

*Self –Delusion in Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing (1950)***Luqman Omer Khedir****Asst. Prof. Juan Abdullah Ibrahim Al-Banna (Ph.D.)****Banaali_juan@yahoo.com****Dept. Of English - College of Languages - Salahaddin
University/ Erbil****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.v2i144.4038>****ABSTRACT:**

This study presents Doris Lessing as one of the most accomplished and significant British writers of the post-World War II generation. Her work looks into *The Grass is Singing* (1950) from a psychological, socio-cultural and economic point of view. It attempts to analyze the bleak and the tragic causes and effects of self-delusion in the lives of female and male characters alike in a racist society grappling with a number of deep-rooted social and political misconceptions and misjudgments. Moreover, it showcases a recycled series of psychological problems the main female protagonist faces due to her delusional beliefs which end only with her tragic death. It also sheds light on the importance of knowing oneself in a baffling and fragmented world enmeshed with people caught tight in the grip of self-made delusional conceptions in an attempt to cope with the challenges set by modern life. This fact can be discerned through the analysis of Lessing's representative novel: *The Grass is Singing* (1950) from Autobiographical, psychoanalytic and existential perspectives to make readers familiar with the destructive power of delusion and self-delusion in life. Lessing tackles issues that are at the essential concern to whole humanity around the world; therefore, this study can be taken as an attempt and an entry point of highlighting some aspects of the creative and innovative intellectual accomplishments of any truly concerned and committed writer with mankind problems in the world regardless to gender, race and educational and cultural background. The study is in two sections. Section one is concerned with the analysis of *The Grass is Singing* (its abbreviated form is *TGS*), and Lessing's narrative creativity through reader's concentration on causes rather than results. The second section presents racial discrimination and self-delusion in the text, taking childhood trauma into consideration and the issues of Marriage and Self- Delusion followed by conclusions and Bibliography.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, *TGS*, Racial Discrimination, Self-Delusion, Psychoanalysis.

Introduction

1.1 Doris Lessing and her Fictional Art

Doris Lessing was born in 1919 in Persia (now Iran) to English parents who moved their family to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the hopes of successful farming. She was educated in a convent school and later a government-run all-girls school, but her formal education ended at the age of thirteen. A voracious reader, Lessing had excelled in school and continued her education by reading the wealth of books her mother ordered from London. By the age of eighteen, Lessing had written two drafts for novels and was selling stories to South African magazines, though she would not publish her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, until 1950. In 1939, she married Frank Wisdom, a much older man with whom she had two children. The marriage, which lasted four years, inspired *A Proper Marriage* (1954), considered one of her most acutely autobiographical novels (Beacham “Summary”). Lessing joined the Communist Party in the early 1940 and also met and married Gottfried Lessing in 1943, a Jewish German with whom she had a son, Peter. In 1949, the couple separated, and Lessing and Peter moved to England. In London, Lessing established herself as fiction writer, critic, journalist, and political activist. Though she became disillusioned with the Communist movement and severed her ties to the Communist party in the mid-fifties, in 1956 she was banned from returning to Rhodesia, presumably for anti-apartheid sentiments expressed in her writings. Although details of Lessing’s personal life are limited, critics agree that her fictions draw significantly from her own experiences. Though she, as an author, was always distancing herself from the feminist or Women Liberation Movement, she is often commended for her candid portrayals of female characters who struggle with their roles and the division between their emotional and intellectual needs in modern life. Lessing was awarded the Noble Prize in 2007, and passed way in October, 2013 (Ibid). Being born in Iran in 1919, moving to a colonial land at an early childhood and moving back to her country of origin in 1949, Lessing enjoyed a multi- cultural vision of the world and of humanity as well which made her fictional style uniquely rich and diverse in terms of themes and techniques. The year 1922, three years after she was born, marked the peak of experimentalism, of stream of consciousness in literature. Thirty years later, Lessing had already written her first novel *The Grass is Singing* in which traces of experiment are clearly to be seen. Yet, she was fully aware that the novel must return to the narrative, to a simple obvious story, if it is meant to survive. She felt that the author gains nothing by withdrawing in the presence of his readers and that they have to contribute to derive meanings from an artistic work other than what

the writer intends (Vianu 1-2). Lessing's fiction is deeply autobiographical; much of it is a reflection of her personal experiences in Africa and England. Relying upon her childhood memories and her serious engagement in modern politics and social movements like Communism and anti-racism, Lessing had written about the clash of cultures, between attitude within cultures, the injustice of social inequality, individual's challenge in resisting established patterns of societal beliefs and the conflict between the individual's conscience and the collective good (Solzhenitsyn 2292). In addition, her distinct treatment of the themes of marriage and motherhood, her anti-apartheid stance and her experimentation with genre and form have made Lessing an exciting and often controversial literary figure. Though many of Doris Lessing's novels and writings especially the African ones might have lost some of their aesthetic aspects for modern readers and she had herself been probably considered as being hallucinating at the time of publishing them, the themes which she was tackling more than half a century ago in those writings have proved to be importantly prophetic in terms of heralding the birth of a new generation with a new future for human inter-cultural relationships on the African soil (Sabir 310-311). Further, though many modern readers consider some of Lessing's themes as being irrelevant to the twentieth century issues, a critic and a scholar of Lessing argues that artists, in general, and creative writers, in particular, are often those who are most sensitive to the spiritual powers at work in the universe, and Lessing is such an artist (Perrakis 75). It is not only Lessing's themes that are confronting to the readers, but her non-conformity with traditional forms and genres of fiction writing is also a challenge which makes her attribution or categorization to any single literary school or style almost impossible. Throughout her career, she has consistently challenged conventional notions of form and themes, making it difficult for critics to categorize her as any particular kind of writer and never allowed herself to become trapped in a particular literary box; the breaking of conventions in Lessing's work, is, however, never done gratuitously. Language, story and unconventional literary techniques are always in the service of uncovering the hidden machinations of society and the human psyche (Smith 11-12). In line with what Alex Martin discusses in *The Modern Novel*, Lessing manipulates different devices and techniques, among them, her narrative processes present an omniscient point of view, multiple narrators and multiple points of view to penetrate all the insights and ideas of her characters especially the female protagonists, and also to emphasize the complexity and richness of experience which is probably the most significant development in the modern novel to reflect typically twentieth century

