

# Exodus and Return: a study of spaces in *The Summer Before the Dark*

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**Abstract.** British writer Doris Lessing (1919-2013) is praised as an epicist of the female experience. In 2007, she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. *The Summer Before the Dark*, published in 1973, is one of Lessing's best-selling books. It has been mostly studied from the perspectives of feminism, psychoanalysis, and narratology. This paper adopts an innovative perspective of space theory to analyze the work. Kate, the heroine of the novel, has long suffered from the patriarchal gaze. Kate resorts to a variety of spatial means to escape her original suffering. She tries to get rid of spiritual slavery through her exodus. In the journey, she discovers that only by establishing a firm self can she truly emerge from her spiritual dilemma. Lessing's pioneering exposition of women's experience continues in this novel. She points out that the private feelings of women are difficult to find expression in the male-dominated world. The story finally leads to the woman's psychological liberation and reunion with her family.

## 1 Introduction

Doris Lessing is known as one of the greatest female writers and the winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature. She wrote nearly 60 literary works on various subjects. Her writing style is unique, creative, and changeable, with profound thoughts, sharp views, and novel insights.

As one of Lessing's classic works, *The Summer Before the Dark* is a profound travel novel which tells a middle-aged woman's experience in a pivotal summer. After realizing her spiritual crisis, Kate resorts to a variety of spatial means to escape her original suffering and to resist the gaze. Kate comes to a proper understanding of herself during the summer journey and achieves a spiritual renewal.

The novel has been mostly studied from the perspective of feminism, psychoanalysis, and narratology. Few scholars have studied the text from space theory. Nevertheless, space is an important symbol in the text, representing the protagonist's situation and serving as a crucial means for the protagonist to resist the predicament. This paper studies the spaces in "The Summer Before the Dark" that play a prominent role in the novel. The chosen study method is innovative and benefits further studies of Lessing. Kate represents all middle-aged British women, who face complex and numerous dilemmas [1]. This paper explores an important feminist theme: the relationship between the individual and the family, a long-standing

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concern in Lessing's work, which can be helpful in addressing the practical problems of contemporary women's identity confusion and spiritual crisis.

## **2 A selfless dedicator and victim**

### **2.1 A dejected housewife in the family space**

Of all the houses, one's own family house has its own unique significance. Compared with men, most women put their families first. Women often take on more responsibilities in family matters. The house is part of their life and marriage. The space of the house is so important that it is not only an exterior structure framework of a home but also the reflection of the power relations inside the family.

In the novel, Kate is a middle-aged housewife. Her husband is a busy doctor who is not often at home. All her children have grown up. Therefore, she feels like a non-essential person at home. Her house becomes a base camp for their family. Children only stay there for a day or two when they have a school holiday or are in transit during a trip. However, even so, Kate "was looking forward to it: not only to the many people but the managing, the being conscious of her efficiency" [2]. Housework is one of the most demanding things on women's time and energy. However, for Kate, housework itself has a different meaning. In Kate's eyes, it is a significant way to show her value to her family.

In the novel, Lessing gives a detailed account of Kate's garden. "There was not a crumb of earth that Kate did not feel she knew personally, had not made" [2]. From the description of the garden, it is clear that Kate has put much effort into it. Kate has taken care of the garden and the house for more than twenty years, in fact symbolizing her taking care of the members of her family for more than twenty years. She has organized the garden well for the family to enjoy. Because of Kate's careful care, her family keeps a warm and harmonious atmosphere.

However, even within her own house, there are different space allocations and spatial relationships. In the home space, the kitchen is often a place to exploit women's time and energy, a space for hard work. At the beginning of the novel, Kate appears on the steps behind the kitchen. While her husband Michael and her friend Alan talk inside the study, she travels to and from the garden and the kitchen. The only time Kate enters the house is to bring the two men their brewed coffee. At ordinary times, her location is not decided by herself. Her husband often needs to attend conferences all over the world. She has to accompany her husband to different conferences same as the wives of her husband's colleagues. Her movements always fit with those of others, coming and going to and from various spaces.

