

Dora's Growth in The Bell

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Abstract

The Bell is one of Iris Murdoch's early novels but it already contains her main themes which are developed in a deeper sense in her later novels. Dora, who came from the lower middle class and had an inferiority complex, married a much older rich and refined art historian hoping to become a member of higher society. But her husband was a tyrant and she became a victim of an unhappy married life. The process of her awakening to the need of independence and self-respect is connected with Catherine, Toby and Michael. Paintings in the National Gallery and a legendary bell found in the lake by Toby played important roles in Dora's growth. They touched and shook and changed her into a mature woman who could cope with her problems. Dora's future liberation is hinted at by references to a butterfly and birds. A beautiful secluded religious community called Imber Court, which she had at first hated, offered her a place for serious thinking about her future.