concerns including the complex nature of reality, the decline of belief in absolute truth, a fascination with psychological analysis and a belief in the importance of individual experience and opinion (Martin and Hill 18). Her process of character formation and development is purely objective. Since Lessing's approach is utterly psychological, the causes within the narration process are more preferable than the results of events. The very reason which leads to comprehend the depth of the complicated sense of the characters' agonies in a world full of complexities that result in different points of view via describing events through the eyes of different narrators which is characteristic of modern fiction .

Section One

1.1 The Analysis of *The Grass is Singing*

Most Literary historians and critics have taken the account of the relation of individual authors to the circumstances of the social and cultural era in which they live and write as well as of the relation of a literary work to the segment of society that its fiction represents or the audience towards which the work is addressed (Abrams, *A Glossary*, 334). This being said, *The Grass is Singing* is Doris Lessing's first novel in which she questions the false assumptions and misconceptions of the institutionalized 'Color Bar' or the apartheid system in South Africa. The story is a comprehensive inquiry into the complex social and cultural relationship between white and black people in one of the British colonies in South Africa which ends with violent and devastating consequences (Drabble 588). The events of the novel take place in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, in Southern Africa under the white rule during the 1940s and deal with the racial politics between whites and black in that colonized country. The novel created a sensation when first published and had a great success in Europe, England in particular, and the United States. In fact, as a result of this book, Lessing was considered a *persona non grata* in South Africa and was prohibited from entering it from 1956-1995 (Smith 11). This novel is a bleak and gloomy analysis of a delusion-based failed marriage between a white couple named Mary Turner, a depressed and frustrated wife of an unsuccessful farmer, Richard Dick Turner. As a result of both being trapped in a cycle of self-delusion in the colonized and racist environment of Rhodesia, Mary gets killed at the hand of her black servant and her husband eventually gets mad. It reflects Doris Lessing's disapproval of the entire deluding values and misleading institutionalized sexual and political prejudices of the Rhodesian white colonial society through the portrayal of the unhappy marriage of Mary and Dick Turner and the tragic end of Mary's fatal relationship with her black servant. Written almost entirely in the form

of an extended flashback, the novel sheds light on the psychological, spiritual, financial and marital

disintegrations of the lives of Dick and Mary Turner, white farmers

struggling to make a living off a farm in South Rhodesia. Embedded in

delusional racial and gender values and beliefs, the novel explores the fatal

theme of self-delusion and an individual's adaptive need for it to avoid

facing uncomfortable truths which is the very subject of this study. The novel's treatment of the fatal theme of self-delusion underlies the tragic decline of the unhappy married couple. The theme in question also serves as a prophecy against the presence of the whites in Africa whose delusory image of themselves as more civilized and cultured is simply based on their misleading established belief that the native black population is primitive and monstrous. The title of this novel is a phrase from the fifteen lines of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) quoted after the novel's dedication to Mrs Gladys Maasdrop "of Southern Rhodesia, for whom I feel the greatest affection and admiration." The title is included in the following lines:

In this decayed hole among the mountains
 In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
 Over the tumbled grave about the chapel
 There is the empty chapel, only the window's home.
 It has no windows, and the door swings,
 Dry bones can harm no one (*TGS* ii)

In light of the contextual use of these words which is the juxtaposition between

the romantic connotation of the title and the grim, depressing and the seamy side of life which Lessing portrays in her first novel, shows that the choice of such a title will provide some visioning into the thematic contents of the novel which the current study tries to reveal and analyze.

1.2 The Autobiographical Traces of the Novel

The Grass is Singing carries over some of the experiences and memories

based on her upbringing, childhood and youth as a white settler in South

Rhodesia. It includes some issues and ideas that are related to Lessing's real life mixed with her creative imagination to produce the artistic essence of the work. In her second volume of her

autobiography *Walking in the Shade*, Lessing talks about the episode which caused her write the novel: The episode from which the story grew was this: I overheard contemptuous and uneasy talk on the verandahs about a farmer's wife on a near farm who allowed her cook to 'button up her dress at the back and brush her hair'. This was correctly described by my father as the ultimate in contempt for the man: like aristocrats permitting themselves every kind of intimate and filthy behavior in front of servants, because they weren't really human being (8).

Hearing these words by mere accident, prompted the very young girl, Lessing, think and read political and sociological books about the unjust

institutionalized racial system which the white minority settlers including her own British parents were adopting against the majority of the black population of Southern Rhodesia. It actually drew her attention to the inhuman and hypocritical racial attitudes of the white colonizer against the

colonized black people. *The Grass is Singing* is a creative outcome of recording and recollecting that ordinary life episode. In fact, it was this which initiated the 'allurement of the forbidden' (Lessing, *Under My Skin*, 193) i.e., talking about and exposing the Color Bar in Africa. The whole point of the novel was the unspoken, devious codes of behavior of the whites and their delusional acclaim of superiority over the black race (Lessing, *Walking in the Shade* 8).

1.3 Narrative Creativity: Readers' Focus on Causes rather than Results

The story of *The Grass is Singing* opens where it ends. It begins with an anonymous article from a local newspaper announcing the news of the murder of Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner. The novel begins with the

following article:

Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found

murdered on the front verandah of their homestead yesterday morning.

