

The Protagonist's Inner Beauty Concepts Reflected in Danielle Steel's Novel Big Girl

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the concepts of inner beauty reflected in the protagonist of Big Girl, a novel by Danielle Steel. The main character, Victoria Dawson, was portrayed as an intelligent, loyal, and optimistic woman who often faced rejection from her parents due to her physical appearance. This research used a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis based on selected excerpts from the novel. The findings showed that Victoria's true beauty was expressed through her persistence in pursuing education, her loyalty in relationships, and her optimism in achieving her dream of becoming a teacher. This study emphasized that inner beauty was more meaningful than physical appearance, and Victoria's character served as a strong representation of moral values and the strength of women in overcoming social and familial pressures.

Keywords: Inner Beauty, Protagonist, Danielle Steel, Big Girl, Novel

INTRODUCTION

The top author in America, Danielle Steel, is the author of the fictional book Big Girl. It's a heartwarming tale of a lady who, despite any setbacks, is able to confront the hurt of her past and move on to her future. This book has a strong protagonist and is inspiring. 2011 saw the release of Big Girl, which was first published by Delacorte Press in the US. The intriguing aspect of Big Girl is how Victoria's *inner beauty* has been used to bring her enjoyment since she was a young child.

When considering human beauty, the proverb "True beauty comes from within" eventually comes up. In the real world, this proverb can be interpreted. The interpretation connects it to what Cooper (2008) refers to as a virtue-centered view of beauty. A person's outer beauty is determined by how well their moral qualities are manifested, according to this notion. The adage, according to the understanding, makes a distinction between inner and outer beauty.

Gaut (2007) defines *inner beauty* as a person's personality, character traits, and behavior, not physical appearance, emphasizing that it is psychological rather than physical. Furthermore, Reid (1969) argues that *inner beauty*, encompassing intelligence, loyalty, and optimism, is a constant and never-fading aspect of one's appearance, morality, attitude, and usefulness to others. This study explores the protagonist's *inner*

beauty concepts in Danielle Steel's *Big Girl*, aiming to provide moral lessons and personal interest.

A protagonist is the first main character in one literary work who has good character in a story. There are so many definitions of protagonist explained on other resources. According to Karl Beckson and Ganz (1990: 217) state a protagonist is the first actor, who played the leading part and doubled in some minor roles. The term is referred to the most important character that can be a hero or heroine in a play or story. Additionally, Willay (2010) says that protagonist is a person who plays a leading or active part. The protagonist is the first actor which has good character in the story. The description above shows that the protagonist's role is to represent the positive thing in the story.

Inner beauty is the definition of being a generally good person (www.urbandictionary.com). It is a person's true beauty that transcends their outward looks. According to the definitions given above, an individual's *inner beauty* is determined by their skills, mentality, and "inner" qualities such as being polite, kind, industrious, forgiving, motivating, aspirational, intelligent, and self-assured, rather than by their appearance. Every woman is meant to possess one of the numerous types of *inner beauty*. In addition, Cunningham, Druen, and Barbee (1997) contend that beauty criteria may be intrinsic rather than acquired. Contrary to common assumption, the inherent nature of beauty standards makes them culturally universal and unchangeable. It implies that being confident and true to yourself, rather than trying to look or be someone else, is what truly defines beauty. Beauty depends on who is looking at it. It takes on numerous shapes and is unique to a wide range of individuals. According to Reid (1969), there are three kinds of *inner beauty* which are intelligence, loyalty, and optimism. According to Skinner (1959) intelligence is demonstrable in ability of the individual to make good responses from the stand point of truth and fact". It means someone can be called as an intelligent person if he or she is able to figure out the problems, creates something new which is beneficial for others and gives innovation wherever her or she stands.

Jacoby and Kyner (1973) said Loyalty is a subjective, psychologically influenced behavioral response expressed over time by decision-makers towards one or more brands. It is a crucial quality in any close relationship, as it provides strong assurance of another person's care. Loyalty is hard to find as it is priceless. It is a result of specific characteristics, such as synchronization between words promised and actual actions demonstrated. It is essential in work, business, family, friendship, and relationships, as it is a powerful force that can be expressed through words but also through actions. Optimism comes from the Latin word *optimus*, meaning "best", which describes how an optimistic person is always looking for the best in any situation and expecting good things to happen. <http://www.definitionofoptimism.com>. (May 2017). Optimists expect good things to happen to them (Carver, Scheier & Segerstrom, 2010). It means that optimists always think about good things and expect the positive things to happen to them.

