

Analysis of Katherine's Return to the Real Order in *The Well*: Based on Lacan's Three Orders Theory

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Elizabeth Jolly, a famous female writer in Australia, has created various characters on the margin of society. *The Well* is one of her representatives. It tells the story of Hester Harper and her adopted orphan Katherine living together in a farm. The originally quiet life was broken by a sudden car accident, after which Katherine became insane. This thesis discusses the process of Katherine's return from the Symbolic Order to the Real using Lacan's Three Orders Theory of psychoanalysis. The purpose is to reveal Katherine's madness for returning to the Real, as to draw a conclusion that Katherine's madness is not only the escape from the Symbolic, but also her resistance to the patriarchal society and oppression of Hester.

Keywords: *The Well*, Katherine, Three Orders Theory

Introduction

This novel was regarded by many critics as one of the most difficult and mysterious Australian works since its publication. Jolley is fluent in using surreal techniques to overstep rationality and logic. She exerted her imagination and creativity freely in the fictional world she built, making the story full of weirdness. Jolley created an old lame character Hester who was selfish and eccentric as well as a passionate young lady Katherine who was oppressed by Hester to show the suffering of marginal people and their confrontation to patriarchy. Scholars at home and abroad interpret this work mainly from the perspective of post-modern narrative mode, symbolism and analyze the character of Hester. However, few people put their attentions on Katherine. This paper aims to discuss the process of Katherine's return from the Symbolic where she was oppressed and lost her freedom to the Real in combination with Three Orders and will probe into the mental state and distorted psychology of women in the patriarchal society, to draw a conclusion that Katherine's neurosis is not only the separation of the Symbolic, but also her resistance to the patriarchy.

Misunderstanding of Self-Recognition: Lost in the Imaginary Order

Inspired by Freud's Triple Personality Theory, Lacan proposed three distinctive constitutes: the Imaginary Order, the Symbolic Order, and the Real Order to establish the Subject Psychological Structure.

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According to Lacan, the Imaginary Order is concerned about images and imagination, illusion and fascination, and especially dealt with the dual relation between ego and the specular image. The imaginary refers to a subjective area where the subject's individual life is followed by the logic of vision or illusion. It is a pre-linguistic realm where the perception of ego, identification recognition, and illusory sense of unity are mingled with each other and is closely related to the mirror. In this order, individuals establish the imaginary identification of ego and the world, but it is a kind of narcissistic misrecognition.

After spending several nights at the drive-in cinema, Katherine started to follow the lives of certain movie stars and would imitate the accents or their dressing styles as if she was also a star. She regarded the perfect and unified virtual image in the mirror as her true ego because of the influence of American movies. But this identification is a narcissistic misrecognition, which is doomed to failure. Hester also admitted that Katherine had a certain quality of copying which is quite alarming because there was nothing she could not copy or learn (Jolley, 1986). Even when sewing, Katherine would bare her teeth in the Hepburn smile dipping her head forward then lifting it and blinking her shadowed eyelids. She was so obsessed with the stable ideal-ego and the wasteful life and believed that she deserved to live like this. However, Hepburn was just the illusory image in the mirror and reflected the ideal-ego in Katherine's, which caused the alienated anxiety she must face.

Repressed Desire: Struggling in the Symbolic Order

Lacan pointed that the Symbolic Order structures the visual field of the Imaginary, which involves a linguistic dimension. When an individual begins to master the language, he has entered the Symbolic Order in which his desire will never get satisfied. According to Lacan, the essence of language is symbolization and the cultural system consisting of law, regulation, and rules is constructed by language. He also believes that "the symbol's order can no longer be conceived of there as constituted by man but must rather be conceived of as constituting him" (Lacan, 1998a, p. 34). When the subject expresses his desire by language, he is controlled by the desire of the Other. It is not only about the things and people around the subject, but also refers to the whole social symbols where the subject is located, such as religion, politics, law, custom, and other norms, which make the Other the most obvious symbol of the Symbolic Order with the authority to dominate almost everything.

Katherine tried to live an ideal life she imagined. However, she was trapped in the Symbolic Order, a patriarchal world both the society and Hester Harper built. Although Hester was born a woman, her words and behavior were full of masculinity, which is a kind of oppression for Katherine. Hester hung all the keys instead of necklace around her neck just like her father and could break a rooster's neck without hesitation when its crowing annoyed her. When she brought Katherine back from the store, her father asked: "What have you brought me then" (Jolley, 1986, p. 9). "I've brought Katherine, but she's for me" (Jolley, 1986, p. 10). In a male dominated society at that time, women were seen as the appendages. They were silent and had no right to speak. However, Hester's answer not only reflected her resistance to her father and the patriarchal society, but also showed her hegemony of "male chauvinism" formed under the influence of her father.

