

Between Convention and Innovation

—A Border Crossing in *The Summer Before the Dark**

GE Jing-ping

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

Alice Ridout and Susan Watkins offers a best perspective in their book *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings*, to contemplate Lessing's writing. In her 57-year publishing career, Lessing always crosses the borders: as a feminist or anti-feminist, as a science fiction writer or a realist who lost her way, as a Marxist or a reactionary, as a British writer or a postcolonial one. Lessing's border-crossing not only lies in her different genres of writing or in different novels, but even in a single comparatively traditional novel. *The Summer Before the Dark* is a representative work of Lessing's women portrayal transition from focusing on their outside world exploration to on their inner world seeking. This essay tries to look at the content and form of the novel, and to illustrate that Lessing's border-crossing is also fulfilled in one single novel. She successfully crosses the border of convention and innovation: conventional in content, while innovative in form.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark*, border crossing, convention, innovation

1. Introduction

It has been 11 years since Doris Lessing was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The more we study her works, the more difficult we feel to categorize her. Perhaps Susan Watkins and Alice Ridout offer the best perspective in their book *Doris Lessing: Border Crossings* (2009). In 2013, Susan Watkins argues in her Lessing obituary, "Her challenge to generic conventions and boundaries is apparent in the range of her work" (Watkins, p. 617). Lessing crosses borders in many aspects. She is known as an innovative and experimental novelist, but her writing genres are many, including fiction, non-fiction, plays, autobiography, science fiction, and poetry. Her themes encompass a wide range, from the political and social issues of colonialism and communism to psychological depths and mystical heights.

She is usually labeled as modernism, postmodernism, Sufism, socialism, feminism, skepticism and a science fiction writer. In fact, in terms of ethnicity, she was a Persian-born, Rhodesian-raised and London-residing novelist. In her 57-year publishing career, she crossed ideological and generic borders: as a feminist and/or anti-feminist, as a science fiction writer and/or a realist who lost her way, as a Marxist and/or a reactionary, as a British writer and/or a postcolonial one.

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GE Jing-ping, MA, Senior Lecturer, School of English and Education, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.

The Summer Before the Dark (1973) was Lessing's fifth novel, and is also the most neglected one. It was frequently discussed in critical books of the late 70s, 80s and 90s like Roberta Rubenstein's *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* (1979), Betsy Draine's *Substance Under Pressure: Artistic Coherence and Evolving Form in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (1983), and Claire Sprague and Virginia Tiger's *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing* (1986). However, it does not appear in a number of books of the past 10 years, including Alice Ridout and Susan Watkins' *Doris Lessing: Border Crossing* (2009), Debrah Raschke, Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, and Sandra singer's *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times* (2010), and Kevin Brazil, David sergeant, and Tom Sperlinger's *Doris Lessing and the Forming of History* (2016).

In *The Summer*, Lessing presents a psychological journey of a woman whose life has been devoted to her family. Through the journey, Lessing deals with the pressure of social conformity, pain of aging and mental breakdown that a woman undergoes while searching for freedom, self-awareness and questioning her domestic responsibilities. More importantly, this single novel can illustrate both the convention and innovation of Lessing's writing, which is also a type of border-crossing. *The Summer* is conventional in content, while innovative in form.

2. A Conventional story

The Summer is about an ordinary, middle-age suburban woman, Kate Brown, whose very name and lifestyle shows her conventionality and the limitations of her outlook. She is intelligent, capable, attractive and with a successful husband and four grown-up children. One summer, however, Kate is persuaded to help out temporarily at the Global Foods, an international organization, first as an interpreter and then as a conference organizer. After the conference in Istanbul, she goes to Spain with a young American man, and they start an old-woman-young-man love affair which soon turns into a sort of mother-son relationship. When she realizes that she is about to fall as seriously ill as her American companion, she flies back to London, and stays in a hotel for three weeks. A dramatic change takes place in her during the three weeks, and by the time she again rises from the bed, she finds herself a different woman. She looks old and haggard. Nobody pays any attention to her when she walks outside. Even her neighbors fail to recognize her. She later rents a flat and lives with a young woman called Maureen. In the flat, she tries to come to terms with the dark reality of her past, present and future, through series of dreams, memory and experiences. In the end, she returns home with a newly achieved awareness of self.