The researcher conducted a study about the *inner beauty* reflected in Victoria's character in Danielle Steel's novel to find out what are the forms protagonist's *inner beauty* found in the novel? and How does the protagonist reflect her *inner beauty* in the novel?

METHOD

In this study, qualitative research is used. Denzin and Lincoln (2004: 2) state that qualitative research entails the examination and gathering of a range of empirical materials that describe ordinary and troublesome moments and meanings in people's lives, including case studies, personal experiences, introspective, life stories, interviews, observational, historical, interactive, and visual texts. Furthermore, qualitative research is a type of social inquiry that focuses on how individuals understand and make meaning of their experiences and the society they live in, according to Holloway (1997: 2). Within the broader context of this kind of research, there are many distinct methodologies, but they all strive to comprehend the social reality of people, communities, and civilizations.

The primary points of the novel are gathered, described, and analyzed as part of the study's procedures. The supporting details are gathered in relation to the *inner beauty* of the protagonist. In the fourth chapter of this study, the data gathered from the novel is examined. Classifying the collected data into subchapters—intellect, loyalty, and optimist—that are relevant to the study's research issues allows for the analysis to be carried out. The purpose of the data analysis is to address the two problem statements in the introduction part.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research explains the real beauty concept of Victoria's character reflected in novel *Big Girl* written by Danielle Steel. The analysis tries to reveal the real beauty concept including forgiving, aspiring, intelligent and loyal.

4.1.1 Intelligence

Victoria was an easy, happy baby who has good natured and undemanding. She walked and talked early, and people always commented on what a sweet little girl she was. Examine the following quotation:

“Victoria appeared to be extremely intelligent as she got older. She was chatty and amiable, and had nearly adult conversations with them by the time she was three. She said funny things, and was alert and interested in everything around her.” (Big Girl, 2010: 8-9)

From the quotation above can be seen clearly that she has brain that can be more useful than beauty. She is able to read when she was four. And when she was five, her father told her she had been named after a queen. Victoria would smile with delight every time he said it.

Unfortunately, What she got never made her parents proud of her. Her parents hoped that she was never be smart, the only thing they want was to be beautiful and gained much money from that. They need more than the brains. Examine the following quotation:

"You'll need more than that," Christine had said. "Men don't always like smart girls," she said, looking worried.

"You have to look more attractive too." (Big Girl, 2010: 28)

From the quotation above shows that what Victoria always does never right in her parents' eyes. As parents they must support and be proud of what she got that not all children have it. Beauty is everything and has power for them to gain much money. The naming of big girl is given to Victoria that she is never sure what part of her they were referring to.

She was one of the top three students in her class, and had been asked to give a speech after the valedictorian, which stunned the audience with the seriousness and value what she said. Unstoppable desire to leave home becomes bigger because of the feeling of different from her parents in so many ways. No matter how hard she had tried, she just was not like them. And that is why she was willing to push herself out of her comfort zone. Examine the following quotation:

"She wanted to go to school and college with real people, who were not obsessed with how they looked. Her choices in the end were Northwestern, New Hampshire, or Trinity. The greatest thing it had going for it was that it was far away, and it was a great school." (Big Girl 2010: 44-45)

From the quotation above seen that Victoria never feels comfortable stay with her parents. Her desire is getting bigger when she knows that she is the one of the top three students in her class. How happy she is. Congratulation greeting comes from her parents and spontaneously says that they are very proud of her, although they distressed that she was leaving California and could not understand what she would.

Victoria's years in college were exactly what she hoped they would be. The school was even better than she had dreamed or expected. She wanted to acquire the skills she needed to have a job and a life someplace other than L.A. And all the jobs would she did as long as it could support her finance. She was a smart woman. She loved doing something new which gave her new experince and enriched her knowledge. Examine the following quaotation:

"She went to New York as she hoped to cover spring break, and managed to get a job as a receptionist at a law firm for the summer." (Big Girl, 2010: 57)

From the quotation above can be seen that all she had is its brain. Victoria is proving her parents that beuaty face does not guarantee a good career, it depends on the effort itself. One thing must be reminded that the real beauty comes from the inside not from the outside only. *Inner beauty* is never fades by the time but the outer beauty is changeable.

Being a teacher is what she always dreams since she was primary. Victoria told her self to be more dilligent and sensible about it. She had not much time to go somewhere or a date. Her parents worried about that and pressed her to lose her weight and find a man at her graduation day. Examine the following quotation:

"You don't want to be poor for the rest of your life, do you?" he said with a look contempt. "You can't afford to be a teacher, and I'm not going to subsidize you forever," he commented bluntly. "I don't want to work in advertising," she said firmly. "I want to be a teacher." (Big Girl, 2010:98)

4.1.2 Loyalty

Loyal means if someone stands by you during the bad times, he or she deserves to be there during the good times. Being loyal needs process and it is everything for people to keep relationship long last. It is depicted in Victoria's character. She has the *inner beauty* that not all people have it so easily. Her first love did not run well since she knew the man she loved was a guy. Almost her whole time has spent with Jack and she sacrificed for him to. How painful she felt but she tried to be tough. Examine the following quotation.

