

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Mouloud MAMMERI University of Tizi-Ouzou
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of English



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**Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and Joseph Conrad's
Heart of Darkness (1902): a study of an "Anxiety of
Authorship"**

Presented by: Sabouni Lydia

Mezbout Sonia.

Panel of Examiners:

Mr. HADDADOU Mohand, M.A.A, University of Tizi-Ouzou, Chair.

Mrs. BENSABI Hassiba, M.A.A, University of Tizi-Ouzou, supervisor.

Mrs. TABTI Kahina, M.A.A, University of Tizi-Ouzou, Examiner.

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Dedication

Sabouni Lydia

To:

My lovely grandmother,

My parents Malika and Chavane to whom I owe my life,

My brothers: Nassim and Ghiles,

All my best friends,

All the readers.

Mezbout Sonia :

To :

My dear parents Lounes and Dalila who always encourage me,

My brother Yacine,

All my family members,

All my lovely friends with whom I shared the most memorable lifetime moments,

All My teachers.

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Abstract

This dissertation deals with Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). The purpose of our study is to shed light on Conrad's influence on Doris Lessing, and depict how the latter struggles for self-creativity. To reach this aim, we have applied Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar feminist theory of "The Anxiety of Authorship" that is developed in their *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). It is concerned with the anxiety female writers encounter when they "attempt the pen". This work examines the most articulate characters in both novels: Mary Turner, the leading female role of the *Grass is Singing*, and the character of Kurtz, who is one of the protagonists in *Heart of Darkness*. In order to accomplish our analysis, we have taken into consideration the diverse themes that unite the two novels which are, Racism and Madness, then we have dealt with the way both authors treat their female characters or the way they represent them. This dissertation can be used as a tool to help readers get familiar with the way Doris Lessing tries to break with the boundaries that are imposed on women writers through her work, and go beyond the domination of the male predecessors.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, Joseph Conrad, anxiety of authorship, women, men, madness, racism

I.Introduction

According to the French School Theory, every author is influenced by his predecessor. They define this term as a kind of reproduction of a theme or an image from one text to another. After the development of the feminist theories, many works have been subject to “thematic similarities”, mainly from those who deny women writers place in art and literature, to those who attempt to correct these views, such as Doris Lessing with her first novel *The Grass is Singing*. The latter has been raised in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), which leads her to be familiar with the African society, and her first work published in 1950 is set in that same place.

Through her protagonist Mary Turner, Lessing has dealt with the suffering and repression of the Blacks under the White Colonial rule. Being a feminist writer, the author reveals through flash backs the protagonist from her life as a single and independent woman, to that of a married one. Indeed, Mary Turner is driven to marriage because of the patriarchal society’s “norms” since most of her friends could not accept and understand her single life. She is in fact far from imagining that her life would take another turn towards poverty, sadness and depression. Through Dick Turner, the husband, who is revealed to be unreliable, weak and a failed farmer, Lessing questions the inferiority of women in comparison with men, and through the intimate relationship of Mary Turner with her houseboy, she questions the inferiority of the Blacks who are repressed and marginalized by the white man.

Doris Lessing is influenced by many writers who have enabled her to build her career as a writer herself, among them Joseph Conrad with his *Heart of Darkness* which is also set in Africa. Joseph Conrad is a polish émigré, exiled from his country. Even if he is considered as an outsider who has come from another country, he finds home in Britain. He has

managed to impose himself as an English writer. Most of his works are concerned with the sea and adventures. In fact, we notice that even Conrad has been a seaman himself before being a novelist since he has incorporated some elements in his novel which are inspired from what he has experienced and seen during his trips.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) tells the journey of Marlow through the African jungle and his search for Kurtz, who represents the perfect European figure and exploits the natives through violence and domination. The novella may be considered as a reflection of the European's exploitation of Africa in the late 19th century. If we go deeply inside the novel, we may notice that it talks about colonialism from the point of view of a male writer. We may say that Conrad is an anti-feminist writer since his novel is full of sexism especially when Marlow says: "Girl! What! Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it—completely. They—the women I mean—are out of it—should be out of it"¹. He has shown that women are weak, incapable, and dependent on men. He believes that women will never be able to equal or surpass men. Indeed both the writer and Marlow (the main narrator in the novel) share the same view. In fact, this is shown in the portrayal of the female characters that are silenced in the novel, which means they do not play a significant role and this is typical to women's representation during the time in which the novel is written.

The Review of the Literature

The Grass is Singing has been analyzed and studied from many perspectives, among them, a feminist one by Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed with his study on *Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing: Anatomy of a Female Psyche in the Midst of Gender, Race and Class Barrier*. He says that the novel is about Mary Turner and her relationship with the Black servant. For Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed the novel does not only deal with

this relation of slave/master but he explains that what makes Mary Turner alienated is the position in which she is put on since she has to be subservient to Dick and live an unhappy marriage. This brings her to behave badly and treat her black servants in a horrible way².

Sima Aghazadeh's *Sexual-Political Colonialism and Failure of Individuation in Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing* (2011) discusses the relation between gender, class and race. She focuses on the representation of Mary Turner as she fails to feel as an individual herself. Sima argues that Mary Turner fails to create what she has always desired "as different from that of her mother, not depending on men emotionally and economically, because she cannot transcend her gender subjectivity."³

Rajendra P. Tiwari in his article of the International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies entitled *Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing: a Projection of Naturalism* investigates how the environment, socially and economically, has a great impact on Lessing's protagonist's life, Mary. He refers to her childhood and believes that for both Mary and her mother their house is a source of sorrow. He says: "for both the mother and the daughter the house was like a hell"⁴. He also argues that Mary's family has in fact a negative influence on her since she has lived in an atmosphere of constant quarrels between her parents. He also adds that: "she developed hatred not only towards her father but also towards all men"⁵. Rajendra points out that "the environment city of life" plays also a major role in the protagonist's life through her decision of getting married since she has always refused any marital relationship.

Alia'a Youcef Bahlaq has analyzed the *Grass is Singing* from a feminist perspective in her thesis *A Critical Analysis of Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing*. She argues that Lessing depicts inequality between men and women and shows the suffering of the latter in a world of oppression. She focuses on the protagonist Mary Turner who is driven to get

married against her will because she is living in a patriarchal society. “The presence of any woman is associated with the presence of a man in her life”⁶. She also refers to Dick Turner as a “peaceful man”, but he has the tendency to rise his voice against his wife Mary because she argues, “love of control” is within men’s blood. It is a way to say that men, in general, are satisfied only when they feel that women are inferior to them.

There are also post-colonial readings of the *Grass is Singing*. Katherine Fishburn in her article published by Indiana University Journal discusses the “Manichean allegories” of Doris Lessing’s the *Grass is Singing* and focuses mainly on the protagonist of the novel Mary Turner. She argues that the life of Mary has passed from the happy youth in the town to a desperate and fatal one as a married woman “in the high veldt”⁷. She also believes that Dick and Mary’s lives are destroyed by wilderness, brutality hot climate and harshness. Fishburn says that the *Grass is Singing* is a book about Africa that does not focus on the Africans themselves, but mainly on their white colonizer. She regards the novel as a “Manichean allegory” that shows the power of the white colonizer and his brutality over the blacks by considering them as “animals”, “dirt” and “beasts”.

Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* has also been subject to many discussion and criticism mainly after the birth of the post-colonial theory. Among those who have criticized Conrad and his work, Chinua Achebe who writes in his essay, *An image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*:

The other person being fully my own age could not be excused on the grounds of his years. Ignorance might be a more likely reason; but here again I believe that something more willful than a mere lack of information was at work. For did not that erudite British historian and Regius Professor at Oxford, Hugh Trevor Roper, also pronounce that African history did not exist?⁸

Indeed, Achebe argues throughout his essay that Joseph Conrad is a « bloody racist » due to his negative portrayal of the native Africans in his *Heart of Darkness*. In the above

quotation, the African author says that the lack of knowledge and “youthful inexperience” about the African continent may have led Conrad and the European in general to be full of stereotypical images about it. He adds by claiming that the denial of the African history is not, in a way based on evidence, but mainly done deliberately. In his essay, Achebe tries to demonstrate that the image of Africa depicted in *Heart of Darkness* is not the original one but it is rather the main idea that dominates Europeans’ minds. He adds that once the West will start to get rid of these negative views about Africa and consider it “as a continent of people”, they may take many advantages from it.

