and sympathy for young people growing up.

It is straightforward to ascertain from this story that many themes within the story that relates to the plot itself. The plot typically drives the theme; it is the text of the thematic content. One of the themes during this story is loneliness and alienation. To stress this theme, Lessing features a character Jerry who is between childhood and adulthood; he has no father and features a polite but strained relationship with his mother. Once he sees foreign boys swimming, she emphasizes his loneliness which fiddling with them may be a "longing that fills his whole body. He urgently needed company, and that we saw this through the opposite boys. However, he does not look for this sense of happiness in his mother, he seeks it elsewhere, and once the boys

leave him, he has prompted to require the work of the tunnel.

Another theme is the plan of rites of passage; the boys bear trials and challenges to prove that they can become an adult, a man, and leave their childhood behind. The episode begins with Jerry going through the protection of the beach to explore - absorbing additional adult challenges. Then, as he trains and practices for his tunnel dive, we tend to see him pushing his limits, going his childhood games behind, and initiating his rituals that he feels he should pass.

As he succeeds, he becomes an independent young adult from his mother and assures himself as a separate entity from her. He felt mature, accountable, and capable of absorbing the challenge. Lessing enforced the tunnel challenge that was joined to the theme of achieving adulthood.

4. CONCLUSION

"Through the Tunnel" is one of the few short stories in contemporary British literature that reflects the theme of adolescent development. As an ordinary mother, Doris Lessing delicately uses a series of familiar imagery to deeply describe the growth of a shy, unconfident boy who encounters frustration, has an epiphany, emerges from confusion, and finally transforms into a confident and brave man. Through this paradigmatic transformation experience, the difficulties and courage of an adolescent struggling with the harsh environment are vividly presented. The irreplaceable roles of family, self, and peers in the individual's growth process are illustrated.

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