The houseboy has confessed to the crime. No motive has been discovered. It is thought that he was in search of valuables.
(TGS 1)

The article also reveals that the houseboy whose name later revealed to be Moses has been arrested and charged with the crime. The narration later on reveals that the Turners are white and Moses is black. The news actually acts like an omen for the other white people living in the African setting of Southern Rhodesia who receive the news as Lessing, the omniscient narrator comments "as if some belief

had been confirmed, as if something had happened which could only have been expected. When natives steal, murder or rape, that is the feeling white people have.” (TGS1) This prejudiced, generalized and collective reaction of the white people shows that they are not much surprised by the killing of a white women at the hand of a black servant since they already have the mistaken and the discriminatory preconception and belief that the black natives are murderous, thieves and rapists. Using a newspaper article to document the murder of a white farmer’s wife by her native servant, Lessing addresses the human tendency to generalize based on inadequate opinions and small amount of information and also to confirm their worst assumptions, fears and rigid beliefs about others (Beacham 26).The retrospective non-linear technique Lessing employs in this novel where she opens the story with what’s essentially the climax and then using the rest of the story to explore how that climax was reached, and the distinctive intrusive omniscient narrative voice through which, in Martin’s views, readers are explicitly taught about things and comments on the events, encourage readers to focus on the real causes that lead to the killing of Mary Turner from a wide understanding of viewpoints (19).Whether the Turners, especially Mary who in later stages of the narration develops a kind of unfulfilled emotional intimacy towards her black servant, Moses, were disliked by the white minority as they ignored its code of action through avoiding and not mixing with them or their neighbors despised them as they kept themselves aloof because “They simply kept themselves to themselves” (TGS 2), Lessing directs her readers’ focus on the reasons of the homicide case. She says:

The more one thinks about it, the more extraordinary the case becomes. Not the murder itself; but the way people felt about it, the way they pitied Dick Turner with a fine fierce indignation against Mary, as if she were something unpleasant and unclean, and it served her right to get murdered. But they never asked questions (TGS 3).

This narrative statement clearly indicates Lessing’s interest in how individuals silently succumb to the assumptions of the dominant class in the society without even questioning the truth or the falsehood of those assumptions. The statement also implicitly shows how people who back the ruling class’s point of view perceive the victim of a violent death even if that view is falsely believed or propagated. Lessing had continued to question such assumptions in both her fiction and non-fiction writing (Beacham 26).This attitude of submitting to misleading and delusory beliefs of the old white settlers about the native blacks is more applicable to so many new young English settlers who traveled from England to the racial society of

Southern Rhodesia to learn farming. Lessing describes the insistence of the old settlers on the new white comers to adapt themselves with the coercive rules and regulations of the South African white society in the following quotation:

When old settlers say “what had to understand the country,” what they mean is, “You have to get used to our ideas about the natives.” They are saying, in effect, “Learn our ideas, or otherwise get out: we don’t want you.” (*TGS* 11)

In light of this quotation, Lessing clearly describes the strict and rigid code of conduct adopted in this African society where the new comers who “were brought up with vague ideas about equality” and “were shocked, for the first week or so, by the way natives were treated” since “They had been prepared to treat [the natives] as human beings” (*TGS* 12), were supposed to consciously ignore their ideals about social equality and embrace racially delusional ideals instead that are void of human sympathy and compassion as a means for mere survival since “They could not stand out against the society they were joining” (*TGS* 12). After this non-chronological presentation of the collective point of view of the dehumanizing delusional dimension of racial discrimination that is shattered by Mary Turner’s murder at the hand of Moses, the next chapters of the novel shifts into the individual and gets into the life of Mary.

The novel starts telling the life of Mary in a chronological order concentrating on her unhappy childhood, and then the happy days in town, her desperate marriage at the age of thirty, coming to the village as a result of her marriage to Dick. Then, it sheds light on the broken illusions of both, Mary’s brutal treatment towards the natives, the economic collapse of the couple and the sale of their farm, her mental breakdown and lastly her murder by Moses in the end where the circular structure of the novel is completed. Hence, this novel explores two main core themes: the undertone

societal theme of racism and the core theme related to the nature and danger of self-delusion as shown through the psychological analysis of the characters especially the character of the key female protagonist, Mary Turner who passes through three different stages in her life. First, she experiences a stage of gloom reflected in her traumatic childhood. Secondly, she enjoys a kind of bloom in her early adulthood life in the town after her father passes away, and last finally comes the fatal stage of doom as a consequence of her delusional miscalculated and mismatched marriage with Dick Turner on the farm where she makes direct contact with the natives for the first time in her life. It can be said that the novel never rests on the single theme of racism, but, it rather exists in the background of the novel to reinforce the main theme of self-delusion in the form of the

rigid and dogmatic discriminatory practices of the minority white settlers against the native black population of Southern Rhodesia. In her own words, Sima Aghazadeh, a Research scholar in the department of English Literature in the University of Malaysia, states that “*The Grass is Singing* is both a personal and psychological portrayal of its female protagonist, Mary Turner, from her childhood to death, and as a political exposure of the futility and fragility of the patriarchal and colonial society.” The novel, Aghazadeh thinks, is “Mary’s failure of individuation in the confrontation of her psychological and cultural parts, shaped by colonial experience and by her social and behavioral expectations” (107). Mary’s failure to realize her sense of self is partly because of her own troubled psychology combined with the degree of her being with or against the long-established set ideas and beliefs of the racist colonial society in which she lives. This makes it clear that the theme of racism is the background subject for the foreground one of Mary Turner’s and other key characters’ psychological analysis. Lessing herself admits that at the time of writing *The Grass is Singing*, she had very little experience or direct contact with black people (qtd. in Wang 44). Furthermore, many other critics of Lessing’s works believe that it is possible to read this novel as a severe social critique against the discriminatory practices the minority white settlers adopted towards the majority black population; however, Lessing, explained in the preface of *African Stories*: “When my first novel, *The Grass is Singing*, came out, there were few novels about Africa. That book, and my second, This was “The Old Chief’s Country”, were described by reviewers as about the color problem... which is not how I see, or saw them” (qtd. in Pickering 18-19). Elaborating upon this point, Lessing says: And now we were quarrelling about the Color Bar, the Native Question. The trouble was I had no ammunition in the way of facts and figures, nothing but a vague and strong feeling there was something terribly wrong with the System (Lessing, *Under My Skin*, 179). These autobiographical quotations explain that Lessing had much deeper intentions while writing this novel than to be only confined to the theme of racism which in this case serves only as a background for an individual’s gradual mental disintegration due to being unable to balance between her own wishes and desires, simply being her true self, and the misleading intentions and requirements of her society. With regard to Lessing’s writing process, Per Wastberg of the Noble Foundation Committee for Literature says that: “She often begins by observing her characters from within and then moving outside them, to strip them of their illusions from an objective distance.” (Wastberg 3) This comment sheds light on the fact that Lessing is concerned with the inner psychic life and ideas of her characters rather than their

