

Exploring the Psychological Trauma of Mary Turner in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*

Sheikh Saifullah Ahmed^{1*}

¹Department of English and Modern Languages, International University of Business Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT), Dhaka 1230, Bangladesh.

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Abstract

*This paper explores the traumas of Mary Turner, the protagonist of the widely celebrated novel *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) by Doris May Lessing (1919-2013). The plot of the novel centers on Mary Turner, a white farmer's wife whose declining mental health and eventual tragedy reveal society's deeply established biases and repressive structures. Psychological trauma includes abuse, violence, accidents, war, and witnessing traumatic occurrences that may cause long-term mental health issues such as flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, despair, emotional numbness, and relationship issues. Therefore, using trauma theory and psychological frameworks, the study examines Mary's traumatic experiences that shape her actions and interactions throughout the novel. In the novel, Mary seems to be terrified by her infantile memories, traumatized by the social slurs, and trapped in an African parched terrain, approximating the wasteland, from which she cannot escape. She has relentless nightmares about haunting sexuality, sporadically with her father or Moses. It seems that her repressed desires unlocked into her dreams persecute her inexorably. Therefore, she mislays control over herself and suffers from a complete nervous breakdown. Consequently, Mary undergoes a syndrome of psychopathology for which she cannot lead a normal life. A qualitative content analysis method is adopted to inspect Mary's childhood trauma that persuades her disorders. The analysis suggests a correlation between adolescent trauma and psychosis, which can disrupt an individual's sense of self, conduct, and mental state. Accordingly, Mary's conscious control breaks down as her childhood pain returns, revealing her natural urges and unconscious side.*

1. Introduction

Mary Turner, a white lady trapped in a loveless marriage and a life of suffocating isolation on a distant farm, is central to the plot of *The Grass is Singing*. Mary's mental illness and growing sadness are shown against the background of an oppressive society ruled by racial segregation and bigotry. She is supposed to adhere to the harsh societal conventions of the day as a white lady, but she struggles against these expectations, seeking to establish her identity and purpose. Thus, Lessing's work is a compelling investigation of the human condition, revealing society's

* Corresponding author's E-mail address: ahmed.saifullah@iubat.edu

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paradoxes and cruelties while throwing light on the complexity of race, gender, and power relations.

While the malignities of colonization, racial prejudices, and other anxieties are extensively manifested in the narrative, the psychological aspect cannot be refuted. Lessing, in many aspects, attempts to illustrate the innermost crisis of her protagonist, Mary Turner. Thus, the narrative revolves around narrating the consecutive incidents that are responsible for her inability to cope with the social requirements. Mary grew up in such a family where quarrels and violence remained a regular phenomenon. This familial violence affects her psyche immensely. Therefore, she abhors her father from her childhood. Her contacts' remark on her marriage injures her more. This slur develops as a trauma to her psyche. Moreover, after getting married to Dick Turner, a flopped farmer, she becomes cynical. She ruminates it as her father's will which coerces her to lead a life like her mother. When Dick becomes sick, she visits his farm and utterly misbehaves with Moses, a black native worker on Dick's farm, and suffers from constant fear and threat from him. Henceforth, she repeatedly dreams about Moses and her father approaching her with primitive erotic desire. This fright of Moses unbalances her psychologically. Gradually, she loses control over her consciousness. Afterward, she feels an attraction for Moses and develops a sensual relationship with him. Mary's repressed childhood carnal desire is manifested through her relationship with Moses. It seems to be an erotic relationship, like the relationship with her father. As Mary breaks the color bar between the white and the black, she seems to feel some ominous things such as the threat of death from Moses. Her Electra complex makes her develop a carnal relationship with Moses, and her rejection of Moses ultimately leads her to death. Thus, the fear of death traumatized Mary from childhood when her two siblings died. She seems to be internally appalled by the encounter with death that emerges as a trauma in her later part of life. The following sections will examine the familial violence, critique from others, and Mary's relationship with Moses, highlighting the role of trauma and her fear of death in shaping her psychological state.

