

Trauma and Self-Redemption - A Social Psychological Reading of *Counselling for Toads: A Psychological Adventure*

Qianying Ren^{1,*}

¹Liaoning Normal University

*Renqy233@163.com

ABSTRACT

Contemporary British psychologist Robert de Board's *Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure* tells the story of the main character Toad's journey from depression to a return to his former enthusiasm. According to David G. Myers' *Social Psychology*, social thinking, social beliefs, social influences and social relationships are important factors that influence human psychology. In this paper, the author will analyze Toad's psychological process from self-avoidance, self-redemption to self-recovery from the perspective of social psychology.

Keywords: *toad, Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure, social psychology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Robert de Board is well-known in psychological research and clinical practice in British. Robert believes that although many other events in later stages of life have an impact on us, the earliest experiences shape the rudiments of the personality that cannot be denied or forgotten. From the perspective of youth, he portrays vivid and specific characters in a childlike and lively way of narration to discuss issues of psychological consultation, healing and identity with the youth of today.

Robert's two professional books, *Counselling Skills* and *The Psychoanalysis of Organizations* are both best-selling psychology textbooks in the United Kingdom. *Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure*, his most famous popular psychology book, has been on sale for 24 years and is still on the list of psychological counselling and education books. *Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure* is a deep healing novel. Based on psychological theories, the book tells the whole process of a toad suffering from depression, under the guidance of a psychological counselor-Heron, through 10 times of psychological counselling, and finally regaining happiness and confidence. In 2020, Robert's novel *Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure* was published in China. The novel borrowed the main characters of *The Wind in the Willows*, a classic English literature story, and brought Mr. Toad and his friends back to play the story about psychological consultation. Mr.

Toad, the hero of the story, being sensitive, persistent, adventurous, and laughing and alive, was now unconventionally depressed. He stayed alone in his room and didn't want to get out of bed. Worried by his friends, Toad went to see Heron, a famous local psychological consultant.

During the 10 times of psychological consultation with Heron, Toad gradually merged with the society and himself, bravely explored his inner world, and gradually got back confidence and hope. Finally, he became a respected Mr. Toad through his own efforts. Based on the exchange between Mr. Toad and psychological consultant Heron, the novel explores the source of Toad's feelings of inferiority and depression, as well as the way to discard depression psychologically and live a truly confident and hopeful life.

In recent years, domestic scholars have focused on Robert de Board's novel *Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure*. They have studied and analyzed Robert de Board's initiation novel and corresponding writing technique, but the psychological activities and childhood trauma of the characters in the novel have not been involved. *Social Psychology* by David G. Myers offers a new perspective. The new perspective, centering on the definition of social psychology, illustrates how social thinking enables us to view ourselves and others, and how social influence enables individuals to better recognize the subtle social effects on themselves, and analyzes the attitudes and

behaviors of social relations. The self-concept runs through the whole social psychology research. The study of social psychology is very beneficial to people's future mental health. Firstly, social psychology can help us deal with interpersonal relationships better. A well-known psychologist once said, "where there are people, there is psychology." Therefore, studying social psychology can help us better understand ourselves and the psychology of others. Social psychology helps people deal with interpersonal relationships more scientifically. Secondly, social psychology makes people know themselves better. The social psychology of learning for self-education is particularly important. Only when we understand our own psychological changes scientifically can we evaluate our psychological situation. We will also have a better understanding of our strengths and weaknesses, which will ultimately help us further develop our strengths and avoid our weaknesses. Finally, social psychology can help us to realize self-worth. Studying social psychology can broaden our mental knowledge. With the development of modern society, people's spiritual life has become more and more important. In modern society, people suffer from mental illness frequently, and scientific knowledge of social psychology should be mastered. Social psychology can not only help people solve psychological problems, but also help people realize their own value. Therefore, this paper focuses on Toad himself, starting from social thinking, social belief, social influence and social relations in social psychology, and studies its process from self-escape, self-redemption to self-recovery.

2. THE SOURCE OF MR. TOAD'S DEPRESSION

Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure takes the psychological counselling cases as the clue. In the process of Mr. Toad's psychological counselling, according to the exchanges between Mr. Toad and Heron, the emotional source of Mr. Toad's inferiority complex, weakness and depression are revealed thoroughly. The book describes many details of psychological counselling, most of which are related to Mr. Toad's psychological trauma. Mr. Toad's trauma is a cumulative process, the result of a combination of multiform external forces. The trauma suffered by Mr. Toad comes from his family and friends, which leads to Toad's depression.

Firstly, Mr. Toad's miserable childhood led to depression in adulthood, the former is the source of his psychological trauma. Childhood memory is very important for teenagers, many things that happened in childhood are rooted in their hearts, affecting their future development. What happens in childhood is like an iceberg, buried under the huge subconscious, subtly affecting the mental health of young people and secretly putting pressure on their future development. Childhood experiences are like shadows that follow the adolescent's

mind, and the repressed consciousness will burst out at the right time. Toad's grandfather was a successful local entrepreneur who ran a distillery, and his grand and magnificent Toad Hall, which was visited by princes and princesses, is now in decline under Mr. Toad's ownership. Mr. Toad indulged in pessimism because of the huge gap between his achievement and that of his grandfather, who had won the great glory of the Toad family.

