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ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF GENRE FEATURES IN DORIS LESSING’S SHORT STORIES

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Abstract the influence of modernist and postcolonial literary traditions on Lessing’s narrative techniques. Her stories reflect a deep engagement with issues such as gender identity, individual freedom, social constraints, and colonial experience This article explores the artistic representation of genre features in the short stories of Doris Lessing, one of the most influential literary figures of the twentieth century. The study focuses on how Lessing redefines and transforms the conventional boundaries of the short story genre through innovative narrative strategies, thematic complexity, and psychological depth. While traditional short stories often rely on linear plots, concise structures, and unified effects, Lessing’s works challenge these norms by introducing fragmented narration, open endings, and multi-layered perspectives.

The research is grounded in qualitative literary analysis and examines selected short stories, including “To Room Nineteen,” “A Sunrise on the Veld,” and “The Habit of Loving.” These texts are analyzed in terms of their structural organization, thematic concerns, and stylistic devices. The article pays particular attention to the interaction between form and content, demonstrating how genre features are not only preserved but also artistically transformed in Lessing’s works.

Keywords Doris Lessing; short story genre; artistic representation; narrative techniques; psychological realism; modernism; postcolonial literature; genre transformation; English literature; literary analysis

INTRODUCTION

The short story has long been recognized as one of the most flexible and dynamic genres in literature. Its relatively concise form allows writers to experiment with narrative techniques, thematic focus, and stylistic expression. Throughout the twentieth century, the

genre underwent significant transformations, reflecting the complexities of modern life and the shifting perspectives of writers and readers alike. Among the authors who played a crucial role in this transformation, Doris Lessing stands out as a writer who consistently challenged and redefined the boundaries of short fiction.

Lessing’s literary career spans several decades and encompasses a wide range of themes and styles. Although she is widely known for her novels, her short stories represent an equally important aspect of her literary work. In these works, Lessing demonstrates a remarkable ability to combine traditional narrative elements with innovative techniques, creating stories that are both structurally complex and thematically rich. Her short fiction reflects not only her personal experiences but also broader social, political, and cultural realities.

One of the defining characteristics of Lessing’s short stories is their focus on the inner lives of characters. Unlike conventional narratives that prioritize external events and plot development, Lessing often centers her stories on psychological processes, emotional conflicts, and existential questions.

This shift in focus results in a reconfiguration of genre features, where traditional elements such as plot, setting, and character are reinterpreted through a more introspective and analytical lens.

In addition to psychological depth, Lessing’s stories are notable for their engagement with social and ideological issues. Themes such as gender inequality, colonialism, racial identity, and personal freedom are central to her work. These themes are not merely presented as background elements; rather, they are integrated into the narrative structure and influence the development of the story itself. As a result, the genre features of the short story are transformed into tools for expressing complex and often controversial ideas.

Another important aspect of Lessing’s short fiction is her use of narrative experimentation. Her stories frequently employ non-linear structures, shifting points of view, and ambiguous endings. These techniques challenge the reader’s expectations and encourage active interpretation. In this sense, Lessing’s work aligns with modernist literary traditions, which emphasize fragmentation, subjectivity, and the limits of representation. At the same time, her stories also anticipate postmodern concerns with multiplicity and uncertainty.

The relevance of studying genre features in Lessing’s short stories lies in the broader context of literary theory and criticism. Genre is not a static concept; it evolves in response to changing cultural and artistic conditions. By examining how Lessing manipulates and redefines genre conventions, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between form and meaning in literature. The analysis also highlights the role of individual authors in shaping and transforming literary traditions.

The primary aim of this article is to investigate how genre features are artistically represented in the short stories of Doris Lessing. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the key characteristics of the short story genre in Lessing’s works?
2. How does Lessing modify traditional narrative structures and stylistic conventions?
3. In what ways do thematic concerns influence the artistic representation of genre features?

In order to answer these questions, the article adopts a qualitative analytical approach, focusing on selected texts that exemplify Lessing’s narrative style and thematic interests. The study is organized according to the IMRAD structure, which allows for a systematic presentation of the research process and findings.