"I never should have started it, but I fell in love with you the day we met." Then why can't this work? She asked softly, grateful for his honesty, but it hurt nonetheless. "because it won't. This isn't who I am." (Big Girl, 2010: 66)

From the quotation above shows that Victoria cannot leave him go eventhough he told already the truth about who he really is. She tries to convince him that it will be okay but he only said that Victoria only her female fantasy. The longer they spend the time, the more hurt Victoria will be.

Beau has gone away. He promised to call her back after that bad moment happened. Actually, that was the way for him to keep distance and leave her softly. He dropped the English class without Victoria knows that . He thought it would be easier for both them. And Victoria cannot lie herself that she still loves him. Examine the following quotation.

"I'm sorry I was so stupid and selfish. I just didn't want to make a bigger mess later on." He said. "It's okay," she said softly, and smiled at him. "it's okay. I love you, for whatever that means to you now." (Big Girl, 2010: 69)

From the quotation above can be seen Victoria is very suffering. Victoria still felt shattered over the disappointment with Jack Bailey when she left for L.A. for thanksgiving. And she was feeling terrible about herself.

She was twenty three years old, and so far no male she had ever known had fallen seriously in love with her. She had been passed over and ignored for years, except by friends. She felt like shapeless, sexless and totally undesirable object. And she said she was willing to do whatever it took, even the process was painful for her.

Being afraid of continuously judging by her parents, she tries to open her heart for someone who really wants to know more about her. He met Jack Bailey, He is in thirties. He never cares how Victoria looks, what her weight is. Unfortunately, when Victoria was hard to believe that someone she cared about so much and had been so open with had been dishonest with her. Oneday, Victoria's roommates found Jack cheated on her. Something that broke her heart said by Jack, their relationship were not exclusive and the time they spent together only for killing the time not more than that. Examine the following quotation:

"You have no right to snoop around about me." "I never told her I was exclusive with her either," he said, looking angry. "And it's none of your bussiness anyway. I haven't slept with you, Victoria. I don't owe you anything, except pleasant comapny when we go out, and a nice evening."
(Big Girl, 2010: 212-213)

From the quotation above shows that Jack does double duty and never tells her before. Two months with a guy she liked and had believed in, and he had cheated on her, lied, and had no regret whatsoever. He did not give a damn about her. That much was evident. Her tears cannot stop falling in her eyes when she heard his nasty words that she never realized before.

And for the third date, finally, she felt in love again with a man who worked in the same school with her, Collin White. He felt what Victoria did. Examine the following quotation:

"all through your story, women are supposed to look like you," Collin said simply." (Big Girl, 2010: 332)

From the quotation above shows that Collin loves just the way she is. He does not like a woman who is pretender. For the first Victoria met someone who really does not care about her appearances especially her weight. She stared at Collin and thought he was crazy or like big women. But all is wrong, he even does not care about it at all. He loves Victoria for what is inside, the curse of her father never been right because Collin has come to proof that she deserves to get true love.

4.1.3 Optimist

Optimistic means having a great ambition or ultimate goal; desire strongly. It is reflected from Victoria's character. No matter how much bad comments she got continuously for her parents, she always tries to show what she believed is right for her future. She studies and works harder to keep up her grades and be able to apply to favorite schools. It can be seen clearly from this following quotation:

"And it was why she was starting the most important adventure of her life, and leaving home to do it. She was willing to push herself out of her comfort zone." (Big Girl, 2010: 47)

From the quotation above shows that Victoria can not stand anymore for what her parents have done to her for years. She really wants to go far away and lives independently after graduated from senior high school and finds the real life. Victoria was well aware of it, which was why she had never in her entire life felt at ease with them, and she felt even less so now, because she was different from her parents in so many ways. She has obviously ambition that must be reached.

Victoria lived in the big and sunny apartment, with a double living room, a small den, a dining room, a kitchen that had seen better days, and four modest-size bedrooms, and it was under rent control. She had been working out at the gym at school in order to make her dreams becoming true; be a teacher, loose her weight and especially buy the apartment to show her parents that she can stand alone by working hard. Examine the following quotation:

"She had a job, an apartment, and a new life." (Big Girl, 2010: 110)

From the quotation above shows that she is able to reach what something impossible for her parents. All she has gotten in New York. She had to do now was buy furniture for her bedroom, and she could move in. She called her parents that night to tell them, and Gracie was delighted for her because of her high spirit. 'Gracie had been so happy for her, and Victoria had promised to send her photographs of the apartment and her room.