2.1 A Conventional Character: A Middle-aged Housewife and an Archetype of Eve

Kate Brown is a middle-aged housewife who makes housekeeping her profession. She is always careful about the propriety of her appearance and manners, who cares more for the flowers in her front garden than for anyone outside her world, and would rather stay home waiting on her family than working for some big organizations. She is certainly a conventional character who is different from Lessing's former non-conformist, modern Martha Quest or Anne Wulf.

She is conventional in what she is doing and thinking. From the very beginning, a Biblical Eve is presented. A woman is waiting for the boiling of the water. Her name remains unknown to the reader until page 8, so that the focus becomes women rather than a woman. This one woman thus represents the entire female gender. She is nameless but recognizable. She is a housewife: "a pretty, healthy, serviceable woman" (Lessing, 1973, p. 11). Her deliberations and subsequent actions establish her character and conflicts. "A woman", the narrator repeats,

“stood on her back doorstep, arms folded, waiting for a kettle to boil” (Lessing, 1973, p. 5). These are modern times, but she boils water over an outdoor fire because of a contemporary problem: power failure. This metaphor of modern life initiates the action. This old chore presents timely and timeless dimensions, around which the story moves on. “A woman” waits that she may prepare the coffee for her husband and his guest. She seems quite the Miltonian ideal: she waits and serves.¹

A woman, as she might have done any time during the past several hundred years, stood under a tree, holding a crowded tray. (Lessing, 1973, p. 7)

In a garden, beneath a tree: the archetype rises almost effortlessly. And like Milton’s Eve, who has taken the forbidden fruit against God’s word and seduced Adam into eating it too, this woman must be banished. But this Eve is different. She is not willingly searching for the forbidden fruit. Instead, with her hands safely full, she does not consciously seek knowledge, although unsettling questions have kept intruding upon her consciousness in the past few years. She is a woman who does not withhold obedience to husband or household chores, although such matters seem less satisfying recently. And yet, despite her passivity and reluctance, knowledge of good and evil and exile/expulsion from the Garden await her.

After serving with pleasure, “a woman” settles down to enjoy her own coffee, careful to “set an attentive smile on her face, like sentinel, behind which she could cultivate her own thoughts” (Lessing, 1973, p. 14). Carefully responsive to the needs and commands of others, she also deliberates the summer management of her household—the arrivals and departures of husband and grown children, all mobile. But such decisions prove to be useless. Her life in the summer is decided for her by her husband and his guest. With a few words, they move her from family service into business service. She must leave her beautiful house and garden, to leave the world and life she is used to, to take up a journey in search of the forbidden fruit: the knowledge of the reality, the knowledge of her own self.

This woman longs to remain within the bonds of the family. She has felt challenged, useful, and often happy within it and only unwillingly admits to herself how it devours her. She has served devotedly. She has accepted the post-industrial definition of “a woman’s” true sphere: “the welfare of men and children” constitutes “the true mission of women” (Rich, 1976, p. 32). Kate Brown has tried to realize the familial ideal, with the female inside and the male outside the castle/home. She has longed to stay in the house, serving the others, doing all the housework, but she has now outlived her usefulness. She is no longer needed as a full-time wife or mother. As a properly socialized, conventional female, she has expected such changes, but not so soon and not without a retirement celebration among her dispersing “nuclear unit”. Kate struggles to accept this shift, admitting that “her energies must be switched from said children to less vulnerable targets, for everybody’s sake ... her own as well as theirs” (Lessing, 1973, p. 21). Though her emotions defy her intelligence, this exile of “a woman” awaits her.

2.2 A Conventional Theme: The Female Self-discovery

Rita Felski, a 20th Century feminist critic, asserts: “Perhaps the genre which is most clearly identified with contemporary feminist writing is the narrative of female self-discovery, in which access to self-knowledge is seen to require an explicit refusal of the heterosexual romance plot, the framework which has traditionally

¹ *The Return of Eden* by Northrop Frye contains this statement: “And when Eve serves the meal, goes away, and leaves the men to their masculine conversation, we feel that we are as close as Paradise can get to port and cigars,” p. 66.

defined the meaning and direction of women's lives" (Felski, 1989, p. 122). Some of the texts of the feminist self-discovery are familiar to large numbers of readers. For example, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983), etc. *The Summer* is definitely one of them. It involves a woman's gradual awareness of her own identity and inner self during a long and painful journey in summer.

