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The Conundrum of Dominance: Mary's Psychological Trauma in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

This research entitled “Ambiguity of Dominance: The Masque of Psychological Trauma in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing* ” has been successfully completed under my supervision by Apecksha Gurung partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English. I would like to recommend this research be examined by an external examiner.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Ambiguity of Dominance: The Masque of Psychological Trauma in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, by Apecksha Gurung has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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The Conundrum of Dominance: Mary’s Psychological Trauma in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing*

Abstract

This dissertation explores the conundrum of dominance as a psychological trauma in Doris Lessing's The Grass Is Singing *from a psychological perspective. The novel captures the tormented life of Mary, who is psychologically shattered by childhood experiences because of her cold familial relationship and wounded by traumatic repercussions in her marital days with Dick Turner. Indeed, she loathes the black servants and shows her dominance; however, she collapses herself when she is involved in a sexual relationship with Moses. Against these backdrops, this research focuses on three specific questions. Firstly, what is the purpose of depicting Mary as an ambivalent character, who is distorted by childhood trauma? Secondly, why does Mary oscillate between being dominant and being dominated? Thirdly, how does the novel articulate the ambiguity of dominance through the character’s narratives? To answer these questions, this study embodies Cathy Caruth’s understanding of PTSD and Dominick LaCapra’s notion of ‘absence and loss,’ and argues that rather than being a constant, human quality, dominance is a style that varies depending on a person's psychological state. In other words, dominance may be understood as a manifestation of psychological embodiment that takes many forms. It can present as enslavement, hatred, and disintegration, or it might manifest as ambivalence, contradictions, self-deception, destructiveness, and delusiveness. The research discloses dominance as a repercussion of trauma which can be both productive and destructive.*

Keywords: Psyche, manifestation, memories, superiority, delusion, recuperation, and repercussion

The research critically analyzes the traumatic psychosis of white people who are entrapped in the ambiguity of dominance in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* (1950). The novel exposes the versatile countenance of dominance, arguing its modular nature by presenting the major characters— including Dick Turner and Mary Turner— as socially superior to blacks but slaves of Moses psychologically. Expostulating the magnitude of the protagonist, Mary Turner, Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* remaps the psychological domain of the human sphere and illustrates how individual trauma capacitates in breaking the social understanding of dominance. Thus, the research exemplifies the relationship between trauma and individual suffering and underscores the contradictory affinity between individual psychosis and social dominance.

The novel begins with Mary Turner's mystery murder article in the newspaper. She is the wife of ambitious but "A bad businessman" Richard Turner, who tries his best to succeed in life but fails to achieve his dream (13). The novel gradually reveals Mary's tormented life through flashbacks and exposes the bitter reality of her careless murder. She confronted sheer poverty in her childhood. Growing up in a cramped home, Mary was unintentionally entrapped in the psychological distortion because of her parent's cold relationship. This experience left her with a lasting sense of unease and aversion towards sex. After leaving school young, Mary finds both companionship and a sense of purpose by working for a company and living in a girls' club. As years go by, she naturally takes on a mentor role for the younger girls, though she maintains a youthful appearance.

Mary's life was routine but relatively secure. However, a careless remark from her peers sparked a deep insecurity. This insecurity drives her to marry Dick Turner hastily. This impulsive decision brings her to the farm, where she finds herself trapped in the very situation she had always strived to avoid. The harsh realities of Mary's rural life, marked by poverty and hardship, take a toll on her mental well-being. This manifests in heightened

anxieties surrounding intimacy, particularly with the farmhand Moses. Though the novel leaves the details ambiguous, it hints at a possible sexual encounter between them coinciding with Mary's mental decline. This unsettling dynamic continues until the arrival of an outsider, Tony Marston, who recognizes the disturbing shift in Mary's mental state.

Tony's encounter changes the relationship between Mary and Moses and offers a detachment in between. Following orders, thus, Mary dismisses Moses from her employment. However, he makes a chilling return on the night before she leaves the farm, culminating in a violent act on the front terrace of her house. While the exact nature of their relationship remains a mystery, whispers about Mary's inappropriate conduct lead to an unspoken agreement among outsiders to shroud the case in silence. In the end, the event of Mary's murder rejoins the beginning of the novel.

Mary's astonishing relationship with Dick and Moses, particularly, has evoked a sense of curiosity among the readers since the publication of the novel. In an interview with Stephen Gray, when Gray focuses on Mary-Moses relationship, Lessing suggests, "You see if you take a very inadequate, a very psychologically frail woman and put her in an environment like that, of course, she's going to become dominated by a strong personality. It doesn't really matter who it would be, black or white" (332). Concerning this statement, different scholars have strived to analyze Lessing's work of art from a different perspective with dissimilar vantage points. Katherine Fishburn, for instance, in her article "The Manichean Allegories of Doris Lessing's '*The Grass Is Singing*'" embodies Abdul R. JanMohamed's notion of the Manichean allegory—an allegory that reinforces the white ruling class's power and supremacy, and argues, "Lessing's text makes no real effort to understand Moses: who he is, what he believes in, where he comes from, why he treats Mary with compassion, or even why he ultimately kills her" (4). Instead, Fishburn remarks, "This novel that takes place in Africa and is (apparently) about Africa focuses not on the lives,

fears, dreams, foibles, or strengths of the Africans but on their white colonizers" (3). Fishburn's reading of the novel suggests that Lessing's depiction of the major characters is the repercussion of colonial supremacy which subdues the echoes of the black people. Indeed, undoubtedly the pages of the novel are palpable to accept Fishburn's argument. Moreover, Mary's scornful behavior against Moses and her loathing for their race represents a colonial revamp. However, Fishburn fails to incorporate Mary's mental and psychological distress, which is responsible for her monstrosity.