Michael and his friend Alan also embody a condescending posture when they ask her to help out at the Global Food organization. "Alan Post and Michael were both looking at Kate, waiting for her to say that she would be happy to be a third" [2]. "Michael and Alan Post were helping themselves to coffee and waiting for her. What she was feeling was a kind of panic" [2]. Their gaze is extremely stressful, giving Kate a sense of coercion. Under this gaze of power, though unwilling to leave the family, Kate reluctantly agrees to their request. "'Of course I'd like to. Can I do the washing up first?' They laughed, she laughed"[2]. Although it seems like a joke, it reflects Kate's slightly poignant mood. Looking back to her previous life, she sees the defining feature of her life: passivity, and adaptability to others.

Even though it is her house, the most important place in Kate's life, she is not in control of it. About the house, her opinions are neglected by her husband. This summer, with her husband and children travelling or working, she is left alone, and suddenly, Kate feels as if she is a non-necessity. Kate is forced to accept her new job and leave her home. Kate's sense of loss is exacerbated when her husband informs her that he is renting out the house. Her husband deliberately neglects her wishes and rents the house, making her homeless

throughout the summer. She has no space to stay. She feels as if a warm covering has been removed from her, as if she is an animal being flayed. She is like “garments taken down off a rack” [2]. She feels dismissed and belittled because the house is considered so unimportant. Michael approximately evicts Kate from home, forcing Kate to embark on her summer trip. The initial purpose of Kate’s trip is not for pleasure but to find other new spaces and rebel against the gaze.

In her own family space, Kate works diligently to maintain her role as a housewife and consciously internalizes the male’s gaze in her spirit. The role of the mother seems to be a synonymy of her own identity. “This woman was Kate Brown; to be accurate, Catherine Brown, or Mrs. Michael Brown” [2].

She is deeply bound by her status as a mother. The word “choice” occurs throughout the text. Kate always feels like a manipulated puppet or robot. Because she always needs to consider the opinions of her family. She hardly does things for her own pleasure. Even though it is just a table or several plastic cups at home, she feels like it is not her choice. If she can choose, “her own choice would have been to go barefooted, to discard her stockings, and to wear something like a muu-muu or a sari or a sarong—something of that sort—with her hair straight to her shoulders” [2]. However, in reality, her time and place have to follow her family. Moreover, she has to consider their opinion while choosing her dress. Early in her children’s adolescence, she observed that they disliked her giving rein to her nature. Therefore, she does not allow her appearance to bloom. Her appearance is a conscious and deliberate choice, an exquisite tact. It is appropriate for her middle-class status, her position as her husband’s wife and the mother of her children.

Their family seems to be harmonious. However, in reality, Michael has had an affair for many years. In the face of her husband’s infidelity, Kate, who has been disciplined, still chooses to be tolerant. She often convinces herself that someone has to sacrifice in marriage.

Foucault explores the possibility of using the spatial power force of the gaze for discipline [3]. Kate’s husband, Michael, imposes male desire and oppression on her through the patriarchal gaze, threatening her mental freedom. Kate has to satisfy the desire of the male’s gaze in her family space and conform to the patriarchy’s demands on women.

## **2.2 Professional women in the public space and male-dominated society**

Public space is often seen as a male domain. Although Kate's escape from home to Global Food represents a leap from domestic space to public space, Kate seems to acquire a new social identity as a professional woman in the workplace and achieve economic independence. However, the male gaze in the public space continues, fulfilling its role of circumscribing and regulating women's behavior. Here, Kate still has to endure the male gaze that makes her feel uncomfortable, witness the sexual oppression that is ubiquitous in the workplace, and continue working as a mother under patriarchal oppression and discipline.

While analyzing the spaces in Lessing's work, Xiao Qinghua once mentioned, “The office building is...a place where status and power favor men...and gender differences and segregation are even more pronounced in this space” [4]. As a large international organization, Global Food is teeming with a wide variety of people coming and going, a broad range of services within, complex job functions, and a clear hierarchy of positions. It provides a window to observe the differences in prestige and power between the genders. In the modern urban space, the male can maintain his tight control by holding some key resources, one of which is space. By maintaining his separate space, he exercises authority and power over women, causing them to feel anxious. Here, Kate occupies only a secluded and ambiguous space. This is a closed, one-way space hidden in the corner of the office. When she is on her way to her male colleague’s office, “he hurried her along a wide passage that gleamed and shone and was many-windowed, and into a lift that was large...and along another impressive

passage...and into a very large, long room...” [2], while her own work environment is “in glass-walled cubicles at either end of the room...It would be Kate's task to sit in one of these cubicles...” [2]. The silence of the corner and the transparent glass reinforce the sense of separation and difference that Kate feels in the male-dominated society.