Katherine has been in a patriarchal atmosphere Hester created for a long time. From the day when Katherine was brought back, she was regarded as Hester's own property, and was instilled Hester's hobbies and memories

to make her as Hester hoped. Perhaps because she was an orphan, this thin and pale girl had a nervous and cautious attitude towards the world. Growing up in an orphanage, Katherine developed a set of rules of life. She tried her best to please everyone who could give her a chance to live. When Hester, the only child of the local largest farmer, decided to take Katherine home, she chose to follow Hester without hesitation. No matter what purpose Hester adopted her for, she could accept it. Since in Katherine's mind, there was no place more terrifying than the orphanage, she knew that this was the only chance for her to never go back to the orphanage, and she must seize it. Therefore, when faced with Mr. Harper's flirtation, Katherine used a playful tone to resolve the embarrassment. When got Hester's protection, she would warmly kiss her thanks. Since then, gratitude has become the theme of Katherine's life in the farm. She tried her best to help Hester, so that Hester could have more time to do charity.

In a society of heterosexual hegemony, everyone advocated heterosexuality and regarded homosexuality as abnormal. However, Hester's eccentric sexual psychology tried to keep Katherine only around herself; she spoiled Katherine and had a strong possessive desire for her and hated outsiders to disturb the world of their two. While Katherine, who has sprouted her love for men, tried to get rid of Hester, she tried to find freedom in the patriarchal society under the oppression of Hester, but the way out was always blocked by Hester, because she was completely attached to the old and disabled lady economically. Even if her heart was full of yearning for the colorful world and instinctive desire for heterosexual love, she could only be confined to the cottage due to the needs of material life. Even communicating with Joanna, her playmate who grew up in the same orphanage with her, was controlled by Hester. When receiving Joanna's letter, Katherine could only hide secretly and read the letter while Hester was absent. She was completely trapped in the Symbolic dominated by Hester.

Madness: Escape to the Real Order

The Real Order enjoys its fundamental status in the field of psychoanalytic theory. It is neither synonymous with reality nor simply an opposition to the Imaginary Order and it is located beyond and exterior to the Symbolic Order. The Real Order is a realm which is outside language, resisting symbolization absolutely. According to Lacan, the Real Order as the source of desire, is an original ignorance and disorder, which embodies a kind of total negativity and emptiness implied by the "death drive" (Lacan, 1998b, p. 759). Actually, the Real Order cannot be expressed by language because once it can be imagined and said, it will enter the realm of Imaginary Order and Symbolic Order. Therefore, the Real Order is not an object and it precedes language. This is the period when human beings are closest to nature and pure material existence. In Seminar XI, Lacan defined the Real as the impossible, because it is impossible to imagine and impossible to integrate into the Symbolic, being impossibly attainable. It is this resistance to symbolization that lends the Real its traumatic quality. Everyone both in real world and in novels is in the pursuit of the Real Order, which is doomed to failure.

In *The Well*, the anti-traditional homosexual relationship conflicted with the traditional sexual relationship. Hester attempted to kill Katherine's interest for male. However, Kathrine cannot directly confront the Symbolic Order Hester built until the occurrence of a car accident and the loss of Hester's money awoke her suppressed self and changed her emotional world. On the way home from a celebration, Katherine accidentally hit a person

on the track while driving. She helped Hester throw the dead into the well after which they found Hester's money was gone. Although Hester helped her cover up the criminal evidence, they had conflicts about the subsequent loss of money. As a "murderer", Katherine's reborn destiny fell into endless darkness. Hester, the one who gave her a second life, wanted to "kill" her. She was forced to get down into the well to fetch the money from the dead and was suspected to be the initiator of the money theft. When Katherine experienced such a great psychological gap, she became crazy and had a reaction formation. She began to fantasize about the dead in the well and fell in love with the man in the well.

Katherine realized that the real her was when talking with Joanna about having a wedding with her beloved man and the real her should marry a man instead of spending the rest of her life with an old lady. Only in this way can she go back to the Real. What Katherine did was to use the dead in the well to get rid of Hester's control. She began to imagine the thing in the well as a man who was still alive. She no longer repressed her hatred for the dead but turned all her resentment into abnormal love. She carefully prepared meals, blankets, and medicines for the man in the well every day. She even imagined that the man did not blame her for hitting on him and killing him, but was grateful, because he met and loved Katherine this way. She replaced the real motivation or reason of her behavior with a reason that the ego could accept, and the superego could forgive. She looked for an excuse to forgive her mistake of killing a man. Because of her misconduct, she could meet the right person and have a chance to escape from Hester and to find her true self. She said to Hester in madness: "I love him and he says he loves me and he's glad I didn't kill him only knocked him out. When he's up from down there he's going to ask me to marry him... he's the sweetest, sweetest person!" (Jolley, 1986, p. 206)

Conclusion

The protagonists of Jolley's work were on the edge of margin and unable to extricate themselves from their distorted thoughts. They are wandering at the intersection of self-salvation and struggling with the outside world. In *The Well*, Katherine described her fantasy and accused Hester of materialism. No matter whether this accusation is true or not, it shows the indignation implied in Katherine's complaint: dissatisfaction with Hester's ignorance of her feelings, desires, and needs. Jolley revealed the female emotional world through the image of the well. As a crack, the well gushed out Katherine's desire and gave the chance for her to escape to the Real Order from Hester's oppression. Her madness is not only the escape from the Imaginary and Symbolic Order, but also her resistance to the patriarchal society. However, only through madness, dream and death can be one approaching to the Real Order and no one can really escape from the domination of the Imaginary and Symbolic Order, because the interaction of the three orders can make people move forward. The description of marginal people shows Jolley's exploration and concern of these people and the exploration of human nature.

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