Similarly, tracing Judith Butler's notion of performativity as both abjection and agency, Joy Wan's article "White Postcolonial Guilt in Doris Lessing's '*The Grass Is Singing*'" discusses how historical guilt reiterates rather than renounces the white privilege. The personal subjectivity of the protagonist transforms into collective guilt which Wan regards as the vehicle for redemptive alleviation of white postcolonial guilt. In his words, "By the time of her death, Mary is the epitome of the abject: she is impoverished, excluded from all social contact, insane, sexually terrorized, and waiting only for death. Yet this absolute state of abjection allows her to come into being in a way that at last gives her a sense of progress and purpose" (43). Wan's approach to dealing with the novel wonderfully shows how the historicity traces its route in human performativity despite being dislocated from its distant past. However, if Wan's argument is considered, the question is how those reiterations of history manifest in historical occurrences. In this context, I argue, that Wan failed to discuss the transformed performativity of the actors, who are guilty of their past. Indeed, human beings are incapable of abstaining from their past but the historical recurrences are never similar. Thus, incoherent repetition of history not only changes the faces of the origins but also rearticulates their ambiguous and paradoxical nature of dominance.

The reappearance of distant history is a multitudinous scope that changes the comprehensibility of social practices and individual exercise. Michele Wender Zak has

slightly captured this issue in the article "'*The Grass Is Singing*': A Little Novel about the Emotions." Focusing on the relationship between individual circumstances and the material nature of social and economic systems, Zak argues "It [novel] eschews the endless cataloging of apparently self-perpetuating dislocations psychological and social that serves as a substance for much of what has come to be called modernist literature" (481). Zak's analysis offers a road map of modern art forms culminating from Lessing's way of blending individual, social, and economic aspects of human beings. What has art become is based on certain realities inculcated historically in Lessing's novel; nevertheless, as Charles Sarvan and LiebetrautSarvan argue, "*The Grass Is Singing* is a complex novel, and one aspect of it is the racial conflict which Doris Lessing, writing more than two and a half decades ago, saw as inevitable in Southern Africa" (536). Moreover, in the words of AniasMutekwa and Terrence Musanga, "Doris Lessing's text, *The Grass is Singing*, focuses mainly on the white colonialists during the early to mid-days of colonialism, that is, the 1930s to the 1940s . . . . The novel, therefore, is a critique of colonial racism based on Enlightenment binary notions of civilized and uncivilized, and a Social Darwinian conceptualization of human societies" (241). Astonishingly, the majority of the scholars have identified common issues, namely the color and racial dichotomy, in the novel. For this, Eve Bertelsen does not hesitate to categorize the structure arguing, "As a text, this novel offers the reader two distinct and apparently contradictory readings—one, an explicit indictment of racist colonial society, and, two, a mystical and deterministic resignation in the face of the forces of savage Nature" (646). The point is that despite Lessing's attempt to capture multiple issues in a single novel, scholars are indebted to adamant racial binaries. I am not arguing the method they are using to disclose the variegated colonial issues is identical and neither I am undermining their toil to incubate colored analysis. The point is they have missed the psychological aspect of the novel which could have been a wonderful ground to evaluate characters and the nature of

dominance the white people hold. This research work, thus, explores the novel from a psychological perspective, particularly from trauma studies, in light of Cathy Caruth's understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Dominick LaCapra's notion of 'absence and loss.'

Caruth describes PTSD as "an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations, flashbacks, and other intrusive phenomena" (24), in her article "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History." Rereading Sigmund Freud's trauma theory, she understands trauma as striking "events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them" (417). In this sense, for Caruth, PTSD itself is an event when the victim of the past event suffers in the present because of a certain terrific experience. Caruth's description of PTSD is deliberately chosen as a theoretical perspective for two specific reasons. Firstly, Caruth allows us to evaluate Mary, Dick, and Moses from a psychological dimension. Secondly, by evaluating the experience of both the characters, to explore the nature of psychological dominance over others, especially Moses.

