



The Characters of Jean Louise Scout Finch in the Absence of Maternal Love

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Abstract: This report will take Jean Louise Scout Finch, a little girl in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as an example, to figure out the features that a motherless kid has in a certain period of time. Our discussion will base on three typical characters on Scout Finch.

Keywords: maternal love, family education, gender identity, growth and development of a child

1. Introduction

Mother is the child's first guide in life and the first instructor to the society. The majority of people spend their childhood with mothers who have the most exposure to them; Mother is a teacher in a child's growth. In the family education, mother often plays a significant role while children are forming their behaviors. What's more, the quality of a child's behavior is often determined by mother and a person's achievements in life, to a large extent, are attributed to the mother through her will, strength, self-control and other aspects of influence. Thus, we can draw the conclusion that mother is an indispensable role in the growth and development of a child. However, due to personal or social factors such as the death of a mother, the divorce of parents, the jobs that require parents to migrate without taking children and so on, not every child can enjoy complete maternal love. Hence, what kind of reflection can the children lacking maternal love have in character is a question worth exploring.

2. The analyses of characters

2.1 Lack of gender identity

Gender identity is the correct understanding of one's own gender, that is, to master one's own sexual attributes or corresponding functions. In terms of Scout Finch, female identity is not evident in her daily action and even the antipathy towards her own gender can be revealed at many points in the novel. For example, "I reluctantly played assorted ladies who entered the script. I never thought it as much fun as Tarzan." [1] She refuses to play female roles, instead prefers the stories that are strongly masculine. Another notable case is when Jem mocks women, saying "Ladies pick funny things to be proud of." [2] Scout does not take a woman's stand against this somewhat offensive remark. Therefore, it can be seen in Scout's young mind that there is no sense of identity for the female group.

Social learning theory [3] points out that children's comprehension of gender role is shaped by the elders, especially their parents and teachers who live in their environment. And imitation and observational learning are important ways to recognize and acquire gender role. It is obvious that the absence of a mother's role has caused a flaw in Scout's female identity. Although there are some female figures around her to imitate, they are far from replacing the maternal influence and power. A classical instance is her resistance to wearing a skirt, which draws the ire of Aunt Alexandra. This can be proven from the following statement. "Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to be doing things that required pants." [4] Not surprisingly, Aunt Alexandra couldn't make her accept skirt for Alexandra is unable to have an impact on her as a mother does in the daily routine, but only educates her briefly and verbally.

What's more, when Scout is growing up, there is no one to guide her behaviors, especially when she is upset about being a girl. As for Calpurnia, the woman with whom Scout spent the longest time, rarely listens to Scout's inner voice. In addition, after her brother Jem says something like "I swear, Scout, sometimes you act so much like a girl it's mortifying"[5], no one gives her a positive guidance when she is not sensible. One the one hand, she will naturally feel that women are the embodiment of cowardice and then be more prone to admire boys' brave, tenacious character rather than accepting the feminine side. On the other side, Jem often treats Scout as a boy, playing and interacting with her in the same way that he gets

along with male partners. At the same time, her father is indifferent with their “brotherhood” for he can’t set an example to teach Scout how to behave like a girl. Therefore, she will imitate boys and regard herself as a boy in her self-consciousness so as to accept and get used to this identity. The two factors mentioned above make it difficult for Scout to identify with her gender.

2.2 High-tempered

Scout is a high-tempered girl because of her loss of mother’s protection. Mother can usually act as a protector of the children while Scout loses her mother when she is two years old. So, she has to deal with all the problems by herself in daily life. Although she has Calpurnia, an educated black nanny who acts as a mother figure in her family, Calpurnia cannot be equally treated as a mother since she has little sentimental interaction with Scout. E.g., Calpurnia was something else again. She was always ordering me out of the kitchen, asking me why I couldn't behave as well as Jem when she knew he was older, and calling me home when I wasn't ready to come. Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus always took her side. She had been with us ever since Jem was born, and I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember.[6]

After the analysis above, the only way this young little girl can solve offensive issues is fighting back with her fist. Without a mother’s help she has to be tough and strong, which makes her a high-tempered girl. For example, Scout's cousin Francis says something bad about Atticus and it annoys Scout. At first, she can keep calm but she cannot control her temper anymore once Francis calls her father a Nigger-lover. She fights back although Francis is a boy and she is not afraid of him.