The modern woman has a choice between her family and her career, yet Kate fails to completely escape from her family after choosing her career. Psychologically she tries not to think about her children, “suppressing an impulse to send her daughter messages of love and support” [2]. In her role in the workplace, Kate is also unconsciously relegated to the role of mother. Kate, at first, always has a sense of being an outsider. “She was, after all, an outsider... She was a migrant; it would all be over in a week” [2]. She still does not have a sense of belonging and considers herself only a passer-by. However, gradually, she begins to help with everything like she used to do at home. Later, she is invited to stay not for her ability on interpretation work, but for playing the role of a mother well. When she is working as an interpreter, people in the organization often turn to her whenever they need help with trivial things, for example, asking where to buy food or how to find a hotel. After only a couple of days, Kate has “become what she was: a nurse, or a nanny” [2]. Kate is aware of the awkward situation: she still plays her original role unconsciously.

Aghazadeh argues that Lessing uses satire and parody as narrative strategies to question the construction of female identity, especially social gender roles, reveal the illusory myths behind, and deconstruct the norms of social roles that are taken for granted [5]. Kate finds that she is not really able to escape the male gaze and gain her own separate space. Women in social spaces not only have to endure the male gaze of desire but also sexual conquest in the office. In the office, men still see women as objects of conquest. At first, Kate enters the workplace to escape the gaze of men like her husband, Michael. She just wants to be an outsider, lowering her inner thermometer and silently observing the people in the coffee room. However, she soon realizes that it is not easy to stay quiet alone. There are always all kinds of men coming near and treating her as an amiable companion for the coffee table after “having given her that skilled, professional inspection...with which we sum each other up in such encounters of the sexual and professional mart”[2]. She discovers that if she wants her own space, she needs to “sit badly, in a huddled or discouraged posture, and allow her legs to angle themselves unbecomingly”[2]. If she did so, no man would see her. Only when all the seats in the coffee room are taken, someone would come to sit near her. In addition, there are many hidden sex transactions in the working place. “The sexual patterns were, of course, the easiest to see-as always; the casual couplings and friendships” [2]. There is even a term for the particular group-Debby girls, which refers to those young and pretty girls working as escorts. For those deputies who come at the prescribed time each year, the girls may be food guides, theatre companions, available flings, and the most enviable secretary candidates.

### **3 Kate's confrontational attempts**

#### **3.1 Kate's holiday: an escape from marriage and motherhood**

Having finished her work in Global Food, Kate does not stop there because her journey is not over yet and she has not really found a way to solve her spiritual dilemma. So, she heads off on a journey to Spain with Jeffery. The journey to Spain is exceptional in all chapters of the novel. It is the biggest change that has occurred in her physical space. She has fled further. The route of their journey is long and tortuous. They first travel by plane from Global Food to a seaside town, then by bus to a small town one mile from the sea; from there they change to another vehicle to a village fifty miles inland from the sea. Here, she is a total stranger. She is anonymous and no longer Mrs. Brown. She wants to abandon her past self and escape

from the patriarchal gaze. As a result of patriarchal discipline, Kate has always played the role of devoted wife and mother. Now Kate has doubts about her original views on marriage and family and wants to try new sexual and love relationships. Kate wants to enjoy the freedom of sex and love and, at the same time, be free from her motherly duties.

Being chronically frustrated by Michael, Kate intends to find physical and emotional comfort from Jeffery. She wants to get revenge on her husband through an affair. At first, she thinks that their extramarital affair, in which the woman is older and the man is younger, is “the most poignant, tender, poetic, exquisite” [2]. She believes that this tender and poetic relationship can undoubtedly serve as an analgesic to help her out of endless despair and grief. However, this affair is not so satisfying for Kate. Markow explores the reasons for the plight of women in the novel. She argues that the root causes are women’s failure to recognize the need to take responsibility for themselves and their exorbitant expectations of romantic love [6]. Contrary to her expectations, Kate does not receive much comfort but suffers much mental anguish. Their problem is first reflected in their discordant sexual life. In addition, Jeffrey’s illness comes suddenly. Jeffrey’s tenderness and sensitivity, as well as his illness, soon make Kate a caring mother. She urges Jeffrey to take medicine, takes him to the doctor, takes care of him at his bedside, and listens to his inner turmoil and confusion. She and Jeffrey immediately become mother and son. Their unhealthy relationship is revealed through Jeffrey’s body. She initially thinks that by having an affair, she can escape the pain her husband has caused her. However, in fact, an affair is not a useful way to solve her spiritual crisis.