2. Psychological Trauma

Psychological trauma is extreme emotional and psychological discomfort caused by a traumatic incident or series of events. It often entails powerlessness, dread, and a violation of basic safety, trust, and control assumptions. Traumatic occurrences include physical or sexual abuse, violence, accidents, natural catastrophes, war, and witnessing them. Trauma can also permanently alter a person's beliefs, feelings, behaviors, relationships, and well-being. In this way, trauma may cause flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, melancholy, avoidance, emotional numbing, and trouble sustaining healthy relationships. Paranoia is a mental disorder in which a person may erroneously assume that others are attempting to harm him or her (Hornby, 2015); neurosis is a mental disorder in which a person suffers from intense feelings

of fear and anxiety (Hornby, 2015); and psychosis is a serious mental illness that makes a person lose contact with reality (Hornby, 2015).

In addition, psychological trauma covers a very wide range in the field of psychology and psychoanalysis. It is “the most discussed, debated, and researched topic in the history of psychology and psychiatry” (Reyes *et al.*, 2008, p. vii). “To study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature” (Herman, 1992, p. 4). In the 1850s, Briquet, a French psychiatrist, first attempted to make connections between “hysteria” and “childhood histories of trauma” (Kolk *et al.*, 1996, p. 49). In the mid-1890s, Janet, Freud, and Breuer came up with a similar idea that psychological trauma causes hysteria. The unbearable emotional reactions to traumatic events induce the symptoms of hysteria (Herman, 1992). The term ‘trauma’ originates from a Greek word that may be translated as either ‘damage’ or ‘wound’. The phrase ‘the simple disease of a damaged mind’ best describes trauma. Trauma is always the narrative of a wound (Caruth, 1995). The term ‘psychological trauma’ was coined by psychiatrist Janoff-Bulman (1992) who categorized it as a violent shock, the sense of a wound, and the idea of consequences impacting the entire body. Trauma is typically coupled with intense feelings of humiliation; feeling frightened, defenseless, and out of control is a critical attack on the ability to rely on oneself (Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). Trauma repeats itself with the conscious knowledge of the trauma survivor. The crux of the trauma is that it once faced the victim with an unpleasant reality. The patient has to discover a strategy to address the buried truths that no one, including the patient, wants to face (Kolk & McFarlane, 1996).

Memory refers to the mental process of encoding, storing, and retrieving information or experiences. When it comes to trauma, it can have a profound impact on human memory. Traumatic experiences are events or situations that overwhelm an individual’s ability to cope, often resulting in intense fear, helplessness, or horror. These experiences can range from physical or sexual abuse to witnessing violence, accidents, natural disasters, or warfare. It is important to note that individuals may experience a range of memory responses to trauma, and these responses can vary from person to person. Some individuals may have vivid and intrusive memories, while others may struggle with memory gaps or difficulties in recalling specific details. The impact of trauma on memory is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by various psychological, biological, and contextual factors.

Traumatic memories, according to Kolk and McFarlane (1996), may take on several forms. It might take the form of flashbacks, intense feelings like panic or wrath, physical symptoms, nightmares, interpersonal reenactments, character traits, passive life themes, and so on. These traumatic memories appear vividly to the victims, like their first experience of trauma. This emergence of traumatic memories can take years or even decades to reappear in the traumatized person after the

original trauma. According to them, Trauma emerges when both internal and external resources are insufficient to deal with an external danger. Once traumatized individuals are dogged by intrusive re-experiences of their trauma, they typically begin structuring their lives around avoiding the feelings that these intrusions trigger. In addition, [Caruth \(1995\)](#), a renowned trauma psychiatrist, defines trauma as follows:

It is not the first act of violence or the initial event in a person's past that causes trauma; rather, it is the way in which the very unassimilated nature of the event — the manner in which it was specifically not recognized in the first place — returns to haunt the survivor in the future. (p. 4)

Therefore, psychoanalysis traditionally placed a strong emphasis on psychic trauma, both clinically and theoretically ([Weisaeth, 1996](#)). Intense personal pain is a component of psychic trauma, but it also entails realizing truths that most of us have not even started to consider ([Caruth, 1995](#)). According to [Terr \(1990\)](#), psychic trauma develops when a person is attacked from outside by a sudden, unexpected, severe emotional blow or a succession of strikes. Although traumatic experiences are outward, the mind soon incorporates them.

