

The Writing of Life in the Plague—A Review of *The Island*

Yaling Tang

College of Foreign Studies, Nanjing Agricultural University, Nanjing 210095, China

Abstract: *The Island* serves as a plague novel, recounting the story of a leprosy outbreak and the subsequent isolation of patients on the island of Spinalonga. When the plague strikes, it is met with fear and rejection by nearly all, with any individual exhibiting signs of leprosy infection being deported to the island, thereby facing a lifetime of seclusion. The *Island* exemplifies the vivid portrayal of people reigniting hope, destigmatizing the disease, and ultimately triumphing over the plague. During the period of the plague's ravage, individuals hope to seek strength from the catastrophic memories recorded in literature, fostering the courage and confidence to combat the epidemic. By reviewing *The Island*, one can observe the profound attention given to the consciousness of life, the in-depth exploration of biopolitics, and the forward-looking reflection on the meaning of life in plague novels.

Keywords: *The Island*, Life Writing, Epidemic, Leprosy.

1. Introduction

As the debut novel by the British author Victoria Hislop, *The Island* garnered immense acclaim upon its publication in 2006, securing the top position on the British bestseller lists [1]. Hislop's creation of *The Island* was inspired by a spontaneous insight during her travels in Greece, where she was deeply affected by the country's cultural landscape and its historical significance as the cradle of Western civilization, and learnt about the experiences of ordinary individuals during World War II through conversations with the elderly [1]. Set against the backdrop of the pre- and post- World War II period, *The Island* narrates the story of the Petrakis family's struggle against leprosy, depicting from various perspectives the dire plight of leprosy patients during the plague and the gradual dissipation of societal panic towards the disease. Indeed, *The Island* meticulously highlights two important roles associated with leprosy: the perception of lepers from the viewpoint of the healthy population, and lepers' own journey towards self-redemption. These dual roles serve as a framework for a profound exploration of the consciousness of life under the darkest moments of despair, the commitment doctors showed to their professional ethics, and the multifaceted manifestation of human nature in the ongoing struggle against the disease.

2. The Recurrence of the Plague

2.1 The Social Schema of "One Island, One Disease" in *The Island*

One island refers to Spinalonga and one disease refers to leprosy. Although the novel is a work of fiction, its backdrop is rooted in historical reality as the Greek island of Spinalonga, north of the coast of Crete, was once the primary leprosy quarantine zone in the country. Upon diagnosis of leprosy, patients were sent to this water-encircled island, which ultimately became the final place of death for almost all leprosy patients. When Alexis, the fourth generation of the Petrakis family, initially reached Spinalonga, she found out "the massive stone walls of the Venetian fortification loomed above her" [2]. Everyone, exactly, all lepers need to get past this miserable obstacle through a small entrance to become a member of Spinalonga, which changed their identity, no

more a healthy person.

Spinalonga might superficially be identified as a miserable place, given its association with the stigmatization and isolation of those who afflicted with leprosy. Nevertheless, a nuanced investigation into the conditions of the patients residing on the island reveals a compelling aspiration of existence. According to Alexis' description, "It went on for some metres, and when she emerged from the semi-darkness once again into the dazzling early afternoon light she saw that the scale of the place had changed completely" [2]. Despite the conducive circumstances for despair, the patients in Spinalonga did not lose their will to survive. Instead, they demonstrated a remarkable resilience by creating a sense of domicile and engaging in meaningful occupations, carving out a promised lands within the confines of their isolated environment. Furthermore, the island's geographical seclusion played a pivotal role in circumventing the perils of World War II. The inhabitants were shielded from the onslaught of Nazi aggression and the associated horrors of persecution that ravaged much of the continent during that period. "In 1941, Crete was invaded by the Germans and occupied until 1945, but the presence of lepers meant Spinalonga was left alone" [2]. This fortuitous attribute of the island inadvertently transformed it into a rare haven of tranquility and purity, a sanctuary where the residents could find solace and continue their lives away from the turmoil of the war.