In conclusion, the introduction establishes the theoretical and contextual framework for analyzing Lessing’s short stories. It emphasizes the significance of genre as a critical category and highlights the innovative nature of Lessing’s contribution to the development of short fiction. The following sections will provide a detailed examination of the methods, results, and implications of this analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach to examine the artistic representation of genre features in the short stories of Doris Lessing. Since the research focuses on literary texts and their interpretative dimensions, qualitative analysis is considered the most appropriate method for exploring narrative structures, stylistic devices, and thematic patterns.

The research is based on a textual analysis of selected short stories, aiming to identify how genre features are constructed and artistically expressed. The descriptive-analytical design allows for a detailed examination of literary elements such as plot structure, characterization, narrative voice, and thematic development.

The study does not attempt to quantify literary features; instead, it seeks to interpret how these elements function within the text and contribute to the transformation of the short story genre. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the relationship between form and meaning in Lessing’s short fiction.

The primary sources of this research consist of selected short stories by Doris Lessing, chosen for their relevance to the topic and their representation of key genre characteristics. The selected stories include:

To Room Nineteen

A Sunrise on the Veld

The Habit of Loving

These texts were selected based on the following criteria:

Their strong representation of psychological and social themes

Their use of diverse narrative techniques

Their recognition in literary criticism as significant examples of Lessing’s short fiction

To achieve the research objectives, the following analytical methods are applied:

Close Reading

Close reading is used as the primary method of analysis. This involves a careful and detailed examination of the texts to identify stylistic and structural features. Attention is paid to language use, imagery, symbolism, and narrative perspective.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is employed to explore the central ideas present in the stories. Themes such as identity, gender roles, psychological conflict, and social constraints are analyzed in relation to the structure of the narrative. This method helps to reveal how thematic concerns shape genre features.

Structural Analysis

Structural analysis focuses on the organization of the narrative, including plot development, sequence of events, and narrative techniques. Special attention is given to non-linear structures, shifts in perspective, and open endings, which are characteristic of Lessing’s storytelling.

Comparative Analysis

The study also includes a comparative dimension, examining how Lessing’s short stories differ from traditional models of the genre. Classical principles of the short story, associated with Edgar Allan Poe, emphasize unity, brevity, and a clear narrative structure. By comparing these conventions with Lessing’s works, the research highlights her innovative approach to genre.

The analysis is guided by key concepts from literary theory. The study draws on genre theory to understand the evolving nature of the short story and its formal characteristics. The ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin are particularly relevant, especially his concept of dialogism, which emphasizes the interaction of multiple voices and perspectives within a text.

In addition, elements of modernist criticism are used to explain the presence of fragmentation, subjectivity, and psychological depth in Lessing’s stories. These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for interpreting the artistic techniques employed by the author.

This study is limited to a small number of selected short stories, which may not fully represent the entire body of Doris Lessing’s work. Furthermore, as a qualitative study, the analysis is interpretative and may allow for alternative perspectives.

However, the selected texts provide sufficient material to identify key patterns and draw meaningful conclusions about the artistic representation of genre features.

In summary, the methodology of this study is based on qualitative textual analysis, combining close reading, thematic interpretation, structural examination, and comparative analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive investigation of how genre features are artistically represented and transformed in Lessing’s short stories.

RESULTS

The analysis of selected short stories by Doris Lessing reveals a complex and multi-layered artistic representation of genre features. The findings demonstrate that Lessing not only employs traditional elements of the short story but also significantly transforms them through innovative narrative techniques, psychological depth, and thematic integration.

One of the most prominent findings is the transformation of conventional narrative structure. Unlike traditional short stories, which typically follow a linear progression with a clear beginning, middle, and end, Lessing’s stories often disrupt this pattern. For example, in *To Room Nineteen*, the narrative unfolds through a gradual exploration of the protagonist’s psychological state rather than through a sequence of external events.

The structure is often fragmented, with shifts in time and perspective that challenge the reader’s expectations. Instead of a clearly defined climax, Lessing frequently employs open or ambiguous endings. This structural flexibility allows the narrative to reflect the complexity of human experience and avoids simplistic resolutions.

Another significant result is the central role of psychological realism in shaping genre features. Lessing’s stories prioritize the internal experiences of characters, focusing on thoughts, emotions, and subconscious conflicts. This emphasis shifts the focus of the narrative from action to introspection.

Characters are often depicted in moments of crisis or transformation, where their inner conflicts become the primary driving force of the story. The use of interior monologue and free indirect discourse allows readers to access the characters’ mental processes, creating a deeper emotional engagement.