[Herman \(1992\)](#) focuses on traumatic stress. To him, Traumatic events can change the psychology, emotion, cognition, and memory of a traumatic person. In his book *Trauma and Recovery*, he contends that the remarkable nature of traumatic occurrences is not based on the fact that they are infrequently experienced but rather on the fact that they overpower the common human adaptations to life. Traumatic occurrences, as opposed to everyday misfortunes, typically involve threats to a person's life or the integrity of their body or a direct and intimate confrontation with violence and death. They put people in situations where they feel completely helpless and terrified, and they evoke behaviors that are consistent with a catastrophe. Thus, traumatized persons feel utter loneliness and alienation from family, society, or religion.

Moreover, sometimes, the fear of death, which impacts a person's entire thinking, creates trauma for the person. Excessive fear destabilizes the internal control of a person over his/her emotions and the "overwhelming emotions can do damage to our bodies as well as our psyches" ([Bloom, 1999](#)). [Sandra L. Bloom \(1999\)](#) defines:

When a child fears for their own life or the life of someone they care about, they are at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The way in which we think, the way in which we learn, the way in which we remember things, the way in which we feel about ourselves, the way in which we feel about other people, and the way in which we make sense of the world are all profoundly altered by traumatic experience. A traumatic experience impacts the whole person. (p. 2)

Psychologically traumatized individuals suffer from fear of their preceding traumatic experiences and memories. Kolk (1996) contends that Traumatized individuals often lack the flexibility and adaptability to discover answers. They constantly get preoccupied with their painful pasts. Traumas provoke emotional responses in proportion to the fear and terror they carry. People who have experienced trauma often lose control over self-defense and are more likely to put themselves in danger. People who have experienced trauma behave and feel as if their neurological systems are no longer linked to the present (Herman, 1992). The normal developmental processes of a traumatic person are hindered because of his or her traumatic memory. Therefore, trauma in childhood can disrupt normal developmental processes.

By considering these theories and observations on trauma and memory, readers can analyze how Lessing's novel addresses these themes, understand the significance of traumatic experiences in shaping the characters' lives, and explore the broader implications for memory and its connection to identity and society. This theoretical context will help shed light on the specific factors that contributed to the intensity and lasting effects of Mary Turner's trauma and contribute to understanding the following literature as well.

3. Psychological Trauma and Mary Turner

Trauma indicates the "events that are emotionally shocking or horrifying which threaten or involve deaths or a violation of bodily integrity" (Reyes *et al.*, 2008, p. x). Violence in the family, abuse in childhood, and any form of threat may cause psychological trauma. In light of this, Mary also experiences the shock of the death of her siblings. She is also threatened to death by Moses. She apprehends this threat after the smack of her slash on Moses's face. She cannot come out of those traumatic incidents. It is the paranoia that causes her trauma. She always remains afraid of being raped by Moses and amalgamates him with her father. These fears of being raped and killed by Moses create her trauma. Due to the trauma, she loses control over her conscious mind and suffers from neurosis, a mental disorder for which she suffers from intense feelings of fear and anxiety and psychosis that makes her lose contact with reality.

Furthermore, the memories of her parents' hectic conjugal life generate trauma in her mind. Moreover, the whispering of her friends in a social function procreates another trauma. Therefore, she desperately searches for a husband and marries Dick Turner in a hurry with a short courtship. A constant secretive fear works in her mind of becoming the double of her mother. Therefore, she cannot develop a fertile conjugal life, which makes her suffer from a psychological disorder. Eventually, she feels alienated in the African wasteland. The African landscape also appears to her traumatic. She hates the sun extremely because of the scorching heat and urges Dick to build the roof on their house, but he ignores her demand. Therefore, she has to bear the unbearable heat of the sun. In one stage, she

becomes depressed about everything. As a result, she suffers from neurosis which gradually develops into psychosis. Her traumatic nightmares weaken her to keep control over herself. Gradually, losing control over herself, Mary starts to depend upon Moses, the black house boy. She becomes a patient of psychosis as her conscious control breaks down.