Edward Said has published *Two Visions in Heart of Darkness* in 1993, in which he legitimizes racist views of Conrad in his novella. He says: “independence was for white and Europeans, the lesser or subject people were to be ruled; sciences, learning and history emanated from the West”⁹. He believes that *Heart of Darkness* was written in time of imperialism, and this is what leads Conrad not to be able to have written anything other than that. In other words, he cannot imagine that it will come to an end, and that the natives will be able to gain their independence. “As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critics of the imperialism that enslaved them”¹⁰. By this quote, Said argues that Conrad deals with imperialism because he does not know that the British oppression and rule over Africa would collapse.

McIntire Gabrielle’s *The Women Do Not Travel: Gender, Difference and Incommensurability in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness* is an article that looks at women’s role in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and the manner in which he portrays them in the novella. It is also concerned with the idea that women are represented as being inferior or minor characters in other words, imperceptible or simply invisible. This is clearly demonstrated through Conrad’s premeditated intention of excluding and removing women

in his novel since he only silences them. In fact, this is perceived from the beginning of the story since women are viewed in a negative way.

McIntire repeats that, even if women do not really play a great or any major role, still they offer a lot, and work hard in order to acquire a position. Despite the fact that they are put in the background, they are perceived as “workers of darkness, afflicted with the same blackness that Conrad abhors in the Natives of Africa.”¹¹. He argues that, Through oppressing the voice of the female characters and managing to show how dependent they are on men, Conrad may be characterized as an anti-feminist writer.

Issue and Working Hypothesis

Though Lessing’s and Conrad’s fictions have invited a lot of critical work, it seems that the feminist analysis are narrow and incomplete since to our knowledge, the area of our research that is based on the theory of “The Anxiety of Authorship” which is mainly concerned with the female writer, has not been explored yet. This leads us to go deeper in our researches in order to fill in the gap and complete what is missing. In other words, our study will not only be concerned with women as individuals in society, but also as writers. We believe that our work will add fresh perspectives to the existing body of critical work already done.

Therefore, in our research paper, we are going to analyze in details both novels *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *Heart of Darkness* (1902) to find out what is common in both works. We will draw a parallel in order to know how deep the influence of Joseph Conrad over Doris Lessing is. To do so, we are going to rely on the theory of “The Anxiety of Authorship” that most suits our study. It is mainly concerned with Doris Lessing, since it deals with the female writer and her desire to reinforce her voice without being confined inside the stereotypical ideas that are imposed on her by the patriarchal authority of art.

To reach our purpose, we shall divide our work into methods and materials, where we are going to account for the theory of “The Anxiety of Authorship” developed by Gilbert and Gubar in their book, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979), since it represents the cornerstone that supports the present research. We will then provide a short summary to each of the two novels. After that, we will analyze in details the common themes that unite *The Grass is Singing* (1950) with *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and more precisely, the theme of Racism and Madness since they are the most apparent one. We will close the discussion section by dealing with the representation of the female character. In other words, the way both authors represent them, which will define how Doris Lessing expresses her “Anxiety of Authorship”

End Notes

¹Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1902), (2, 13)

²Kaosarmohammadahmed, *Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing: Anatomy of a Female Psyche in the Midst of Gender, Race and Class Barrier*. International Journal of English and Literature Vol. 4(1). (2013).

³Sima Aghazadeh, *Sexual-Political Colonialism and Failure of Individuation Grass is Singing*, Journal of International Women's Studies, Issue 1(2011), 109.

⁴Rajendra P. Tiwari, *Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing: A Projection of Naturalism*, International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, Number 1, (2013), 44.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Alia'a Youcef Bahlaq, *A Critical Analysis of Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing*, (Department of English Language and Literature: Faculty of Art Middle East University, 2011).

⁷Katherine Fishburn, *The Manichean Allegories of Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing*, Indiana University Press Journals, No. 4, (1994)

⁸ Chinua Achebe, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Heart of Darkness*, (New York: Norton, 1977), 1.

⁹Edward Said, *Two Visions in Heart of Darkness*, (New York: Norton, 1993), 24.

¹⁰Ibid, 30.

¹¹Gabrielle McIntire, *The Women Do Not Travel: Gender, Difference, and Incommensurability in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*, Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration: The Jhon's Hopkins University Press, Volume 48 (2002).

II. Methods and Materials

1. Theoretical consideration

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have developed their feminist theory of “The Anxiety of Authorship” in their book *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. The title is in fact a reference to Charlotte Brontë’s female character “Bertha Rochester, imprisoned in her husband’s attic”¹ in her novel *Jane Eyre* (1874). The two feminist critics try to explore the different anxieties and obstacles that women face and experience while writing. They show not only how women manage to break free from the different literary traditions and limitations that are forced on them, but also the hardship that they go through by their exclusion from the patriarchal authority of art, which deprives them from their autonomy. Gilbert and Gubar say in their book: “we” (meaning especially women writers) “may inhale despair from all those patriarchal texts which seek to deny female autonomy and authority”²

In their theory, they argue that from the past until nowadays women writers’ inventiveness has been identified or related somehow with men, so they look for a place where their writings can be heard. Gilbert and Gubar argue that men and women’s anxieties are different from one another. This means that male authors have the tendency to revise the writings of their predecessors, which is a kind of “father-son battle”, as the Son is “in a literary Oedipal struggle”³, whereas female writers do the same but with their predecessors from the opposite sex (male). The two feminist critics suggest that this is due to the lack of works produced by women, since the world of art and literature is governed by men. They say: “for western literary histories overwhelmingly male-or more accurately, patriarchal”⁴. That’s why they need to create their own writing. In order to achieve what they need which is to go beyond those ideals that are put on them by society, in other words the stereotypes

they are confined in, they do not only have to struggle for self redefinition as authors, but also as persons in society.

“The Anxiety of Authorship” can thus be read, as Gilbert and Gubar have mentioned in their work as a revision of Harold Bloom’s theory of the ‘Anxiety of Influence’. They describe it as a “drastic” fear undergone by female writers that they cannot be creative in art and literature. This is referred to by the two critics as “a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a “precursor” the act of writing will isolate or destroy her”⁵. But this is not the only anxiety that women writers face. It is followed by the one of not being recognized as writers themselves by the males’ authority. So the literary daughters have the “Anxiety of Authorship” imposed on them. In other words, this feeling of fear and inadequacy is stuck on them by the pervasive view of the writing’s sphere as an only male activity in which women lack capacities, and can never be part of. Indeed, they are supposed to take care of the house and only be subservient to their husbands. Gilbert and Gubar say that, as persons in society, women are said to be either angels or monsters. This means that, if they are not ideal and perfect, they must be doing evil. This view is clearly pointed out when the two critics say: “it is debilitating to be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters”⁶.

“What does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are [...] both overtly and covertly patriarchal”⁷. Indeed, because of male domination, socially and intellectually, Gubar and Gilbert affirm that the woman writer faces a huge pressure while writing, which makes her struggle. Thus, it seems a hard and almost impossible task for her to impose her own voice as a writer.

The path of the woman writer towards the world of art and literature is thus confronted by the authority of patriarchy, her works are considered to be related to that of

her male precursor. This has urged her to struggle in order to find a place where she can be heard alone. Gilbert and Gubar affirm that their task consists of demonstrating their competences by correcting the images and views that are vehicled by men. Their duties are seen through their process of rehabilitating the way they are viewed in society. Gilbert and Gubar say: "Her battle however is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her. In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization"⁸. This means that women have to show that their role is not limited to stay at home and take care of the husband, but their capacities cross these limited boundaries.

1. Materials

a/ Summary of *The Grass is singing* (1950)

Doris Lessing has written *The Grass is Singing* in 1950. This fiction is set in Africa more precisely in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), when it has been under the White rule and colonization. The novel is about the life of Mary Turner who is introduced by the author from her sad childhood, living with her unhappy mother and drunken father, then to her youth as an independent and happy woman, and finally to her life as a married woman and then her death. Lessing denounces the horrors of the White Colonizer and his injustice. In fact the latter was supposed to bring light and civilization to the Africans but their temptation drives them to marginalize, enslave and torture the Black natives. This is seen through Mary Turner who treats her workers harshly, with no mercy and pity. The protagonist discovers how the life of a married woman ruins her as she loses everything her job, her happiness and her autonomy. She looks at her happy youth from her poor and miserable situation and regrets having believed her friends' gossips. Mary becomes the mistress of her houseboy Moses and loses her authority on him as she becomes under his

power. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that have driven her mad, because she has broken with the “White Civilization’s standards”. This means that, as even Lessing referred to in her novel, the white race cannot accept another relationship with the Blacks apart from the master/slave one. At the end of *The Grass is Singing*, Mary Turner is being murdered by her houseboy Moses, and this may be interpreted as the Black’s revenge against his oppressor.

