

A critical analysis of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is singing*

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Abstract

Doris Lessing as a writer aspires to throw light upon the cruelty of the real world instead of creating something imaginary, one that cannot be felt by people around the world. The present study displays this fact through analysing her first work; *The Grass is Singing* (1950). It analyses the work from different perspectives. And though these different viewpoints, one can glean the fact that the novel is a multi-thematic one. Furthermore, the study can be used to make readers familiar with Doris Lessing as a writer who does not belong to a univocal culture or mentality. She addresses issues which concern people all around the world; therefore, this study can be an example of a work that principally focuses on the achievements of a creative writer irrespective of his/her background.

Keywords: character, study, analysis, deterioration, angst, racism, identity and self-discovery

Introduction

"Lessing uses symbolic images of rooms to illustrate the limitations that individuals, particularly women, experience because of the patriarchal collective, in both "To Room Nineteen" and *The Grass is Singing*." (Lynda Scott)

Doris Lessing is a British writer who was born in 1919 in Kermanshah, Iran. *The Grass is Singing* is her first novel published in England in 1950. The novel's title was taken from T. S. Eliot's *magnum opus*, *The Waste Land*. The novel is a proto-feminist one, because it was written before the Women's Liberation Movement. The search for individuality becomes an important segment of modern literature.

Doris Lessing (1919-2013) is considered an exceptionally innovative radical and outstanding woman writer. The present study attempts to make a full described comprehensive critical interpretation on the themes of feminism in Doris Lessing's novels.

Lessing started writing her novels in the 1960s before the launch of the feminist movement; hence most of her novels are recorded out of her own naked experiences. She independently picked the issues to women and subsequently they became the chief concerns of the feminists later. The main features of Lessing's woman protagonists are being aware assertive and intellectually independent who have hard feelings regarded the sexual discrimination against them. Most of Lessing's works are women oriented. The protagonists are women.

Her first novel the grass is singing is her landmark novel, where she explicitly provides a woman's view of her experience Lessing's women characters are intelligent, active and responsible and do not conform to the traditional picture of women as foolish and helpless. In her second novel the golden notebook as a female writer Lessing has expressed many female emotions and provides female experiences in her novels. The golden notebook is carefully constructed masterpiece that creates a short novel called 'Free Women'. The main character of free women, Anna Woolf, a writer that keeps a series of

notebooks –black red yellow and blue, which give colouring to the novel. In effect the heroine of free women steps out of the novel to comment on its action. Free women and the notebooks become *The Golden Notebook*. The next novel the cleft offers a socio-cultural and feminist assessment. The novel deals with concepts and theories offered by new historicism and cultural materialism.

Lessing puts the notion of Adam and Eve creation by God under a big question. She tries to convert the male oriented attention of people to women as the bearer of human on the earth through the primal belief of women's presence in the world before men's and their creation out of women's womb as their mother. The fourth novel under consideration is the fifth child, which is narrated from a mother's perspective hence, motherhood; feminine matters and familial concerns are presented and emphasized as the fundamental themes. What makes the novel float on feministic essence is its basic focus on the role of the mother.

Doris Lessing believes that patriarchal society with its prejudice, conventions does not provide the ground for women to succeed in changing their status to a truly equal one.

She dreams and visualizes a world based on equality, harmony and sorrow sharing between men and women. She quests for a society with the virtues, demands and status for both sexes are valued equally, and males and females perform as each other's complementary parts.

The Grass is Singing is set in 1940s Rhodesia, a southern African country now called Zimbabwe. The novel centres on the murder of a white farmer's wife by her black houseboy, a crime driven by the ingrained racism that pervades 1940s Rhodesia. The novel has an exceptional structure; it starts with the murder of Mary and features the manner in which the locals react to it, and then segues into a long recollection to explain the causes and events that went behind the committing of the aforementioned crime.

The First Chapter begins with a newspaper article that describes the killing of Mary Turner, wife of a farmer named Richard Turner, by her native African servant, Moses. The local white community is astonished, but not overly concerned. The Turners kept themselves cloistered and never did inspire cordiality, with Richard subsequently going mad. Their assistant, Tony Marston, explains how he found the body and also hints that he might indeed know the reason for the killing of Mary. But the Turner's neighbour, Charlie Slatter, and local authority Sargent Denham think nothing of this explanation, feeling that Marston, a fresh transplant from England, does not really understand how life in Africa is like.

The murder disturbs Marston to such an extent that he packs up and leaves for England in the months following the killing of Mary. The novel again segues back to Mary Turner's discontented early life. Bearing with emotionally inattentive and, aggressive parents, Mary early life is spent in a boarding school, after which she gains employment by doing secretarial work. She then starts searching for a husband and has the misfortune of meeting Dick Turner, an up-and coming farmer, who sees Mary at a movie and whom Mary ultimately ends up marrying.

The early years of their marriage are none too happy, since Mary, comfortable living in the city, does not feel all that comfortable on Dick's rural farm. She meets the black house servant, Samson. She begins to display a deep antipathy towards Dick for his generosity to Samson, which she feels is both undeserved and uncalled for. She wreaks havoc by taking control of the household and getting so tight-fisted that Samson is forced to offer his resignation. This act of Mary raises the already increasing tensions rise between Mary and Dick, as he grows annoyed with her misuse of precious water and growing lack of interest in having sex with him. Mary meets the Slatters; however she soon develops a dislike towards the overly-ambitious Charles Slatter and his well-meaning wife whose only intention is to pull Mary from her misery. The Turners go from one black house servant to another without getting even a single worker to work for them for long because of Mary's miserly attitude towards paying what the workers are due.

It is at this juncture that Dick engages in an ill-starred endeavour to turn into an apiarist or a bee-farmer, and Mary starts to doubt that he is not nearly as good of a farmer as he wants her to believe. He then decides to open a kaffir store, a shop for native black Rhodesians. Mary is repulsed by her customers and the store becomes extremely unsuccessful. Dick has more failed business endeavours he tries to to raise pigs, turkeys, and even rabbits.

At one point her discontent reaches such an extent that she hastens back to the city where she had been so contented before. But Mary soon realizes that beginning afresh is neither possible nor probable. She has stayed away for so long away that even she begins to see that her clothes mark her off as belonging to the poor farmer class. Her effort to get her old job back falls apart so badly and that it leaves her feeling humiliated and mortified.

Finally, her husband comes to escort her back to the farm. She is so disheartened that she goes with him meekly and uncomplainingly - back, so to speak, to serve the rest of her sentence.

Her psychological health worsens even further. She is completely engulfed in an overpowering abhorrence of her social situation, and she begins to take this disgust out on

Moses, the latest of a series of black house-boys. Her relationship with him is highly equivocal. On the one hand, it is dominated by her mistakenly perceived ideas about class and race; on the other, she grows ever more reliant on him. These mixed perspectives cause both confusion and bewilderment for both of them, and finally Moses, unable to take her humiliation of him, kills her. The impression is strongly given that Mary has, at some level brought this upon herself wilfully.

Some of the frequently appearing theme and motif in the Grass is Singing is that of money, psychological meltdown, marital discord, discontent, bigotry, alienation, lack of spiritual life, obsession and a kind of sadism.

In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing puts up the representation of cumulative experience, and then depicts how Mary efforts to mould herself into an andocentric expectation regarding women even though she knows that she is extremely ill-suited to them.

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