Where Cartuth discusses the nature of trauma, LaCapra sheds light on its impact. More specifically, LaCapra conveniently exposes the way trauma manifests in human behavior and the responses it attains in the social domain. In his words, "a post-traumatic response of unsettlement becomes questionable when it is routinized in a methodology or style that enacts compulsive repetition, including the compulsively repetitive turn to the aporia, paradox, or impasse" (699). LaCapra elucidates the patients' incapability to overcome the dreadful past, resulting in the inability to distinguish between the past and the present. When an individual suffers because of scornful events, the terrific experience occupies voluptuous space in mental strata that ruptures the aptitude of negotiation between the

'happened' and happening,' inflicting them with a motif of reluctance that allows them to speculate the possibility of recurrence of the same event. LaCapra's way of understanding the consequences assists in exploring the consequences of traumatic experience, thus, his theoretical apprehension is embodied in the study to observe the ambiguity of dominance in the characters.

Although the significance of all the characters in the novel is equally important in exploring the dynamics because every character holds a certain level of meaning in shaping the condition of the major character, two characters—mainly representative, Mary and Moses, could help to excavate the traumatic events that formulate the traumatic resemblance and ambivalent relationship between dominant and dominated in the novel. The triangulation of these two characters recedes from the fixed notion of dominance and interplays between the powerful and powerless simultaneously. The point is in a literal observation, the white characters seem to be powerful and Moses to be powerless; however, if the consequences of the dominance are explored critically, this relationship turns vice versa. Thus, the question is, is Mary a dominant character? Or, rather Moses? This study, therefore, investigates the nature of dominance in these characters and attempts to answer why the contradiction of dominance prevails.

Indeed, *The Grass Is Singing,* in totality, encapsulates the relationship between blacks and whites, and the hostile relationship between these two races is undoubtedly the issue of dominance, stereotype, and prejudice. However, as Bill Schwarzp proclaims, "If at the outset it can be read as a generic mystery story, *The Grass is Singing* quickly transpires to be nothing of the sort. There can be no concluding finale in which everything is returned to its rightful place" (130). For Schwarzp, the novel cannot be read as a crime thriller mystery story of Mary Turner because the events of the story are organized in such a way that it validates the sequences as the narrative gradually develops. Moreover, "Instead, the story is governed

by what may be called principled unknown ability, regulated by the narrative voice. Notwithstanding the narrator's corroboration of the district's perception of the failings of Tony Marston, this is a voice that itself is replete with ambiguity" (130). Thus, Schwarzp's analysis paves the way for investigating the 'unknown principle' that creates ambiguity in the meaning-making process. In this relevance, the study assumes the characters to be psychologically impaired because of traumatic events that delude them with a sense of dominance. Subtly, the characters who pretend to be dominating are at the same time victimized by their dominance, and the one who is dominated repulsively becomes dominant in other ways. To probe these issues, the study deals with the acts of Mary and Moses respectively.

Firstly, Mary is a victim of her tattered past; She barely enjoyed her childhood in homely peacefulness. In fact, "For Mary, the word 'Home' spoken nostalgically, meant England, although both her parents were South Africans and had never been to England. It means 'England' because of those mail days when she slipped up to the store to watch the cars come in and drive away again laden with stores and letters and magazines from overseas" (Lessing 32). She has a deep affinity with the 'store' because it "was the real center of her life, even more important to her than to most children" (32). As time goes by, "When she grew older, the store came to have another significance: it was the place where her father brought his drink" (32).

The connection between the store and her father here becomes the focal point that instigates the origin of her mental impairment because "Mary Knew, even as a child, that her mother complained for the sake of making a scene and parading her sorrow: that she really enjoyed the luxury of standing there in the bar while the casual drinkers looked on, sympathetically; she enjoyed complaining in a hard sorrowful voice about her husband" (33). The drunkard father exacerbated the status of the family and tortured her mother so badly that

"she used to cry over her sewing while Mary comforted her miserably, longing to get her away, but feeling important too, and hating her father" (33). The cold relationship between her father and mother is described in the novel in the following ways:

> He drank himself every evening into a state of cheerful fuddled good humour, coming home late to 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. And for all practical purposes, he was not. He bought home the money and not enough of that. Apart from that, he was a cipher in the house and knew it. (33)

The unshared relationship between the father and the mother was rooted in the hazardous behavior of the father, which not only made the mother hostile and careless but also incubated disdainful images in Mary against her father. The relationship in totality became an irreparable wound for Mary that generated scornful and threatening responses for marriage.

Perhaps, because of this reason, Sheila Roberts argues, "Mary is a woman who through childhood trauma has been incapacitated for marriage. When she does marry because of perceived social pressure, she is almost immediately unhappy" (74). Roberts's presupposition is based on her childhood experience, which is followed by the societal norms to get married because "she was not playing her part, for she did not get married. The years went by; her friends got married. She has been a bridesmaid a dozen times; other people's children were growing up; but she went on companionable, as adaptable, as aloof and as heart-whole as ever" (38). The problem with Mary here is not about her loneliness but rather how deeply she was ruptured by the past experience that she could not overcome the fear of marriage because "when she thought of marriage she remembered of her father coming home red-eyed fuddled; when she thought of children she saw her mother's face at her children's

funeral – anguished, but and dry as hard rock" (Lessing 39). However, when she got married for the first at the age of thirty, she left her husband because of his old age. These all events are the foundations for Mary's traumatic initiation of her psychological disruption. In fact, these incidents fundamentally pave the way for her further disruption, manifesting it as a dominance in different forms.