As the novel describes it, "Leprosy can affect nerve endings, and the result of this is that you can't feel it if you burn or cut yourself. That's why people with leprosy are so vulnerable to inflicting permanent damage on themselves, and the consequences of that can be disastrous" [2]. Lepers have obvious external symptoms, so it is impossible for lepers to return to their normal appearance even after recovery. Therefore, they become abnormal members of "the others" in the society. "Leprosy in its heyday aroused a similarly disproportionate sense of horror" [3]. Leprosy was once considered an incurable scourge, a punishment meted out by spirits, fate, or moral degeneration, so "It was the natural response for someone whose knowledge of leprosy came from Old Testament stories and the image of a bell-swinging sufferer crying, 'Unclean! Unclean!'" [2]. Owing to the

pervasive ignorance, profound fear, and enduring stigma associated with leprosy, lepers were historically subjected to a regime of isolation, persecution, and societal abandonment. Despite many plights, many survivors affected by leprosy in Spinalonga never gave up their aspiration for a better life when confronted with entrenched prejudices harbored by the broader society.

2.2 The Portrayal of Characters Facing “Leprosy”

The novel features a multitude of female characters in the Petrakis family, and it is through the perspective of Alexis, the fourth generation of the Petkis family, that the novel unfolds, initially aiming to resolve her emotional entanglements by delving into the experiences of the women in her family, only to inadvertently uncover their stories related to leprosy. The female members of the family exhibit starkly contrasting attitudes towards the plague. For instance, Eleni is the first generation of the Petkis family that is cruelly afflicted by leprosy. As a teacher, she was so virtuous that she was unable to turn a blind eye to her students infected with leprosy and unfortunately contracted the disease herself. Consequently, she was compelled to leave her family and sent to Spinalonga, but she persisted in educating the children to ensure they became useful members of society. Her efforts and dedication have trained the next generation of teachers for Spinalonga like Dimitri. In addition, In the face of repressive circumstances, she demonstrated an unwavering attitude to realize her dream with fortitude. With her innate desire to live better, Eleni set about to repurpose the unoccupied yard space with her ingenuity. She also requested her husband Giorgis to bring her a bunch of seeds, which she utilized to cultivate an array of flowers and vegetables within the once desolate expanse. This transformation of the yard into a verdant and productive garden imbued the area with an ambiance of warmth, like a true home. Eleni's unwavering affirmation of seeking life, coupled with her steadfast determination to improve her circumstances, served to substantially mitigate Giorgis's concerns for her welfare. Therefore, she can comfort Giorgis “We have our own courtyard and by next spring we should have a herb garden if you can bring me some seeds. There are roses already in bloom on our doorstep and soon there'll be hollyhocks out too. It's not bad really” [2]. For the same fate, Eleni's younger daughter Maria unfortunately contracted leprosy on the eve of her wedding and was also dispatched to the island. Despite the misfortunes in her life, Maria, like her mother, never gave up hope of being alive and recovering. Upon her arrival on the island, she dedicated her efforts to helping others, sharing the use of herbs for healing and cure, and even “scour the uninhabited, rocky part of the island for herbs” [2] as she knew “there were, however, plenty of other ailments that people suffered from on Spinalonga, from stomach disorders to coughs, and if she could relieve them of those as she had done so successfully in her old life, then it would be a worthwhile contribution” [2]. Moreover, Maria demonstrated an extraordinary willingness by volunteering to participate as a subject in experimental medical treatments. Her unwavering perseverance and commitment to the pursuit of a cure for leprosy ultimately yielded fruit and lepers' involvement contributed to a groundbreaking therapy. The medical breakthrough not only heralded a new era in the treatment of leprosy but also paved the way for Maria to reclaim her happiness, thus affirming the

resilience of women and the transformative power of hope in the face of adversity and also destigmatizing the plague.