During the journey, she is still unable to escape the fetter of patriarchy. Without Jeffery, she just stays in the small hotel room. “She could have arranged for herself; it had never crossed her mind, of course” [2]. Even when she goes out, she helps him find a doctor. The various decisions on the trip, such as the destination and transportation, are all decided by Jeffery.

In the small and remote inland town, Kate is still subject to the gaze and oppression of the patriarchy. Here, as in the family space, she is equally aware of others’ gazes. They see her as an invalid and expect that she will soon recover and return to her former normal role as a mother and wife. She and Jeffrey are judged by others’ gazes. For here, the patriarchal oppression is still strict— “men still owning women’s sexuality” [2]. The hotel owner finds out that his guests are in some sort of scandalous relationship. His expressions exude reproach and sadness, and he seems to be condemning them. He wishes the sinfulness and irregularity could be removed from his hotel sooner. Such a remote mountainous region, far from the hustle and bustle of the world, promises physical freedom but cannot satisfy her desire for spiritual freedom, and intensifies her inner struggle. Kate’s current understanding is imperfect. She only thinks that by escaping the family space, she can escape patriarchal oppression and motherhood and that by having an affair, she can escape the pain her husband has caused her. It does not occur to her that physical, bodily, and material freedom is useless if spiritual freedom is not available.

### **3.2 Change of body space: a silent statement against the patriarchal gaze**

The body space plays a crucial role in the construction of female identity in patriarchal discourses, which coincides with Lefebvre’s view that all social space begins in the body [7]. Judith Butler has also explained the relationship between gender and the body in *Bodies That Matter*, explaining how the body space as a gendered existence dissolves and breaks gender boundaries [8]. The body can also be a gateway to break the oppression of gender and resist the gaze of males. Kate’s alteration of body space becomes an important tool to resist the patriarchal gaze.

While staying in the family space, Kate has always confined her appearance and manner to fit her identity as a dutiful mother. After leaving her house and entering the social space, Kate's first reaction is to transform her physical body space, as if she believes that a new outfit and a new hairstyle can ensure her fitting in a new circle, a new identity, and a new life. At work, Kate, under the social gaze, still holds an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, she wants to reject the male gaze and keep the emotional thermostat low. On the other hand, as a fashionable woman, she does not want to totally "leave of make-up, and wear old woman's clothes, and make herself ugly" to avoid the gaze [2].

Later, after ending a brief affair with Jeffery, Kate returns to London alone. At the same time, she falls into a confused, disoriented mental predicament. She is haggard and woebegone because of a serious illness. She has lost much weight. Moreover, her hair becomes stiff and frizzy. As Kate walks down the street, she notices that pedestrians are staring at her, thinking that she is a crazy woman because her appearance does not fit the norms of a middle-aged woman. She walks through the city as invisibly as possible, resisting the gaze of others with her scarf and shawl. Kate wanders down the streets and unknowingly goes on the way home. Homeless Kate begins to miss her family and thinks that they would be shocked to see her like this. To her dismay, she returns to her acquainted block only to find that none of her close friends nor neighbours can recognize her. Kate begins to reflect on how she has limited her appearance and expression to a horribly small range, losing herself for the visual gratification of others. Kate has spent much time in front of a variety of mirrors during these years. However, now she is grimacing in the mirror and trying on different expressions. She realizes that there have been at least hundreds of expressions that she has never thought of using.

Instead of going to the familiar streets or the homes of acquaintances, Kate leaves the hotel and checks into Maureen's flat. In the flat of Maureen, Kate learns that, for the first time in her life, she is living alone away from home. "But here no one expected anything, knew anything about her supports, her cocoon" [2]. Only Maureen is confronted with the real Kate. She walks down the streets, observing every face towards her "to see how she was being noticed, how she was fitting into the expectation that had been set in that other person by the modes of the time" [2]. It becomes clear to her that all she has to do is put on this mask of Mrs. Michael Brown, "with the mask, the charade, the fitting of herself to the template, came the old manner, the loving lovely Mrs. Kate Brown" [2]. Gradually, Kate finds herself starting to grow stronger inside. She does not care about being liked by others or not anymore. Nevertheless, a week ago, she might easily weep for it. Kate ponders why it is important to meet the imaginary demands of other people, to make others satisfied, while her own dreams have been buried. She also wonders why women care about the other's gaze and conform their appearance, body, posture, and dress to social norms, which are like "an animal presenting its backside to another offered subservience, defeat, obeisance" [2].