As Mary marries Dick, her reaction against the black servants shows her dominating behavior which makes her a more cruel character in the novel. When Dick introduces Samson, the first black servant she encounters in Dick's home, Mary "was rather outraged at this casual stockmarket attitude; then she saw that it was only a matter of form, and calmed herself. She was left with a feeling of indignation, saying to herself, 'And who does he think he is?" (57). Her assumption of superiority and loathing attitude toward the servant though for the first time seems natural because of the master-slave relationship; however, her indifferent attitude, behaving with servants like animals ostensibly remarks her attitude of dominance.

Significantly, the burdensome childhood, the toxic relationship between her father and mother, and the social pressure that compelled her to marry traumatized Mary and intensified her discomfort because of the suffering that elevated over time. For instance, "she was so naive, so unconscious of herself in relation to other people, that it had never entered her head that people could discuss her behind her back" (Lessing 41). The surrounding people who talked about her troubled her often thus, "she who had never had time to think of herself, took to sitting in her room for hours at a time, wondering: Why did they say those things? What is that matter with me? What did they mean when they said that I am not like that?" (41). These sorts of questions haunt her constantly which changed her perception towards people. And as a result, she started having jaundiced eyes over those who could be dominated. These very happenstances are the reflection of the traumatic events that penalize the individual without

giving chance to overcome the threats. In the words of Caruth:

> If the return is displaced by trauma, then, this is significant in so far as its leaving-the space of unconsciousness is paradoxically what precisely preserves the event in its literality. For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs, or to put it somewhat differently, that history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence. (187)

For Caruth, history can only be comprehended within the framework of its repetition. The exactness of the historical events deals with their significance in reference to the accessibility one has in its occurrence. In this relevance, Mary's sense of superiority and hatefulness against the blacks is, I argue, the abstraction of her traumatic past, specifically relating to her father who was dominant in her family. In this sense, perhaps, she was bitterly wounded by her father's dominance thus, she was always in chance to dominate others in response to her being dominated. As Caruth contends, "The trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge— that cannot, as Georges Bataille says, become a matter of "intelligence"—and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time" (419), Mary's behavior against the servants is a repercussion of dominance as a traumatic enactment.

The way Mary discords Moses and shows affinity with the last servant questions her firmness of dominance. In other words, her aversion towards blacks, accentuating herself to a category of a powerful, and sexual affair with Moses, ultimately ending her life being killed by the servant to whom she dominates, disfigures her nature of domination. In this sense, the question is, is Mary dominant or being dominated? Is she ruling over Moses or vice versa? Indeed to a large extent, except for the last servant, she is a character who dominates the rest and grips her firmness over the people without any hesitation. However, the last player changes the game and makes her vulnerable. In fact, in the words of Charles Sarvan and

Liebetraut Sarvan:

> Mary is not a woman who can justify her conduct rationally or courageously maintain it on principles: Doris Lessing shows clearly that it is her sickness which drives Mary into such a situation. To have presented it otherwise would have been to falsify matters. Only extreme weakness could have overcome Mary's upbringing and years of cultural conditioning. Mary is not one who has the strength to challenge the code and values of her society, and in an apartheid society someone like Mary has to become less than her normal self in order to become truly human. (536)

Sarvan and Sarvan explicitly hint at Mary's 'sickness' that made her vulnerable to retain courage in following the social principles. She lacks the strength to go beyond societal norms and values and she has to struggle to be a human because she is yet to define her humanness. Her obstinate dominance in behaving with Moses makes Sarvan and Sarvan categorize Mary as inhuman. Undoubtedly, she effaces Samson indirectly by occupying space in the kitchen; she blames him for stealing raisins and forces him to accept the lie. She dominates Samson and sustains her authority by defying the acts of her servant. These acts resemble her sickness but a sickness of traumatic suffering. Perhaps this is the reason behind her inability to perform a human act that could prove her humanness because as Caruth argues, "The flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys, that is, both the truth of an event and the truth of its incomprehensibility" (420). The point here is Mary's obstinate behavior is an exposition of the impaired traumatic memory that collides with the present and incapacitates her from distinguishing the truthfulness of the event, which enables the reader to compound her in the regime of an inhuman being.

Mary is enshrouded with a magnitude of reluctance and never strives to validate her point while dealing with the servant. She lacks instinctual commonness that aligns people because of shared experiences and fails to empathize with people and their vulnerability. For

instance, Dick finds a new servant after Samson leaves home but when the next boy respectfully responds to Mary in native gesticulation, she flames; “She did not know it was part of the native code of politeness not to look a superior in the face; she thought it was merely further evidence of their shifty and dishonest nature. It was as if he were not really there, only a black body ready to do her bidding. And that enraged her too” (Lessing 68). As a result, “ She felt she would like to pick up a plate and throw it in his face so as to make it human and expressive, even with pain” (68). Moreover, her suspicion is so severe that “All the time, at the back of her mind, was the thought that the new servant was alone in the house and probably getting up to all sorts of mischief” (69). Her mistrust is rooted profoundly in the memories of the dark days; the painful experiences stored in her mental warehouse although do not resemble the act of the servant, those traumatic events are undoubtedly owned by registering the experiences. In Caruth’s words, “Trauma, that is, does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (417). In this sense, although the servant’s way of presenting himself was not the data that encoded trauma in Mary, her behavior is a repercussion of traumatic responses because they have registered in her dark memories as a fact.