As a result, traditional elements such as plot and action are redefined, becoming secondary to psychological exploration. This represents a significant departure from classical short story conventions.

The analysis also shows that Lessing’s short stories are deeply embedded in social and ideological contexts. Themes such as gender inequality, colonialism, alienation, and personal freedom are not merely background elements but are integral to the narrative structure.

In *A Sunrise on the Veld*, for instance, the depiction of the natural environment is closely linked to themes of growth, identity, and human vulnerability. Similarly, *The Habit of Loving* explores emotional dependence and societal expectations, particularly in relation to gender roles.

These themes influence the development of genre features by shaping character behavior, narrative progression, and the overall tone of the story. The integration of social critique into the narrative structure enhances the artistic complexity of the genre.

Lessing’s use of symbolism and imagery is another key aspect of her artistic representation of genre features. Objects, settings, and natural elements often carry symbolic meanings that extend beyond their literal function.

For example, physical spaces such as rooms, landscapes, or isolated environments frequently symbolize psychological states or social conditions. This symbolic dimension adds depth to the narrative and allows for multiple layers of interpretation.

Imagery is used not only to create vivid descriptions but also to reinforce thematic concerns. The interaction between imagery and theme contributes to the cohesion and artistic unity of the stories.

The findings indicate that narrative voice and perspective play a crucial role in shaping genre features in Lessing’s short stories. She frequently employs shifts in point of view, moving between third-person narration and a more subjective, character-centered perspective.

This technique creates a sense of ambiguity and multiplicity, as the reader is exposed to different interpretations of events. The narrative voice often maintains a balance between objectivity and emotional involvement, allowing for both critical distance and empathetic understanding.

Such flexibility in narrative perspective challenges the traditional notion of a stable and authoritative narrator, further contributing to the transformation of the genre.

A comparison with classical short story theory highlights another important result: Lessing’s departure from the principle of unity of effect associated with Edgar Allan Poe. While Poe emphasizes a single, unified emotional impact, Lessing’s stories often produce multiple, sometimes conflicting, responses.

Her narratives are open-ended and resist definitive interpretation. This multiplicity of meaning reflects the complexity of modern life and aligns with broader trends in modernist and postmodern literature.

Overall, the results demonstrate that Lessing’s short stories represent a synthesis of traditional and innovative elements. While she retains certain features of the genre, such as brevity and focus on a limited number of characters, she simultaneously expands its boundaries through experimentation and thematic depth.

This synthesis allows her to create narratives that are both accessible and intellectually challenging, contributing to the ongoing evolution of the short story genre.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that the short stories of Doris Lessing represent a significant shift in the development of the short story genre. Her works illustrate how traditional genre conventions can be both preserved and transformed through innovative artistic strategies. This section interprets the findings in relation to broader literary theories and contextualizes Lessing’s contribution within modern and contemporary literature.

One of the central implications of the findings is that Lessing reinterprets rather than completely rejects traditional genre conventions. While classical short stories emphasize unity, brevity, and a tightly structured plot, Lessing retains some of these features but adapts them to suit more complex narrative purposes.

Her stories often maintain a limited number of characters and a relatively concise form; however, the internal structure becomes more fluid and less predictable. This suggests that genre should not be viewed as a fixed set of rules but as a flexible framework that evolves over time. Lessing’s work exemplifies this evolution by demonstrating how established conventions can be reshaped to reflect new artistic and intellectual concerns.

The emphasis on psychological realism in Lessing’s stories highlights a broader shift in twentieth-century literature toward the exploration of inner experience. The findings indicate that her narratives prioritize the subjective perceptions of characters, often blurring the boundary between external reality and internal consciousness.

This approach can be linked to modernist literary traditions, where the focus shifts from objective representation to subjective interpretation. By centering her stories on psychological processes, Lessing expands the expressive capacity of the short story genre and challenges readers to engage more actively with the text.

Moreover, the psychological dimension of her stories reinforces the idea that genre features are not merely formal elements but are closely connected to thematic and philosophical concerns.

The presence of multiple perspectives and shifting narrative voices in Lessing’s stories can be interpreted through the theoretical framework of Mikhail Bakhtin. His concept of dialogism emphasizes the coexistence of different voices and viewpoints within a single text.