In addition, [Buyu \(2007\)](#) examines Freudian models of Psychoanalysis. Buyu discerns the strategic frameworks of Freudian Psychoanalysis which includes concepts like ‘the Electra Complex’, ‘death and life impulses’, ‘the unconscious’, ‘id’, ‘ego’, and ‘superego’ (p. iv) in the psychic zone of the protagonist. Buyu fixates on the “repressed past experiences” (p. 1) of the protagonist; explores the concealed displeasing experiences of Mary’s childhood that leads her towards neurotic personality; inspects Freud’s idea of “repetition compulsion” in the analysis of Mary’s psyche; interprets Mary’s dreams arisen from her ego, and analyzes the excessive fears of Mary of being like her mother. Freud’s “Seduction Theory” of neurosis is correspondingly applied by Buyu. The sexual encounters that Mary had with her father may have contributed to the development of her neurosis. Because of this, she develops a dread of sexuality, which finally leads to the dissolution of her married life. However, it is an attempt to scrutinize what factors contribute to Mary’s traumas; the effects of those traumas on her psychology, and the relationship between her childhood trauma and psychosis.

Mary’s traumatic recollections reveal that traumatic ambivalence and double consciousness affect her psychopathology, underlining the necessity for comprehensive research to address these complex psychological states. [Misi \(2014\)](#) remarks upon the “double consciousness” of the white Zimbabweans who are alienated, secluded, and failed to belong. Misi points out Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “traumatic ambivalence” of the white segregated from “political existence”. Successively, Misi observes Mary’s “traumatic ambivalence of personal, psychic history” and her sufferings from “double consciousness” (p. 24). Here, the impact of Mary’s traumatic memory on her psychopathology is explored. It emphasizes the significance of traumatic ambivalence and double consciousness in understanding the psychopathology resulting from Mary’s traumatic memories, and highlights the need for further research and interventions that address the unique challenges faced by individuals who navigate these complex psychological states.

Mary’s cultural trauma comes from traumatic memories from her youth and an Electra complex that made her choose an older husband. It shows how she feels disconnected from her native roots and indifferent to sexuality and marriage. [Letá \(2014\)](#) identifies both Lessing and Mary as culturally traumatized. Both are alienated from indigenous culture and feel rootlessness in an exotic setting as they think they belong to nowhere. Here Mary’s cultural, psychological and ecological syndromes are attempted to explore. She investigates the traumatic effects on the institution of marriage, and argues that the memory of violent relationships of her parents in childhood prohibits her to think about family life. As a result, a sort of

apathy to sexuality and marriage develops in her mind. Mary's Electra complex that is her choice of husband as old as her father is compared with her relationship with her father in her childhood.

In the same way, [Lalbahshe and Haj'jari \(2015\)](#) associate Fanon's idea of "tactile delirium", a sense of distaste towards the touch of any man. Due to it, Mary cannot adjust with Dick. They examine that "colonial fears" of rape is evident in Mary when Moses touches her shoulder. She feels "emotional ambivalence" towards Moses and Moses becomes the object of her "repressed passions" (p. 95). They also remark upon the Freudian term of infantile Electra complex and the "incestuous passion" of Mary towards her father. To them, "Mary's nightmares and daydreaming infer psychological trauma" (p. 96). In her dreams, she associates her father with Moses. The incestuous passion for her father is altered with that of Moses. It is an endeavor to demonstrate the influence of Mary's psychological and Electra complex that drives her to the realm of psychosis.

However, [Bahlaq \(2011\)](#) reviews the narrative from a psychoanalytic, feministic, racial, and autobiographical perspective. She dissects Mary's psychic life from childhood to death through the analysis of her id, ego, superego, dreams, and desires. [Aghazadeh \(2011\)](#) interprets the narrative as both a "psychological portrayal" of Mary and "a political exposure of the futility and fragility of the patriarchal and colonial society" in "Sexual-Political Colonialism and Failure of Individuation in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*". She argues that Mary, as an individual, fails to play her "psychological and cultural part" in the "colonial experience" (p. 107). To Aghazadeh, she fails to maintain a social, cultural, and racial code of conduct as she develops a natural distaste for sex and marriage. Aghazadeh explores Mary's dreams about Moses as her "childhood trauma and repressed Electra feelings" toward her father because she imagines Moses as "her father who was threatening her" (p. 117) and opines that these repressions, exclusion, isolation, and breakdown lead her to death.