Mary does not recall her bygone days nor does she lament upon the childhood events in the novel that could mobilize her to commit anything wrong; however, the horrible past is so unwillingly imprinted in her memories that she could rarely imagine its pervasiveness in her daily exercises. When I argue against Mary’s deceptive performance in proving her ambivalent character, a scholar like Lynn Sukenick may claim, “Working against an admission of female resemblance is the mistrust of female irrationality, an irrationality which crops up in Lessing's fiction not only as eccentricity, or paralyzing neurosis but, as in *The Grass Is Singing*, a foaming craziness” (519). Indeed Suckenick is right in the sense that women are different and they must be acknowledged for their rationality, and significantly

the novel has failed to provide dignity to the female protagonist. However, since my argument is not based on gender issues, what I would rather suggest is Mary's impotence in synchronizing herself in the rural present is rooted in her traumatic psychosis which engulfs her in the powerplay of dominant and subordinate. Indeed she is portrayed as a meek character on her own but practically speaking, she disrupts the limits of docility and authorizes her dominance over the servants. This sense of formalization in her authority is underscored by the trauma that she inherited in her childhood because as LaCapra asserts:

> Trauma brings out in a striking way the importance of effect and its impact on memory, pointing both to traumatic memory in the form of post-traumatic effects (repetition compulsions, startle reactions, overreactions, severe sleep disorders, including recurrent nightmares, and so forth) and to the challenge to work through them in a viable but perhaps never totally successful fashion. (377)

LaCapra exposes the medium through the trauma releases its energy to negotiate the present encountered. Moreover, he underscores how trauma validates its presence in the inner psyche of human beings and how they prioritize the essence of being lively in the human sphere. In this sense, Mary's act of dominance resonates with the presence of the traumatic traces of memories and disintegrated thoughts that bear within.

Indeed Mary shows her engulfed in trauma merely after marriage and her traumatic experiences escalate as she continues her relationship with Dick. Her marital entanglement succumbs to the cusps of brutality and inhumanness the more she encounters the native black servants. In the words of Sheila Roberts, "Dick's house is a very ordinary, simple construction on an ordinary farm, yet these disquieting and uncanny emanations arising from it and its surroundings pres- age the breakdown of the barrier between the internal and external in Mary's psyche, a state also symptomatic of the paranoid" (75). Penalizing herself, she ruptures her healthy robustness and deteriorates her psychic normality despite showing

her dominance against Moses. However, it does not mean she never tried to tame her psychic disintegration. In fact, she strives to overcome and react against the psychic urging forces repeatedly though she could not get rid of those diabolical past. For instance, she works in the kitchen to overcome the thoughts, reads novels, and even tries to resettle her life in the city leaving Dick alone at his home; nonetheless, since every attempt surrenders to eradicate those haunting past, she submerges into the vastness of trauma and restlessly continues to reflect her incompetence to subdue her dominance against the servants. In this sense, trauma cannot be evacuated from the traces of the psychic sphere easily rather it demands a constant effort to experience the way in harmonizing the past and the present. In the words of Caruth, "The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (187). For Caruth, unless an individual succeeds in delinking historical horror, the traumatic infliction persists and keeps haunting with uneasy experiences. Thus, in this sense, Mary, though she relinquishes in forgetting the past unconsciously, her circumstances triumph in failing her to recuperate the wounds.

Mary's incompetence in overcoming the former days does not allow her to isolate herself from the assumptions she holds against the blacks. Inwardly, she dissolves her compassion in the swamp of hostility and succumbs to the nexus of the master-slave category. As a result, her dominance does not merely prove her to behave indifferently with the servants but also forces her to vandalize the possibility between her and the blacks. This happenstance is more palpable when her psychic traces come into visibility. For instance, as Dick is aware of intervals in the worktime of the servants, for Mary, "it seemed to her insolence directed against her authority over them when they stopped, without permission, to straighten their backs and wipe off the sweat, She kept them at it until sundown, went back to the house satisfied with herself, not even tired. She was exhilarated and light-limbed and

