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The female self as a narrative source in Doris Lessing's love, again

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Abstract
This paper seeks to investigate the female self as a narrative source in connection with wider constructions of femaleness with particular reference to the lifestyle women have chosen, the socialization they have experienced and interpersonal relationships they may establish through their lives. Starting with Paul Ricoeur's ideas that narrative relates with time and self is a form of "being aware of existence", I will give examples of how female self-expressed at various levels is mirrored in Doris Lessing's Love, Again.

Keywords: female self, dimensions of self, narrative time, love, again

Introduction

Love, Again was published in 1996, written by Lessing at the age of 76, which helped her achieve a good reputation as a well-known contemporary novelist. In love, again she mainly explores the unfair treatment that the marginalized aged woman, colored woman and ignored problem youth suffered in the patriarchal society. Love again is the study of two women separated by time, brought together by art. Sarah Durham is an educated widow of 65 who works in the theatre. She has moved into a serene stage of her life where she is able to concentrate undistracted upon work. Love and its attendant unmanning, she believes, is behind her. She has a delinquent niece, Joyce, whose near mother she has been accepting the responsibility delegated by her own tiresome brother Hal and his unhappy wife. She has satisfactory children of her own.

The other woman who dominates the book has been dead since 1912, when she drowned herself, although it might have been thought that her turbulent life was at last approaching a period of calm. Julie Variron was a beauty from Martinique, gifted in writing, drawing and music, a free spirit living before her time. Lessing has succeeded in rendering this person whom we see through the double glass of a fiction-within-a fiction as a book's live list spirit. Since the many characters in the novel are united and affected by her, this works well. Often in novels that take on this game of parallels and echoes it feels like technique but, as is invariable with this author, her work denies almost the existence of technique. The priorities are so clear that one isn't more that troubled by the scratches on the glass. Indeed in putting the questions differently, the absorbing and cleanly edited collection of interviews with her that Earl G Ingersoll provides, she declares to Brain Aldiss I hate rhetoric of all kinds.

In Love, Again Sarah Durham commissions a play about the life of Julie Varion. She meets Stephen Ellington – Smith, a rich amateur of opera, who runs a festival from his country house in old style Glyndebourne current Garsing ton manner. Stephen is charming, attractive, intelligent and clearly damaged. He is in love with Julie Vairon, whose own amatory career had been passionate and bittersweet. One of the benefits of the solidity of Lessing's style is the trust the reader can repose in her. Stephen's love across time for Julie seems wholly believable of all many love affairs in the novel, this is the subtlest, the most plausible and feels the most real. It's also tragic. On the less mediumistic plane, Stephen has a wife, Elizabeth, who has a decisively practical but not matrimonially very soothing affair with the nanny housekeeper. As for the apple cheeked bantering country women in the kitchen, that's science fiction. It is when Sarah comes to love. Lessing's description of the incongruity and violence of her desire is immaculate, but its objects never come alive. It is one thing and not unusual to fall in love with an unworthy object another to fall for someone who can't struggle off the page. Sarah goes mad for an actor, promiscuously narcissistic Bill, it is the emotion, but Bill is just a ganglion of adjectives. Stephen romances a pair of actresses who interpret his adored Julie; it because of the self-subverting misery of romantic love. Other passions seethe, some with novelettes simmer. A kirk Douglas figure announces he is crazy for old ladies. It should not have for the poly morphousness of human love is a terrific subject and Lessing is assuredly one of the few artists up to it, on both the eidetic and metaphysical planes. Now that Naipaul has so publicly announced the death of the novel, we must resign ourselves to not having what would surely have been a masterwork from him on this. Only writers of such hard won objectivity as these two could report valuably on simultaneously so noble and humble a feature of our condition.

The explanation of the disturbance of the three dimensions is Sarah's identity crisis relies on the approach of psychoanalysis and sociology. In Narrative and the set, Kerby discusses these three dimensions but focuses only on the facet temporality. Taylor's arguments which dwell on the moral dimension of the self and Anthony Gidden's theory in Modernity and Self-Identity to examine the social aspect and the maintenance of

self-identity. Despite the difference of their perspectives, all the three critics endorse the concept of self as narrative and at a closer look their points frequently echo each other. Based on their arguments, we construct the three dimensions of the self to facilitate the exploration of Sarah's identity crises, particularly their effects. Considering the beginning of the novel Love, Again, Sarah Durham is introduced to the reader as a calm and cool-headed character. Thus, she comes to stop for a minute before a mirror, common means for interrogation of decline, not necessarily a desperate one.

