
Doris Lessing

The Grass is Singing



Title: The Grass is Singing

Author: Doris Lessing

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Description

Set in South Africa under white rule, Doris Lessing's first novel is both a riveting chronicle of human disintegration and a beautifully understated social critique. Mary Turner is a self-confident, independent young woman who becomes the depressed, frustrated wife of an ineffectual, unsuccessful farmer. Little by little the ennui of years on the farm work their slow poison, and Mary's despair progresses until the fateful arrival of an enigmatic and virile black servant, Moses. Locked in anguish, Mary and Moses - master and slave - are trapped in a web of mounting attraction and repulsion. Their psychic tension explodes in an electrifying scene that ends this disturbing tale of racial strife in colonial South Africa.

The Grass Is Singing blends Lessing's imaginative vision with her own vividly remembered early childhood to recreate the quiet horror of a woman's struggle against a ruthless fate.

Author Biography:

Doris Lessing was born to British parents in Persia in 1919 and moved with her family to Southern Rhodesia when she was five years old. She went to England in 1949 and has lived there ever since. She is the author of more than thirty books - novels, short stories, reportage, poems, and plays - and is considered among the most important writers of the postwar era. Her most recent works include two volumes of autobiography, *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade*, and a novel, *Mara and Dann*.

Insightful reviews

Lisa (Harmonybites): I read this in one sitting--not so much because it's short--although it's a relatively short novel--but I found it nigh un-putdownable, which is a bit odd, because this novel has several aspects I'd ordinarily find off-putting. It's on an ugly subject--racism, with characters impossible to like but I found oddly compelling, and it's very interior--with pages, even chapters--where you'll find very little to no dialogue.

This is set in what was Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) around World War II. We're told the ending from the first sentence: *Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer at Ngesi, was found murdered on the front verandah of their homestead yesterday morning.* A sentence that would head many a whodunnit. Except we're told paragraphs in their houseboy Moses seemingly did it, and this isn't a mystery novel really. I don't know I'd even call it a whydunnit--since that also is telegraphed early on. It's more about how did we get here. It's like those ancient Greek tragedies where we all know where things are headed with all the morbid fascination of a train wreck. I couldn't take my eyes off it. And it's an ugly scene. Especially in that first chapter the word "nigger" rains down on us. Both Mary and Dick Turner use the word unsparingly--as well as using "boy" even for elderly black Africans.

Yet somehow there's nothing routine about this treatment of racism. Too many stories of racism fall between two stools. Even when written by whites, white racist characters are often dehumanized so the reader can comfortably think, well, that's not me. Or else the racism is there simply to set off the heroic Noble White Liberal (tm). Lessing doesn't take those easy

ways out. Lessing grew up in Southern Rhodesia from the time she was five years old until thirty when she headed to England in 1949 with the manuscript of *The Grass is Singing*: her first novel. You just know she's known people like the Turners. She takes advantage of her omniscient perch to be scathing and acerbic about white colonial attitudes--and yet...

Well, Lessing's pitiless in her depiction of Mary, but she makes you crawl inside of her skin. I can't say I ever liked Mary, and I'm not sure empathy is quite how I'd describe what I felt for her; even aside from her racism she's a chilly, neurotic character. Yet at times I did feel an identification with her, especially early on, and Lessing was masterful in showing her deterioration--and how it was fed by her attitudes towards the "natives." Dick has a decency despite his racism but is frustrating in his fecklessness. Moses is more a cipher. He only gets a point of view toward the very end, and is far less knowable, though never pitiable the way the Turners are--he's not a simple victim, a noble martyr--and I think the opacity of his character is deliberate.

Besides the characterizations, I was also hit by the luminosity of Lessing's prose. She certainly conjures up the African landscape and climate, the isolation of the farm and its shabbiness and exudes an atmosphere that was suffocating and oppressive. Even that interiority of the narrative contributed to that, I think. I would definitely seek out Lessing again.

Nancy: This is a very powerful book that deals with racism in South Africa during apartheid. What impressed me about the novel is that she is able to convey the inherent fear and hatred that existed between whites and blacks in such a way that shows how subconscious their feelings were. The whites were self-righteous in their belief that the natives were subhuman and good for only serving the whites. They were offended if natives spoke English to them—many believing they shouldn't be educated. The book begins with the murder of Mary, a white woman by her African 'boy' Moses. As the story progresses, we learn why. She is brutal in her hatred of him at what she perceives as insolence, lashing him in the face with her whip when all he wants is a drink of water. She then grows to fear him when her husband makes him their house boy. However, what finally causes him to kill her is when she degrades him by having him help her dress and undress—not recognizing him as a man, but just a thing to serve her—it's the final humiliation. Lessing wisely allows us to empathise with Mary despite her unreasonable attitude toward the blacks, by placing her in extreme poverty with an obstinate husband and hinting that she'd been sexually abused by her father. This was Lessing's first book, published in 1950. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature last year at the age of 88.