In "Cultural and Psychological Border Crossings in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*", [Georgescu et al. \(2011\)](#) illustrate Mary's psychological split. To examine her psyche, they incorporate Freudian and Jungian models of psychic growth, "the idea that the psyche is inherently divided, but its inner dynamic leads to wholeness" (p. 29). Mary's unconscious is her relationship with Moses, the "metaphoric substitution" (p. 29) of her father. These unconscious contents of Mary are exposed without any repression of consciousness.

Prior research on Mary Turner's trauma has shed light on the nature and effects of her traumatic experiences. Various aspects of her struggles, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression in response to her trauma, have been investigated by scholars. However, despite the existing research, there are still gaps that this study seeks to address. Firstly, this study aims to employ a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from fields such as sociology, trauma studies, and psychology, to provide

a more comprehensive understanding of Mary's struggles. By integrating multiple perspectives, it aims to uncover the intricate interplay between individual experiences, societal factors, and the broader context in which trauma occurs.

By synthesizing and critically analyzing existing research and scholarly works, this study aims to deepen the understanding of psychological trauma and its intersection with the life of Mary Turner. It has previously been an ignored area of debate. The following section of the paper provides the background to examine how the character of Mary has been distressed by psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociation, and other trauma-related disorders.

4. The Traumatic Encounters Mary Struggles with

Mary's soft childish mind cannot accept her parents' tumultuous relationship. She develops hatred and phobia about marriage and familial relationships. Whenever Mary thinks of marriage, the memory of traumatic incidents; "the strife between her parents" (Lessing, 1950, p. 36); the death of her two siblings, and the sexual exposure of her childhood appear before her. Lessing writes about Mary's infantile memories:

When Mary imagined 'home', she imagined a wooden box that was shook by passing trains; when she imagined marriage, she imagined her father arriving home bewildered and red-eyed; and when Mary imagined having children, she imagined her mother's face at her children's funerals, which was distressed but as dry and hard as rock. (p. 39)

This quote showcases the profound influence of trauma on Mary's imagination and perspective. It illustrates how her experiences have shaped her understanding of fundamental aspects of life, casting a shadow of fear, instability, and emotional turmoil over her vision of home, marriage, and parenthood. In addition, there is an indication of a traumatic sexual incident which is evident in Chapter 9:

She halted, feeling terrible, at the entrance of the bedroom. There was her father, the little, jovial and beer-smelling guy with a chubby tummy. He was cradling her mother in his arms. Her mother was acting out a faux protest while also expostulating in a humorous manner. Her father was crouching down over her mother. (Lessing, 1950, pp. 162-163)

The above-mentioned incident is an unexpected psychological shock that Mary is not prepared for. She is traumatized by this incident. Like "Wolf Man" who has a reoccurring nightmare in which he is confronted by a pack of wolves who are sitting in a tree and watching at him. This nightmare is a reaction to a series of horrific events that occurred in Freud's case study; Mary is sexually traumatized. She holds down "sexual gaucherie" (Lessing, 1950, p. 43) in her entire life "in this

age of scientific sex” (Lessing, 1950, p. 43). Rycroft (1995) in this regard opines that:

Experiencing psychological shock is the result of encountering something completely out of the blue, for which one is not prepared by vigilance or anxiety, and which compels one to re-orientate oneself to cope with. Traumata refers to unpleasant shocks of sufficient intensity to create symptoms or, if experienced by a kid, to disrupt development. (p. 170)

Therefore, Mary is disinclined to remember those memories of her childhood. Consequently, she leads a solitary life and denies marrying to shun her childhood memories and to keep herself free from a sexual relationship. Her refusal to sexuality is emphasized when she has always sought to distract the masculine focus from herself, which is why she maintained a childlike appearance into her thirties (Roberts, 1993). She is hesitant and terrified to get married, due to her fear that the father image may emerge to shatter the safe environment she has made for herself (Goktan, 2010).

Society and social customs occasionally play a role in stimulating trauma in an individual’s mind. Elissa Marder (2006) asserts that trauma has an intrinsic political, historical, and ethical component and that traumatic events often happen as a result of social forces as well as in the social realm. Some can adjust themselves to social customs. But some cannot reconcile with the social demands, norms, rules, regulations, and requirements. Mary is such a person who cannot cope up with social demands. The social criticism formulates another trauma for her. The whispering of her friends about her age and marriage wounds her. The words of her friends shatter her ‘protective position’, and she is forced to perceive herself according to the threads of the world through which she had previously traveled naively. She cannot accept the “heterosexual identity imposed by society” (Goktan, 2010, p. 32). She is utterly shocked that it is “the immediate response to a psychological trauma” (Rycroft, 1995, p. 187).