Deciding to return home, Kate is well aware that previously, "the clothes, hairstyle, manners, posture, voice of Mrs. Brown had been a reproduction" [2]. All parts of her body which are ageing but concealed, are all objects of others' gaze. She decides to stop doing her hair and instead put it in a ponytail, leaving it white and frizzy. Her hair is like a statement. Instead of measuring herself by the standards of male society, Kate now asserts her individuality and redefines herself.

## **4 Equations and mathematics**

#### 4.1 A room of her own

During her professional days, Kate stays in the hotel of her colleague. She thinks the room is “much better than her large family house...this is what she would choose if she could choose” [2]. This room in her image has gone beyond architectural imagery to symbolize Kate’s spiritual pursuit, and it is a space where women can be spiritually independent and free.

For a middle-aged woman like Kate, complete rebellion from her home, and separation from her family is not the idea that Lessing wants to promote. Lessing advocates that women should have their own space. However, she does not see family and self-space as conflicting. After her trip to Spain, Kate is once again living in a space of her own. However, this time, she is filled with loneliness and longing. “Kate was lying in a room the size of the smallest bedroom in her home. It was planned and fitted like a work box”[2]. After an incongruous affair, Kate misses her family even more. At this point, the hotel room looks like a toolbox, free of clutter and excess, but also uninspiring and emotionless, just a place to stay for a while. She cannot help but think of her own room and bed at home, the space that holds her memories for over twenty years. It is implied that at the end of the summer, Kate will choose to return to her family.

At the end of Chapter 4, Kate does not have enough money to support her continued stay in the expensive hotel. Therefore, she moves into the ground floor flat, sharing it with Maureen. The flat is a space that belongs exclusively to the two women, Kate and Maureen. When quiet reflection is needed, “the door rang, or the telephone: they took no notice”[2]. They are the masters of this space and can make their own choices, free from anyone’s arrangements or influence, especially the man. In the flat, Kate has found a space where she can think in peace and someone who can really listen to her. Kate helps Maureen as an experienced woman while also reflecting on herself. The presence of female spaces helps women to focus on each other and to explore women’s existence together in mutual interaction. The unique experience of women’s lives is transmitted and shared in same-sex relationships, creating a unique atmosphere that reflects female culture and their rhythm of life.

In Maureen’s flat, Kate does not have to take into account the various roles she normally has to play. Her inner self can make a comeback in this strange space. The time that she spends in the underground flat with Maureen is the first time that Kate lives as her true self, without the pretense of specific masks to fit the social mould. She cries out in her flat room and lets out all the resentment, hurt, sadness, and anger she has felt for so many years. Her true self is no longer hiding in the dark cave. Kate reveals her true self to Maureen. “Maureen had been responding directly to Kate, to what Kate was, to what Maureen saw of Kate—which was a dry, wry, cautious smile” [2]. Kate then further learns to express her true feelings directly, without pretense. Kate is happy to be able to show her true self to others, stripped of any role or pretense. When Maureen says she is leaving home for a few days, Kate uses dirty words to express her upset. “To use the word was like entering forbidden territory—self forbidden, self-censored, even a form of tact” [2]. This expletive, which she has never uttered before, shows that she is able to express her inner discontent, anger and other negative emotions directly and that she no longer needs to pretend to be affectionate and gentle.

With Maureen, Kate also receives genuine trust and concern. Maureen sympathetically calls Kate “a sad sack” [2]. Kate feels touched by the genuine acceptance of her true self, a feeling she has never experienced before in the family.

In Maureen’s flat, Kate naturally develops a mother-daughter-like relationship with Maureen because she is of a similar age and has a name that is identical to her own daughter’s. They also share the same teenage girl problems.