2/Summary of *Heart of Darkness*(1902)

Joseph Conrad has written *Heart of Darkness* in 1902. The story is about the expedition that Marlow makes into the African jungle, more precisely into the Congo River. His main purpose is to meet and bring back a certain person whose name is Kurtz to the so called “civilized world”. Kurtz is considered as an important figure of the company for which Marlow works for. Throughout the story, we are introduced to Marlow when he discovers the truth about Mr. Kurtz. In fact, the latter does not want to go back to Europe because he likes the idea of dominating the natives and the feeling of being worshiped by the Africans. Conrad gives a taste of the cruelty and the imperialist practices that were used by the Europeans against the blacks during the pre-colonial period. This is all represented through the character of Kurtz with his harsh treatment of the Africans mainly through enslaving them. Marlow manages to bring back Kurtz but he dies uttering his last words which are “the horror! the horror!”. At the end, Marlow goes back to England, and pays a visit to Kurtz’s intended. In fact, she asks him about the last words of her husband, wishing that the latter was thinking about her. Marlow makes the decision to lie by telling her that he was saying her name.

End Notes

¹Maureen Corrigan, *How a 'MadWoman' Upended a Literary Boys Club*, January 16, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/01/17/169548789/how-a-madwoman-upended-a-literary-boys-club>.

²Sandra Gilber and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (Princeton University: Joyce Carol Oates, 1979),52.

³ Ibid, 47

⁴-Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, 49.

⁶ Ibid, 53.

⁷ ibid, 45-46

⁸-Ibid, 49.

III.Results

After our close reading and analysis of the two novels, we have reached the point that though they are written by two different authors belonging to two different identities and having distinct background, they deal with the same themes. Indeed, Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950), and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) are closely related, which is mainly seen through the themes of Racism and Madness. We have also reached the result that both authors represent their female characters differently, and this is due to their opposed views about women's role in society.

Doris Lessing is raised in Southern Rhodesia, and her novel is set in that place which leads many critics to believe that it is an autobiographical one. Infact, she has got the opportunity to witness the situation of the Blacks in the colonial period. *Heart of Darkness* is also written from a good acquaintance with the diverse form of colonialism as well as the atmosphere that surrounded Africa during the time of imperialism.

The two authors who seem different, are infact connected to each other since their novels are closely related. They deal with the same issues and themes. Through our close reading of the two novels *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and *The Grass is Singing* (1950), and relying on the theory of "The Anxiety of Authorship", we have reached the point that Doris Lessing has made a kind of revisionary process in which she focuses on the two marginalized groups, women and the Blacks. Infact, her concern is to break with the views of Conrad towards them that are: weak and inferior for women uncivilized and powerless for the Blacks.

IV. Discussion

Due to their oppression, not only as persons in society but also as writers, women have attempted to prove their place and impose their literary voice through their struggle for creativity. Their concern is to get rid of their male precursor's views, through the process of "correction", "redefinition" and "rehabilitation". This section will be devoted to the analysis and discussion of the way Lessing comes to question issues dealt with by her male predecessor, Joseph Conrad since "the undercover female tradition that Gilbert and Gubar were talking about was one in which writers [...] used similar themes and images to dramatize the social limitations they themselves suffered from as women"¹. Lessing's concern is to impose her literary voice within patriarchal authority of art. We will attempt to trace the way she experiences her "Anxiety of Authorship" by dealing with the themes of racism and madness, as well as the way the two authors represent their female characters.

1. Racism

Racism is one of the major themes that is discussed in the two novels by Doris Lessing and Joseph Conrad, who both expose the horror of imperialism and colonialism in Africa from different points of view. Through her protagonist Mary Turner, Lessing introduces us to the colonial period of Southern Rhodesia. Conrad deals also with pre-colonial Africa, mainly in the Congo River through the character of Kurtz who symbolizes the "White Civilization" since he comes to "enlighten the virgin land".

Doris Lessing introduces us to Southern Rhodesia as a class society. It consists of the black race who are the inferior and discriminated African natives such as Samson and Moses, and the White race who are the superior and the rulers like the Turners. Their relationship is based on nothing but exploitation. In other words, the Blacks are alienated

and marginalized, and the Whites need them only for work and servitude. Lessing writes: “When it came to the point, one never had contact with natives, except in the master-slave relationship, one never knew them in their own lives, as human being”². Infact, this shows that the natives are completely isolated from the White race.They only show up when they work for their interests. The author believes that the Blacks are “human beings”, and that the Whites consider them as being different due to their lack of knowledge about them.

Lessing shows her opposition to the racist views and attitudes of the White race towards the Blacks. Thus, she tries to denounce the injustice of Racism and its negative impact on the natives’ lives. She shows that Whites are full of stereotypical images. In the first chapter of her novel the author recounts the tragic murder of her protagonist.In fact when the settlers have heard about it, they seem not to express any feeling of surprise. Lessing says: “Normally that murder would have been discussed for months; people would have been positively grateful for something to talk about”³. This proves that the non reaction of the white settlers is due to the fact that they believe the blacks are capable of anything, as a result, the murder of Mary by Moses is like something that is expected to happen.In his work *A Freudian Study of the Grass is Singing, Aylan Adam and the White Hotel*, BüyüGül says: “The white want to interpret the murder according to their prejudices. They are conditioned to think that the Blacks are guilty by birth”⁴. This means that the Blacks are accused of evil whether they are guilty or not.

The author considers Mary Turner’s murder by her houseboy as a kind of revenge from the oppressed (and Moses symbolizes the whole Black race) against the White colonizer.It is also a triumph and a kind of step for a possible independence.She says: “Charlie stood directly in front of the murderer and looked into his face. The man stared back, expressionless, indifferent. His own face was curious: it showed a kind of triumph, a

guarded vindictiveness”⁵. This quote shows the strength of Moses, his daring look at the white man, who is supposed to be his master. Doris Lessing, in a way or another, breaks with the negative portrayal of the West since they consider the Blacks as inferior, ignorant and powerless.

We are informed also in the beginning of the novel about the intimate relationship of the protagonist with her houseboy Moses. In fact, this is considered as something unpleasant, unacceptable and revolting by the white man. This is because he is blinded by his “supremacy” and may never be able to expect another relationship with a Black man apart from the master-slave one. Indeed, they consider the opposite as a threat to their civilization, as it is revealed in Charlie Slatter’s words: “White civilization which will never, never admit that a white person, and most particularly a white woman, can have a human relationship whether for good or for evil with a black person”⁶. Moreover, when it came to transport Mary’s dead body, they refused to place it in the same car with Moses because, “one could not put a Black man close to a white woman even though she were dead”⁷. This shows not only injustice and discrimination, but also the absurdity of the white man’s attitudes towards a Black person.

Lessing believes that the white’s aversion of the Blacks resides in their behavior and attitudes. They find them strange because they are not used to their habits, as a result they look at them with repugnance and disgust. For instance, Mary Turner parallels them to animals due to the way the African mothers hold their children. In fact, her judgment is based on something that is completely new for her. Lessing says: “The children hold to their mother’s back (like monkeys Mary thought)”⁸. We may notice the way the author draws attention to the fact that the protagonist may not be right in her beliefs since she says

“Mary thought”. The latter shows also her disgust due to the way mothers feed their babies.

It is illustrated in this quote:

she hated the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil. ‘Their babies hanging on to them like leeches,’ she said to herself shuddering, for she thought with horror of suckling a child⁹.

From this, we may understand that, the author tries in a way to show how the white colonizer legitimizes his supremacy by claiming that the Black’s attitudes do not fit in a “world of civilization”, without considering that it may be part of their own culture and traditions.

The natives’ pain and abuse is seen in the *Grass is Singing* through the way their White masters make them work without rest and pity. They exploit them in an inhuman way. Lessing denounces these colonizer’s attitudes, which seem cruel and unfair. She says: “when one of the men paused for a moment in his work to rest, or to wipe the running sweat from his eyes, she waited one minute by her watch, and then called sharply to him to begin again”¹⁰. This shows the physical exploitation of the Blacks, and the suffering they have to endure from their masters.

Doris Lessing’s concern is to expose the atrocities and cruelties of the Whites towards their servants, who make them under their power and call them by different terminologies such as the word “monsters”. The phrase “get back to work” is repeated many times in the novel, mainly by the protagonist. This demonstrates that the natives are somehow abused physically, since their bodies are never at rest. Besides, these masters cannot accept that “the slaves” may have the right to complain. In fact, they are not afraid of it but it rather infuriates them. This is shown in this quote when a “slave” complains to Dick about Mary’s unfair treatment: “it made her furious that this black animal had the right to complain against her, against the behavior of a white woman »¹¹. Lessing

demonstrates also that the white man's behavior has to be approved by the Blacks even if it may seem unacceptable or unjust.