To keep making much money, she tries to apply for a job to be a teacher. Eric Walker, the head of the Madison School, had been a tough choice between her and several other teachers, and it makes Victoria was happy because she was officially accepted be a part of the teachers there. Her first time of teaching a composition class is not running well. At the beginning, she tries to be friendly to all the students by introducing herself in front of the class and followed by other students later. Sometimes she gets hard to deal with the students but it can not stop her to teach them. She still believes that she can be a good teacher for her students who are almost as old as she is. Again and again her father never appreciate what her first daughter have already done. Victoria said quickly and confidently answered about her father viewed as a teacher. Examine the following quotation:

"You would do so much better in another field," he repeated for the thousandth time. "I like teaching," she said quietly (Big Girl, 2010: 134)

From the quotation above shows that Victoria has big passion in teaching. She was born to educate person who cared with kids including her sister, Gracie. It is not easy to convince her father that she is always okay to stand alone without her parents. In fact, she has already had an apartment. This is the true beauty found in Victoria. She cares with others and never hates people whom judge her when she was in the lowest condition.

For the next two weeks, Victoria fought to keep her students' attention and gave them tough assignments. Victoria met her junior and sophomore students on the second and third days of school, and she was surprised to find them much harder to deal with

than seniors. The juniors were stressed about the heavy workload they would have that year, which would count more than any other year in their applications to colleges. And the sophomores were unfriendly and almost belligerent, and there was no harder group to teach than fifteen-year-old girls. She never thinks they are trouble makers for her. She supports frequently herself to keep tough to handle them every day. Examine the following quotation:

"They sound dangerous to me," he said and pretended to shudder, and Victoria laughed. "They are not as bad as that," she defended them. "They are just kids." (Big Girl, 2010: 134)

From the quotation above can be seen that Victoria was so glad to handle the class. She managed it well so that the students did good progress. Most of kids at Madison were so happy and interested in Victoria's subject in the class. Victoria smiled proudly at her kids' achievements. All her hard work turned into reality.

Out of from her career, she was so obsessed to loose her weight. No supports she got from her parents. She struggled to get what she admired since she was young, that made her being different and underestimated in whole her life. Examine the following quotation:

"Are you sick?" her father said with a straight face. "I've never seen you turn down a potato." "I'm fine dad."
Victoria said quickly.

From the quotation above shows that her parents had abandoned her emotionally the day she was born, when she did not look the way they had planned, or anything like them. She is never good enough, no matter what she does. It had been unacceptable to them, and a crime they could never quite forgive her, and did not even try. Instead they made fun of her and diminished and dismissed her. They always made her feel unwanted and not really good enough them. Someone that always believed her dream was Gracie. Gracie loved her sister as much as Victoria till one day she really could stand alone without support from her beloved people, her parents. She struggles for herself to survive there, but she never mentioned it to her parents. Examine the following quotation:

"She said she might travel somewhere with friends. In fact, she wanted to go to New York and try to line up a summer job." (Big Girl, 2010: 56)

She was going to be the youngest member of the English department, and she would teach four classes, to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Her ambition can beat all her parents' belittling comments about her job and choice.

CONCLUSION

A chubby little girl ordinary looks; Victoria Dawson has always felt out of place in her family, especially in body-conscious L.A. While her parents and sister can eat anything and not gain an ounce, Victoria must watch everything she eats, as well as endure her father's belittling comments about her body and see her academic

achievements go unacknowledged. Ice cream and oversized helpings of all the wrong foods give her comfort, but only briefly. The one thing she knows is that she has to get away from home, and after college I Chicago, she moves to New York City.

Landing her dream job as a high school teacher, Victoria loves working with her students and wages war on her weight at the gym. Despite tension with her parents, Victoria remains close to her younger sister, Grace. Though they could not be more different in looks, they love each other unconditionally. So when Grace announces her engagement to a man who is an exact replica of their narcissistic father, Victoria worries about her sister's future happiness, and with no man of her own, she feels like a failure once again. As the wedding draws near, a chance encounter, a deeply upsetting betrayal, and a family confrontation lead to a turning point.

Behind Victoria is a lifetime of hurt and neglect she has tried to forget. Ahead is a challenge and a risk: to accept herself as she is, celebrate it, and claim the victories she has fought so hard for and deserves. Big girl or not, she is terrific and discovers that herself.

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