In contrast to the optimistic and resilient women in the family who fought against the disease, the fortunate ones who escaped the scourge of leprosy, Anna and Sofia, maintained a negative and evasive attitude towards the family's history with the plague. Anna, a survivor whose mother and sister were both afflicted, concealed her family's medical history from her husband's family to safeguard her affluent lifestyle and enviable marriage. Sofia, Anna's daughter, who was also spared the suffering of leprosy, became reticent and evasive due to the family's leprous history and the emotional entanglements of her biological parents. She chose to marry into a distant family, fleeing the birthplace that brought her shame, and cautiously concealed her correspondence with Fotini, being tight-lipped about her early life, thus ensuring that her origins remained unknown, forever shielding herself from the stigma of the past. However, the societal stigma associated with leprosy has been so ingrained that attempts to conceal the presence of the disease within a family have invariably failed. In the case of Anna, her husband's family eventually learned the truth, and Sophia, with the assistance of her daughter, unraveled and finally accepted the family's history of leprosy.

3. Life Writing in the Disaster

3.1 The Unknown of the Isolated Environment

The residents of Crete were fraught with fear and ignorance towards leprosy. Once the signs of leprosy infection emerged, lepers who had been sent to Spinalonga were not allowed off the island which was known as “‘The Place of the Living Dead’ and there was no better description” [2]. For Eleni, the survival situation on the isolated island is unknown and the two daughters' growth without her participation is alarming. In the days upon Eleni's departure, her daughters Anna and Maria showed great sorrow. “Anna had begged her mother not to go, beseeched her to stay, ranted, raved and torn her hair while Maria had wept, silently at first and then with huge racking sobs that could be heard out in the street” [2]. The island across the strait appears to be a detention center, a place where their mother is confined. The residents, stricken with leprosy, face immense danger and uncertainty. They are lost in a sea of ambiguity and powerlessness, unable to glimpse any possibility of a turning point or a ray of hope. This isolated island, cut off from the outside world, symbolizes more than just the physical distance from their family; it represents a profound emotional and psychological barrier. They can see their loved ones from afar, but the invisible barrier prevents them from reaching out and making contact, adding to their sense of despair and isolation.

The night before Eleni departed for Spinalonga, “She was watched by rows of sad eyes. This was the hardest moment of Eleni's life and now the least private” [2]. When the same fate befalls Maria, “she tossed and turned and fretted with fear as the hours of darkness passed with aching slowness” [2]. The novel also describes her state of mind upon arrival on the island: “In this dark room she wished she was dead. For a moment it did occur to her that perhaps she was dead since hell could not be a gloomier or less welcoming place than this”

[2]. The continuous deterioration of their condition, the inadequate medical facilities, and the harsh living environment all contribute to the isolated environment of uncertainty. The experience of being quarantined on an abandoned island is really daunting. Similarly, during the contemporary COVID-19 period, where the government emphasizes home isolation to control the spread of the virus, it has generated discontent and panic among many who are unaware of the truth. The lifelong imprisonment on the island is enough to make many patients lose their will to survive.

For those who stricken with leprosy, their new journey begins with fear—fear of the unknown, fear of the disease's progression, and fear of the social stigma attached to it. This fear is soon followed by a deep sense of uncertainty as they face the worsening of their health with limited medical support and the bleakness of their surroundings. The isolation on the island exacerbates their sense of helplessness, as they are cut off from the world and their relatives forever. This is the reality of survival for most leprosy patients on the island, and it is precisely the scenario that strikes fear into the hearts of the healthy living on Crete Island. The constant reminder of their neighbors' plight serves as a stark warning of the fragility of their own well-being in the face of a disease that can easily tear apart families and communities. There is an underlying sense of powerlessness, a recognition that in the face of the plague, even the strongest defenses can sometimes fall short. Crete's healthy residents may live with this paradox, grateful for their health yet constantly aware of how quickly it could be taken away.

3.2 The Awakening of the Sense of Life

The Island by Victoria Hislop elucidates a profound consciousness of life through the lepers' demonstration of a robust spirit of resistance and survival on the quarantined Spinalonga. Confronted with the geographical and social isolation of this zone, the inhabitants of Crete apprehend the island as a symbol of mortality and despair. In the eyes of the Cretan population, Spinalonga emerges as a liminal space, an island of death that segregates the living from those deemed living dead. However, the leprosy-afflicted people residing on Spinalonga present a diametrically opposed attitude as they actively pursue avenues of hope and life, with the intent to transmute their melancholic destiny and achieve reintegration into mainstream society. Some lepers on Spinalonga embody an indomitable will to live, perceiving the island not as a purgatorial expanse but rather as a sanctuary that affords them a reprieve from the profound privation and ostracism they have suffered. As noted by Hislop, "For these victims of the disease, Spinalonga was a relief, respite from the abject misery they had endured as outcasts" [2]. This sentiment reveals the lepers' reclamation of living and their subversion of the fatalistic narratives imposed upon them.