Moses is represented by Lessing differently from the other natives in the novel. Indeed he dares to address his mistress in English while the others are not allowed to do so. She says: "But most white people think it is 'cheek' if a native speaks English; she said [...] don't speak English to me [...] she opened her mouth to storm at him, but remained speechless"¹². He is also not afraid to ask for something, the author says: "Moses who was standing beside her with the tray, said he wanted to leave at the end of the month. He spoke quietly and directly"¹³. Lessing wants to demonstrate that the natives are not powerless or ignorant as the White believe them to be, and that they are soon able to get rid of the colonizer's bad images. She refers to Moses and says: "But although he was never disrespectful, he forced her now to treat him as a human being. It was impossible for her to thrust him out of her mind like something unclear as she has done with all the others in the past"¹⁴.

Similarly, this notion of Racism and Imperialism is also depicted in *Heart of Darkness*. Indeed the Polish writer exposes also the horror that the white colonial rule has brought into the virgin African forest, the Congo River. But through our reading of the novel, we may notice the way Conrad thinks of the Black race and his stance which seems to be against them. He portrays them in a negative way, and reinforces the stereotypical images they are confined in.

Through *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad characterizes the Blacks as animals and savages who seem to be in need of "Light and Civilization". In fact, it is apparent in the beginning of the novel that the Europeans and Conrad vehicle images and diverse stereotypes about Africans by representing them as brutes. In other words, they are referred to as people with

no objectives in life, their only role is limited to serve and obey their white masters. These visions are clearly formulated in the novel. All over it, we may see how Conrad depicts the Blacks through the use of different terminologies to point a finger towards them in order to describe and portray their slavery. We also encounter the incessant use of the different words “savage”, “animals”, “brutes”. This strengthens the concept of racism and imperialism in the novel. Furthermore, it embodies the sentiments of prejudice, intolerance and racial discrimination.

Marlow describes a native and says: “He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs.”¹⁵. This is a good illustration of racism because, here we are introduced to what natives are compared to, and in this quote, Marlow is clearly referring to them as “animals”. Conrad seems to show that the Blacks are powerless with no standards, since they are not characterized as human beings but as animals. Indeed, this is a disturbing image and a racist view upon the Africans.

The author describes through Marlow the Congo River, he says: “going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest”¹⁶. Indeed, this quote illustrates the way the author perceives Africa as a land that has not yet reached the stage of development. As a result, he compares it here to “the early beginning of the world”. We may understand that Conrad’s concern is to legitimize the white’s colonization, by claiming that the African continent needs help from their Civilization”.

Throughout the novel, we encounter the various ideas that are vehicled by the author which mainly characterize Africa and the Blacks. He gives us a negative portrayal, which is reflected in this quote:

The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side”¹⁷

This proves that Conrad considers the Congo River as a kind of jungle inhabited by animals. In fact, this quote reinforces the imperialist attitude of the author in his novel.

Conrad gives the impression of Black’s depreciation, he in a way shows his aversion of them. In fact, he disvalues them as being powerless, incapable, with no standards. This in fact is a disturbing image and a racist view upon the Africans. Conrad adds:

the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner, his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence. While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone ¹⁸

As mentioned above, he qualifies the Blacks in terms of “phantom” which refers to creatures that appear when the night falls. Additionally, he adds a negative description of these mortal bodies which are viewed only as objects

Throughout the novel, we also come across the different ideas that the character of Kurtz features, though it may also represent and reflect Conrad and European’s visions which are illustrated in this quote:

The opening paragraph, however, is the light of the later information, strikes me now as ominous. he began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them (savages) in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the

might of a deity , and so on , and so on , ‘ by the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded’¹⁹.

Unlike Doris Lessing, Conrad points out to the supremacy of the white race. It is apparent in this quote when Kurtz, who symbolizes the white civilized race, believes that they are the superior race on earth. He even perceives himself as a god who must govern the Blacks. Indeed, this is why he feels forced to bring his help in order to “enlighten Africa”.

Conrad draws attention to the way the Blacks are treated by the whites and how they humiliate them:

therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly , while a big crowd of his people watched him , thunderstruck , till some man , - I was told the chief’s son , -in desperation at hearing the old chap yell , made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man – and of course it went quite easy between the shoulder –blades²⁰

This represents the overall glance on how the white man is considered to be the dominant force, as it is reflected through this passage. The evidence confirms so, when he punishes one of the Blacks in front of the whole community. Furthermore, this quote manifests obviously the aggressive attitude, the savagery of the Africans towards their masters. In fact, Conrad’s position settles at the heart of this quotation, in which he characterizes Blacks in terms of enemies and rebels. He confesses:

I had come to crawling before Mr. Kurtz, he crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all. I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers- and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks²¹

Differently said, the hostile posture of Conrad’s towards the Africans is overwhelmingly admitted and loudly declared by identifying the Blacks as source of troubles and mutiny.

Throughout the novel we notice how Kurtz is portrayed. In the beginning he is seen as an educated famous leader and a rational person, but as we go through it, we encounter how this vision changes as he becomes evil, harsh and destructive. Along with his last

utterances: “The horror! the horror!”²² Kurtz adds: “exterminate all the brutes!”²³. This explains in a way the hatred that he nourishes towards the Blacks whom he considers as ‘monsters’ or ‘brutes. This makes it obvious how deep he wants to see them being exterminated and disintegrated by any possible mean, either through exploiting them or simply killing them. This reflects the racist attitudes that reside at the core of Conrad’s book. He believes that Africans are nothing but objects, usually treated with intolerance and non sense of humanity.

From what is above-mentioned, we have on the one hand a racist author, Joseph Conrad, who belongs to those “White Supreme Race”. The latter tries to legitimize the white colonial rule by referring to the lack of civilization, power and knowledge of the Blacks. On the other hand, an anti-racist writer, a female one, Doris Lessing whose concern is mainly to stand with the oppressed Blacks and denounce the bad treatments of the White colonizer and oppressor, by exposing his cruelty, violence, injustice, and discrimination towards them. She has also denied the fact that they are powerless and ignorant through the character of Moses. We may say that this difference stems from the fact that Lessing is involved in a sort of battle because of her “anxiety of authorship”. In this sense Gilbert and Gubar argue: “the female writer’s battle for self creation involves her in a revisionary process”²⁴. Lessing challenges not only the views of Conrad about the Blacks, but also those of the West in general. She exposes their strength through Moses, who symbolises the Blacks’ rebellion against the White masters.

Gilbert and Gubar define the revisionary process undertaken by the Nineteenth-Century female writers as: “the act of looking back, seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.....an act of survival”²⁵. Accordingly, through a close analysis of *The Grass is Singing*, we may consider that Lessing has done the same thing. In

fact, she uses Conrad's novel as a way of "looking back with fresh eyes" by trying to deal with the same issues in her own way. Her purpose is to question what she may believe as a threat for her as a woman writer, and this is considered as her own "act of survival". Lessing as the other women writers who experience anxiety of never being heard, and the fear of being accused of a lack of originality, tries to impose her voice through her rebellion. Indeed, it consists of challenging the views of Conrad about Africans through the character of Moses who dares to impose himself and get rid of his white master. This in fact may be considered as a way to the female author to accomplish her revisionary process.

End Notes

¹Maureen Corrigan, *How a Mad Woman Upended a Literary Boys Club*, January 16, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/01/17/169548789/how-a-madwoman-upended-a-literary-boys-club>.

²Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1950), 15.

³Ibid, 6

⁴GülBüyüA *Freudian Study of The Grass is Singing, Aylan Adam and the White Hotel*. (The Graduate School of Social Sciences, 2007), 24.

⁵Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, 11.

⁶Ibid, 24.

⁷ Ibid, 24.

⁸ Ibid, 22

⁹ Ibid, 100.

¹⁰Ibid, 118.

¹¹ Ibid, 127.

¹² Ibid, 126.

¹³ Ibid, 160.

¹⁴ Ibid, 166.

¹⁵Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (London: Penguin, 1902), (2, 4).

¹⁶Ibid, (2, 2)

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid, (1, 12)

¹⁹ Ibid, (2, 13)

²⁰ Ibid, (1, 5).

²¹Ibid, (3, 3).

²²Ibid, (3, 12).

²³Ibid, (2, 13).

²⁴Sandra Gilber and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Litrary Imagination*, 49.

²⁵ Ibid.

2. Madness

Madness is somehow a difficult term to define, as it has multiple definitions and interpretations. It is defined by the Oxford dictionary as "extremely foolish behavior"¹. This means that the person behaves in an unreasonable way. It is another common theme which is introduced by the two authors Doris Lessing and Joseph Conrad in their novels. Madness concerns mainly the two protagonists Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing* and Mr. Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*.