James: I still cannot believe *The Grass is Singing* was Doris Lessing's debut novel. Never has the writing seemed so precise and mature, so filled with wisdom and story, it read old beyond its years and is able to penetrate into the psychology of its characters with such strength. Set in Southern Rhodesia the novel is on one hand domestic, focusing on the isolated lives of a couple who rush into marriage and move away to Dick's farm, but within the oppressive environment of the farm, the isolation that Mary - once, a happy and satisfied woman - suffers as she becomes the housewife is wholeheartedly political. Lesser readers might dismiss this novel out of hand but its relevance is as strong as it must have been for Lessing, who with great power deals with racial politics, almost in a experimental bubble through the couple and their various dealings with the native workers on the farm. Of course, in such a novel the main

characters are rarely likeable, and one can feel palpably the racism that roots itself into the psyche of that time, and for it to be revealed in the protagonists so outwardly makes for an interesting read; I want to sympathise with Mary and Dick, but equally I must wonder how much of their situation is because of their own weaknesses and follies. Mary, really, is the central pivot of *The Grass is Singing*, and is a character Lessing writes superbly well in capturing the emotional turmoil of a victim of culture-clash, patriarchy and colonialism. Coupled with such insight, which really is the highlight of Lessing's writing, is the arid, dry, unfeeling and hard landscape which is painted harshly without any trace of exoticism or beauty. Much like Lessing's very straightforward prose, everything on a surface level seems devoid of life or hope, and readers must penetrate into the earth in order to extract, after TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the song of the grass. Beautifully wrought and never missing a beat, *The Grass is Singing* is a tour-de-force; critics who judge the book because of its supposed simplicity of message not only miss the various nuances of the writing but also unjustly criticise a writer for tackling with such themes that men are lauded for doing. And again as a first novel this is rather astonishing, even more so because it is never thought of as Lessing's greatest work, and although Lessing's work became much more political, and less focused on Rhodesia, this novel must be able to take its place amongst the well carved African literary tradition.

Chrissie: This publication grows on you. whereas i used to be studying it, it disturbed me. It has a robust emotional impact. What disturbed me used to be that the tale is told. there's an omniscient narrator who explains everything, what occurs and why every one personality makes the alternatives they make. we're informed how they consider and why they do specific things. How as a reader do you react in case you imagine different purposes may be the reason for a selected choice? I wasn't rather definite if i thought what i used to be being told, so instead of accepting the givens, I puzzled everything, and eventually I turned annoyed. The ebook is ready lifestyles at the veld in what's this present day Zimbabwe. it truly is a few couple, farmers, white colonials, with out children, proprietors of a really small poorly run farm. The husband can't appear to make a pass of it and attempts one fanciful thought after another, all to fail. The wife, she is a unique case too. She contains plenty of luggage on her back. studies of her personal youth weigh her down and she or he merely marries at thirtyish simply because she purposes she easily has to. She didn't wish to, she had to.....she used to be getting too previous and discovered all have been whispering approximately her. She isn't pleased with men, not just is she instable, yet she should be categorised as being mentally ill. She can't care for sexual attraction; it throws her thoroughly off kilter! This ebook is ready how white colonials examine local Africans. at the very least that's what we're told. there's a murder. we're instructed firstly that the spouse is killed by means of the local condominium slave. The query is why, how did this come about. this is often the important theme. How good does this couple signify colonial whites in Africa? that's what involved me! I by no means felt that this was once a subject matter exclusively of utter disdain and hatred for the natives, yet quite a pair that used to be emotionally unbalanced. How can those be used as a replicate of the way colonials seen the African natives?! What i can't deny is that I felt and breathed the ambience of the veld. The environment, the weather, the shabbiness, the heat, the storms weigh on you as you learn this e-book and impose a feeling of doom and hopelessness. this feeling of our surroundings is impressive. I well-known it from different books i've got examine Zimbabwe - do not Let's visit the canine this night and Cocktail Hour below the Tree of Forgetfulness. I stored considering i've been in areas like this, albeit basically in books. I certainly want the writing of Alexandra Fuller

though. i'd suggest that while you're drawn to the southern African milieu to begin with "Dogs" instead. there's humor in that. it's extra rounded, and it deals a extra sensible and balanced view of colonials; they cannot, should still not, all be depicted as Doris Lessing does. The Grass is making a song is a novel, whereas the opposite pointed out are autobiographical. i actually imagine Doris Lessing's ebook issues extra the suggestions of a girl with emotional problems, however the surroundings of the time and position is impressive.