Once her dignity is violated, she will fight back immediately. Even when her brother does not take her side, she will also directly get angry and vent her emotion. E.g., “Jee crawling hova, Jem! Who do you think you are? "Now I mean it, Scout, you antagonize Aunty and I'll-I'll spank you." With that, I was gone. "You damn morphydite, I'll kill you!" He was sitting on the bed, and it was easy to grab his front hair and land one on his mouth. He slapped me and I tried another left, but a punch in the stomach sent me sprawling on the floor. It nearly knocked the breath out of me, but it didn't matter because I knew he was fighting, he was fighting me back. We were still equaling [7]

There are other clues to show her high temper. E.g., When her teacher Miss Caroline misunderstands her behavior, she revenges the initiator of all and uses her fist again.

2.3 Unconstrained

Scout is an unconstrained child. According to the theory of the Second Sex [8], all the social rules about rigid definition of girls are directly imparted by mothers. Namely mother acts as a supervisor and controller in a daughter’s life. She will make her daughter less free and unconstrained as they are born to be. Even though mother knows the rules and restrictions she impacts on their daughter are quite not fair, they still insist their opinions due to the traditions or social concepts. However, Scout does not have a mother, which means that no one tells her or shows her anything about those social rules that are imposed on women. Like “you have to dress like a lady “or “behave like a lady! E.g., “Today was Sunday, and Aunt Alexandra was positively irritable on the Lord’ s day. I guess it was her Sunday corset. She was not fat, but solid, and she chose protective garments that drew up her bosom to giddy heights, pinched in her waist, flared out her rear, and managed to suggest that Aunt Alexandra’ s was once an hour-glass figure. From any angle, it was formidable.” [9]

Corset and the female garments are “formidable” things for Scout Finch. Dress and corset are commonly recognized as the fetter to females since they limit the movements of women. In the past times, wearing pants is the privilege of man. If any woman dared to wear pants and ran across the streets, there would be detention waiting for her. Girls have to wear waistband since they were 11 or 12 years old. The first women-wear pants were not appeared until 150 years ago but were immediately criticized by the whole society as a misconduct. In the past few decades, wearing pants is a modern action and women may face the danger of getting captured. While Scout is a tomboy who loathes to wear dress, so we can perceive her unconstraint and desire for freedom by nature.

In addition, mother is the order-keeper in a family according to the article — A Mother’s Role in the Family Education. The role of mother can be divided into two parts. First is to keep the house clean and order so as to provide a safe and orderly environment to kids, which is Scout’s black nanny’s major job. The second role is to keep the family in order, which means children must respect the elders both in family and in society. But Scout is a motherless child, so she seldom shows respect to other people, especially when others are irking her. For example, she never calls her father “Daddy” but calls him in name, which indicates the absence of order in her family. The nanny undertakes the first part of mother’s role while she fails to have sentimental exchange with Scout. Therefore, no wonder Scout often shows her unconstraint feature in this novel quite often. This character endows Scout braveness and courage but also brings her rudeness and tomboyish personality.

3. Conclusion

In the lifetime of a child, mother is such a significant role that is hard to be replaced by other people. Although the black nanny and other female characters who also give Scout and Jim love and guidance have appeared in the novel, the lack of maternal love cannot be easily made up. Scout is rude, unruly with a high temper. More importantly, she lacks of gender identity and hates the dresses of girls and being addressed as lady. From the analyses of her characters, we have found out the importance and necessity of maternal role in family education and building children's personalities and temperament, especially to daughter. Mother is the first tutor of kids and the public should pay more attention and lay more emphasis on this group. For those children who have lost their motherly love, both other family members and the society should pay more attention to their psychological condition and character development so as to ensure a better and brighter future for them. Although Scout Finch is a character in fictional book, it reflects a lot about the motherless children and their life and leaves profound thoughts and enlightenment on us readers.

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