The lepers' spirit of resistance is manifest in their pursuit of a semblance of normalcy and their collective efforts to forge a sound community within the confines of Spinalonga. They engage in the cultivation of gardens, the establishment of businesses, and the creation of cultural and social institutions, thereby challenging the preconceived notions of their capabilities and the limitations imposed by their condition. Their actions are emblematic of a desire to change their

circumstances and to assert their dignity in the face of societal prejudice. "Spinalonga was a model of democracy and the regularity of the elections was intended to ensure that dissatisfaction never festered" [2]. With the impetus of the leader's work innovation and the efforts of the island's residents, women had an adequate water supply and people had access to concealed outdoor public sanitation facilities. Subsequently, commercial transactions began to thrive, and social life improved significantly. Also, Luxuries such as movies, posters, dances, and weddings were no longer out of reach. Life here is no different from that on Crete, except for the fact that they are infected.

3.3 Reflections on Human Nature and Death

In human life activities, where we follow the fundamental biological principle of "seeking benefits and avoiding harm" in a sophisticated manner, if death is considered the greatest "harm", then life, highlighted from the opposite side by death, is the greatest "benefit", which transforms "seeking benefits and avoiding harm" into "seeking life and avoiding death" [4]. In the novel, human nature is laid bare in the face of a plague. The common phenomenon is that "Most people on the mainland imagined that all lepers were as ravaged by the disease as these extreme cases and the very thought of their proximity repulsed them. They feared for themselves and for their children and had no doubt that the bacillus that had infected the people on this island could be airborne into their own homes" [2]. There was a concern that the disease might be disseminated through the air into their homes, a worry that reflected the prevalent misconceptions about the transmission mechanism of leprosy at that time. The inhabitants of the Crete exhibited apprehension regarding their own health and the safety of their children, prompting the segregation of those afflicted with leprosy to avert potential risks of infection. This behavior of exclusion manifestly demonstrated the societal tendency to ostracize vulnerable groups, a tendency that was largely grounded in ignorance about the disease and the resultant fear. Such exclusionary practices are indicative of a broader societal phenomenon where fear and misinformation contribute to the marginalization of those perceived as a threat to public health. What's worse, "One minute they feared the idea that they too might end up on Spinalonga; the next they seethed with envy at the idea that the colonists might be living more comfortable lives than they were themselves." [2]. This envy comes from the evil of human nature, as they perceived the island's inhabitants to be living in relative ease. The lack of accurate knowledge about the disease led to a proliferation of baseless anxieties that only served to exacerbate the stigma associated with leprosy. Owing to the envy and even anger, "people began to descend on Plaka, intent on the island's destruction" [2] and "it would rid them of this filthy blot on their landscape" [2].

The goodness of human nature is also ever-present despite the constant threat of an impending plague. Many people's support and assistance brought hope for life to those affected by leprosy. In Spinalonga, although the pandemic ruthlessly consumed numerous leprosy patients, with an aura of suffering pervading Spinalonga, many lepers persevered with considerable efforts to maintain a semblance of normalcy in their lives in the adversity. The island's leader Petros Kontomaris waged a campaign against the government to

enhance the medical conditions for leprosy patients, and his efforts culminated in the hospital reform and the construction of other buildings. Additionally, he devised a scheme to allocate land to every resident on the island, as they aspired to cultivate their own fruits and vegetables, not only for personal consumption but also for sale at the market. Along the main street of Spinalonga, which only a few months prior was lined with dilapidated houses, now stood an array of shops. The small island began to develop its own economy, mirroring the dynamics of a society that was indistinguishable from normalcy in that "People were productive: they bartered, bought and sold, sometimes at a profit, sometimes at a loss" [2]. In addition, Dr. Lapakis, fearlessly facing the peril of infection, proactively volunteered to work within the leper isolation zone. He conducted thorough medical examinations of the patients, administered wound care, attended to their physical needs, and advised on preventive measures to sustain health. His courageous dedication to the welfare of the afflicted reflects a profound commitment to the well-being of the community, underscoring the principle that every member has a role to play in the collective effort towards recovery and resilience. As *The Island* depicts, "Dr. Lapakis was fulfilled in this work and enjoyed the difference, albeit limited, that he could make to these poor people's lives. In his own opinion, there was no afterlife, no second chance" [2].