Madness is introduced by Doris Lessing as a psychological turn of the protagonist. It is a result not only of the hypocrisy of imperialism and colonialism, but mainly of patriarchal oppression that erases her autonomy and real sense of life mainly after she hears about gossips from her friends who blame her for not getting married yet. Alia'a Bahlaq mentions this in her thesis: "She experiences her first shock when she knows the truth about herself from people she considers close to her"². As we have already pointed out, the protagonist is characterized by her racist and imperialist attitudes, her hate and harsh treatment of the native Africans (her workers), but we notice through the novel that she seems to become powerless and weak in front of her houseboy Moses. Lessing's main concern is to depict the tragic end of Mary Turner as she faces her failed marriage with a failed farmer, who leads her to poverty and disappointment.

At the beginning of the novel, mainly in the second chapter, we are introduced to the happy youth of Mary Turner, her life which seems fulfilled as she has an appropriate job and can be responsible for herself. Lessing characterizes this as her happiest years ever, she says: "she was extremely happy, so happy that she dreaded going home at holiday-times"³ and also "till she was twenty-five nothing happened to break her smooth and comfortable life she led"⁴. But after her marriage, she has lost everything that used to be precious

for her. She is no more the independent woman surrounded by people and friends, she becomes isolated and represses everything within herself. Her life becomes senseless and empty as she has nothing to do to pass her time, she says to Dick “[...] but I can’t go on like this, I must have something. I have anything to do”⁵. Her despair pushes her to think of a child, as something that will bring back hope and joy. All this has contributed to the depression and madness of the protagonist

Mary’s madness starts from her constant fear of Moses, her houseboy. The author says: “she thought: soon he will be coming back she lay still so as to seem asleep”⁶. This shows that Mary starts to behave oddly as a result of her fear and anxiety. Moreover, this feeling has started to get intensified and reinforced as this quote demonstrates “she repeated to herself that there was nothing to fear. At last she gathered her legs close, and let them down over the edge of the sofa, very quietly, not daring to make a sound”⁷. Lessing shows also that Mary’s psychological disorder is due to her unhappy childhood with a drunken unsuccessful father and husband who loses his wife’s interest. Lessing says: “it was as if she didn’t 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”⁸. In fact, Mary’s childhood, and mainly her father, have a negative impact on her. We encounter many passages in the novel in which she has illusions of him as he started to haunt her. This is referred to in this quote:

He approached slowly, obscene and powerful, and it was not only he, but her father who was threatening her. [...] he came near and put his hand on her arm. It was the voice of the African she heard. He was comforting her because of Dick’s death, consoling her protectively; but at the same time, it was her father menacing and horrible, who touched her in desire⁹.

The author believes that everything is gathered to bring the protagonist into madness, and from what is already shown, men have a great part of responsibility.

The psychological disorder of Mary Turner is also the result of the protagonist's intimate relationship with the native Moses. He deliberately attempts to please her and touch her, as she barely resists him. "She felt helplessly in his power"¹⁰. This is clearly seen in this quotation:

Madame lie down on the bed she did not move. He put out his hand reluctantly, loathe to touch her, the sacrosanct white woman, and pushed her by the shoulder; she felt herself gently propelled across the room towards the bedroom. It was like a nightmare when one is powerless against horror: the touch of this black man's hand on her shoulder filled her with nausea; she had never, not at once in her whole life, touched the flesh of a native¹¹

Indeed, due to his belonging to "the White Civilization", Mary cannot allow herself to have a natural relationship with Moses mainly because of its norms. Thus, she finds herself unbalanced between her desire to flirt with him on the one hand, and the restrictions and moral values on the other one. Sigmund Freud, in his psychoanalytical theory, says in fact that the personality is divided into three parts: the Id, and according to him it is the unconscious part based on desire, pleasure and instinct. The superego, and it is the conscience of the mind, it is concerned with the moral values or what is forbidden in society. Finally, the ego which according to Freud is the part that makes a balance between the Id and the Super Ego. He argues that if the Ego fails to accomplish his task, the person becomes mentally unbalanced. This is indeed what happens to Mary Turner as she fails to make a balance between what the "white civilization" asks for, and her desire to be closer to Moses. This also contributes to the protagonist's mental disorder.

Doris Lessing's revolt against the patriarchal authority of art is seen through her way of revising women's socialization. Indeed her process is to blame not only men but the whole institution of marriage of being the only cause that destroys women physically and mentally. When Mary gets sick about her situation with her husband Dick, she decides to

leave him and go back “into town for that lovely peaceful life, the life she was made for, to begin again”¹². But she fails to accomplish her will, due to the fact that she does not fit in such a world any more, mainly because of her marriage. When she goes back to the girl’s club that used to be her job in her youth, Lessing describes the scene:

When she looked at the girls in their pretty frocks, with their dressed hair [...] she found herself glancing down at her hands which were crinkled and brown, and hid them under her back. The man opposite to her was staring at her, looking closely at her face then he glanced at her shoes which were still red with dust¹³.

This shows the first contact of Mary with what she looks like after her marriage, mainly through her comparison with the other girls in the club. The author seems to prove that any woman is threatened by madness when she is confronted to patriarchal society and its oppression. In other words, Lessing shows that it is a hardly accepted idea from any woman to realize that her autonomy and freedom have been erased by male’s authority.

In the last chapters of *The Grass is Singing*, We encounter many passages that show Mary’s state of madness. She becomes overwhelmed by illusions that somebody is threatening her. This is shown in this quote:

Listlessly she stacked the plates, carried them into the kitchen, filled the sink with water, and then forgot what she was doing. Standing Still, her hands hanging idly, she thought, ‘Somewhere outside, among the trees, he is waiting’. She rushed about the house in panic, shutting the doors, and all the windows, and collapsed at last on the sofa, like a hare crouching a tuft of grass, watching the dogs come nearer¹⁴.

The quote illustrates clearly the protagonist as she is in a way starting to lose her mind. Her attitudes seem strange and extremely odd. In fact her madness appears in her constant worry and fear.

Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* deals with the theme of madness from a different point of view, since he introduces us to the madness that takes its origins from temptation and from becoming a powerful and a dominant person. It comes from the

corruption of the human soul and how those who pretend to be higher intellectually sell their soul to the devil and become alienated.

Conrad includes from the very beginning of his novel madness as a dominant theme since Marlow faces the fascinating question that the doctor of the trading company asks him: "Ever any madness in your family?"¹⁵. This proves that in a way the whites know this form of illness and they have already been exposed to it. The authors shows that when a soul is vulnerable and temptation is at its highest, an individual cannot control himself and say no to what is offered to him. This is why in the end Kurtz loses himself to the devil that is inside of him, or the dark part of his heart is exposed to the real world.

In Heart of Darkness, Marlow realizes how little temptation can suck all what is human in man. In other words, the way it may take away a person and drive him to go mad. He sees the excessive madness to which Kurtz is exposed throughout the different comments that are made on him in the beginning of the novel. He is said to be: "a very remarkable person"¹⁶, which means a genius or a kind of prodigy who succeeds in everything he does. He is a kind of a leader who can lead the natives into a world of civilization, bring light to them. He is perceived as a god or a certain savior while numerous people make mention of his impressive greatness and his amazing potential within the Company. This is confirmed through the words of the accountant whom Marlow meets before his voyage he argues: "oh, he [Kurtz] will go far, very far," he began again. "He will be a somebody in the Administration before long. They, above – the Council in Europe, you know - mean him to be."¹⁷.

From this abundant opinion, it is clear that Kurtz has made a positive impression among the workers of the Company. But as we go through our reading, we notice the way Marlow starts discovering how his greed transforms him to another person who is not the

one that everyone was worshiping in the beginning. He is somehow obsessed with power and domination that he forgets his true nature, and Conrad even portrays him by saying:

the wilderness had patted him on the head , and , behold, it was like a ball- an ivory ball; it had caressed him , and –lo!- he had withered; it had taken him , loved him , embraced him , got into his veins , consumed his flesh , and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation¹⁸

He uses what fascinates Kurtz which is ivory in order to describe his head, he says that he resembles an “ivory ball”, a kind of material. The jungle has “got into his veins, consumed his flesh”¹⁹. It means that, he has completely changed, he becomes a different man who is absorbed inside his own darkness, the darkness of the human soul.

Kurtz’s madness may be due to the fact that he has spent so much time in the African continent, more precisely in Congo. He plunges himself inside the mode of life which the natives have been leading. Thus it makes him forget all what he has known of the sense of restraint since the blacks are known for not having any ethics. Here with Kurtz’s integration inside their sphere, he clearly becomes one of them. Marlow says ‘powers of darkness have claimed him for their own’²⁰. He no longer recognizes European moral values or what is good or evil. It may be argued that Conrad’s concern is to show the way spending so much time in an unknown place where savagery and darkness is everywhere, can bring the individual to lose control or simply become mad. This is what happens to the character of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. He goes mad and this is presented in this passage:

But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had – for my sins, I suppose – to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one’s belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it – I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself²¹.

