

Self and Identity of Marie in Doris Lessing's *A Road To The Big City*

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ABSTRACT. Doris Lessing's *A Road to The Big City* takes the female perspective to review women's confusion about love, time and themselves and describe racial conflict, class contradiction and so on to review the broken modern civilization. Marie is one of the common protagonists in Doris Lessing's story and she is pure and innocent. Lured by her sister, she comes to the big city, wanting to have a different life. She changes her value in the process of integration with the big city. This article researches from the perspective of Marie, exploring the inner conflict and hard decision of the lower class women. Changing themselves can help the women actually have bravery, courage, and cleverness instead of backwardness and ignorance.

KEYWORDS: Doris Lessing; *A road to the big city*; Female perspective

1. Introduction

Doris Lessing, living in the South Africa for 25 years, pays much attention to the status of women. She describes a lot of women images in her works. From her works, we can learn a lot of the miserable conditions of Africa women. All her works vividly represent a series of important political and social problems.

While exploring individual experience and psychology in penetrating detail, she has also considered the interplay of individual experience with historical, sociological, political, and finally cosmic forces that constrain the freedom with which we can think, act and even feel.

2. The Theme and General Idea of *A Road to the Big City*

Doris Lessing casts her sympathetic eyes on the situation of women in the patriarchal world. Sympathetic description of female misfortunes is part of the author's effort. In fact, she wants to stir the female constant struggles against the traditional female role characterized by passivity, self-sacrifice, helplessness, and marginalization.

Marie is a female image in Doris Lessing's *A Road to The Big City*. Under the pursuit of modern city life, she flew away from the countryside of North South. This article based on the value change of Marie, and the narrator is Rosen.

The theme of the novel is: The lure of big city's life to people who live a quiet boring life in the countryside. People's hard decision to live in the modern city. Although she knew what the future would be, she chooses to stay without hesitation. She hasn't received good education. An innocent, pure girl, who lived a simple life in the countryside with her parents, turns to be one of many "Marries" like her sister. She has deliberately chosen her own fate.

In Rio de Janeiro, while waiting in the train station, Jansen met Lissa and her sister Marie in the train station. Lissa has already been in the city for a year and done such business. She cheated Marie that she was a typist and had a handsome boyfriend who is not only rich but kind to her. , lured by those words, Marie came to the city. Jansen persuade Marie to go home, he spend a lot of time to tell her what Lissa was really doing. So innocent that when Jansen mentioned the word "hotel", instead of embarrassed, she showed delight and interests---she misunderstood it to be a good place. It was not until Jansen said "Your sister's a bad girl!" that Marie knew the occupation of her sister. He used such a common word "bad" to make Marie believe the life. Then he gives her some money, buy a ticket and settle her down to the seat.

3. The Inner Conflict of Marie--Stay or Return

Marie is a common protagonist in Doris Lessing's novel, and she struggles to assimilate what the outside world gives. When she was confronted with a hard situation, she can't make a quick decision. So when Lissa invites her to the city, she escapes from the backward countryside. Living with her parents for 18 years, she hasn't received good education. So after receiving the letters, She takes it for granted that all the words Lissa told her was true.

There she sat crouched on the edge of the seat, watching the promised city sweep past.

The promised city/land was a terms from the Bible. It is a term used to describe the land promised or given by God, according to the Hebrew Bible, to the Israelites. The promised land is a place or situation in which people expect to find happiness, wealth, freedom, etc.. [1].

Doris Lessing intentionally names the girl "Marie". For Marie is a lost name in the Bible, in this short story Marie lost her way. The last sentence of the story: with the pound notes clutched loosely in her hand she was struggling her way through the crowds back to the lights, the love, the joyous streets of the promised city.

The end represents the theme and the main idea of the story.

4. Enlightening Cultural Consciousness and Constructing Female Subjectivity

4.1 The Reconstruction of Female

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone De Beauvoir claims that the cultural identification of women is merely the negative object, or "other", to man, the dominating "subject", who is assumed to be "self", which represent humanity in general. Women's social position is inferior, subordinate and marginal.

