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ELC2013

4 October 2022

Analyzing the Theme of Female Psychological Growth through Varying Settings or Sets in *The Garden Party a*nd *Atonement*

Theme is defined as the central idea or topic of a story(“Theme.” 1). It serves an important role in cohering the discrete elements of a literary work(AU 106). Women's mental awakening and growth are literary themes that have received a significant amount of attention. With the rise of the feminist movement in the 20th century, women's self-realization is increasingly valued by society(Seigneuret 519). Through an analysis of the changing sets or settings in Joe Wright’s *Atonement* and Katherine Mansfield’s *The Garden Party* related to the portrayal of Briony and Laura, this paper will explore how the theme of women’s mental growth is presented in the two works.

In both *Atonement* and *The Garden party*, the shifting sets and settings are used to convey the theme of women’s mental development. At the beginning of *The Garden Party*, Mansfield describes a fabulous picture of the garden. The sky is clear and the weather is warm. The grass and rosettes are brilliantly illuminated. The lovely karaka-trees bear clusters of yellow fruit. Additionally, Mansfield depicts the indoor environment as the tea party is being prepared. The soft and rapid pace, the quiet rumble of the green door opening and closing, the amusing laughter, and the two dots on the silver picture frame and ink bottle formed by sunlight are all delineated by Mansfield through Laura’s perspective. By portraying the settings of the estate where the Sheridan family lives, Mansfield paints a magnificent picture of Laura’s joy and excitement for the upcoming tea party. This demonstrates that Laura was a young child at this point, enamored with the opulent lifestyle of the upper class. However, from the climax of the novel, when Laura visited the family of the deceased man, to the resolution, the settings changed. Laura travels by herself to the slum district while carrying the leftover food from the tea party. As the vast road to the poor section narrowed, the image described by the author became murky and dark. Simple-clad men and women rush by, there were murmured sounds coming from the decaying grass huts, light flickers, and ominous shadows float. Men, women, children, buzzing sounds, lights, and shadow were intertwined, indicating the chaos and contradictions within Laura. Laura dipped her head and moved quickly, wondering if anyone was observing her, fretting about her garish headgear, and debating whether she should visit this location. The vivid description of the sound, color, and light in the novel foreshadow Laura's development as a result of her internal conflict of opposites between her sympathy for the dead poor and the bourgeois values of her heart. This tension in Laura’s ideological sphere reflect her inner growth.

In *Atonement*, the shifting sets between the manor where the young Briony lived, the hospital where she worked, and the landscape in the final shot of the film also underline the theme of women’s mental development. Fu indicates that sets play an essential role in demonstrating the transformation of the characters' emotions, values, and psychological states(4). In *Atonement*, several set changes depict Briony's internal development under the fluctuating fate. Similar to *The Garden Party*, in the film's opening, Wright creates a stunning tableau: Cecilia and Briony were relaxing on the lawn's golden glow while basking in the sun's warmth. The vibrant pictures reflect Briony's youthful innocence and carefree spirit. However, Briony's misperception of Robbie increase as a result of witnessing the profane phrases he writes and Robbie's intimate behavior with Cecilia in the library, and the movie's colors shift into a darker phase. The color changes in films represent Briony's uncertainty and fear after being thrust into the challenging adult world. As she gets older, Briony starts to understand how the trajectory of Robbie and Cecilia's lives were irreparably altered by the erroneous allegations she made when she was a little kid. In an effort to atone for her sins, Briony decides to train as a nurse rather than pursue further study at Cambridge University. The hospital where Briony receives her training frequently appears to be wrapped in darkness. The unexpected turning off of the dormitory lights at night, the softly illuminated hallways, and the hurried typing in the background highlight Briony's internal feelings of loneliness, remorse, and dread. However, different from *The Garden Party,* towards the finale of Atonement, the scene’s effects shift for the third time from dim and depressing to bright and tranquil. The joyful conclusion Briony crafted for Robbie and Cecilia in her novel was presented at the end of the movie. In the shot, Cecilia and Robbie played blissfully on the beach in the sun while holding hands. This image's hues are warm, the scene is bathed in beautiful light, and the sound of the waves is calm and clear. Briony's ‘a final act of kindness’(Wright 1:53:21) to Cecilia and Robbie paints such a positive picture and serves as a key to unlock the prison of Briony's self-loathing. In conclusion, Briony's gradual repentance, introspection, and growth from adolescence to old age are set off by the shifting light, color as well as the soundtrack of the scenes in *Atonement*. Briony spends a lifetime traveling to find self-redemption and eventually becomes a truly mature woman.

Sets or settings changes are presented in both works. From the luminous and broad garden to the gloomy and cramped slums, Laura jumps out of the Eden of the upper class, witnessing the demise of life and realizing the vast differences between the different classes and the hypocrisy and apathy of the upper class. From the gilded estate to the shadowy hospital, to the cozy sea and beach, Briony sheds the shadow of her childish and emerges from her world, atoning for her mistakes and bringing the truth to light in her old age. The changing sets or settings reflect the mental development of women in *Atonement* and *The Garden Party.*

Works Cited

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