Marlow claims that, being alone in the wilderness has driven Kurtz’s soul mad, and the most tragic and incredible thing in all this, is that Kurtz knows all of it and he struggles

sincerely with himself. However, he cannot win against what makes him trapped inside this madness. In other words, it is his greed and his hunger that corrupts him. Marlow says: “his soul (is) mad”²². In fact, he is aware about Kurtz’s madness and he admits it. We notice also that Kurtz’s illness is referred to from the very beginning of the novel, since he had already got diseased mind, which spreads throughout his body, and then becomes a physical. At the end of the novel we are confronted to Kurtz’s final words: “The horror! the horror!”²³. This gives us a real interpretation of how dark a human soul may be, and how deep greed and corruption can make someone go mad without having any way to return back to their old self.

This analysis points out to the madness of the two protagonists in Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Mary Turner’s psychological disorder in *The Grass is Singing* is the result of patriarchy, oppression and the negative impact of the “Institution of Marriage” on her. Kurtz, on the other hand becomes out of balance because of his “corrupted soul” and due to his awful deeds towards the Blacks. We may consider that Mary Turner’s madness is the result of her failure to fit in a world of male’s oppression. Her mental disorder seems to symbolize the one of the preceding female writers who struggled to impose their places in patriarchal authority of art. Gubar and Gilbert say: “For if contemporary women do now attempt the pen with energy and authority, they are able to do so only because their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foremothers struggled in isolation, that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity[...].”²⁴.

In fact, though she is confined in the memories and barriers of her father, husband and servant, who represent patriarchy in the novel, the protagonist is introduced by Lessing as a feminist woman. She is aware of patriarchal oppression and knows its negative impact

on her. She says: “Men! they get all the fun”²⁵. Thus, it is possible to deduce that Mary Turner’s struggle against patriarchal oppression is pointed out through her madness.

End Notes

¹Pocket Oxford American Dictionary. Third edition, (Christine A. Lindberg, 2009).

²YoucefAlia’aBahlaq, *A Critical Analysis of Doris Lessing’s The Grass is Singing*, (Department of English Language and Literature: Faculty of Art Middle East University, 2011).

³Doris Lessnig, *The Grass is Singing*, (New York: Thomas Y.Crowell, 1950), 33.

⁴Ibid, 34.

⁵Ibid, 134.

⁶Ibid, 127.

⁷Ibid, 175.

⁸Ibid, 31-32.

⁹Ibid, 176-177.

¹⁰Ibid, 165.

¹¹ Ibid, 161-162.

¹²Ibid, 102.

¹³Ibid, 105.

¹⁴Ibid, 204

¹⁵Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*,(London: Penguin, 1902), 7.

¹⁶ibid, (1, 13).

¹⁷:ibid.

¹⁸ ibid, (2, 29).

¹⁹ ibid.

²⁰ ibid.

²¹Ibid, (3, 29).

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, (3, 43).

²⁴ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, (Princeton University: Joyce Carol Oates, 1979) 51.

²⁵ Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, 37.

3. The Representation of the Female Character

If we look back to the Victorian era, we may notice the way women were oppressed and marginalized. In fact, they did not have rights, abused and oppressed as a result of policy in which discriminatory laws existed”¹. As Coventry Patmore portrays and refers to them by “The Angel of the House”² in his poem, their only and required task was to take care of the house and their husbands. Women were considered as the weak sex who had nothing to do in public spheres, whose only task was to please men, as it is till nowadays shown in media, since a lot of magazines show clearly how women equal their bodies. In a discussion paper called *Women and Media: Who do They Think you are?* Hon RobynMcSweeney says:

Women’s magazines are filled with advice on dieting, sex tips, fashion and the positioning of the body as the most important part of a woman’s life. The increasing use of Photoshopped images in these magazines adds to unrealistic perceptions of what women look like.³

Starting from the nineteenth century, due to the development of the feminist movement women started to ask for their rights, and many female authors have directly blamed men for the miserable situation of women as they are excluded from public spheres. Furthermore, they have denounced “the institution of marriage” which for their opinion deprives women from their autonomy and happiness. Doris Lessing is among those strong female voices calling for equality of the two sexes. In *The Grass is Singing* (1950), she has shown how women’s life changes into despair as they grow in a patriarchal society, and how the institution of marriage damages them physically and emotionally. We may consider that, if we are brought to draw a kind of link between Lessing’s work and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) in this sense, the female writer’s concern is in fact to make an opposition to Conrad’s views of women, due to his anti-

feminist attitudes in his novel. The latter reflects the images of silenced woman, who do not play any role in his book, because he belongs to a patriarchal society that refuses to view them in another way.

Through a continuity of flash backs, Lessing introduces us to the life of Mary Turner from her childhood, as she witnesses the failed marriage of her parents and the despair of her mother. Through Lessing's words we notice the sadness and sorrow of Mary's mother as she complains all the time about her drunken husband, who spends all his money in drinking and fails to accomplish his task as a husband and a father. She says: "she enjoyed complaining in a hard sorrowful voice about her husband every night he comes home from here, she would say, every night!"⁴. This shows how unsatisfied and sad she is about her life of a married woman, with a drunken husband. Mary's mother finds comfort in the arms of her daughter, even when she was a child; "she used to cry over her sewing while Mary comforted her miserably, longing to get away, but feeling important too and hating her father"⁵. We notice through this quote that even from an early age, Mary has been aware of the hardships her mother goes through, and how her father contributes to this.

Lessing shows that despite her family's situation, her drunken father and miserable mother, Mary succeeds to flee in order to seek for a life she thinks she deserves. The author says: "she was sent to Boarding School and her life changed. She was extremely happy, so happy that she dreaded going home at holiday-times to her fuddled father"⁶. This proves that Mary's happiness is found far from her family and mainly her father. In addition to this, the author breaks with the stereotypes of women as the passive and perfect weak sex whose place is only at home to take care of it. She describes the life of Mary as she starts working:

At sixteen she left school and took a job in an office in town [...]. Again, she was very happy. She seemed born for typing and shorthand and book-

keeping and the comfortable routine of an office. [...], by the time she was twenty, she has a good job, her own friends, a niche in the life of towns⁷.

We may feel in this quote how Mary is able to handle her life by herself and how happy she feels, or how she enjoys doing so; her life is simply fulfilled as such.

In her novel, Doris Lessing shows that the happiest years of a woman and her most beautiful time, physically and emotionally, are those of her youth when nothing prevents her from living her life. She considers men as the only source of confinement, she says:

Till she was twenty five nothing happened to break her smooth and comfortable life she led. Then her father died. That removed the last link that bound her to a childhood she hated to remember. [...] She was free. And when the funeral was over and she had returned to the office, she looked forward to a life that would continue as it had so far been. She was very happy. [...] at twenty five she was at her prettiest. Sheer contentment put a bloom on her: she was a thin girl, who moved awkwardly, with a fashionable curtain of light-brown hair, serious blue eyes and pretty clothes. Her friends would have described her as a slim blonde: she modeled herself on the more childish looking film stars⁸.

We may see through this extract that Mary, now that her father (her only source of sorrow) is dead, enjoys her life not only as she is physically and mentally fulfilled, but also as an independent and free woman.

Doris Lessing denounces patriarchal society, since in her opinion, it marginalizes women and imposes on them a set of rules that they have to follow even though sometimes it leads them to the wrong direction. We can understand from the novel that even the protagonist is aware of this since she has also this kind of feminist views that she has inherited from her mother. Lessing says: "She seemed not to care for men she would say to her girl, Men! They get all the fun"⁹. This shows that Mary is aware about male's oppression. But the fact of living in a patriarchal society forces her to get married, like when she hears her friends' gossip about her, « Why doesn't she marry? She must have had a plenty of chances."¹⁰; "she should marry someone years older than herself. A man of fifty would suit her"¹¹. As a result, the author shows how the protagonist's life changes

gradually from her happiest years ever as a young woman, to desperate and hopeless years as a married one, which is only the result of the stereotypical images that men vehicle towards women. Dick Turner, who is Mary's husband, is introduced by Lessing, she says: "He knew perfectly what he wanted: a pleasant companion, a mother for his children and someone to run his house for him"¹², and this infact is, in the opinion of men, the only way women are needed.