Although the resolutions of feminist narratives reveal significant differences, they do share some commonalities. First, they share a common starting point, typically beginning at the stage when the traditional plot of women's life breaks off, with the attainment of a male sexual partner, for instance. The status of marriage as the goal and endpoint of female development is thus called into question by the emergence of a new plot, which seeks to expose the insufficiencies of the old. Secondly, the beginning of the text usually introduces a negative model, an image of female alienation which the text will strive to overcome. While the restrictive nature of women's social roles is often exemplified in the emblematic figure of the housewife whose entire horizon is circumscribed by the daily drudgery of catering to her family's domestic and emotional needs. *The Summer* is an example of such type of novels. The sexual division of labor manifests itself in women's responsibility for the task of emotional nurturance and in the prevailing assumption that the female protagonist will invariably place the needs and desires of a male partner before her own. According to Rita Felski, women's confinement to the private sphere denies them the potential for public activity and independent self-fulfillment, while locking them into relationships of psychological and/or economic dependence upon a partner who is unable to acknowledge women other than in relation to his own emotional and sexual interests (1989).

The internalization of this view of female identity as supplementary to and supportive of a male figure by women themselves is registered as the most disturbing indication of the deep-seated influence of patriarchal ideology. The protagonist is unable to see herself except in relation to the needs and desires of others. Doris Lessing writes of her protagonist, "she knew now... that all her life she had been held upright by an invisible fluid, the notice of other people" (Lessing, 1973, pp. 170-171). And a sense of remoteness from a preformed destiny which the protagonist feels helpless to alter is typically described as a splitting of inner and outer self, the heroine experiencing a powerful estrangement from the external appearance by which her social status as a woman in a patriarchal culture is largely determined. Lessing's heroine, for example, undergoes an intensive learning process in a period of a few months, moving from the settled and comfortable life of a middle-class housewife into the workplace, then experiencing a brief extramarital affair, and concluding her voyage in an anonymous London apartment, where she attempts to bring to light and examine critically the stereotypes of femininity by which her entire life has been defined.

Female bildungsroman, i.e. the story of women's self-discovery/awakening, can also be divided into the rational or rebellious type and the more conservative. The former usually deal with the newer, more modern intellectual women who defy all the conventional restraint and seek complete freedom physically and spiritually. The latter is about the more moderate and contemplative women and often has an open ending, leaving no clear answer to the problem, except for a few possibilities. *The Summer* is one of the later. Kate is a conventional housewife who passively leaves her warm and seemingly happy family, and has been pushed little by little to achieve her self-discovery. What's more, her return to her family remains open to understanding. Why she chooses to return and whether her return is a positive ending give the readers much room to think.

3. Innovative in Structure

“After the experimental and meta-fictional achievement of *The Golden Notebook* and the speculative experience of *The Four-Gated City*, both of which attempt distance from the realistic narrative mode through a long, dense and layered structure, Lessing comes back to her early realistic narrative style in this novel to demonstrate another female protagonist of hers in search of a new sense of ‘self’” (Aghazadeh, 2010, p. 14). Sima Aghazadeh states in her Lessing’s Narrative Strategies in *The Summer Before the Dark*. According to Sima Aghazadeh, Lessing deliberately creates a conventional and seemingly straight forward narration in order to interrogate the “constructedness of this woman’s identity, especially the gendered roles she plays. To do this, beneath the surface realism and apparent simplicity of the text, she brings into play the narrative strategies of satire, parody, and ambiguity. Writing in 2016, Sima Aghazadeh notes that “By insisting on the performativity of gender and aging roles in *The Summer Before the Dark*, two decades before the publication of Judith Butler’s theory of ‘gender performativity’, Lessing dismantles the very notion of a universal and essential self” (Aghazadeh, 2016, p. 25).

Besides these strategies, *The Summer* has an innovative narrative style. The theme of a woman’s self-discovery is built and developed upon the framework of three kinds or levels of journeys: the physical, the symbolic and the intro/retrospective journey. The physical journey is also the surface and conscious journey, while the symbolic and the intro/retrospective journey is the inner and unconscious journey. The three journeys, constructed at different levels, parallel and intersect each other. They begin almost simultaneously, progress almost at the same pace, intermingle at key moments, and end together at the final achievement of her self-discovery before she sets off for home. At the same time, they develop differently in their own way: the conscious journey is a circular one because after leaving her home Kate Brown returns back, while the unconscious journey is a linear one because she does not see the recurring dream after her psychological journey ends in the summer of self-exploration.