Kate’s response to Maureen is a departure from her previous image as a gentle and loving mother. Kate learns that it is not a good idea to immediately show excessive care for Maureen,

as she used to do with her children. She has learned that motherly love must be given in moderation. They develop a relationship that is both close and reliable. From Maureen's perspective, she identifies with Kate. Kate feels accepted and valued. She becomes someone Maureen wants to rely on. This dependence, unlike the one she feels at home, does not cause much burden and makes Kate feel comfortable. As Maureen is faced with the life-long decision of whether or not to marry and to whom, Kate recalls seriously her past married life for Maureen. Through her relationship with the young girl, Maureen, Kate learns to see her relationship with her children in the right way. Originally, Kate has to do everything around the house herself. Such tedious things as household chores are seen by her as a means of achieving her self-value. She seems to have been assimilated into the role of motherhood. Not only has she allowed her self to be lost, but she has also failed to deal with the relationship with her family. Now, she no longer plays the role of the dutiful mother who has to intervene in everything, trapping herself in the tedious affairs of the family.

#### **4.2 The ending of Kate's journey: life in her firm self**

Travelling is a process of production of meaning and revalidation of the self. Women come to terms with the established fact that they have been marginalized in their families and society while at the same time researching the redefinition of their self-image and identity. While working and traveling outside her home, Kate breaks through the spatial limitations under a patriarchal society and dissolves the patriarchal gaze of power and discipline.

In the past, Kate has overly imprisoned herself both in appearance and thought as a patriarchal female role. She feels the constant gaze of man and unconsciously internalizes it. After realizing that she is in the middle-age crisis, she takes various actions to escape her old misery and to resist this gaze. However, then, after this journey, she comes to a clearer understanding of herself. Kate's choice to return home is not an unconditional compromise in despair but an autonomous choice after a new understanding of herself. At the end of the essay, Kate sets about making arrangements for the family's return after receiving a message from her family. Maureen looks at Kate with resentment and says, "I'm not going to be like you...You're maniacs. You're mad" [2]. The word "mad" carries a very strong emotional connotation and a warning tone. Her reaction reminds Kate that she has lost herself again. She cancels all her appointments and decides to return home in October. She tells her family to handle everything on their own. Kate has discovered herself and is no longer willing to unconditionally sacrifice her own feelings and desires in order to please her family. When Kate is at a crossroads in her life, this voyage allows her to see herself clearly: life is not elsewhere but in her firm self.

Virginia Tiger considers the novel, like *The Golden Notebook*, a contemporary guide from an intelligent woman who was once confused for other intelligent women [9]. Lessing does not share the extreme feminist view of completely overthrowing the peculiar femininity and image of women. In Lessing's view, most housewives today must first be free from mental slavery and traditional conventions to achieve emancipation and freedom. Woman's self-awareness is fundamental to the pursuit of freedom. Lessing's perspective reflects her pragmatic approach to women's issues. Self-discovery does not imply instantaneous change but rather the freedom of choice and emancipation.

Shi Yi suggests that the novel is a journey of awakening and psychological growth of Kate's sense of self through the three stages: awakening, exploration, and self-discovery [10]. Kate's journey in this pivotal summer is a journey into her soul. Kate embodies a lot of middle-aged women. Lessing is educating all women on how to live through her precise portrayal, providing us with unlimited inspiration and insights.



## 5 Conclusion

In *The Summer Before the Dark*, the heroine, Kate, a representative middle-class housewife, has long played the role of mother and wife at home. After leaving home, Kate employs a number of rebellious spatial means to resist this patriarchal oppression. Although her physical body exodus, the spirit self did not. Abolishing a single-minded desire to break out of physical space, Kate gradually became aware of the construction of her mental space. In the end, although she returns to her family, she returns with a new self and her spirit has changed. Through her journey in the summer, Kate achieves the reconstruction of self-identity. She discovers that only by establishing a firm self can she truly emerge from her spiritual dilemma. The ending leaves room for imagination and hope.

This thesis uses the space theory to analyze *The Summer Before the Dark*. The study method chosen is innovative which offers a new analytic perspective and inspires further study on Doris Lessing's *The Summer Before the Dark*. Unlike extreme feminists, Lessing seeks practical solutions while exposing the patriarchal social gaze and the injustices of men and women in society, proposing ways for women to find spiritual freedom while advocating balance between the individual and the family, offering a possible guide for contemporary women to solve their spiritual confusion and achieve self-value. In this novel, Kate's psychological space is also worth paying attention to. Kate experiences equally meaningful journeys in her dreams, and future research can combine the tangled narrative with analysis.

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