Therefore, these harsh criticisms drive “knives into her (Mary’s) heart” and leave “her quite of imbalance” (Lessing, 1950, p. 41). These taunts “had a profound effect on Mary” (Lessing, 1950, p. 41). People were talking about her in a manner that would have made her ill in the months leading up to her wedding (Lessing, 1950, p. 43). This wound is caused by social structure. After this traumatic incident, she hysterically seeks for a husband. In choosing a husband, another trauma appears. She selects the person who is as old as his father. Mary, Goktan (2010) says, predictably chooses an older guy to flirt with as a way to make up for the lack of fatherly love she had from her childhood.

5. Patriarchy and Gender Concerns Associated with Mary’s Trauma

In addition, patriarchy and gender issues are relevant to the discussion of Mary’s trauma because they contribute to the social and cultural contexts in which her

traumatic experiences occur. They can influence power dynamics, social expectations, and gender roles, which may worsen Mary's sense of alienation, oppression, and the internal conflicts associated with her traumatic ambivalence and double consciousness. In the patriarchal society, Mary has little to opine on anything. Her husband, Dick, an agent of patriarchal society, does not pay any heed to her opinion either about farming or selecting a house boy. Her husband is insensible and unsuccessful like her father, another agent of the patriarchy. When Mary suggests to her husband about the better way of farming, "a look of bleak fear" is noticed on his face. This facial expression freezes her. Dick is so obdurate that she cannot move him (Lessing, 1950). This is traumatic to Mary as her husband ties her with failure which she always tries to escape.

Mary looks for someone stronger than her. She no longer intends to tie to the failure of her husband. Therefore, she leaves Dick's house and goes back to town to restart her former life. But she is now not allowed there to get back her job. Being shocked and depressed, she has to return to Dick's house. When she notices that Dick is spending money foolishly on unnecessary things, she collapses psychologically that she is trapped in failure, and there is no escape from it. She thinks that something miraculous will happen to get rid of failure, but there is no hope now. She is shocked:

Fatal shocks take time to exhibit their consequences. It took her some time to stop experiencing intense surges of eagerness and optimism that appeared to emanate from deep within herself, from a region of her mind that had not yet received the news of the tobacco failure. (Lessing, 1950, p. 132)

The incongruity between Mary's expectations and reality induces her trauma. The repetition of the abortive relationship of conjugal life, which existed between her parents, is again encountered by Mary after her Marriage to Dick. But Mary cannot comply with this recurrence of her past traumatic life. The failure of her husband becomes unbearable for her. She cannot adjust herself to the shabby condition of her husband's house. While living in town before her marriage, she imagined a romantic life in the countryside. But the reality in Dick's house shocks her terribly.

Mary never intended to become a double of her mother, as highlighted by Roberts (1993). However, despite her resistance, circumstances force her into assuming this role, resulting in profound distress and trauma. Mary's recollections of her mother persistently resurface, almost like an older, jaded reflection of herself accompanying her. Consequently, she finds herself treading the predetermined path set by her upbringing, as Lessing (1950) sharply observes. Unbeknownst to her, Mary unwittingly embraces the same role her father coerced her mother into, intensifying her anguish. The narrator aptly depicts her torment, explaining that women married to men like Dick eventually realize they have two choices: to succumb to madness, tearing themselves apart in futile outbursts of anger and

rebellion, or to hold themselves together, albeit harboring bitterness (p. 90). Thus, Mary's unsuccessful relationship with Dick gradually propels her towards madness.