She looked at a handsome apparently middle-aged woman with a trim body. Her hair was described as fair on her passport. Surely, by now, she ought to have at least, the odd grey hair? She didn't often look in the mirror: she was not anxious about her looks, why should she be? She was often thought twenty years younger than her real age. Only later do the readers become aware of the protagonist's quest for a template of real self' partly due to her daily professional life focusing on a successful career as a writer/administrator for a London fringe theatre, Sarah has not been involved in any relationship with any man since her husband's death twenty years earlier. Her feelings about this are completely detached just as the feelings about her appearance.

She examined herself in the dim mirrors, switching on all the lights, not bad, she supposed. She looked a handsome middle age matron. A hairdresser had improved her hair-do: a small smooth head had gone well with clothes more expensive than anything she had bought for years. At the theatre, her colleagues commented her. Sarah, as well as her colleagues, becomes very fond of a lately rediscovered feminist, Julie Vairon (a nineteenth Century Martinique quadroon), whose haunting music and colly intelligent journals prove to be very basis for a play Durham writes hoping to produce and perform it later on. As rehearsals start advancing and mobilizing people, the company falls under Julie's erotic spell. Thus, Stephen Ellington Smith, a wealthy patron of the arts, confesses he has been desperately in love with the long-dead woman. Sarah, who is described as having reached the heights of common sense the evenly lit unproblematic uplands where there are no surprise allows herself to become obsessed with a twenty year narcissistic actor, playing one of Julie's lovers. Being exposed to such experiences after a long period of time fully dedicated to singleness, our protagonist starts questioning her female self in terms of life experiences.

She was being treated by these independent individuals – husband and young people only just free from the tyrannies of adolescent emotion and therefore all the more intolerant of other people's weakness as something that had to be put up with. She was like an old nurse who had given her years to the family and now be put up with. The virtues had turned to vices, to the nagging and bulling of other people (….) always to give out attention to details, minuscule, wants, demands, needs, events, crises (….)

Thus, the conclusion is that in response to the crisis, the female protagonist feels compelled to reinvestigate the pictures of their lives so as to figure out what has gone wrong. The survey of their personal histories produces a form of narrative from which the self emerges and against which they try to make sense of the present situation, Sarah's love affairs are the more overt and obvious responses to the identity crisis and, similarly, Mary's extramarital relations as well as her job responsibilities are a means of solving her dilemma. For Sarah, the temporal dimension of existence is also significant in terms of identity. As she travels form London to the south of France and back, love Again's heroine will move from erotic obsession to detachment. Her journey is prompted in part by an older mentor, a female figure. For Sarah Durham it is the spell of Julie Vairon, the long dead writer and musician whose romantic story – three lovers loved and lost, a child dead, a reclusive life ended by suicide, is the source for a collaborative drag Durham and others create. Long before the show is mounted Sarah falls under Julie's erotic be witchment. Therefore, the quest for self-identity would necessarily take the route of clarifying what is important to us and what is not. Our point here is clarifying might lead to a certain closure. However, in Sarah's Case the notion intensifies her wandering mind, resulting in a sense of disgust and staleness followed by a self-recovery. Unlike her, Mary Turner suffers from a sort of transition. She cannot accept the change in her life even if she understands its necessity. She is pushed into the deep end and completely loses control of herself. She is able to follow the progress her illness makes, admitting she is seized with madness. Then there is Sarah's lifelong jealousy of her younger brother, who upon his birth boosted her from her mother's lap. Ironically, his grown daughter comes to Sarah for guidance. A druggy girl right of the streets, she stops in for a handout or to get her aunt to do her laundry. Clearly, Sarah is bound to the girl for more reasons than mere empathy. This relationship has much more resonance than the relentless romantic hawing that take up most of the novel.