swung the sjambok jauntily on her wrist" (112). Mary's character and attitude allow us to assume that she is overjoyed when she can enjoy authority by brutalizing others. In other words, unless she celebrates her superiority, she wraps herself in the fabric of gloominess. One of the possible reasons behind her attitude, perhaps, can be racial prejudice that she consciously adheres to. She is a white woman and a colonizer in other ways, who inherently is respected in countries like South Africa as in the novel (19). More importantly, as AniasMutekwa and Terrence Musanga argue, "Colonialism, a product of the human struggle over geography and the control of the environment, is by its very nature a hegemonic discourse in so far as it is premised on the domination of the indigenous people by the colonized" (242), her hateful deportment is a product of colonialism. However, since her attitude is almost constant against Moses, Dick, and any other White characters like Charlie Slatter and Tony Marston, Mary's attitude cannot recognize as the byproduct of colonial hegemony. Instead, since " the novel incorporates the iconology of female paranoia, is reinforced when Mary is brought as a bride to Dick's farm, her paranoia now exhibiting the classical symptom of an irrational fear of being menace" (75), as Sheila Roberts claims, Mary is harmfully a character who because of self-contained traumatic suffering, aims to make the people suffer as she does.

The novel disrupts the harmony between the past and the present of the protagonist. As Mary enters the uncomfortable situation, she delinks with the historicity that emerges as an apparatus that not only fundamentally breaks her essence but also reinforces the past with unknown strength. In Caruth's observation, "The trauma of the accident, its very unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure. It is a departure which, in the full force of its historicity, remains at the same time in some sense absolutely opaque, both to the one who leaves, and also to the theoretician, linked to the sufferer in his attempt to bring the experience to light" (190). In this sense, Mary's behavior against the black servants is an

unwanted welcome that unconsciously plunges her into the veil of suffering while dominating the blacks. Her double faces of dominance are explained in the novel in the following ways:

> She had learned, standing in the sun watching them all day, to hide her hatred when she spoke to them, but she did not attempt to hide it from herself. She hated it when they spoke to each other in dialects she did not understand, and she knew they were discussing her and making what were probably obscene remarks against her — she knew it, though she could only ignore it. (115)

Mary's consciousness is destabilized because of her traumatic history and the recurrence of those repressed desires is exploded with hatred and loathing. Moreover, since she is internally wounded, her reflection against the blacks is the return of the repressed that verbalizes her inner despair.

Mary's endeavor to hide her hatefulness and incapability to delude herself shows her depleted psychic order, which she often tries to overcome or survive the distortion. It is because "For the survivor of trauma, then, the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple comprehension" (419-20). In this sense, perhaps Mary instead of eroding herself, is trying to navigate herself to the shore of conscious apprehension' however, what she fails to realize is as Kate Schick claims, ". . . acting out— extremely problematic, encouraging simple narratives and knee-jerk responses that perpetuate the cycle of violence" (1838). Thus, her act of renunciation exacerbates her situation rather than repairing it. As a result, "She hated their half-naked, thick-muscled black bodies stooping in the mindless rhythm of their work. She hated their sullenness, their averted eyes when they spoke to her, their veiled insolence: and she hated more than anything, with a violent physical repulsion, the heavy smell that came from them, a hot, sour animal smell" (115). In this relevance, Mary's act of dominance is not a matter of supremacy in every context but rather a way to evacuate the dreadful history, an apparatus to

erase the traces of memories, and a process of eroding herself for the sake of her betterment.

Mary's traumatic manifestation of the repressed self and her attempts to reconcile the fractured present take an unpredictable turn when she encounters Moses, who surpasses her every strength turning the victimizer into a victimized character. It is not to argue that Mary instantaneously surrenders in front of Moses. In fact, she puts her utmost effort into resisting him and offers ample resources to subvert the strength of Moses; however, Moses turns out to be a better player than Mary, which compels her to collapse in front of him. For instance, "She was unable to treat this boy as she had treated all the others, for always at the back of her mind, was that moment of ear she had known just after she had hit him and thought he would attack her. She felt uneasy in his presence. Yet his demeanor was the same as in all the others" (142).

Although Mary disdainfully reacts to Moses, her strengths are not powerful enough to overpower his robustness. In fact, if we observe this situation more closely, a new way of understanding comes into visibility, and dominance itself bears the threat of inferiority.

Dominance and superiority are never a constant state of pleasant experience but rather a fleeting moment that is made stable based on hubris or delusion that an individual inwardly poses. Significantly, dominance retains assumptions of fixities in behaviors unless the individual corresponds with the perpetuation of dominating but this perpetuation is so vulnerable and camouflaged that when it turns into domination even who is dominating at a time does not know. In relevance to the novel, as Wan remarks, "As Mary's relationship with Moses evolves, the text of *The Grass Is Singing* vacillates between representations of Mary's fears of Moses as delusional paranoia, on the one hand, and legitimate terror, on the other" (41). The point Wan is making is based on Mary's instatic and transient reaction against Moses. Mary always behaved badly with the other black servants; however, she could not harm Moses as she did to the previous servants. Her incoherent reaction to Moses is so

powerful and full of ambiguities which is described in the following details:

> Remembering that thick black neck with the lather frothing whitely on it, the powerful back stooping over the bucket, was like a goad to her. And she was beyond reflecting that her anger, her hysteria, was over nothing, nothing that she could explain. What had happened was that the formal pattern of black-and-white, mistress-and-servant, had been broken by the personal relation; and when a white man in Africa by accident looks into the eyes of a native and sees the human being . . . , his sense of guilt, which he denies, fumes up in resentment and he brings down the whip. (144)

The preconception she had over the black servants has a dark history and her definition of the subordinated native was confined within some prejudicial values; however, she could not befit Moses in her conventional conception. In fact, she oscillates between her attraction and distraction; love and hate; want and dislike, and approval and disapproval with Moses no matter how hard she tries to tilt herself in her convention. The passage articulates the similar condition of Mary while dealing with the robustness of Moses.