Marco Tamborrino: "She can't be mad. She doesn't behave as though she were. She behaves easily as though she lives in a global of her own, the place different people's usual don't count. She has forgotten what her personal individuals are like. yet then, what's madness, yet a refuge, a taking flight from the world?" The Grass is making a song è il primo romanzo in assoluto di Doris Lessing, e sono felice di aver iniziato da questo consistent with conoscere una scrittrice così importante. los angeles mia docente di letteratura inglese contemporanea ce l'ha proposto come romanzo di ispirazione coloniale, e lo è certamente, ma ritengo anche che, senza il crollo psicologico e nervoso che subisce los angeles protagonista durante los angeles narrazione, questo romanzo non sarebbe stato ugualmente bello. È ben scritto, scorrevole e tragicamente pessimista. Il matrimonio è il tema centrale, ma non c'è nulla che possa ricordare Jane Austen (giusto in keeping with nominarne una che di matrimoni s'intende) in questa storia cupa e grottesca. Piccola premessa: il primissimo paragrafo del romanzo ci svela che Mary Turner, l. a. protagonista, è stata uccisa dal suo houseboy, il nativo addetto ai lavori in casa della fattoria sua e di suo marito. Il movente dell'omicidio è ignoto, forse una tentata rapina, così viene scritto sul giornale locale. Mary Turner è una donna indipendente. Ha alle spalle un'infanzia infelice, ma dopo essersene andata di casa è riuscita advert emanciparsi e a trovare un ottimo lavoro in una cittadina della Rhodesia, costruendosi anche un buon giro di conoscenze e amici. Mary non sa quant'è fortunata a essere una donna bianca, non sposata e benestante, perché los angeles sua libertà deriva semplicemente dal fatto che vive in una colonia inglese: se visse in Inghilterra le cose sarebbero diverse. Mary viene colta da una sorta di epifania quando sente due sue amiche parlare di lei e del fatto che a trent'anni non si è ancora sposata, che non è una donna da matrimonio. Da quel momento in poi Mary penserà solo a sposarsi. E sarà questo l'errore che l. a. porterà al crollo. "They may were type to her, simply because she had ignored 'the top issues of life'. yet then there are such a lot of those that don't wish them: such a lot of for whom the simplest issues were poisoned from the start." Ora, senza continuare a raccontare tutta los angeles trama, dirò in breve cosa porterà Mary alla sua tragica fine. l. a. protagonista si sposerà con Dick Turner, un agricoltore povero che con onestà l. a. avverte delle condizioni in cui vive. Mary non ci fa molto caso e lo sposa comunque. Il loro matrimonio non sarà infelice in line with i classici motivi che si possono immaginare. Dick non maltratterà l. a. moglie, non alzerà le mani su di lei né si rivolgerà a lei in malo modo (escluse le consuete liti domestiche). Ma Dick rappresenterà comunque un problema according to Mary, perché Dick è un incapace, non sa come gestire l. a. fattoria, crede sempre che l. a. prossima stagione sarà quella giusta, passa da un'attività all'altra sperando di fare fortuna e non vuole dare retta ai consigli della moglie. Gli anni passano e Mary sprofonda sempre più nell'apatia, incapace di cambiare le sorti della famiglia e costretta advert assistere a un fallimento dopo l'altro da parte del marito. "When Dick came, he said, her with dismay, that he had no longer woken her at lunch-time, and that he was hoping she was once now not ill. 'Oh no,' she said. 'Only tired. i'm feeling...'" Her voice tailed off, the clean glance settled on her face." La situazione psicologica di Mary precipita quando arriva il nuovo houseboy, ovvero Moses, che è anche lo stesso ragazzo

che un giorno, quando Dick period malato e non poteva dirigere i lavori alla fattoria, Mary aveva frustato a causa di un'insolenza. Il rapporto tra Mary e Moses raggiunge presto l. a. morbosità. l. a. situazione è dominata dal nativo, che si approfitta della debole condizione psicologica della padrona. Il rapporto sessuale non è mai nominato, ma è sempre sottinteso. l. a. scena più tesa l'abbiamo dal punto di vista di un personaggio esterno, ed è una scena che vede Moses aiutare Mary a svestirsi prima di andare a dormire. E l. a. conclusione è inevitabile, are available tutte le tragedie.

Mary: The Grass is making a song is a singular of colonialism, human degradation, and an uncomfortable view of the existing perspective of a time and place, and yet, to me it was once extra so a strong portrait of a crumbling mind. Mary Turner is a hideous woman; bitter, cruel, entitled. What began as a woman's resentment over an uneventful farm lifestyles and marriage quickly became whatever deeper and lots more and plenty extra unsettling. occasionally individuals are damaged so early of their lifestyles that it's very unlikely to ever be whole, and at her core, Mary Turner used to be ruined lengthy sooner than maturity and her neurosis used to be purely the lid on a simmering pot of rage and hurt. The e-book opens together with her murder; we all know she's doomed. We watch as she flails and unravels and within the end, perhaps, reveals a few form of distorted relief. this can be Lessing's portrayal of a lady and not using a choice; a toddler and not using a choice; a humans with no choice. The farm fails, the wedding fails, Mary Turner's mind fails. Apartheid fails. the ambience during this e-book is sweltering, suspenseful, and hypnotic. It's all unrelentingly warmth and blinding solar and insufferable tension. Something's obtained to give. The ineffectual making an attempt making an attempt trying...Mary Turner tried, yet she by no means stood a chance, no longer with that husband, no longer in that country, no longer with that childhood, now not while she used to be destined to brood away all her days within her head, the disappointment a ticking time bomb. this is often what happens, Lessing said, while ladies can't choose. this is often the outcome, she tells us, should you enslave people. this can be unnatural and mistaken and this can be what you get.

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