3.1 The Physical/Surface/Conscious Journey

In this particular summer, without any purposes, Kate Brown has been persuaded into accepting a temporary job as a translator for Global Foods, so that she has been forced to get out of her London suburban home, and starts her physical journey. From London to Istanbul, to Spain, back to London in a Hotel, and then in a apartment living with Maureen, and finally she goes back home. She works as a translator, an organizer, a lover, a friend, and as herself. To some degree, she has been crossing the boundaries always, visible and invisible.

The journey lasts more than four months. It provides a realistic narrative framework and also gives Kate Brown the opportunity to distance herself from her family and from her own past so as to reach a truthful understanding of her self. During the journey, she is not only playing the roles of a wife or a mother. Away from her family, her relatives, and the burden of the housework as well, she has the time and space to recall, to reflect, to experience and to discover.

The journey is circular when she leaves home, and returns home finally.

3.2 The Symbolic Journey: The Seal Dreams

According to Sigmund Freud, the best way to discover the interaction of the conscious and unconscious is through dreams because the hidden meaning symbolized during the dreaming period is a “substitute for other

thought-process” (Freud, 1997, p. 10). “Dream formation is based in a process of condensation” because dream thoughts are represented by means of one of the conceptualized elements (p. 172). However, it is the “unconscious that motivates most of the human actions through slips of tough dreams and irrational behavior” (p. 89)

In *The Summer*, interweaved with Kate’s memory and kept in step with her physical journey away from home to Global Foods in London, to Istanbul, to Spain, and back first to a hotel in London and then to a flat, and finally, home, there is another journey she takes in a recurrent series of 15 dreams.²

In the dreams, Kate is attempting to carry a lost, scarred, dying seal northward back to the sea. The dreams begin soon after she leaves home. The day after she has her last seal dream, she packs up and goes home. At a deeper level from her physical journey, the seal cycle is symbolic of her journey of self-discovery, of her search and desire for freedom and salvation from a scarred life and near death.

The worry, burden, pain, fear or anger we have felt by day can reappear to us in our dreams at night in totally strange or inexplicable ways. These dreams are an important keys to the solution of our psychological problems. Doris Lessing seems to attach great importance to the capacity of dreaming, for she frequently resorts to dreams when portraying people engaged in inward searches. As she states in *A Small Personal Voice*: “The unconscious artist who resides in our depths is a very economical individual. With a few symbols, a dream can define the whole of one’s life and warn ... of the future, too” (Lessing, 1994, p. 62).

Kate has the first seal dream soon after she goes to work for Global Foods. In the dream,

She picked it up. It was heavy. She asked if it were all right, if she could help it. It moaned, and she knew she had to get it to water. She started to carry the seal in her arms down the hill. (Lessing, 1973, p. 32)

The dream is symbolic of Kate’s own struggle for survival. The seal is her injured self, “helpless”, “stranded”, and out of her element, just as the seal is out of water. The helplessness, dreariness, and loneliness of the wintry and dark landscape suggest her emotional pain, her fear of aging and her long isolation. The repeated wintry landscape imparts a tone of hopeless desolation. That this is repeated until she arrives at the sea is a reflection of her own pitiable physical as well as psychological and emotional states. At the time, she is in a state “with not so much as a room of her own” (Lessing, 1973, p. 22). She is desperately lonely, thirsty for the warmth and familiarity of home. Her crisis, however, has more sociological than cosmic implications. No longer needed by her family and exiled from her home which her husband has let out for the summer, she is forced into “private stock-taking” (Lessing, 1973, p. 9) and into recognizing that her unease is very much related to her gender-role, her role of wife and mother:

The small chill wind was blowing very definitely, if still softly enough: this was the first time in her life that she was not wanted. She was unnecessary. That this time in her life was approaching she had of course known very well for years. She had even made plans for it; she would study this, travel there, take up this or that type of welfare work. It is not possible, after all, to be a woman with any sort of mind, and not know that in middle age, in the full flood of one’s capacities and energies, one is bound to become that well-documented and much-studied phenomenon, the woman with

² A number of significant articles have been written on these dreams. Here are some of them: Roberta Rubenstein’s excellent analysis in her chapter on *The Summer in her ground breaking critical work, The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* (1979). The following year Ralph Berets wrote, “A Jungian Interpretation of the Dream Sequence in Doris Lessing’s *The Summer Before the Dark*.” In 1985 the dream sequence is related to coming to terms with aging and death in Barbara Frey Waxman’s “From ‘Bildungsroman’ to ‘Reifungsroman’: Aging in Doris Lessing’s Fiction.”

grown-up children and not have enough to do, whose energies must be switched from the said children to less valuable targets, for everybody's sake, her own as well as theirs. So there was nothing surprising about what was happening. Perhaps she ought to have expected it sooner? (Lessing, 1973, p. 21)

The first time seeing a seal lying, moaning, and dying on the dry rocks high on a cold hillside, Kate instinctively realizes that she must save it. She must carry it north to the sea, or it will die.