outward physical appearance in society. She concentrates on the personal lives of her protagonists only by putting them in relation with their societies.

Section Two:

2.1 Racial Discrimination and Self-delusion

As it is mentioned earlier that causes are more important than reasons, racial discrimination against the native blacks of Southern Rhodesia by the white settlers constitutes one of the main reasons behind fatal race-based self-delusion which most of the white characters especially Mary and Dick Turner implicate in this novel. Different definitions of racism by sociologists and well-known dictionaries all share common negative elements of inequality, hatred and deep-rooted violence among human race. According to Fredrickson, racism is “the hostile and negative feelings of ethnic group or people toward another and the action resulting from such attitudes” (3). According to Webster dictionary, racism is “poor treatment or violence against people because of their race or the belief that some races of people are better than others” (Webster, “racism”, 1329), while Oxford English Dictionary defines racism as “the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races” (Hornby, “racism”, 958). Within the context of the novel under study, the delusional racist white settlers believe that they are far better than the native blacks who “one never knew them in their own lives, as human beings” and “one never had contacts with natives except in master-servant relationship” (*TGS* 12). In fact, the racist spatial setting in which this novel is narrated where white colonizers consider themselves superior to the blacks is one of the main delusional reasons which make the novel entirely void of human compassion and love and ultimately making “anger, violence, death seemed natural to this vast harsh country” (*TGS* 13) where, in one of Lessing’s scholar’s sarcastic view, “The whites are so certain of the necessity and rightness of their treatment of the blacks that newcomers to the country are immediately made aware of the difference between England and Rhodesia” (Ahmed 12). Relevantly, this superior master-inferior servant relationship is, as the novel unfolds later on, based on fear, hatred and resentment from both sides which is manifested in the form of Mary’s tragic death at the hand of Moses at the end of the novel. Being herself brought up in a white family where she is taught that the natives should be feared and distrusted, and being forbidden to talk to her mother’s black servants or walk out alone because of the unspeakable threat of rape and murder by the natives, Mary Turner’s delusional fixed preconception about the blacks intensifies after moving into

Dick's farm where she had to have direct contact with the blacks and where her female psyche struggles to accept the blacks as mere humans (11). Since the white settlers including Mary's mother believed that the blacks are nasty and might do horrible things to white women, Mary was always afraid of them because "every women in South Africa is brought up to be under the fixed ideas and cultural discourse of race and gender" (TGS 60). When on the farm, Mary treats her black servants according to the fixed ideas that the racist and colonial culture has implanted in her, and thus, she ruthlessly abuses and punishes the black house servants and cannot even keep one for a long time. She hates not only the black men, but also the black women whom she overtly despises. Lessing describes Mary's hatred towards the black women in the following quotation

If she disliked native men, she loathed the women. She hated the exposed fleshliness of them, their soft brown bodies and soft bashful faces that were also insolent and inquisitive, and their chattering voices that held a brazen fleshly undertone. She could not bear them sitting there on the grass, their legs tucked under them in that traditional timeless pose, as peaceful as uncaring... Above all, she hated the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see, there was something in their calm maternity that made her blood boil. Their babies hanging on them like leeches... She thought with of suckling child. The idea of a child's lips on their breasts made her feel quite sick. (TGS 104)

It can be understood from this quotation that Mary has the utmost kind of hatred towards the black women in relation to having and suckling babies. This is clear indication that she tries to negate her sexuality, femininity and maternity which are deep-rooted in her childhood trauma. One of the reasons which lead Mary to the point of rage against the natives is her suppression of sexuality because of her inner painful conflict and unacceptable feelings of replicating the image of her resentful mother against her drunken father. To compensate for these suppressed feelings, Mary grows an obsessive desire of imposing her authority and control over the natives which leads to her doomed fate at the hands of the black house servant,

Moses. The character of Moses is introduced into the novel as symbolic bedrock on which all Mary's delusions about the blacks are shattered and destroyed. She first encounters Moses while supervising the black men at work in the fields and being herself obsessed with authority crisis she feels relieved with this since "the sensation of being boss over perhaps eighty black workers gave her new confidence; it was a good feeling, keeping them under her will, making them as she wanted" (TGS 125). Some critics believe that Mary projects her anger on the black servants as a clear projection of her anger against an unsatisfactory marriage, and the oppressive, gendered social norms that led to its existence. In fact she pours her anger on the black servants that clearly

caused by other things. In this relation, Joy Wang, a critic of Doris Lessing's works believes that Dick's attitude towards her is never hostile or abusive, but she persistently resents him for things that she knows he is not able to

help, such as his strings of financial failures, the unbearable poverty, and the virtual absence of any company or entertainment at the farm. Even among other white people, such as the nearby Slatter family, Mary feels too much pride and humiliation to express the full depths of her loneliness and despair. It is only in the presence of the black servants that she is able to release the full blown rage and intolerance that have clearly erupted from somewhere (41). Mary's hatred towards the black extremely heightens when once at the farm Moses speaks to her in English i.e., the language of the so-called supreme colonizer race, which Mary interprets as a sign of disrespect. When she angrily protests at this by saying "Don't speak English to me" (TGS 133), Moses looks at her with scorn and contempt. Finding this outrageous since "most white people consider it is cheek if a native speaks English" (TGS 33) and in order to regain her control, she hits Moses with a whip across his face. The narrator describes this incident which reflects Mary's ultimate anger at Moses in the following manner:

Involuntarily she lifted her whip and brought it down across his face

in a vicious swinging blow. She did not know what she was doing.