In Addition, Giorgis earned a modest income by transporting provisions to Spinalonga, thereby subsidizing his family's needs. His modest vessel made bi-weekly journeys, laden with essential goods, to cater to the leprosy patients quarantined on the island. In the novel, "the raison d'être of Plaka itself had been to act as a supply centre for the leper colony" [2]. During an era when leprosy was heavily stigmatized, this task was by no means an easy one, carrying with it a significant risk of infection. However, Giorgis undertook this duty with unflinching resolve. The Contraction of leprosy was effectively equivalent to a death sentence and the afflicted were compelled to proceed to leprosy isolation zones, where they endured a protracted and uncertain period of waiting for death, a duration that was variable and often the most torturous phase of their existence. Upon Maria's exile to Spinalonga, her best friend Fonti frequently accompanied Maria's father to see her, which means a invisible and enduring support. Even as Fonti's own childbirth drew near, she persisted in crossing the sea to see Maria. Immediately following the birth of her child, Fonti resumed her regular visits. Unlike her mother Eleni, Maria had the opportunity for frequent encounters with her father and friends. It was the weekly visits from her dear friend Fonti that provided a detailed narrative of events in Plaka, offering Maria a profound sense of warmth and comfort in her isolation. The constancy of this friendship was a significant source of solace for Maria during her time on Spinalonga.

Upon the realization that their loved ones were succumbing to leprosy, people were simultaneously overwhelmed by a sense of dread. This fear was not merely a reaction to the disease itself but an acknowledgment of the futility of their efforts to escape the tragic fate that ultimately befell the infected. When Giorgis and the leader Kontomaris, learned from a letter originating in Athens that a batch of lepers would soon arrive, they decided to keep this secret as "the prospect of nearly two dozen new patients arriving simultaneously on Spinalonga

would send the islanders into a state of panic" [2]. Although the Island is a sanctuary for lepers, the residents find it hard to accept the arrival of new patients. A large influx of patients would only exacerbate the shortage of already limited living and medical supplies, so they need to build more houses and provide more food, water and shelter. In the face of the plague, most lepers can only think of their current plight, but "these newcomers could be the best thing that ever happened to that island" [2]. In terms of dispelling the fear of death to allow life activities to continue, it indeed reflects the proactive nature of the life consciousness, which determines the ultimate fate of humanity [4].

Indeed, death is an inevitability that affirms the certainty of human existence; however, it remains "an ever-open possibility" in the context of life's activities, implying a profound sense of uncertainty. Thus, death becomes the most uncertain certainty that constantly looms over our life's journey [4]. Despite the uncertain certainty, doctors undertook the task of saving the dying and healing the wounded, fought against leprosy regardless of their own lives, and brought hope to the leprosy patients. With doctors' treatment and encouragement, many patients' resolve to persevere in the face of such a tragic destiny was bolstered. They continued to engage in a valiant struggle against the forces of mortality, refusing to yield easily to the inevitable. This unwavering commitment to resistance encapsulates the essence of life's meaning. In *The Island*, Dr Lapakis spent his time on Spinalonga treating wounds and advising his patients on all the extra precautions they could take and how exercise could help them. With new arrivals he would always do a thorough examination. "His emphasis on cleanliness, sanitation and physiotherapy gave them a reason to get up in the morning and a feeling that they were not simply rising from their beds in order to continue their gradual degeneration" [2]. In addition to physical treatment, psychological treatment, an equal and sound social environment are also of great importance. "We need another ward and several more treatment rooms. The men and women ought to be separated—if they can't have their lives, the very least we can give them is their dignity" [2]. As individuals afflicted with leprosy, they were the forsaken of both society and the state, enduring a condition of discrimination and apathy. Spinalonga, however, remained unscathed by World War II due to the pervasive fear of plague among the populace, thereby shielding its inhabitants from the menace of war and, in this regard, they were considered fortunate. Lepers, typically associated with a disfigured appearance and devoid of the respect afforded by others, found an unusual environment on this island where the medical professionals not only engaged in material assistance, but they bestowed upon these patients a sense of equal respect and dignity. In the context of plague-related catastrophes, it is a recurring phenomenon that individuals of an optimistic and robust disposition manage to surmount their own misgivings and anxiety, thereby engaging proactively with the predicaments at hand. Ultimately, their fortitude paves the way for the emergence of a beacon of hope, signifying the potential termination of the calamitous period.

