

Examining *The Grass is Singing* through a Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

This paper addresses the postcolonial movement that occurred in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in the late 1940s in Doris Lessing's well-known book *The Grass is Singing* (1950). The psychological study of Mary Turner, a disgruntled lady, and her marriage to Dick Turner is interpreted in this essay. Lessing has also produced a portrait of Rhodesian society at the same time. The way Black people and white masters interacted throughout that time is the main topic of this essay. From 1923 to 1980, Rhodesia remained a white colony. The semi-autobiographical book *The Grass is Singing* exposed the terrible differences in relationships between Black and white South Africans. In addition to being a beautiful psychological portrait of lives in uncertainty and a superb recreation of African beauty, the novel is, above all, a thorough examination of the ideology of white dominion.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Hybridity, Othering, Rhodesian, *The Grass is Singing*,
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The Grass is Singing is a powerful anti-colonial work that foreshadows current postcolonial issues and themes. It is preferable to examine some of the core principles of postcolonialism from the outset in order to improve our paper's comprehension. It is impossible to characterise postcolonialism in a single, straightforward term. One definitive definition of postcolonial theory is quite contentious. From a literary perspective, "postcolonial literature" appears to be authored by individuals who now reside in nations that were once colonised by other countries. The original meaning of the phrase is undeniable, yet this is not a sufficient explanation. Many thinkers have pointed out that the meaning of the "post-" in "postcolonialism" cannot be

adequately explained by the old relationship alone. The title of Kwaine Anthony Appiah's work is "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" (Appiah) The significance of the term "postcolonial" extends beyond the historical association with colonialism to encompass themes, periods, and discourse.

Postcolonialism become well known issue first in literature and later, through literature which "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies,"(Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin) in the areas of international relation and sociology. Since writing is essentially focused on the human condition, it becomes important to view it as one of the most edifying tools for gaining knowledge about the effects of colonialism on both colonising and colonised countries. In a colonial context, literary texts serve as a variety of tools to address the varied perspectives of various societies. Literature can gotten to be a medium through which subaltern, which alludes to "those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes"(Ashcroft) declares itself by implies of the "complicity between violence and discourse."(Spivak)

Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism (Vintage, 1993) highlighted the importance of cultural representation in the imperial system. In addition to examining the language of opposition to colonialist perspectives, he suggests that "postcolonialism" must be strengthened if colonised peoples are to become a historical issue. Similar to this range of activities frequently referred to as "postcolonial," it is extremely careful to find a suitable explanation. The term "postcolonial" has been used to describe some of the examples found in the literature of countries like Australia, Canada, India, Pakistan, New Zealand, Kenya, Jamaica, Nigeria, and Ireland. In any case, they are all "postcolonial" in the same sense, and the answer to this question is "no." Readings of postcolonial literature occasionally contain ideas and resources borrowed from a variety of other critical disciplines, including feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and linguistics. In fact, this multiplicity of ideas leads to disagreement and friction in the field, which prevents the development of a single key process that we would identify as generally "postcolonial."

The majority of reviewers expressed their thoughts on postcolonial literature in terms of overlapping subjects, which include the following:

1. The initial interaction of the indigenous people with the colonists and the disruption of their culture.
2. Imitation (the colonized's attempt to fit in by copying the colonisers' speech, mannerisms, attire, and way of life)
3. The need for self-definition of the governmental future and continuity with a precolonial history
4. The portrayal of Aboriginal people as less than fully human by colonisers, known as “othering,” and all types of colonial persecution
5. The struggle for individual and societal cultural identity, as well as associated issues of unhomeliness, alienation, hybridity, and double consciousness.
6. The European tourist's journey through a foreign land with a local guide
7. Exile (the feeling of being a foreign visitor in Britain or an “outsider” in one's own country)

The idea of power and prejudice shown by white characters is one of the primary topics of *The Grass is Singing*. This article gives readers an idea of how prejudice and preconceptions exist in Rhodesian supremacist society. In addition, the truth that is expected as a daily paper report suggests the attitude of Rhodesian society as it is reflected in the works of African creators of the time. The dark academic characters are portrayed throughout Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* as a group of people who the white characters acknowledge are constantly planning to steal their belongings. These unfavourable generalisations made by the white characters highlight how racism has developed socially in Rhodesian society, where members of a certain community build and maintain racial groupings and intolerance. First of all, because the dark figures are not white, they are inherently seen as inferior, just as if a person needed to be white in order to be considered significant in society.

Through her characters in *The Grass is Singing*, Doris Lessing has used critical racial theory. Charlie Slatter and Mary Turner, the two major protagonists, are not hesitant to employ violence and cruelty against the agricultural workers. Workers follow all orders and adhere to the master's demands without question. White people had created a typecast of black people as being docile and submissive, and this ability to see, hear, and understand black Africans as being content with their slave-like function in the labour sector.

This sentence illustrates the authority and control of the white characters as well as Charlie Slatter's unpunished murder of a black figure. However, Slatter supported sambo farming. It hung on the wall above his front entrance. If killing is required, you won't mind. He had once lost his anger and killed a native. He received a thirty-pound fine. He hasn't lost his anger since.(15)

It adds very little significance to the lives of the Black characters; a white person's murder of a Black person was a petty affair. The notion that a black person's life is worth less is demonstrated by the fact that the minimum penalty for murder has been changed.