She stood quite still, trembling; and when she saw him put his hand,

dazedly to his face, she took down the whip she held in stupefaction;

as if the whip had swung out of its own accord, without her willing it.

(TGS 134)

It is at this moment when Moses reveals the real scope of his physical power to Mary when she notices that “He was a great hulk of a man, taller than any of the others, magnificently built, with nothing on but an old sack tied around his waist. As she stood there, frightened, he seemed to tower over her.... Then she made a sudden movement and recoiled, terrified” (*TGS* 134). Shortly after this incident, Moses becomes Mary’s house servant evidently with the intention of making her suffer emotionally in a similar way she made him suffer physically, and also with the intention of eventually killing her, which he does at the end of the novel. Considered a scandalizing social and racial taboo, Mary develops a kind of implicit empathy towards Moses which she cannot fulfill because of her being a wife of a white man who considers interracial intimate relations as illogical and erroneous. This desire which is mingled with fear intensifies when he enters Mary’s house as a servant compelling her to submissively face the black fear face to face:

She felt helplessly in his power. Yet there was no reason why she should. Never cease for one moment to be conscious of his presence about the house, or standing silently at the back against the wall in the sun, her feeling was one of a strong and irrational fear, a deep uneasiness, and even-though this she did not know, would have died rather than acknowledge- of some dark attraction. It was as though the act of weeping before him had been an act of resignation of her authority, and he had refused to hand it back. Several times the quick rebukes had come to her lips, and she had seen him look at her deliberately, not accepting it, but challenging her....And now she

begins to avoid him. And she was held in balance, not knowing what

this new tension was that she could not break down (*TGS* 176).As Mary’s relationship with Moses evolves, Wang argues, the text of *The Grass is Singing* vacillates between representation of Mary’s fear of Moses as delusional paranoia, on the one hand, and legitimate terror on the other” (41).

This makes it clear that Mary has to hate Moses because of the fear of violating the white taboo of holding a relation with him, on the one hand, and giving Moses the right to hit back in revenge of his injured pride at the hand of a white woman. This is most true since with the unfolding of the events of the novel, one can clearly notice that Mary’s life, both physical and emotional, end up completely destroyed as the result of her increasingly desperate dependence upon her delusions, the most notable of which is that black people are disgusting. Hence, one can conclude this section by saying that Mary’s fear of the natives is in part inherited from her family’s misleading perspectives on the blacks and is partly because of the

white society's delusory belief that their dominion over the blacks is an absolute reversible right. All of this indicates that Mary's attitude from inborn fear to delusory control and then back to the cycle of fear makes the thematic point relevant that white control over the blacks is in fact a delusion.

2.2 Childhood Trauma

Central female characters in Doris Lessing's novels especially Mary Turner in the case of *The Grass is Singing* have wishes and desires that they cannot realize in their actual life. This happens because of lack of self knowledge

with regard to the social and cultural circumstances that surround them, or troubled family relations they experience in their childhood which leave severe traumatic effects on them throughout their subsequent lifetime stages.

Webster dictionary defines trauma as "A very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time" (Webster, "trauma", 1754). The Austrian physician and neurologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) defined trauma or 'Psychic Trauma' as "any experience which calls up distressing affects such as those of fright, anxiety, shame, or physical pain" (qtd. in Akhtar 228). Freud also believed that human behavior and mental conditions have causes of which people are unaware, causes that stem from childhood experiences or from suppression of certain basic desires and wishes and thwarting of certain basic urges (Galens 2: 181). The early sketch of the novel's characterization of Mary Turner details her early unhappy childhood, her youth and young womanhood. Her childhood is shaped by her bad relationship with her parents especially her drunken, absent-minded and oppressive father who wastes money on alcohol while his family lives in misery and poverty. Her mother, "a tall, scrawny women with angry, unhealthy brilliant eyes" who "made a confidante of Mary early... and used to cry over her sewing while Mary comforted her miserably, longing to get away, but feeling important too, and hating her father", (TGS 33) leaves profound impact on Mary's later

attitude to sexuality and motherhood. Lessing describes this parental relationship in the following quotation:

He drank himself every evening into a state of cheerful fuddled good

humor, coming home late to a cold dinner, which he ate by himself.

His wife treated him with a cold indifference. She reserved her scornful ridicule of him for when her friends came to tea. It was as if

she did not wish to give her husband the satisfaction of knowing that

she cared anything for him at all, or felt anything for him, even contempt and derision. She behaved as if he were simply not there for

her. (TGS 33)

It is obvious from this quotation that since her early childhood, Mary lives in this father-mother tense and cold marital relationship which makes witness their frigid sexuality and her mother's body in the hands of a man who was simply not present for her. Psychologically speaking, these suppressed and unresolved problems which Mary witness between her remain in Mary's

character and they cause the distortion and disintegration of her escapist and delusional marriage with Dick Turner due to the negative feminine image she gets from her mother as a helpless victim of a miserable marriage. It is this negative image of femininity which results in her sexual suppression and dysfunction as a category of disorder of sexual desires which usually reflect deep disturbances in the early mother-child relationship (Akhtar 264).