The second dream occurs when Kate accepts the offer to work as a conference organizer for Global Foods in Istanbul, Turkey:

The seal was heavy, and slippery. ... She was staggering among the sharp rocks. Where was the water, where was the sea? How could she be sure of going in the right direction? Panic that this was not the right direction made her swerve off to the right along a level place on the hillside, and she went on. ... Again she set herself to go north. The poor seal had scars on its sides: it had been humping overland to reach the sea, and had torn itself on rocks and on stony soil. She was worrying that she did not have any ointment for these wounds, some of which were fresh, and bleeding. There were many scars too, of old wounds. Perhaps some of the low bitter shrubs that grew from the stones had medicinal properties. She carefully laid down the seal, who put its head on her feet, off the stones, and she reached down and sideways and pulled some ends of a shrub. There was no way to pulp this green, so she chewed it, and spat the liquid from her mouth on to the seal's wounds... (48)

The dream reconfirms her painful state of mind and her desperate efforts to save the seal. Its meaning is rich. First, it refers directly, for the first time, to her past life. The poor seal has "scars on its sides... some of which were fresh, and bleeding, and there are many scars of old wounds" (Lessing, 1973, p. 48). The scars symbolize her too much used and now ignored and unwanted self. Then it reveals a maternity, which has become her very identity. As a habitual server and nurturer, she forgets herself in the face of the wounded seal. The little thing has become her responsibility, for without her, she is sure it will die. She grows more involved with the seal by trying to cure its wounds with herbs.

Later, the seal seems to have abandoned her dreams for some time. She feels as though "she had strayed into the wrong room in a house, she was in the wrong dream, and could not open the door on the right one... where was the seal? Was it lying abandoned among dry rocks waiting for her, looking for her with its dark eyes?" (Lessing, 1973, p. 68)

Once the seal is replaced by a turtle. The turtle, having been irradiated after an atom bomb test, walks away from the sea towards its death in a dry hinterland. Kate searches in anguish for her seal, without success. This dream occurs at the point in the novel where Kate seems to have taken a wrong turning and made a bad decision: instead of pursuing her own quest, she agrees to go on a journey with the young American. As she later recalls the whole journey into Spain, she realizes that she "ought to go straight back to England ... rent a room for herself ... and sit quietly and let the cold wind blow as hard as it would. ... She already knew that Jeffrey Merton ... when she looked back, would seem to her all dryness and repetition" (Lessing, 1973, p. 67).

The seal returns again to her dream after Kate, having denied her own knowledge of the sterility of the affair she has begun with Jeffery, arrives in Spain:

She fell asleep and was at once on a rocky hillside. Yes, there was her poor seal, slowly, painfully, moving itself towards the distant, the invisible ocean. She gathered the slippery creature up in her arms---oh, she ought not to have left it there. It was weaker; its dark eyes reproached her. Its skin was very dry; she must get some water for it. (Lessing, 1973, p. 97)

In this dream, she learns that going to sleep and entering this dream is as much her business at this time in her life as wrestling with her emotional self.

In the other dream, which comes just two pages after her realizations about her family's blindness to her inner self, Kate is with her seal in the circus of a Roman amphitheater:

One hot afternoon, in siesta, she was in an arena with the seal: in the northern landscape was a Roman amphitheater. She was at ground level, down on the floor of the arena. Suddenly wild animals leaped from cages that had been opened in the arena walls. Lions, leopards, wolves, tigers. She ran with the seal and climbed as high as she could up the stands, while the animals came after them both. She made an effort and climbed up on to the arena's edge, which was a flimsy wooden rail that shook under her weight and the seal's... (Lessing, 1973, pp. 123-124)

Apparently the fierce animals, represent the hostility that her children, her husband, and even perhaps her lover, might show toward her real or new identity.