6. Dreams and Nightmares Concerning Mary's Trauma

Dreams and nightmares have a great impact on a person's life. Psychological trauma may also be caused by the person's daydreaming and nightmares. [Lalbakshe and Haj'jari \(2015\)](#) assert that "Mary's nightmares and daydreaming infer (her) psychological trauma" (p. 96). The traumatic dreams of Mary bring back the traumas of her childhood. She, as a traumatic person, repeatedly dreams and becomes confused by the influence of one dream over another:

The severely traumatized kid experiences recurring nightmares of his defensive altered states throughout the day and may get perplexed by their combined effects. The outcome may be the production of fragmented pseudo-identities that strive to keep mental contents separate and bind the psychic energy. ([Akhtar, 2009, p. 125](#))

Trauma does not enter consciousness until it forces itself upon the survivor through nightmares and recurrent behavior ([Caruth, 1995](#)). According to [Freud \(1998\)](#), traumatic neuroses patients frequently experience dreams that transport them back to the scene of their accident, from which they awaken in a state of fear. What Freud indicates is the consequences after waking up from the dream, not what happens in the dream. The repetition of traumatic incidents through dreams brings the person before those traumatic past events that the individual passed and does not want to recollect. However, the painful repetition of these traumatic incidents cannot be understood by the patient rather, it intrudes into the mind of the trauma survivor through traumatic dreams without the person's consciousness. According to [Caruth \(1995\)](#), the painful repetition of the flashback can only be explained as the mind's complete inability to avoid a dreadful occurrence that has not been given any sort of psychological meaning. Trauma occurs when the outside has entered the inside without any kind of mediation.

In her dreams, Mary sees Moses approaching her. She mixes Moses with her father, who was threatening her. She also feels "the unwashed smell of her father" (p. 165). Her desire for her father becomes a desire for Moses. It is called "metaphoric substitution", a Freudian term. It indicates her repressed desire for her father. This dream is the consequence of her childhood trauma when she experienced untimely sexual exposure. She feels fear of domination. She screamed nonstop in an effort to wake herself up from the nightmare ([Lessing, 1950](#)). It is also the colonial trauma of a white colonizer who suffers from constant fright and threats from the natives.

Mary is hurt by her dual worries of being a carbon copy of her mother and being coerced into an inappropriate sexual relationship with her father ([Roberts,](#)

1993). Moses continues to inspire constant terror in her. She disliked hearing Moses talk because his voice had taken on a new tone: it was recognizable, semi-insolent, and dictatorial (Lessing, 1950). Like her father's voice, Moses' voice commands her attention. She could hear his voice, which was kind and authoritative, like a father (Lessing, 1950). However, she is afraid to tell Dick about it. Instead, she continues to be undermined with terror by her awful dream-filled nights, her fixation (Lessing, 1950). Because she has a dream that Moses touches her and commands her to touch him. The narrator states:

She had dreadful, terrifying nightmares during her broken nights. Her sleep, once a sudden dropping of a dark curtain, was then more real than her waking. Twice, she dreamt about the native directly, and each time, she awoke in panic as he touched her. Each time in her dream, he stood over her, powerful and commanding, yet kind, but forcing her into a position where she had to touch him. (Lessing, 1950, p. 156)

Therefore, the dreams of Mary are confusing, terrifying, and horrible to her. Sometimes, she awoke in a cold sweat, terrified and determined to forget about them. Even she was too terrified to sleep (Lessing, 1950). This pushes her to resist sleep and keep going. In "The Black Hole of Trauma", Kolk and McFarlane (1996) state that traumatized people intentionally wake up to prevent reliving terrible events during the night. Therefore, Mary's adulthood dreams seem to provoke long-forgotten memories of childhood abuse.

7. The Consequences of Mary's Psychological Trauma

Mary's psychological trauma has profound consequences that shape her character and influence the trajectory of her life. Mary experiences a deep sense of alienation and isolation, both internally and externally. Her traumatic encounters, including an unhappy marriage and oppressive societal norms, contribute to her withdrawal from social interactions. The trauma exacerbates her feelings of being an outsider, which is intensified by the racial dynamics of the time. According to McFarlane and Kolk (1996), those who have experienced trauma might have their physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being negatively impacted. They further contend:

Despite the human potential for survival and adaptation, traumatic experiences may disrupt a person's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of a single incident can come to taint all subsequent experiences, making it difficult to appreciate the present. This tyranny of the past impairs one's capacity to pay attention to both new and familiar events. (p. 488)

Therefore, the traumatic experiences of Mary come to taint her other experiences and spoil her present. The memory of her past life makes her present

life colorless. This incapacity to reconcile with trauma, termed as PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, is a diagnosis that helped build a structured framework for understanding how people's biology, perceptions of the world, and personalities are intimately connected and formed by experience (Kolk & McFarlane, 1996). Thus, Mary's conception of the world, personality, and biological factors are formulated through past traumatic experiences. Those traumas greatly damage her psychology.