In order to forget her traumatic childhood memories, the thirty year old Mary decides to remain a teenager girl. She chooses to live in a girl's club and wearing her hair in a little-girl fashion. She immerses herself in the delusion that she does not have the least care for men despite the ironic fact that "outside the office and the club her life was entirely dependent upon men." (TGS 36) Mary's childish clothing and immature behavior especially before men are her defense mechanisms against her fear of sexuality which is

deep- rooted in her childhood or, in other words, in her unconscious part of her personality. According to the Freudian theory on the structure of personality as it is fully represented in David L. Smith's book *Approaching*

Psychoanalysis, the human personality is divided into three components: Id, ego and superego. The Id is the desires and wishes existing in the unconscious which is the place where all the painful experiences, emotions,

fears, unresolved conflicts, wishes and unacceptable desires are buried. The

ego is the referee between the wishes and desires and the constraints of reality and society; consciousness is one function of the ego and is the seat

of logic, reason, language and perception. The superego stands for the big

brother censorship which suppresses the wishes and desires of the Id if they

were against the moral standards and values of the society (84). The unconscious is the deep dark spot or place where all painful experiences, fears, unresolved conflicts, unfulfilled wishes and socially unacceptable desires are stored which might cause psychological problems if surfaced; if they come out to the conscious. (Smith 85-86) These suppressed feelings and fears will be revealed in the form of dreadful dreams which Mary will have in later stages of the narration.

In order to prevent the coming up of these feelings to the conscious, Mary hides behind the mask of acting like an unripe woman as a defense or protection tool against remembering the unpleasant moments of her sad childhood she had with her parents because whenever she thought of home “she remembered a wooden box shaken by passing trains”, and whenever she thought of marriage and children “ she remembered her father coming home red-eyed and fuddled... or her mother’s face at her children’s funeral delusional intention of becoming a person on her own account. But this was

against her instinct.” (*TGS* 34) In relevance to this psychic description of Mary’s traumatic character, other cohort scholars believe that in addition to early childhood trauma, there are other factors which contribute to personality disorder. The well-known American psychologist and educator, Nevitt Sanford, expresses his viewpoint on this matter in the following manner: Traumatic experiences in childhood may have effects that ramify

throughout the personality and help to determine an adult’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. At the same time, we may still give due attention to social factors as well as early events in the individual life (128). This statement makes it clear that the psychological analysis of any individual or character should take into consideration both early childhood experiences and the later social and human factors, i.e., the relation between the human subject and the objective world which impacts his or her later stages of life.

Having accidentally overhear her friends making derisive comments about her age, her manner of clothing and her unmarried state, Mary focuses on one line of the offending gossip that refers to her failure to marry: “ she just isn’t like that, isn’t like that at all... and that something is missing somewhere”. (*TGS* 38) This little incident that can be considered as the disruption of her illusions by the sudden interference of reality on one hand, and the dramatization of the theme of self-delusion on another, has a profound impact on Mary which puts her at the edge of mental breakdown.

She creates a delusion that she can stay unmarried for the rest of her life, and then she obsessively maintains and strengthens that delusion over a period of time till she experiences that sudden

intrusion from reality which causes the delusion to shatter, and then goes through a period of depression. This is followed by the creation of a new delusion of deciding to get married to escape her socio-psychological dilemma, a decision which plunges her into isolation, mental and economic sterility and emotional and spiritual vacuity which leads to her consequent tragic death. In order to prove herself as otherwise than her friends think about her, Mary begins to criticize her manner of childlike girlish behavior, changes her clothing and appearance and hastily decides to marry whoever comes in her way. At this point, she feels she is split into two selves, the one of Mary herself and the other self which the stereotyping society code of behavior wants her to be. Then she meets and accepts Dick Turner, but “it might have been anybody” (*TGS* 43). In fact, Mary pays a high price for her hasty decision to marry, because “After her marriage, she suffers from laxity and meaninglessness of ill- matched marriage. She is forced by the society to accept loveless marriage that she also saw in her parent’s life” (Ahmed 11). This quotation reflects the two interesting aspects of Mary’s character in being both archetypal and highly individualized. She is archetypal in that she represents a certain set of consistent and strongly observe characteristics within a certain group of people who dare not break away with those characteristics in order to keep their sense of collective affiliation and identity. On the other hand, she is highly individualized because of the important role which her particular circumstances play in defining her subjective identity. Following her decision to get married under the pressure of social expectations, Mary suffers a great internal conflict of reconciling between what she really is and what she wants and desires to be, and finds it “impossible to fit together what she wanted for herself and what she was offered” (*TGS* 40). Consequently, this continuous psychological struggle between the two parts of her split character leads to her mental breakdown and tragic end at the end of the novel.

2.3 Marriage and Self-Delusion

As the narration in *The Grass is Singing* proceeds in terms of Mary and Dick Turner’s short and casual relationship which consummates in a loveless and miscalculated marriage mainly because of the adverse economic and socio-psychological circumstances in which both live, readers become more aware of the difference between delusion and truth that are representative of appearance and reality and their impact on the lives of this mismatched couple. Some scholars and researchers of Doris Lessing’s early African stories and novels believe that Mary’s childhood experiences in terms of her parents’ fixed negative assumptions about the black natives and their miserable marital life which leaves indelible unpleasant psychological

scars in the mind of the child Mary are among some of the reasons which lead to her inability to adapt herself to the life on the farm with Dick where the blacks are whom she refers to as “evil-smell creatures (*TGS* 100), “filthy savages (*TGS* 116) or “animals” (*TGS* 121) and she continuously tries to impose her power and authority on them “without having any analytical