Sarah develops an intense friendship with her co-author, Stephen Ellington-Smith, a wealthy patron of the arts, who happens to be desperately in love with the long dead Julie. She develops a terrible crush on the beautiful young man, Bill Collins, who plays one of Julie's lovers. She learns that the play's other male lead, Andrew Stead, is desperate to go to bed with her. And she falls passionately in love with the play's director, Henry Bisley, who reciprocates her feeling but is reluctant to cheat on his wife. Sarah compares herself to the young actresses in the play, believing that in a few years, her body will be old and forgotten both by herself and those around her: She had been attractive and like Julie always had people in love with her, Basta. She could not afford this new feeling of loss of anguish. Sarah glanced at her forearm, because of the heat, shapely still but drying out, seeing it simultaneously as it was how and as it had been then. By looking at herself in the mirror and comparing her aging body to the younger ones around her, Sarah sees herself as composed of different levels; she feels superposed to the young Sarah, the real one, the one who manifests herself through a revival of passionate feelings.

Lessing provides a therapy for those who are suffering from neurosis through the resolution of Sarah's inner conflicts. Furthermore, Lessing's particular concern of elderly people, the marginalized group, enhances realistic significance of the novel. It is an analysis of characters in love, again from the perspective of psychoanalysis in order to reveal fully the complexity and reality of personality of characters in Love, again from the perspective of psychoanalysis in order to reveal fully the complexity and reality of personality of characters in

the novel. Hopefully, it may provide a new perspective to appreciate Lessing's works as well as draw more attention of readers and critics to love, again.

Driven by her primitive missing, Sarah has long demanded for love but nor achieved love in the really. Her misadventure drives her to drift toward love through fantasy in the imaginary order, while her unconsciousness propels her to keep distance from love imaginary in the symbolic order. In the end she peacefully accepts her lack of love, through which she becomes a cultural being. Based on the above psychoanalysis of Sarah's lack of love, it can be concluded that Sarah's move of her psychological involvement from the imaginary order into the symbolic order leads to her lack of love, a lack which ensures her existence and progress in reality. Such psychological explanation of Sarah's lack of love sheds new light on the way we organize our desire and existence, that is, we should obey the social validity, persist our desire through lack and process our social existence, a more advanced social being that has an awareness of human isolation and morality.

Conclusions

The end of *Love, Again* reintroduces readers in exactly the same room with the description of which the novel opens and whose inventory accounts for the protagonist's sensibility. This time, the character's sensibility must have undergone change, including the exploration of hypocritical memory. Just as she has scrutinized herself before the mirror at the beginning of the novel, so does her at its ending: she scans and skims her image, now finding herself, after merely twelve months, ten years older. The reader gets more awareness in a penultimate scene, where in a London park, Sarah sits solitarily while sensitive memories of her childhood occur to her mind. It is exactly the moment when, as Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis concludes, Sarah finds "on the other side of the whirlpools of masochistic lo ve[...] the beginnings of access to another dimension of reality" (Perrakis, 2007: 105) [12] that make her easily discover her true self. It's a sort of adventure that helps her understand that: *But one day you'll know it doesn't matter what you do and how hard you try, it is no use. And at that moment the door will slam and you will be free again.* (Lessing, 2007: 335) [17] Unlike Sarah Durham, Kate Brown is not a natural rebel and neither does she become one. She rather gives way to the pressures society exerts on her. She becomes the attractive young woman her surroundings expected, keeping her weight down, paying significant attention to her look to meet her husband's and children's expectations. What she gets in return is a sort of freedom that she does not dare to use in order to develop independence. When she realizes it she drives herself to a breakdown. As hard as she might try to heal herself, she cannot change her environment or her family. She alone has become aware of her problems, but she is not strong enough to overcome the accumulated pressures awaiting her.

> *There are times, you know, when there's a sort of switch in the way I looked at things – everything, my whole life since I was a girl, and I seem to myself like a raving lunatic. Love, and duty, and being in love and not being in love, and loving, and behaving well and you should and shouldn't and you ought and oughtn't. It's a disease. Well, sometimes I think that's all it is.* (Lessing, 2002: 218)

If self-identity emerges from narrative, then Kate's journeys and Sarah's descent into a psychic whirlpool can be considered as various versions of self-narratives. Moreover, the two female protagonists stand for the postmodern subjects of a postmodern writer, for whom the experience no matter what form it may embrace is both a response and a contribution to even conclusive evidence that reality and truth are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions and reconstructions. It is exactly the tormenting self-exploration that accounts for the importance of narrative as an expressive embodiment of our experience, as a mode of communication, and as a form of understanding the world and ultimately our self.

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