It is apparent in *The Grass is Singing* that Mary is portrayed as an active and resourceful woman. In fact, she manages to bring back some colors of joy into Dick's house. Lessing says:

With her own saved money Mary bought flowered materials, and covered cushions and mode curtains; bought a little linen, crockery, and some dress lengths. The house gradually lost its air of bleak poverty, and put on an inexpensive prettiness, with bright hangings and some pictures. Mary worked hard [...] ¹³.

The protagonist has nothing to do with the passive woman who has to rely on her husband. She does everything by herself using her own money. Lessing proves that women are capable of more than the patriarchal authority considers them to be.

The author's concern, as we have already mentioned, is indeed to denounce the "Institution of Marriage", which, she considers asa threat to women's stable lives, as they lose their autonomy, their happiness and everything that may have been a source of pleasure and comfort from them. After her marriage, Mary feels little by little that she is losing flavor in what has been for once a hobby:

She unpacked the novels she had brought with her, and turned them over. There wasthe book she had collected over years from the mass that had come her way. She had read each one a dozen time, knowing it by heart, following the familiar tales as a child listens to his mother telling him a well-known fairy tale. It had been a drug a soporific, in the past, reading them ; now as she turned them over listlessly, she wandered as she determinedly turns the pages ; and she realized, after she had been reading perhaps an hour that she had not taken in a word . [...]for a few days the house was littered with books in faded dust covers¹⁴.

We may notice how the life of the protagonist in the novel degrades as she gives up her life and moves to live with her husband Dick Turner. She loses her life of an active woman who may rely on herself, her past and youth become just a memory, she has to think of, and ought never to forget, and this is shown in this quote:

[...] but Dick would not be home for two hours yet, so she lay half-clothed on the bed, drugged with sleep, her mouth dry and her head aching. It was during those two hours of half-consciousness that she allowed herself to dream about that beautiful lost time when she worked in an office.... And lived as she pleased, before “people made her get married”¹⁵.

Mary becomes aware that her life after marriage has started to be unbearable. As a result, she decides to flee her husband in order to look for the girl she used to be, and the happiness she used to live in. This is mentioned in this quote:

Then came the thought that there was nothing to prevent her running away and going back to her old life; here the memory of her friends checked her: what would they say, breaking up a marriage like that? The conventionality of her ethics, which had nothing to do with her real life, was restored by the thought of those friends and the memory of their judgments on other people. It hurt her [...]. But her desire to escape her misery had become so insupportable, that she pushed out of her mind the idea of her friends¹⁶.

This demonstrates the misery that Mary lives in. Her despair pushes her to think of “running away”. In fact, even if she does not want to face her friend’s judgments, still she decides to escape no matter the price.

The protagonist fails to reach her aim and accomplish her desire. Indeed, she realizes that her youthful life is gone forever when she comes back to the town. Lessing portrays her and says: “She looked at the girls in their pretty frocks, with their dressed hair, and thought for the first time that she hardly looked the part. But it was too late now [...] she found herself glancing down at her hands, which were crinkled and brown; and hid them under her bag”¹⁷. Mary becomes aware that her life of a married woman has completely changed her not only mentally but also physically as she even becomes ashamed of herself. She has nothing to do with the beautiful young lady she used to be. Lessing’s aim through

this quote is to show that once they are committed into marriage, women are conditioned to change gradually.

In *Heart of Darkness*, women are not really taken into consideration; their roles are limited to very few apparitions. We notice how insignificant they are, since they do not acquire any tangible position in society, and this is reflected throughout the novel. Women are marginalized by the dominant patriarchal society that imposes on them diverse stereotypes. They are perceived as objects, naïve and not equal to men. In the novel Conrad does not give much importance to women that are mentioned, for he silences them. In a way, we may say that Conrad's female characters do not talk at all, they are somehow silenced or muted, since for him they are confined in a meaningless role. He only manages to convey the image of how they are viewed in a patriarchal society, especially during the Victorian period when women were considered as worthless creatures that would never be equivalent to men.

Throughout the novel we encounter few women, starting by Marlow's aunt, Kurtz mistress and the intended. All of them are represented in a different way. We observe that for Marlow, women are all the same, they live in an idealistic world, since he mentions in the very beginning the hyper reality that women create and this is illustrated when Marlow argues:

It's queer how out of touch with truth women are! They live in a world of their own and there have never been anything like it and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.¹⁸.

In this quote, Marlow refers to the idealistic world women should live in. In fact, for Conrad women are not equal to men but they are rather subservient and dependent on

them. He refers to their weakness by mentioning that they cannot really live their life without the presence of man. The latter is supposed to provide them with what is necessary for them to live happily in a world full of idealization.

Marlow's aunt is rather an enthusiastic and helpful character since she helps Marlow to get a job and go to the heart of Africa. Since Conrad gives an image of women being dependent on men, he somehow accentuates in this situation the feeling of shame that Marlow develops because it is his aunt who manages to provide him the opportunity to get a job. It is affirmed clearly when he exclaims:

Then—would you believe it?—I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job. Heavens! Well, you see, the notion drove me. I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul. She wrote: 'It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, anything for you. It's a glorious idea. I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration, and also a man who has lots of influence with,' She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed¹⁹.

It is, as if for men, the idea that women may be needed or necessary is something unacceptable and revolting. We feel through this quote how Marlow is enraged when he confesses that his aunt has helped him. It shows a kind of underestimation of women's abilities. At this point, we may say that Marlow's aunt does really play a significant role in his life since in a way she saves him from being jobless. Even if she is a simple woman she manages to know a lot of influential persons, but Marlow is unable to accept this due to his stereotypical views of women since he considers them useless, weak and inferior.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is full of sexist language that aims to denigrate women's role in society. Marlow says:

“Girl! What! Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it-completely. They- the women I mean- are out of it- should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, let ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of

it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, “My intended”²⁰.

Through the character of Marlow, Conrad shows clearly his opinion about women. In fact we may interpret through this quote that he considers them as the perfect and ideal sex who has nothing to do in men’s world. This is why he says “that beautiful world of their own”. It means that women have to stay in ignorance about everything, mainly in male’s affairs. In other words, they have to stay disconnected, detached and isolated of the certainty that is behind the real world. Moreover, Marlow evokes the state of Kurtz, when he mentions his intended and refers to him by a “disinterred body” as if it is something shameful. This reinforces women’s negative portrayal in *Heart of Darkness*.

We are also introduced to Kurtz’s native mistress. In fact, the natives are perceived as savages, meaningless and repulsive. In other words, a white does not need to be associated with those kind of primitives. Despite the fact that these stereotypical ideas are proliferated towards the African natives, when Marlow meets the mistress for the first time, he describes her instantly: “she was savage and superb, wild eyed and magnificent there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate process the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her”²¹. Kurtz’s mistress is not only described as being a ‘gorgeous’ and “superb” creature, but she also represents the image of Africa, through her black skin. But, Marlow seems to focus mainly on her physical appearance because he believes that any woman is represented through her body rather than anything else. This asserts the negative reflection of the main narrator which is limited to the corporal materialization of women. Here, we also point to Marlow’s insistence in considering women as object matters whose role is limited to satisfy men’s pleasure.

If we try to take a closer look on the way Kurtz’s intended is portrayed and how the African mistress is described too, we notice how completely different they are from one

another. If we start by Kurtz intended, we observe that she represents the social and the powerful class since she gets the privilege to be a kind of a perfect match to Kurtz, and this is all due to the position in which she is, because she comes from the upper class. We also discern that she is quite naïve due to the fact that she represents the woman who waits for her “supposed” husband to come back, without questioning their deeds. This may be quite typical of how women of the Victorian era were viewed.

We may also add that the intended represents the civilized world that Europe is. This perhaps shows the degree of her naivety since she lives in a sphere of illusions that she creates by herself. There is also an illustration that demonstrates all this. It is when Marlow gets back to Europe, he goes to visit her and when he meets her the intended asks him directly about her husband’s last words:

The Intended says: “I feel I can speak to you - and oh! I must speak. I want you – you who have heard his last words – to know I have been worthy of him. [...] It is not pride. [...] Yes! I am proud to know I understood him better than anyone on earth – he told me so himself²²

This makes us feel how confident she feels about her husband, though she does not know him as she pretends to do. She hopefully wants to see, and to know if he thought of her when he was in Africa, or if he has ever mentioned her before dying. When we read this it makes us feel that it is too much of an illusion to think that way, or it may just seem that the intended is uncertain about whether Kurtz has had the same feelings as her. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that pushes Marlow to lie and tell her that Kurtz’s final words were her name, as it is mentioned in this quote : “The last word he pronounced was—your name²³. We may deduce here the way Conrad perceives women as the weak sex through Marlow’s compassion with Kurtz’s intended. He considers that she will never be able to handle the truth or the reality. In this example, it is evident that Kurtz does not mention

the name of his fiancé when he dies. Thus Marlow feels obliged to lie to her in order to preserve her from any mental break down.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar show in their work *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) that the woman writer's own duty is to break free from patriarchal literary oppression that sees her as inferior and passive. Her work is characterized with a lack of creativity since it is related to men's one, and her voice is never going to be heard in a world where patriarchal authority of art governs. The two critics say: "what does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definition of literary authority are, [...] both overtly and covertly patriarchal"²⁴. This affirms that the male's literary authority deprives the woman writer from her will of "attempting the pen" freely.