As a result of traumatic experiences, Mary suffers from neurosis. She is unable to reconcile with the real experiences that overwhelmed her in the present life. Kolk and McFarlane (1996) assert:

The diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) reintroduced the idea that many 'neurotic' symptoms are not the upshots of some mysterious, almost inexplicable, genetically-based irrationality, but rather the consequences of the person's inability to come to terms with real experiences that overwhelmed his/her capacity to cope. (p. 488)

Akhtar (2009) describes Freud's distinguishing of two types of neurosis- 'actual neurosis' and 'psychoneurosis.' Actual neurosis occurs from the "disturbance in contemporary sexual life," and psychoneurosis is "caused by psychological trauma in childhood" (p. 4). Mary is affected by both types of neurosis. She also suffers from latent psychosis. Her obsession with Moses makes her psychotic. Traumatic experiences of Mary's childhood shape the core of her psychopathology, "a disorder that affects somebody's mind or their behavior" (Hornby, 2015, p. 1240). Mary's psychopathology affects her mind and behavior. She suffers from a psychopathological disorder due to the sexual trauma of her childhood. According to Cathy Caruth (1995), the truth of a traumatic experience lies at the heart of its pathology or symptoms (p. 5).

In addition, Mary recurrently dreams about her father and Moses and becomes muddled. The traumatic memories of Mary get encrypted into flashbacks or traumatic nightmares during sleep. Herman (1992) asserts that when a traumatic event occurs, it becomes stored in an aberrant type of memory that frequently surfaces in the mind, either as a flashback during waking states or a nightmare during sleep. Similarly, Mary's traumatic memories are encoded in the forms of her traumatic nightmares. When her thoughts, feelings, wishes, and desires are repressed or do not get expression in real life, they are exposed in the form of dreams. Mary's repressed sexual desires of childhood also get expression through her recurrent nightmares. Mary's dream serves as clear evidence that she continues to be affected by the traumatic experiences of her early years, which resulted in her detachment from adult sexual experiences.

Thus, Mary's psychological trauma leads to the deterioration of her mental well-being. She struggles with anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness. As her trauma remains unaddressed and unresolved, her mental state continues to

decline, impacting her ability to cope with everyday life. Mary's trauma affects her ability to form and maintain healthy personal relationships. Her past experiences and the associated emotional baggage create barriers to forming deep connections with others. Her strained relationship with her husband and her strained interactions with other characters in the novel reflect the consequences of her trauma on her interpersonal dynamics. Mary becomes increasingly passive and resigned to her circumstances, losing the sense of personal identity she once had. In this way, the consequences of her trauma strip away her autonomy, leaving her vulnerable and disempowered.

8. Conclusion

The Grass Is Singing provides a significant analysis of the enduring effects of psychological trauma on an individual's psyche. Mary's descent into madness and ultimate self-destruction highlight the devastating consequences of unaddressed trauma. Therefore, this study underscores the importance of acknowledging and addressing the psychological wounds inflicted by oppressive systems. Through Mary's character, Doris Lessing illuminates the destructive effects of isolation, trauma, and internalized oppression. By delving into Mary's experiences, the study underscores the profound impact of societal factors on an individual's mental and emotional well-being. It serves as a reminder of the importance of addressing trauma and striving for a more equitable and compassionate society.

In conclusion, the study exposes the issues accountable for Mary's trauma and precisely illuminates in what way the traumas of her former self disrupt her present life. Thus, it attempts to explore Mary Turner's wounded psyche, which seems to lose control over its consciousness due to the recurrence of preceding traumatic events. The study sets its limit to the exploration of Mary Turner's psychological trauma. Nevertheless, it can be the basis for further research on trauma in Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* and advance knowledge in the field of psychoanalysis, providing probable explanations to interpret psychotic disorders of a variety of characters in literary pieces.

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Conflict of interest

There is no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work, as declared by the author. In addition, the author has witnessed all ethical concerns, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and falsification, double publishing and submission, and redundancy.

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