perspective on the racial problem” (Ahmed 12) or having “no measuring

rod to assess the world around her” (*TGS* 48). On another hand, Mary’s

fear of sexuality and maternity also stem from the fact that she dislikes to

repeat her mother’s marital mistake associated with her deep hatred towards men especially towards her own father. In fact, “Mary attempts to negate her sexuality and femininity which are deep rooted in her childhood trauma but she doesn’t have self consciousness to analyze and recognize them” (Aghazadeh 114). Despite this deep-rooted hate towards the other sex, Mary’s horror of sexuality is closely linked with a past that she cannot escape, and she “doesn’t consciously seek to explore her past and her unhappy childhood, even though she makes every effort to live an existence different to that of her mother. It is partly Mary’s refusal to come to terms with the sexual side of marriage that causes her later sterility of her own marriage” (Scott 4). Though Mary tries to avoid thoughts of her childhood from her mind, her fear of her father and her later suppressed sexuality are revealed in her dreams. Sigmund Freud quoted in Peter Gay’s *Freud: a Life for Our Time*, defines dream as “the (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed,

repressed) wish” (Gay109). Freud distinguished between the manifest and the latent aspects of dreams to show that even though the two are meaningfully linked, they differ markedly (110). Manifest dream is the one

that has no psychological importance and is considered as a remembrance of certain regular daily events and the dreamer will not remember it clearly when he/she is wake. Freud called ‘the manifest dream’ as ‘mere surface

phenomenon’ (Akhtar 165). Latent dream is the one that carries a coded meaning that has to be interpreted. Such a dream is of much psychological

significance since they carry suppressed wishes and desires, hidden thoughts and desires and conflicts that dreams embody and disguise (Gay109). In Mary’s dreams, where her repressed unconscious wishes and desires manifest themselves, the nightmares

of her childhood trauma and these suppressed feelings are revealed. In one of her dreams, she sees:

Her father, the little man with the plump juicy stomach, beer-smelling and jocular, whom she hated, holding her mother in his arms as they stood by the window. Her mother was struggling in mock protest, playfully expostulating. Her father bent over her mother, and at the sight, Mary ran away (TGS 185-186).

In her later dreams which are a mix of fear and desire, she confuses her father with Moses, her black servant who kills her at the end of the novel after developing a kind of sexual attraction towards him. In one of these scary dreams, she imagines Moses murdering Dick and then approaching her, but she sees that the threatening figure is not just Moses but “her father who was threatening her. They advanced together, one person” (TGS 188). Mary does not only come into good terms with her past, but she does not also try to adapt herself to her present marital life with Dick. For instance, she refuses to go out with him on the farm where the black workers are whom she deeply hates because of holding fast and tight to the delusory assumptions about Africans taught to her by her parents. She simply does not learn from her past, and it comes to control her marriage with Dick. Commenting on the importance of self-knowledge as a theme shaping all Doris Lessing’s novels, Lois A. Marchino states that *The Grass is Singing* (1950), records Mary Turner’s failure to understand herself, a failure which leads her into an unwise marriage and an impossible situation with the blacks on the Turner farm. Mary’s inability to adequately assess her own attitudes leads to her destruction; because she cannot come to terms with what she is, her death is as much a suicide as it is a murder (252).

It can be said from this quotation that Mary is suffering from deep identity crisis since she suffers from feelings of unhappiness and confusion caused by not being sure about what type of a person she is on one hand, and what her true purpose behind her marriage with Dick is. In this context, the narration reveals that she marries Dick not only for the purpose of reluctantly becoming his wife alone, but basically for quenching her thirst for superiority over men which stems from the negative image her father left in her mind. Thus, she accepts Dick because his worship restores “her feeling of superiority to men, which was really, at bottom, what she had been living from all these years” (TGS 43). Arguably, in one way or another, the whole cast of the white characters in this novel especially Mary, and Dick Turner,

dangerously get involved in self-delusion and their marriage is the core dramatization of this theme and its dangerous consequences. Obviously, they are completely mismatched and are unable to understand each other's actions and motives. After her unhappy childhood, Mary is not prepared for marriage but feels society's pressure to find a husband. Dick who lives desperately alone for many years on his farm, idealistically dreams of a wife and children to accompany life on the farm and marries Mary blindly after seeing her for the first time. The narrator tells us that his decision to marry is a delusional way to escape from his loneliness because it is "essential for him to love somebody" (TGS 48). His first sight of her takes place in the town cinema and even without knowing her name or even having the slight information about her character, she becomes "the focus of his work and imaginings" (TGS 47). He becomes engrossed in thinking about her from a single look and very soon becomes to like this town girl who, he believes can change "a practical, adaptable, serene person who need only a few weeks on the farm to become what he wanted her to be" (TGS 49). Contrarily, after asking her to go for a drive with her in an unpleasant evening, he becomes "angry with himself for his self-delusion and weakness; she was flattered but puzzled as to why he had sought her out" (TGS 47). Similarly, after that evening drive together, she also starts thinking about Dick as a potential future husband without, or rather as a delusional utopia to escape her perplexed and chaotic psychological dystopian status, the narrator describes Mary's feelings towards Dick in the following manner:

Yet what was Dick to her, really? Nothing. She hardly knew him. He

was a spare, sunburned, slow-voiced, deep-eyed young man who had

come into her life like an accident, and that all she could say about

him (TGS 49).

Commenting on their delusion-based marriage, Aghazadeh says:

Their marriage, not based on love or mutual understanding, *is a mutual exploitation and self-delusion* in their use of the other to satisfy their own deficiency, and deceive themselves about the other one's nature. Mary uses Dick to prove herself not "a ridiculous creature whom no one wanted" (TGS 49) and Dick uses her as a way to escape his loneliness (110). This quotation appears to explicitly say that their marriage is a mistake based on mutual self-delusion and unrealistic perspectives, attitudes and beliefs towards each other which end up in inevitable destruction for both. As both are

emotionally under-developed, they become obsessed with each other and with each think of the other as idealized responses to their fantasies and dreams. The plot of the novel, its action, is driven by a series of challenges they both undergo to their precious beliefs about themselves and about their lives and struggle to, in Mary's case, find new delusional beliefs or, in Dick's case, hold onto original beliefs. As a matter of fact, Dick first appears in the novel, at least to Mary, as a kind of hero or rescuer who can take her from the desperate life she has come to hate into a life of freedom and emotional fulfillment. This seems to be mere wishful thinking which would bear no fruit for survival as Mary later frightfully discovers how Dick, who dreams of a productive life on his farm with a wife and children, is ineffectual, inefficient, disorganized and completely deluded about his farming abilities. She makes several attempts to persuade Dick to change his farming style to make their living standards better in the delusion of reshaping him into the rescuer she has mistakenly envisioned in her mind because:

She needed to think of Dick, the man to whom she is irrevocably married, as a person on his account, a success from his own efforts.