The development of globalization and the flourish of multiculturalism are the theoretical roots of multicultural feminism. Influenced by feminist movement, Doris Lessing spends much ink on the awakened women who rise to struggle against the sexual prejudice laid on them. At the same time, she knows clearly the right is grasped by women themselves in fact. Through building such an image "Marie", an illiterate girl who is for the first time leaving her hometown, Doris warns the readers changing themselves, through this way, they actually can have bravery, courage, and cleverness instead of backwardness and ignorance.

The female characters are marginal and subordinate, and represented with complementary to or in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. In this story, Marie represents the female image: innocent and know nothing.

Now look at some vivid description on Marie:

At first sight, the impression of Jansen upon Marie was "she was so different from what he expected"

Then a comparison was made between Marie and Lissa.

Tight short black dress, brass chains, high shiny black shoes

A flowered and flounced dress, flat white sandals on bare and sunburned feet/childish.

The impression of movie is different.

It remained for him a bare, brownish, dirty sort of place. On the contrary, Marie was smiling with charmed amazement.

After Jansen went to Lissa's flat, Marie changes her clothes and shoes.

"A pair of black shiny shoe on her broad feet, a tight red dress, a pretty face painted over her own blunt honest face"

Through the above analysis we can know that women's liberation not only reflects through the oppression on women's bodies and heart, but also on the rebelling spirit. The awakening of female begins with their awareness of self and identity in the society.

Marie was on her way to the big city. While Doris Lessing presents a real Marie, she also leaves questions to be answered, as if to show that in the developing world as well as in the developed world [2].

4.2 The Methods and Importance of Constructing Female Subjectivity

If women are going to get rid of inferiority imposed on them by men, they have to hold up feminism as a weapon to fight against patriarchy. It is essential for women to quest for spiritual insight into the self. Subjectivity is a fundamental concept in the post-colonialism and feminism.

In this short story *The road to the Big City*, Marie symbolizes the under-values women, and it is difficult for them to realize that women and men are sovereign equals and subjects. To have a bright future in the big city for so many “Maries”, Constructing female subjectivity is the purpose of women’s spiritual quest. They must probe their own experiences and assert their own desire.

A woman needs to recognize her own desire and realize that she is her own subject, determining her things, not depending on men and sacrificing her happiness and health.

We may divide characters into flat and round. Round character is applied to the character as opposed to Flat one, introduced by E. M. Forster in his work *Aspects of the Novel*. A flat character usually has only one or two dimensions of traits which do not change during the process of the work, while a round one has two or more than two dimensions of traits which develop and change in the course of a play or a story.

If the character can not be summed into a single phrase---that is to say, we do not remember the character so easily because she waxes and wanes and has facets like a human being. This is a round character [3]. Because they remain in his mind as unalterable for the reason that they were not changed by circumstances; they moved through circumstances, which gives them in retrospect a comforting quality and preserves them when the book that produced them may decay. According to the definitions about flat character and round character made in *Aspects of the Novel* by E.M Foster, Marie is a flat character. As a newcomer to the city, she comes across as simple and shy. “The girl shyly slid into the chair next to Jansen, averting her face as he gazed at her.” Vanity is the primary cause of Marie's change in values. Marie's ideas changed. we shuld memorize in our mind: Women should not lose their sense of reason and self while seeking their own value, which makes us rethink our life: women should seek their own liberation at the same time.

5. Conclusion.

Whether in the developed or developing country, women liberation remains to be a hot issue. Besides the struggle for equal rights and status, women should change their traditional concepts and improve the self-image. All over the world especially in the third country, there are many Maries struggling in the society for a better life. They try every means to stay in the big city, at the expense of their happiness and health. Through building such a female image “Marie”, Doris Lessing successfully tell the reader to survive depending on themselves rather than on the other. For this point, women actually exert a great influence on the society and they will play a more important role to promote the civilization process.

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Note

In the Bible, God led Moses and the other Jews who suffered in Egypt out of the cruel reign of Pharaoh, and after more than 40 years of trials, God brought them to Canaan and promised the land to the Jewish people for generations to come. But Moses was punished by God for whipping stones and other trifles. He was not allowed to enter the promised land, only to be seen from afar. When Moses led his people to the mountains near Canaan, while he was looking at the rich land, he fell down and died.

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