Mary herself does not know whether is she trying to deny his presence or she is willing to embrace him and surrender for her love. Thus, as Alex Zwerdling puts, “Even in the last chapter of *The Grass Is Singing*, which records Mary's breakdown, Lessing moves toward surrealistic distortion. We see the world through Mary's helpless terror, the farm, the clearing, the house, the people engulfed by the implacable twin forces of nature and black rage” (xxxviii). This context especially Mary’s inconsistent reaction against Moses plays a pivotal role in diversing the issue in the novel. The master showing love to the servant, who was her best enemy, not only liquifies Mary’s solidarity but also questions the colonizer and the host who unconditionally encapsulate trauma. Dealing with the feminist issue in this relevancy, Bill Schwarz argues, “Lessing presents Mary’s story as a case study of the pathology of feminized whiteness, turning on the destructive impossibilities that 'race'

ordains" (132). Moreover, "A recurring theme in Lessing's early fiction lies in the disintegration of a succession of female characters. Mary in *The Grass is Singing* becomes a kind of prototype for a subsequent generation of tragic figures" (132). Instead of assuring the novel to be the depiction of traumatic experiences and its result in characters like Mary, Schwarz points out the other faces of white female colonizers, arguing the vulnerable status of women even during the colonial process. However, I argue, that Mary's incongruent behavior is not a reflection of the white pathetic women in the colonial state, but rather a consequence of repressing her inner desire for dominance. More subtly, she knows she is white and she is supposed to dominate the native blacks but she realizes that Moses could not merely transform the reality that Mary incorporates but also change the dynamic of the relationship between colonial and racial discomfort through the impetus of her traumatic repercussion.

The dilemma of acceptance and rejection of Mary regarding the presence of Moses collapses when she is found sexually intact with Moses. Mary, who was never a good mistress for the black servants, now fails to resist her libido and happens to submerge in the thirst for biological entanglement with Moses. As she, "has broken their biracial sexual taboos, the other whites see her as a threat to the myth of their own cultural superiority-a threat to the colonial status quo, one that must be contained, removed, or eliminated" (Fishburn 2). Mary, who was once the most dominating character, now shatters her dominance and encounters death because of her own deeds. In fact, her mysterious behavior with Moses threatens her inner stability and punctures her firmness regarding her own essence. Her inconsistency regarding self-contentness and self-determination is more visible when Moses becomes the vantage point of the discussion in the family. Indeed, "although she always felt sharp relief because the tensions that were created between herself and every servant would be dissolved by his [Moses] going, she also felt indignant, as if it were an insult to herself.

She never let one go without long argument and expostulations" (150). Mary could not prolong the argument with Moses as she did with other servants; her own words are self-deceptive, fraudulent, and confusing for herself.

Mary is entrapped in her will and desire and cannot determine the significance of her doings. For example, when Moses comes in front of her once, "To her horror she discovered she was shaking with sobs again, there, in front of the native! Helpless and weak, she stood beside the table, her back towards him, sobbing" (150-151). When Moses wants to go, "She said at last, wild with panic: 'You mustn't go!' And she wept on, repeating over and over again, 'You must stay! You must stay!' And all the time she was filled with shame and mortification because he was seeing her cry" (151). Mary wants Moses to stay but at the same time, she is also aware of her whiteness and superiority. This flux causes her to distort her comprehensibility regarding what is needed and what is necessary. Perhaps, her mental instability is not merely a reflection of trauma but also a process in which she is indulged in remapping herself; however, Kate Schick contends, ". . . working through takes trauma seriously: it involves a work of mourning for past and present suffering whilst also insisting on a struggle to understand and challenge the social and political arrangements that facilitated that suffering" (1838). In this sense, Mary's affinity to Moses indeed is not merely a counteract against her dominance but also a challenge to a social dogma that takes place in reconstructing herself while isolating herself from the wound of trauma.

Perhaps, the fleeting psychological status and constantly shifting acts of Mary signified Alex Zwerdling to comment upon the novel in totality. As he says: "In *The Grass Is Singing* we are in the presence of a clear-sighted mind that romanticizes nothing and is concerned with how people do live—rather than how they ought to live" (xxxvi). However, the novel is not merely a description of how people try to live, I argue, but a visualization of an individual's life who cannot deny the consequence when traumatic manifestation inflicts

the very notion of superiority. Moreover, it is also a projection of traumatic repercussions that spring unprecedented reality regardless of choice, interest, and desire. It is because who knows Mary's organic desire? Who knows why Mary hated black servants if she was prone to set her desire with Moses? Who knows what enslaved her to surrender in front of Moses? And who knows why she chose Moses as her sexual partner out of numerous servants.