4. Biopolitical Narratives

In terms of biopolitics in the population dimension, the

ultimate focus of national governance must be the security of the entire population. The population issues that biopower concerns ultimately aim to ensure the continuation of humanity as a species and as a living being, pursuing the health of the people and the safety of society [5]-[6]. Firstly, under the guise of collective interest, the government enacts measures of exclusion and segregation towards individuals afflicted with leprosy. The reason behind such behavior is that when juxtaposed with the health and safety of the group, the well-being and aspirations of the affected are rendered insignificant. Therefore, “the government had declared that all lepers in Crete should be confined on Spinalonga back at the beginning of the century” [2]. In the overall governance of the population, to ensure the safety of a healthy population, the “mechanism” perceives those with infectious diseases as “dangerous elements” posing a threat to community public safety, and incorporates them into the macro operations of the biopower [5]. There is no doubt that the infected patients on Spinalonga are regarded as posing a threat to the health of the entire community. Therefore, they must be isolated from the social group to prevent the possible spread of the disease. The government’s approach reflects a utilitarian perspective where the benefit of the majority takes precedence over the rights and freedoms of the few, leading to the marginalization and stigmatization of those who suffered from the plague. The destruction of a particular species or form of life is considered a necessary condition for the preservation of life for another species [7]. The emphasis on the group’s health and security overshadows the ethical considerations of the individual’s right to health, autonomy, and social participation, thereby justifying what would otherwise be seen as unreasonable and discriminatory practices.

Secondly, although the people who lived in Spinalonga went through stages of despair and abandonment, but their efforts made “this tiny island had been a community, not just a place to come and die—that much was clear from the remains of the infrastructure” [2]. The island is teeming with residents stricken by terrible plague, and any sign of restlessness or unease has the potential to cause them to spiral out of control, slipping from the grasp of governmental oversight, which poses a grave threat to the lives of the healthy population. The fragile equilibrium that maintains order in the island is constantly at risk of being upended by the unpredictable behavior of the afflicted. The fear of a breakdown in containment measures is ever-present, as the infected residents, driven by the desperation of their condition, might attempt to flee the restrictions imposed upon them. If they attempt to do so, they could inadvertently spread the disease to the broader community, jeopardizing the health and safety of those who have thus far remained unscathed. “Since it was the government’s policy to encourage lepers to live on Spinalonga, it was entirely in its own interests to minimise unrest on the island, so from time to time it would provide funds for new housing or small grants to restore the old” [2]. On the one hand, when facing the serious infectious disease of leprosy, the government, out of consideration for the life safety and health of the general public, has adopted a series of measures to maintain the stability of life for the normal population. To achieve this goal, the government decided to provide moderate care for patients in the quarantine area. This care is mainly manifested in ensuring the basic living needs of leprosy patients on the island, such as food, clothing, and

shelter, allowing them to live peacefully in a relatively closed environment. By confining leprosy patients to a small area, the government aims to minimize the risk of disease transmission and prevent a larger group from being infected. On the other hand, for this incurable plague at the time, the group of patients has, to some extent, become an abandoned entity by the government and society. In the social context of that era, it was widely believed that leprosy patients could not contribute value to society and might even become a burden. Therefore, the government and society were reluctant to spend excessive financial and emotional resources on these patients who were deemed “valueless”. Under this perception, the government’s response to the demands of the islanders is nothing more than a compromising move after weighing the pros and cons. “although the government had to keep their lives tolerable, its commitment to making them better was perfunctory” [2]. While ensuring that the epidemic does not spread, the Government’s care and support for the residents of the quarantine zone seems limited and sometimes even indifferent.