Gradually the dreams merge with her waking self. She not only struggles northward with the seal in her arms in the dreams at night, but also has a clear idea of it in the daytime. By now, "she knew that walking into the winter that lay in front of her she was carrying her life as well as the seal's—as if she were holding out into a cold wind her palm, on which lay a single dried leaf" (Lessing, 1973 p. 125). She even talks of her hard mission to save the seal to Maureen, whose flat she shares. One thing she is unconsciously or subconsciously sure of is that she must save it. She must see the seal back to the sea.

The last dream comes at the last night at Maureen's flat:

Using the last of her strength, she lifted the seal... There, on a flat rock, she let the seal slide into the water. It sank out of sight, then came up, and rested its head for the last time on the edge of the rock: its dark soft eyes looked at her, then it closed its nostrils and dived. The sea was full of seals swimming beside each other, turning over to swim on their backs, swerving and diving, playing. A seal swam past that had scars on its flanks and its back, and Kate thought that this must be her seal, whom she had carried through so many perils. But it did not look at her now.

The journey was over.

She saw that the sun was in front of her, not behind, not far far behind, under the curve of the earth, which was where it had been for so long. She looked at it, a large, light, brilliant, buoyant, tumultuous sun that seemed to sing. (Lessing, 1973, pp. 227-228)

Her deliverance of the seal to the sea parallels her relinquishment of her old place at home and her old job of mothering. The seal's return to the sea symbolizes her personal survival and rebirth. Her return to the source of knowledge and truth has saved her and opened up a new prospect to her future. Her selfhood is free at last and submerges into the flowing of the free individuals. The freedom of the seal is also the symbol for her final freedom and hope in the future. She is courageous enough now to face her true self, and to challenge the social conventions, which alienate her true self from the social self, and presents the manifestation and growth of her true self.

The seal, which appears in fifteen of Kate's dreams, can be viewed as a symbol of some aspects of Kate's identity.

First of all, the physical description of the seal suggests several of Kate's aspects. A comparison between its dark eyes and Kate's warm brown ones are repeatedly made. Kate's are always associated with "her need to love and give". She rejects that need when she denigrates her warm brown eyes, calling them "the sympathetic eyes of

a loving spaniel” (Lessing, 1973, p. 43). In the mirror image, the seal’s dark eyes appear to Kate’s maternal side, silently pleading for assistance (p. 69) and reproaching Kate when she does not respond (p. 97). They dually refer to Kate’s responsiveness to the needs of others and—insofar as the seal represents herself—her own need to be nurtured in return.

On the other hand, the description of the seal’s body connects it directly to Kate’s social identity. Describing the hairdo that Kate adopts specifically in order to change her image from that of a proper matron to that of a liberated career woman, the narrator speaks of the “the weight of heavy silk swinging against her cheeks” (Lessing, 1973, p. 39), and the “heavy curves” of the new hairdo (p. 47). In parallel language, Lessing repeatedly mentions the heavy weight of the seal, the slipperiness of its silken coat, and even the softness of its hide against her cheek (p. 125). Again the description of the seal is symbolically ambiguous—referring to Kate’s motherliness, her need to be mothered, and her desire to reject the motherly role in taking up a career identity. According to the content of each dream, one of these sides of Kate’s nature is embodied in the seal image. In every case, however, Kate’s care of the seal is a symbol of her attention to some part of her self, of her life: “She knew that walking into the winter that lay in front of her she was carrying her life as well as the seal’s” (p. 125).

And these symbols have been reconciled with the narrator’s prophecy in the first pages of the novel. “What was she going to experience? Nothing much more than, simply, she grew old” (Lessing, 1973, p. 9). To grow old, is to accept the darkness of one’s age, and to accept the reality of one’s past, present and future.

Finally, Kate realizes that in the past 25 years of self-negation she has been deprived of too much. She has overdone too much for the others. She has never lived for herself. She has never chosen what she wants in her life. Therefore, she will begin to choose for herself, to live for herself—as a woman, not someone’s wife or mother, not a servant.

Consciously, the seal dream symbolizes a helpless fish but unconsciously the slippery and smooth skin and featureless face of the seal image can be associated with a human fetus in the early stages of development. In other words, the seal is symbolizing a fetus, burden of maternal roles, a submerged private self and an individual soul that led the way to enlightenment and exploration during Kate’s dream journey.