Mr. Toad's father's psychological blow to Mr. Toad is even heavier. Mr. Toad yearned for his parents' love and care in his heart, but his father never looked at him objectively, instead, he kept belittling and sarcastic Mr. Toad. Every time Mr. Toad tried to release catharsis by crying, his father immediately silenced him and told him to suppress his emotions. Mr. Toad lived under the shadow of his father's criticism and accusation all his life. His father denied everything about Mr. Toad, which made Mr. Toad constantly doubt the meaning and value of his own existence. Toad's mother also brought great psychological harm to Toad. She never comforted Toad and even embarrassed him in front of his friends. Mr. Toad suffered from a miserable family life in his childhood, which led to negative emotions in Toad's psychology. At last, the psychological breakdown is the direct reason for Toad's depression. In the "family of origin", parents enjoy great power to shape their children's personalities. However, under some overly strict requirements, children are likely to have psychological problems. For example, Mr. Toad's father always denies and scolds him blindly, which is closely related to Toad's self-denial later. The influence of his "family of origin" is part of the reason for Mr. Toad's depression.

Secondly, the conformity and obedience psychology in getting along with friends also brought psychological trauma to Mr. Toad, which then led to Mr. Toad's depression. Conformity is a change in behavior or belief to accord with others[1]. Conformity is not just acting as other people act; it is also being affected by how they act. It is acting or thinking differently from the way you would act and think if you were alone. When getting along with his friends, Mr. Toad was usually conforming, submissive, and receptive. He obeyed their expectations and demands, but he did not really like it. His friend Badger made Toad shudder every time. The Badger was always superior to Toad, always preaching to Toad, forcing Toad to accept his point of view without any regard for Toad's feelings. When Toad suffered from depression, the Badger wanted Toad to give up the position of school director to him on the excuse of Toad's depression. At that time, Toad could not refuse Badger's request, because he believed what badger said was dogma and had to be obeyed. Toad did not dare to doubt and object to Badger who was stronger than himself, and had to obey him against his will.

When Toad Hall was occupied by the Weasel, the Weasel sank the boat the Rat had put on Toad Hall, but Rat was angry at Toad, accusing him of being unpleasant, and not knowing how to keep friends. Toad accepted all the bad opinions he said about himself to please the Rat. It was Toad's obedience that caused him to suffer a lot of psychological damage in the process of getting along with his friends. A seemingly innocent rebuke from the Rat was enough to make Toad, who was already fragile psychologically, stir up a great storm inside.

Repeated criticism and blows from his family and friends were the roots of Mr. Toad's depression. Mr. Toad, who had always been optimistic and playful, lost his former personality due to psychological sadness. Robert knew the interpersonal influence on a person of childhood psychological trauma and later interpersonal communication psychological trauma. The reason why he spared no effort to describe the experience of childhood and adult depression patients after the interpersonal experience in the psychology of color thick works is to perform that many psychological abnormalities come from childhood family environment and adulthood interpersonal communication process.

3. SELF-AVOIDANCE IN EARLY DEPRESSION

Self-avoidance is a relationship state, which refers to the separation of the individual from the external environment. Simply, self-avoidance is alienation and withdrawal from society. In many cases, when people are faced with something they can't bear, they will choose to avoid it. For example, the departure of a loved family, the breakup between lovers and so on. If people are psychologically unable to accept the fact, they will turn to self-avoidance, which can paralyze themselves. However, as social animals, in social activities, we need to adjust our speech and behavior to adapt to the social group. In this process, self-avoidance inevitably occurs.

In *Counselling for Toads: a Psychological Adventure*, the protagonist Toad is second-generation rich, but he lacks the love of his parents since birth. As a result, Toad is more lonely than most people of his age. Toad has a strong desire for love because of his long lonely life. However, something has happened to Mr. Toad recently, which makes him more and more depressed. He was unwashed and ungroomed and wearing a sweater stiff with food droppings. He stopped going out with his friends and became lonely. He would cry in the middle of the night, listening to Thousand Sad Reasons, as if he had fallen into the abyss and became a frog at the bottom of the well. As the saying goes, "Things in the world, each of them was filled with grievance." He chose to live in Toad Hall, far away from his friends, and did not leave the house for a long time. "Like all sick or wounded animals, Toad had simply wanted to crawl away and be left him on his own [2]." After suffering from depression,

Toad only wanted to stay in his house, isolated from the outside world, unwilling to talk to anyone. No matter whether it was caused by objective conditions or Toad's subjective choice, he completely enclosed himself in his own space and kept away from his friends, forming a kind of self-protection. Away from social life, not only leads to his escape from society, but also makes him escape farther from himself. Toad, who should have been in a vigorous stage, became depressed and suppressed his feelings and thoughts. In a state of self-escape, Toad buried all his love in his heart due to the lack of love and companionship from his parents.

It is not hard to see that Mr. Toad lacks a sense of self-worth in the absence of other people's attention. Therefore, he seeks his remaining dignity through self-escape through depression.