Indeed, in my opinion, Mary was neither concerned about race nor colonial violence. In fact, her loathing, dominance, and superiority were her means to cope with her fragmented past that not only isolated her from herself but also constrained her to attain what she wanted to attain, being victimized by the consequences of her own obligations. According to Caruth, "The problem of trauma is not simply a problem of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival. It is only in recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience" (24). Taking Caruth's argument as a vantage point, since Mary was a patient engrossed with childhood trauma, her dominance against the black servants is a destructive consequence whereas her sexual relationship with Moses resembles her enigma of survival. One of the reasons behind arguing this is that if she could love and make a relationship with Moses she was always aware of her dominance and sense of superiority against black servants. Moreover, her awareness shows that she deliberately brutalizes herself to inform blacks that she deserves superiority but no longer sustains her psychic robustness and becomes the slave of traumatic repercussions. To recall Caruth:

> Not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced, continually, to confront it over and over again. For consciousness then, the act of survival, as the experience of trauma, is the repeated confrontation with the necessity and impossibility of grasping the threat to one's own life. It is because the mind

cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony to the impossibility of living. (25)

Caruth exposes an individual's confrontation of the dreadful present recurrently if failed to realize it on time. Trauma does not reveal its origin explicitly but slightly hints individual by providing the magnitude of suffering through the psychic domain but the very existence of an individual is threatened to death and problematizes being because the psychological patterns of the mind cannot reiterate its functionality.

In the words of LaCapra, “to construe trauma as evoking essential incomprehensibility is to obscure dimensions of traumatic events and experience that are amenable to at least limited understanding, which may help to aver incidence of trauma or to mitigate and counteract its effects” (378). In this sense, since Mary is unaware of her trauma and its possible revisiting, she is at the same time detaching herself from the possibility of her recuperation. This ultimately leads to her downfall and obliges her to isolate herself from the continuation of life and embrace the pleasure of death. The point here is that because she fails to comprehend the vastness of trauma and its repetition, she collides with her desire which leads to the disruption of her life. And interestingly, “Trauma and traumatic events, experiences, or processes, such as genocides and other forms of violence and abuse, may involve double binds and may limit what may be represented with any degree of adequacy” (LaCapra 377). In this sense, Mary's every act of domination and enslavement is the cause of trauma which leads her to commit a horrible crime against the servants and demolish herself in front of Moses. What brought her into this condition is not trauma basically, but her incapability to unify the threats and heal those traumatic repulsions because as Caruth claims, “the trauma thus requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure” (420). Thus, "The ability to recover the past is thus closely and paradoxically tied up, in trauma, with the inability to have access to it" (419). Against this backdrop, Mary's

incapability to reiterate herself in the transaction between the past and the present not only crafted the traumatic monstrosity but also ruptured the notion of dominance, providing a multifaceted avatar in Mary's behavior.

In conclusion, Mary's childhood incident incoherently distracted her inner psyche and inoculated traumatic traces in her memories, which she is unaware of. Her inability to realize inner vulnerability because of psychic fragility deluded her in presenting as a superior and dominant character against the blacks but this led to the end of her life and eventually getting rid of trauma. In her entire life, the intensity of traumatic repercussions was so powerful that no matter how hard she tried to recuperate her wound, she not only failed to do what she wanted but was also obliged to do what she did not want to do. This act of dilemma paved the way for inevitable mistakes, redefining the meaning of dominance and superiority.

Mary shows her dominance against the black servant in the beginning but when she encounters Moses her dominance shatters into pieces and ultimately transforms into a slave psychologically. Her incapability to distinguish between her desire and thoughts, action and emotion; and love and obsession oscillate her psychic dimension in the ambivalent situation, which changes her firmed status into an aporatic condition where she becomes dominant and slave interchangeably. In this relevance, this research exposes that Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* is a story of a traumatized woman who fails to recuperate her tattered memories and becomes victimized by traumatic inflections, showing her ambiguity of dominance. The research reveals the consequence of trauma and shows what happens if an individual fails to realize the historicity of the past and how that traumatic memory distorts the sense of being and being is sense.

Thus, Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* shows faces of dominance through the life of the protagonist and highlights dominance not as a fixed and static trait of human beings but rather a mode that depends upon the psychological condition of an individual. The intensity

of dominance is based on psychic stability and as long as the psychological condition shows healthy ongoing, dominance behaves persistently, but any disruption on the very foundation of psychic apparatus could destabilize the nature of dominance. In other words, dominance is a manifestation of psychological embodiment and this manifestation has multiple versions—sometimes it appears as ambivalence, contradictions, self-deceptive, destructive, and delusive; and sometimes it emerges as enslavement, loathing, and fragmentation. *The Grass is Singing*, therefore, depicts the ambiguity of dominance, showing its origin as psychic discontent which explodes differently as a surface phenomenon in different mental states of an individual.

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