Lessing’s narratives often reflect this dialogic structure, as they present conflicting interpretations and avoid a single authoritative perspective. This multiplicity enhances the complexity of the narrative and allows for a more nuanced representation of reality.

As a result, the genre features of the short story are transformed into a dynamic system of interactions rather than a fixed structural model. This aligns with contemporary views of literature as an open and interpretative process.

Another important aspect of the discussion concerns Lessing’s departure from the classical principle of unity of effect, traditionally associated with Edgar Allan Poe.

According to this principle, a short story should produce a single, unified emotional response in the reader.

However, the findings show that Lessing’s stories often generate multiple and sometimes contradictory responses. Her open endings and ambiguous narratives resist closure, encouraging readers to form their own interpretations. This shift reflects a broader transformation in literary aesthetics, where ambiguity and multiplicity are valued over clarity and resolution.

The discussion also highlights the importance of social and ideological themes in shaping genre features. Lessing’s engagement with issues such as gender inequality, colonial experience, and personal identity demonstrates that literary form is closely connected to historical and cultural contexts.

Her stories do not treat these themes as external topics; instead, they are embedded within the narrative structure and influence the development of characters and events. This integration suggests that genre features can serve as tools for social critique and ideological expression.

From a postcolonial perspective, Lessing’s work can be seen as a reflection of cultural hybridity and the tensions between different social systems. Her narratives capture the complexities of identity and power, further enriching the artistic representation of the genre.

The use of experimental techniques in Lessing’s short stories is another key point of discussion. Non-linear structures, fragmented narration, and shifting perspectives are not merely stylistic choices; they serve specific artistic and thematic purposes. These techniques allow Lessing to represent the fragmented nature of modern experience and to challenge traditional modes of storytelling. By doing so, she expands the possibilities of the short story genre and opens new avenues for literary expression.

This experimentation also reflects the influence of modernist and early postmodernist trends, positioning Lessing as a transitional figure between different literary movements.

Overall, the findings and their interpretation confirm that Doris Lessing has made a significant contribution to the evolution of the short story genre. Her works demonstrate that genre is not a static category but a dynamic and evolving form that responds to changes in artistic, social, and intellectual contexts.

By combining traditional elements with innovative techniques, Lessing creates a hybrid form of short fiction that reflects the complexities of modern life. Her stories challenge readers to reconsider their expectations and engage more deeply with the text.

The study also suggests several directions for future research. Further analysis could include a broader range of Lessing’s short stories or a comparative study with other modernist and postcolonial writers. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches that

incorporate psychology, sociology, or cultural studies could provide new insights into her work.

In summary, the discussion emphasizes that Lessing’s short stories transform traditional genre features through psychological depth, narrative experimentation, and thematic complexity. Her work reflects a broader shift in literary practices and contributes to the ongoing development of the short story as a versatile and dynamic genre.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the artistic representation of genre features in the short stories of Doris Lessing, focusing on how her works reflect both continuity and transformation within the short story tradition. Through a qualitative analysis of selected texts, the research has demonstrated that Lessing’s short fiction plays a crucial role in redefining the boundaries of the genre.

The findings reveal that Lessing preserves certain fundamental characteristics of the short story, such as brevity, limited scope, and focus on individual experience. However, she simultaneously transforms these features through the use of innovative narrative techniques, including non-linear structures, shifting perspectives, and open endings. These elements contribute to a more complex and flexible model of the genre, moving beyond traditional definitions.

A key conclusion of this study is that psychological realism serves as a central organizing principle in Lessing’s short stories. By prioritizing the inner lives of characters, she shifts the focus of the narrative from external events to internal processes. This approach not only deepens the emotional and intellectual impact of her stories but also redefines the function of genre features within the narrative structure.

Furthermore, Lessing’s departure from classical principles, particularly the notion of a unified effect associated with Edgar Allan Poe, underscores her innovative approach to storytelling. Her stories often resist closure and invite multiple interpretations, reflecting the complexity and ambiguity of modern life. This openness enhances reader engagement and aligns her work with modernist and postmodernist literary traditions.

In conclusion, the artistic representation of genre features in Lessing’s short stories illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of literary genres. Her work not only expands the expressive possibilities of the short story but also provides valuable insights into the relationship between form, meaning, and context. Future research may build on these findings by exploring additional texts, theoretical perspectives, and comparative approaches to further understand the significance of Lessing’s contribution to modern literature.

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