4. SELF-REDEMPTION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING

We are, As Aristotle long ago observed, social animals. We speak and think in words we learned from others. We long to connect, to belong, and to be well thought of [1]. Therefore, after Toad suffered from depression, his friends helped him find a psychological consultant, Heron. Under the guidance of Heron, Toad bravely explored his inner world to carry out self-redemption. Toad began to know, accept and change himself. The 10 times of psychological consultation, like a ladder of life, made Toad climb up step by step from the bottom of the well, and finally realized its self-transformation and became the frog prince loved by everyone.

The premise of self-salvation is to know yourself correctly. The only person in the world who can help you is yourself. When Mr. Toad first visited Heron, Heron told him, "Counselling is always a voluntary process, both for the counselor and for the client. That means we can only work together if you want to do this for your own sake and not just to please your friends [2]." It is because Mr. Toad is so obedient that Heron will use guidance to make Toad feel his own importance. When Toad said, "I am a man who cannot be angry," Heron saw through the false image he had created for himself, and Toad realized that, instead of being angry, he had chosen to be angry in a different way. When Toad said, "I am fine," Heron made him see his sadness and despair, and he kept asking Toad how he really felt, because truth is the entrance to the inner world. Heron made Mr. Toad consciously think about how he really felt. When Toad blames those around him for misunderstanding him and making him sad, Heron pointed out his biggest lie: No one can make you unhappy, you choose to be unhappy.

The way to save yourself is to recognize your true feelings. To quantify Mr. Toad's mood, Heron supposed he had a sort of thermometer that could measure how

patients are feeling. “It has a ten-point scale. The lowest point on the scale is one, which means that you are feeling awful and probably suicidal. The mid-point is five and means that you are not feeling too bad. Ten is the highest point and means that you are feeling euphoric[2].” Mr. Toad gave himself a 1-2 for the first time, and the more consultations he had, the higher he rated himself. In the following consultation, Mr. Toad gradually realized that there are two modes of thinking in the human brain: rational thinking and emotional thinking. Mr. Toad chose to be depressed in the beginning. In fact, he chose to think emotionally, like a baby, only to react instinctively. And from the time he was healed and willing to dissect himself, it was a return to rational thinking. Through psychological consultation, Mr. Toad finally firmed his faith and knew how to refuse all kinds of things, so it can be found that he finally succeeded in self-redemption. In this small society, Toad developed from a depressed mood to outgoing and cheerful. In Toad’s struggle with the ego of inner avoidance, redemption is gradually strengthened, setting the stage for the return of the ego later. Through Mr. Toad’s self-redemption, we understand that we will only lose ourselves if we obey others’ ideas in everything. The most important thing is to pay attention to the real sense of self and not to escape from it.

5. SELF-RECOVERY AFTER PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALING

“Self-recovery” refers to the realization of a balance between self and the outside world through the cognition of life. As a member of a social group, we all have a basic need for belonging, but we need to find a balance among our needs for self-reliance, attachment, personal characteristics and social identity. In the novel, Toad has a pure character and yearns for a warm and loving life. In the absence of his parents’ love and strained social relations, all these are beyond his reach. But when Mr. Toad had his last counselling, he gave up his obsessed cars and rode his bike to Heron. Along the way, enjoying the scenery and the heartbeat of nature, he felt extremely happy in body and mind. Arriving at Heron, Heron asked him, as always, how he felt. “I am feeling happy,” toad said without hesitation. He was already planning for the future, not just thinking about it, but actually having details, agendas, and actions. This time Mr. Toad can really think about his surroundings, at this stage, he gradually formed his own unique social consciousness, such as, when defying authority, as he engages with the Badger directly, he seriously expressed his ideas and privately acted to prove himself at the same time, makes the Badger change views on him. At the end of the novel the Badger says to Mr. Toad, “that I am both pleased and delighted. I know that your father would be equally pleased and not a little surprised. Well done, Toad [2],” and the Mole says, “Toad, you never cease to amaze me! I have always found you exciting and larger than life [2].”

All these are enough to see Mr. Toad’s ideological maturity and return to his original self. When getting along with his friends, Toad was obedient at the beginning, and later he dared to express his own opinions, to oppose, not to yield, and not to be manipulated by the environment and others. From these, it can be found his spiritual independence. Mr. Toad began to take the initiative to control his own fate and gradually formed his own independent social consciousness. In the end, Toad managed to set up his own real estate company. It proves that Mr. Toad can not only adapt to the self in society, but also express his inner self, so that the inner self can be perfectly combined with the external environment.

6. CONCLUSIONS

From the perspective of social psychology, this paper analyzes that Mr. Toad initially suffered from depression and social isolation due to trivial life, and finally achieved self-salvation through psychological counselling and social integration. The story of Toad tells people that suffering from mental illness is not terrible. As long as patients actively receive treatment and integrate with society, they can eventually overcome their mental illness. Life is uncertain, we always may get hurt, and there is always a lot of confusion. Instead of waiting for a cure, we should learn to heal ourselves. Be responsible for yourself, understand yourself, and accept yourself, this is also the psychological state that contemporary youth should have.

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