When she saw him weak and gallow, and pitiful, she hated him, and the hate turned in on herself. She needed a man stronger than herself, and she was trying to create one out of Dick (TGS 143).

Dick's psyche as Mary's is too weak to accept anything that doesn't fit into his self-sustaining belief system, and instead of changing his way of farming as Mary proposes, he clings to his own ways more strongly than ever rather than making changes in his life and relationships to make a truer existence possible. Further, he survives several of Mary's attempts to make him alter his perspective on his beloved farm by holding even stronger to his beliefs, eventually shutting out any opportunity for happiness or any other fulfillment he might have. When it comes to the point at the end of the novel when he can no longer sustain his delusions in any way about his farm and also about the potential for happiness in his marriage, he suffers complete emotional and mental breakdown as he loses his farm and Mary as well. To conclude this part, one can say that here lies the thematic warning against the dangers of holding too tightly to one's own delusions.

Conclusion

In this study, it can be concluded that Doris Lessing's main intention is to reflect the oppressive power and danger of self-delusion that not only women but generally all human beings are forced to confront in the course of their lives. Nevertheless, the female character of the novel, who is actually type characters prove to be stronger and more proactive in braving this deep inner psychic dilemma regardless of the fact that some of them unconsciously replace dystopias with not much aspired utopias. This given, the female character's involvement with self-delusion due to the unfavorable circumstances in which she lives and against which she rather loudly rebels can be explored at three main different levels: the first level is the individual level- a self-analysis of an individual character. The second one is the interpersonal level-her relationships with other close individuals whether a disgruntled or a dissatisfied husband or parent or unfaithful and always on-the-run lovers. Lastly, is the level of social, cultural, economic and political relations which focuses on the attitudes of the female protagonist towards the societies in which they live and with which they feel they are highly misfit and incompatible.

Among the most pathetic female victim of self-delusion whom

Lessing presents in her novel under the study is Mary Turner in *The Grass*

is Singing whose incapacity to know herself well and the environment in

which she lives plunges her into a dangerous cycle of self-delusion. Mary is a white female who lives in a patriarchal male-dominated racist society where instead of the culture of love, the culture of hate and intolerance due to racial discrimination prevails. In fact, she finds herself in a society where rigid, arrogant and irreversible white erroneous pre assumptions and mistaken pre-judgments about the black population exist. In addition to this socio-cultural mode of behavior to which she is accustomed since her childhood, Mary also suffers from lingering childhood trauma which causes her not to develop both sexually and emotionally into full and grown womanhood. Yet, she blindly marries a white farmer in the delusion of shunning her white collective culture's censures of spinsterhood. Dick is also a male victim of self-delusion since he decides to marry the former without having the least knowledge about her character and background. Obviously both Mary and Dick Turner are born with forces they can do nothing about. Both practice self-delusion in return for sustenance and survival based on everything but reciprocal love and mutual understanding. Interestingly enough, Mary, disappointed in her white husband, seeks love and empathy in her black servant whom she hates at first. A white women's emotional

obsession with a black man per se symbolizes the destruction of the long-standing delusion of white-black superiority and subordination over the African soil. The mental breakdown and the eventual tragic death of Mary which is more psychological than physical due to her disowning of white race nobility on the African soil, rocks the foundation on which those inhumanely deceitful societal and cultural beliefs are built.

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تظليل الذات في رواية العشب يغنى (١٩٥٠) لدوريس ليسينك

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الملخص

تقدم هذه الدراسة (دوريس ليسينك) ككاتبة انكليزية بارزة لجيل بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية و تحلل التداعيات الناجمة لظاهرة تظليل الذات او خداع النفس على حياة الأفراد بصورة عامة والشخصيات الأنثوية على وجه الخصوص في رواية العشب يغنى (١٩٥٠) في محاولة لاقتفاء أثر مسببات و عواقب تلك الظاهرة من وجهات النظر الأثوبيوغرافية والنفسية والاجتماعية-الثقافية والاجتماعية الاقتصادية والاجتماعية-السياسية في حياة الشخصية الأنثوية لبطلة الرواية (ماري) التي تواجه العديد من القيود و التحديات في محاولتها الشاقة في تحقيق شخصيتها وهويتها في عالم معاصر مليء بالتشطي والتعقيد. وعلاوة على ذلك تسلط الدراسة الضوء على النتائج المأساوية لخداع النفس، فرديا وجماعيا، في حياة الناس ممن يخطؤون في التمييز بين أسوأ خيارات الحياة وأفضلها. تنقسم الدراسة الى مقدمة ومبحثين واستنتاج. في المقدمة تسلط الضوء على الكاتبة دوريس ليسينك وحياتها وانجازها المبدع. اما المبحث الأول يتناول تحليل رواية العشب يغنى ويحاول تحليل الأسباب المؤلمة والمأساوية لخداع النفس ونتائجها في حياة الشخصيات ذكرا كان ام انثى في مجتمع عنصري يشتبك مع عدد من المفاهيم والأحكام الاجتماعية والسياسية الخاطئة المترسخة. والمبحث الثاني يعرض سلسلة من المشاكل النفسية التي تتعرض لها البطلة الرئيسية بسبب اعتقاداتها الوهمية التي لا تنتهي الا بموتها المأساوي. وأخيرا تلخيص اهم الاستنتاجات تليها المراجع المستخدمة في هذا البحث.