Because it embraces identifying oneself as “the human being” and those who are different as something “other” than human, the phrase “Othering” is cruel. In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing uses Eurocentric ideology and the othering of the indigenous people to highlight the bad aspects of colonisation. Minors who are different are referred to as “Othering.” It is readily apparent in Mary and Dick's home. Mary and Dick are barely surviving. They are not well-respected by other white people since they have pin money and make no effort to blend in with white society. They still think of themselves as superior to the indigenous and servants despite this. Mary even goes so far as to express wonder and astonishment at why anyone would feel anything for a native. She felt a mixture of awe and disgust. She found it incomprehensible that any white person would feel any personal animosity against a Native American.(78). To Mary, they were less than human, ashamed to be kind, sentimental, or sensitive.

The residents are mugged off their names in various situations when they are othered. The majority of residents are described as locals, boys, or niggers. Fewer of them are given distinguishing traits, and some have names. The women were “alien and primitive creatures with

ugly desires she could not bear to think about,” according to Mary.(116). After outlining every situation, it is safe to assume that the settlers had a negative opinion of the locals.

Here, it is easy to discern Mary's intention to defend white women by contrasting them with native earthly moms who have exposed breasts. Additionally, some white women chose not to feed their children at all, and others did not reveal their breasts when doing so. This affirms that white women are correct in their sensible and astute behaviour, which is consistent with the Eurocentric idea that is prevalent in the British culture.

Mary serves as a model for how the native people are viewed in the entire Eurocentric world. When Moses once asked for water in his native speech, Mary immediately insulted him by saying, “Don't talk that gibberish to me.” Moses believes he has been forbidden from speaking both his own and her tongues after this. Mary of Moses, the unasked inquiry, can clearly sense this protesting tone. Due to the fact that English is her language, native speakers are not proficient in it. This arrogant and nonsensical conduct is what exacerbates the divide between the coloniser and the colonised.

Mary's perspective on the residents is a collective creation of the colonial community rather than just her individual desire. However, she worries that Moses would complain to the police if she smacks him. She is slightly distressed by the idea of oppression because she is well aware that she has complete control over the judiciary and administration. However, Mary's problem eventually arises, and it turns out that even the locals had the right to sue the white people because this was no longer a situation that any white person could tolerate. "He had nothing but patience; she had the courts, the police, and the prisons behind her. However, the idea that he even had the authority to appeal drove her insane.(148)

Since she has been surrounded by racist notions since she was a little child, Mary Turner, the main character who harbours hatred towards the black African characters, could be classified as psychological. This comment regarding the white racist members of the society illustrates the idea of white supremacy and the inferiority of black characters: "When the old settlers say 'One has to understand the country,' what they mean is 'You have to get used to our idea about the native.'" "Learn our ideas, or else get out: we don't want you," is essentially what they are

saying.(20) The balance of power between Moses and Mary changes later in the book. As we see at the beginning of the book, Mary had all the power, but as she began to believe in Moses, she put him in a strong position. One of the obvious instances is when Moses leaves the house one day to go back to his sleeping quarters, after which Mary orders him to remain with her. She cried out once more, "You mustn't go," in an impassioned voice, despite the noble demeanour she was attempting to assume. She had to place her palm on the glass as he held it to her lips, and she gulped while tears streamed down her cheeks. She saw an indulgence in his eyes as she beseeched him through the glass, her terror returning.(186). This quotation highlights the reality that Mary is now reliant on Moses. Rather, she is comforted by him "by his voice firm and kind like a father," even if she detests having a black man touch her.(187). It is evident that Moses, who was formerly a black figure, can now command white characters. When Moses tells Mary to drink water, that is one of the situations. As if addressing one of his own women, he said simply, "Drink," and she drank.(186)

In Bhabhas' analysis of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, the term "hybridity" also refers to "the creation of new transcultural forms with the contact zone produced by colonisation." "All cultural statements and systems are constructed," according to Bhabha, in a place he refers to as "the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process." (Bhabha) The cultural identity always appears in this "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" if it is comprehended once, it becomes clear that "inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable." (Bhabha) As time goes on, Moses—one of the most distinctive features of Black people—begins to talk in a different voice and seeks to coerce Mary into treating him decently. Without understanding what to do and what not to do in personal relationships, Mary feels increasingly helpless while Moses gains strength.

Bhabha uses the term "Ambivalence" to modify colonial discourse, and he relates to "the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between coloniser and colonised." (Ashcroft) However, because ambivalence "disrupts the clear-cut authority of colonial domination" and implies "the simple relationship between coloniser and colonised," Bhabha's notion of ambivalence is "an unwelcome aspect of colonial discourse for the coloniser."

One could argue that Mary's relationship with Moses appears to be conflicted, and that this kind of colonial relationship plants the seeds of Mary's own demise.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Lessing's work may be flawed in a few ways, just like many other artistic creations. However, overall, the novel is saved by the author's strong artistic ability, which is demonstrated in the development of efficient techniques and the rejection of a postcolonial ideological perspective that permits sufficient understanding of her subject and the delving into her characters' realities.

Even so, there are still certain issues that need to be discussed regarding the text's length, even if we have attempted to address some of the contentious postcolonial aspects that it exhibits. However, we must also remember that not all postcolonial critics will interpret the same book in the same manner, even if they concentrate on the same postcolonial idea. This is because experts in every subject disagree. Whether we decide to use postcolonial criticism or not, our goal in doing so is to recognise the opportunities and authority that come with living in a culturally diverse world; to learn to see some of the major aspects of literature that we might not have seen so clearly or so vastly without this conceptual frame of mind; and to realise that culture is a way of relating to the world rather than merely a stable collection of traditions and practices that endure over time.

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