“In Spinalonga, vacancies were only created by death. People continued to arrive regardless of whether there was space, and this meant that the island was overcrowded” [2]. When the limited geographic unit of Spinalonga carries more patients than its healthcare system, social resources, and physical space can provide, a systemic state of disorder is highly likely to occur, and the social system as a whole struggles to maintain stability. Through the further intervention of doctors and medical institutions, Biopower imposes “discipline” upon these individual lives to maintain the smooth operation of this discourse mechanism, thereby ensuring the overall quantity and quality of the population [5]. “This innovation and the building of the hospital had been the result of Petros Kontomaris’s campaign to improve medical treatment for the lepers” [2]. To maintain the smooth operation of the society, their requirements for the government’s funds and that a careful doctor could treat and help them without danger of infection himself was accepted. “Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday a doctor would arrive from Agios Nikolaos” [2]. In order to accelerate the progress of leprosy research, patients diagnosed with the disease are subject to close monitoring. Some leprosy patients are confined to hospitals, with little chance of leaving their beds, while others are required to follow medical advice and take preventive measures, including engaging in regular exercise. These interventions are aimed at maximizing the improvement of patients’ health conditions and instilling confidence in their potential recovery. The residents on the island seem to be disciplined and controlled by an intangible spiritual force.

Finally, for lepers who have been medically cured, the government’s approval is necessary before they can leave the island. This is due to the severe consequences that may arise if infectious individuals are released from the control of authorities. “The patients would have to test negative for a whole year before they could be let off the island” [2] as evidence to prove that they are fully recovered and now indistinguishable from healthy individuals except for their appearance. “These medical records gave Dr Lapakis’s patients a clean bill of health and would be in his own safe-keeping until everyone had crossed the water. Only then would he distribute them. They would be the islanders’

passports to freedom” [2]. The islanders were about to get their freedom back and leave the quarantine zone forever, so their reintegration into society should not pose any threat to other social groups and thereby can be recognized as normal and healthy individuals.

5. Conclusion

In *The Island*, with a profound narrative of the leprosy epidemic and its societal implications, Victoria Hislop employs a delicate touch and broad narrative scope not only to recreate the survival dilemmas of individuals and the collective under the scourge of plague but also to delve deeply into the meaning and value of life in extreme circumstances. Through the nuanced portrayal of the lives of the inhabitants of Spinalonga, the novel reveals the brilliance and resilience of human nature in the face of disaster, showcasing an extraordinary journey of seeking hope in despair, rebuilding a community in isolation, and maintaining dignity in suffering. As a paradigm of the plague novel, *The Island* prompts us to reflect on how society constructs cognitive frameworks during pandemics and how these frameworks influence the fate of individuals and the overall direction of society. By focusing intensely on the consciousness of life, the novel exposes the fragility and tenacity of life in the face of catastrophe and underscores the importance of seeking meaning in survival against adversity.

At the same time, *The Island* provokes deep reflection on biopolitics. It exposes the power dynamics and moral considerations underlying isolation policies and how these policies affect individual life experiences and societal justice. By depicting the living conditions and psychological transformations of the island's residents under quarantine, the novel challenges societal prejudices and discrimination against the society, advocating for a more inclusive and understanding social environment. *The Island* also offers profound insights into the meaning of life's existence through its forward-looking contemplation. Under the shadow of the plague disaster, Eleni and her daughter, Maria, in the novel explore the value and meaning of life in their own way—whether by clinging to faith amidst illness, seeking hope in despair, or finding connection in solitude. These stories could converge into a powerful force that inspires us to embrace life bravely and actively explore and create our own meanings when facing the unknown and challenges. By reviewing this novel, one can gain a deeper understanding of the value of plague narrative fiction and how it provides spiritual strength and wisdom to confront real-world dilemmas.

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Author Profile

Yaling Tang is studying in English Language and Literature at Nanjing Agricultural University for a master degree.