3.3 The Intro/Retrospective Journey: The Romantic Dreams and Memory

Free from her family and the domestic responsibilities, Kate finds her mind constantly obsessed with long contemplation and memories of her past life. She tries to convince herself that her marriage is among the most perfect, and that in her life as a middle-aged woman there doesn’t seem anything wanting. And yet, somewhere deep in her heart keeps murmuring a muted voice of bitterness and anger. As a matter of fact, this undefined dissatisfaction and rage has been there in the past few years, though she doesn’t know where to pinpoint it and how to describe it.

Kate’s intro/retrospective journey, or to be more specific, her examination of her past life, progresses in dreams through a series of prototypical fairytales and romance, upon whose framework is constructed a rather vivid and detailed account of the most important happenings in her past life. Sandwiching the dreams, her memories rush out in torrent and carry her away back, back to those moments, those days and those years that she has been so far trying to forget. What is her married life? Are they really as happy as they look or as they say? The intro/retrospective journey leads her to the discovery of truth.

During the painful and lonely physical journey, Kate finally comes to realize that she is just such a woman. She has spent twenty-five years working for her husband and her children. She has been torn between and exhausted by the endless childbearing, child rearing and the sexual requirements of her husband, but nobody has valued this, including her husband, and even her youngest child, whom she loves the most. The marriage as shown in the dream here means women's self-abnegation and their unquestionable obedience and service. Kate's putting the seal down as soon as she enters the house symbolizes her self-abnegation and willing servitude. Once married, she takes up the role of wife and mother, but loses her individuality and independence. She has to serve all the people downstairs, and her prince upstairs. Getting married means for her getting rid of herself. She is living for the others, her husband or children, but not herself.

In dreams, she must meet the prince again but with the consciousness of a forty-five-year-old woman. In her first encounter, therefore, she equates meeting the prince with assuming certain obligations. She cannot approach sexual pleasures, for example, without accepting the responsibilities socially defined as hers. She recognizes the symbolic import of the dream immediately after she awakens: "...the dream's flavor was still, was more and more, that of another time: myth, or an old tale" (Lessing, 1973, p. 98). It has taken on a meaning both personal and collective. It could have been any woman's dream.

This dragon of infidelity so terrifies Kate that only her most courageous examination of memory, together with her second dream of romance, allows her to confront it. The details of this dream are crucial to Kate's dawning awareness of self, love and aging.

By resorting to dreams of romance, Lessing has examined female sexuality in greater depth than in any of her previous novels. In *Children of Violence* and in *The Golden Notebook* the sexual attitudes of the heroines are intrinsic to the plot, bound up with the narrative. Insights from understanding their own sexuality enable both Martha and Anna to know themselves better, and it relates directly to their future actions and motivations. In *The Summer*, however, sexuality is looked at from a deeper cultural plane and from a wider psychological and sociological viewpoint. In this book, Lessing probes into the conventional archetypes for the keys to the mystery of the vast differences between the sexes in aspects of love, duty, fidelity and aging.

Towards the end of the novel Kate has moved away from her initial social stereotype to a different kind of social stereotype despite the masks she selected. In the final moments of her psychic victory, she neither dissociates herself from her husband and children, nor deserts them; but she resolves to keep intact her own private self within the social and domestic framework. she manages to achieve more convincing individuality in the deepest layers of her unconscious. After that, the dream never happens to her again. The dream journey is a linear journey.

4. Conclusion

The Summer brings the reader back to the old topic of conventional life by presenting the dilemma of conventional middle-class and middle-aged housewives. Here the protagonist, after achieving her self-discovery, doesn't break away from the narrow, enslaving world of home and enter the big society to start a career of her own, as many readers would have desired. Instead, she returns home. This is undoubtedly a proof of Lessing's fondness for innovation.

More importantly, in this seemingly conventional little novel, Lessing tries not only to narrate in the strategies of satire, parody and ambiguity, but also in a new style. Three journeys develop side by side in a paralleled form, but in different shape. The surface journey is a circular one, while the dream journey is linear.

As is spoken by Kate in the novel, self-discovery doesn't necessarily lead to immediate change. It suggests emancipation, a freedom to choose. As to what Kate will be, what she will do, the ending provides no specific answer, and yet one thing the reader knows for sure, i.e. Kate is now a changed woman, going back to regain her lost garden, with a full knowledge that the innocence which sustains her in the Garden of Eden is gone, forever gone. A new self and a new style merge and intersect together to create a unique story of Doris Lessing.

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