Both feminist critics say that this fear or this "Anxiety of Authorship", which is as we have already explained, the fear of never possessing a place in a world of literature and art which is dominated by male authors, is represented through the woman writer's process of rehabilitating, or correcting women's socialization. In other words, it is the correction of the way they are viewed in society. Gilbert and Gubar say: "her battle however is not against her (male) precursor reading of the world but against his reading of her. In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization"²⁵.

Indeed, this is obvious in how Conrad considers women through his negative depiction of them, that is weak, vulnerable and inferior; and how Doris Lessing manages to fix these distorted images by representing them as the opposite, i.e., strong and self-reliant. She also condemns men to be the only responsible of women's oppression and confinement. She shows this through the protagonist Mary Turner, who loses everything once getting married, and she says in her novel:

At the age of thirty, this woman who had had a good state education, a thoroughly comfortable life enjoying herself in a civilized way, and access to all knowledge of her time [...] knew so little about herself that she was thrown completely off her balance because some gossiping women had said she ought to get married²⁶.

According to the two feminist critics, this process of correction is in a way, a weapon for the woman writer that she uses to justify her fight and rebellion against patriarchal authority and dominance. They say: “and we shall see women doing this over and over again—searches for a female model not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her “femininity” but because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavors.”²⁷.

Indeed, Doris Lessing has used her female character to reinforce her revisionary process concerning what is said in *Heart of Darkness*. In other words, the protagonist Mary Turner symbolizes any woman in a society and anyone who is repressed and considered as being inferior as a result of patriarchy due to the fact that the latter is governed by men. Conrad is among those who consider women as weak, and have to be submitted to men, as it is clearly pointed out in his novel. In fact, Lessing wants to show that these stereotypes are imagined by the latter in order to put women in the weak and inferior position. Her revision lies in the way she breaks with Conrad’s ideas through bringing an image of women which represents responsibility, strength and autonomy, as we have already dealt with in this section. Lessing goes on by expressing her radicalism concerning men, she considers that they are the only source of women’s confinement and oppression and she blames the “Institution of Marriage” as it takes back women’s identity and autonomy.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar draw attention to the fact that any woman writer who seeks for a place in art and literature where she can be heard alone, needs a kind of support from a female predecessor. Indeed the latter may represent another voice calling for women’s independence and liberty. They say in their book: “[...] she can begin such a struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who [...] proves by example that a

revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible”²⁸. It is worth mentioning that, any contemporary feminist writer is in a way or another, influenced and guided by her female precursor who has permitted and led her to impose her strength and express her ideas.

We believe that Doris Lessing may have found in Virginia Woolf a female precursor whom she may regard as a model. Virginia Woolf is among the most important figures in feminism. Indeed she represents somehow a must for anyone who may be interested in feminism in England. She is known for her strong claims against patriarchy, and her criticism of the “Institution of Marriage”. She believes that the latter destroys women mentally and physically. This is seen through her works such as, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *A Room of One’s own* published in the same year. As Gilbert and Gubar affirms in the above quote, Woolf may be considered as Doris Lessing’s foremother, who proves by examples of her feminist claims that a revolt is likely to happen against patriarchal authority of art.

End Notes

¹FatimaMerizig,*The Status of Women in the Nineteenth Century Victorian England*, (KasdiMerbahOuargla University, 2013) 23.

²Conventry, Patmore, *The Angel of the House*, (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform,1854).

³Hon Robyn, Mc Sweeney, *Women and the Media: Who do they Think you Are?*,Community Services, Seniors and Volunteering, Women’s Interests, Youth, (Minister for Child Protection: Department of Communities, 2014), 2

⁴Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1950), 31

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid, 33

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid, 34

- ⁹Ibid, 37
- ¹⁰Ibid, 39
- ¹¹Ibid, 39-40
- ¹²Ibid, 47
- ¹³Ibid, 62.
- ¹⁴Ibid, 64
- ¹⁵Ibid, 101
- ¹⁶Ibid, 101-102.
- ¹⁷Ibid, 105.
- ¹⁸Joseph Conrad , *Heart of Darkness*, (London: Penguin, 1902), (1, 8).
- ¹⁹Ibid, (1,5).
- ²⁰Ibid, (2, 13)
- ²¹Ibid, (3,5).
- ²²Ibid ,(316).
- ²³Ibid,
- ²⁴Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (Princeton University: Joyce Carol Oates, 1979), 45-46.
- ²⁵Ibid, 49
- ²⁶Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*, 43.
- ²⁷Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, 50.
- ²⁸Ibid, 49

V. Conclusion

This research paper is about Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* influence on Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. It is also concerned with the anxiety female writers experience when they "attempt the pen" or the feeling of inadequacy and jealousy undergone by them. This is mainly due to their male predecessors who belong to the patriarchal authority of art, and who considers that women are not able to equal men in their writings, or even to create an original piece of art, since their work will always be related to the one of their predecessors. This theory is developed by the two feminist critics in order to expose the way male authors characterize their female characters in their writings, by making them passive, and the way women writers feel whenever it comes to "attempt the pen".

What we have set out to deal with in our work, is that, we have chosen to work on two authors, from two distinct countries, having two different points of view on women's role. On the one hand, Doris Lessing who is a feminist author, acknowledged for her struggle against patriarchy and her achievements to denounce men, and break with their negative stereotypes against women. On the other hand, Joseph Conrad with his *Heart of Darkness* who represents the male writer's vision and considers women as mute and weak. Both authors and novels are appropriate illustrations that we have chosen in order to accomplish our study.

We have started our work by analyzing the two main themes that draw a link between the two novels. We have found out that Racism and Madness play a great part in both works. They are represented differently by the two authors, each of Lessing and Conrad have

experienced differently the issue of Racism. We notice how the male author seems to express his imperialist attitudes, by portraying the Blacks in a negative way as it is already mentioned in the discussion section. The female writer is mainly concerned with her own way to defend (if we can say so) the Blacks and to correct the views of the West in general, and those of Conrad in specific. We have then deduced according to the theory that in doing so, Doris Lessing goes through an “Anxiety of Authorship”, and she is involved in a revisionary process. In fact this is typical of any female writer since she only wants to distance herself from her male predecessor and gain a place in society, more precisely maintain a position as a female writer inside a society that condemns women to the position of object.

Then, we have dealt with the female representation in the two works. Here we have noticed the way Doris Lessing reveals her feminist side by the use of the character of Mary. She reflects the way women become alienated and change physically and emotionally through making choices that are imposed on them by the patriarchal society. On the opposite, Conrad reveals his anti feminist side since he barely mentions any woman, or we may say that she does not play any major role in his novel. He manages to silence her, and degrade her image. This is viewed as a kind of discrimination against them.

It is apparent that Mary and Kurtz have much in common since the two share an important element that is madness. Throughout the two novels, we discover how each of them confronts his/her madness. The two characters are similar since both mistreat badly the natives, and behave in a horrible way. But the main difference between them is that one represents the female part and the other is the male dominant one. Lessing makes us understand that it is rather difficult for women to become independent. This is why

somehow she shows that women are driven to madness whenever they are forced to live under male's dominance and oppression.

We may finish by adding that Lessing represents a strong female voice that calls for equality and aims to defend the cause of women and the Blacks. She has proved her bravery and imposed not only her place but the one of any woman as well in a society that is "supposed to be governed by men". Her main purpose is to open the eyes of those who are oppressed. Indeed, Lessing's concern seem to point out that the woman writer is not the only person to experience a kind of anxiety when she "attempts the pen", but also that, in general all humans are required to experience it whenever they are confronted with stereotypical misrepresentations. In this sense Lessing is forced to confront herself to the "Anxiety of Authorship", as any female writer of the Nineteenth-Century. The theme of our study is an important subject to deal with, since it shows how female intellectuals create their own battle in order to impose their voice and ideas. In fact many contemporary women writers are able to "attempt the pen" thanks' to their foremothers. We will not miss to add also that our scope of study is open and extended to many other analysis for future researches, for example a study of the relationship of Mary Turner with her black servant Moses, which is based of "Desire and Repulsion".

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