

## DORIS LESSING'S *THE GRASS IS SINGING*: A PROJECTION OF NATURALISM

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the demonstration of naturalism in Doris Lessing's first tragic novel The Grass is Singing. It relates how the main characters in the novel are influenced by their instinct, their social and economic environment and how their failure or success depends on their adaptability and ability to compete in the struggle for survival. It is based on library study and textual analysis. Result shows that the central characters, Mary Turner and Moses, are the victims of heredity (sexual instinct) and environment (social, economic and political forces), and Dick Turner suffers the consequence of his environment and his failure to prove himself in the competition or struggle for survival.*

**KEYWORDS:** Naturalism, heredity, instinct, environment, conflict, competition

### INTRODUCTION

*The Grass is Singing* is a tragic novel written by Doris Lessing, born of British parents in Persia (now Iran) in 1919, who spent her childhood in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) since she was five and went to England in 1949. Published in 1950 it is her first novel which gained outstanding success in Britain, America and other European countries and which resulted in her international reputation. This novel opens with a very brief newspaper account of the murder of a white lady, Mary Turner, wife of Richard Dick Turner, a farmer in southern Rhodesia. It states that the black houseboy has been arrested and he has confessed to the crime. The newspaper holds that the boy was in search of valuables. Then the novel moves to describe the inquiry into the murder by the neighbours and the colonial officials. The rest of the novel concerns the story of Mary's childhood, her life in town, her ambivalence towards marriage and sexual affair, her marriage with Dick Turner and unhappy conjugal life, her strict behaviour with the native workers, her relation with the black houseboy Moses, the Slatters, Tony Marston and her murder by her own houseboy.

Now the questions arise: what are the causes of the catastrophe or tragedy of the main characters in the novel? Why does the houseboy murder Mary Turner? What role do instincts and environments play in the events of the novel? What was the environment of Mary's childhood, her life in town and her married life? If her father caused her to hate him and the male race due to his bad treatment towards her mother, why does she marry Dick Turner? What is the role of environment and instinct in her ambivalent notion and conduct? Why is she not satisfied with her husband? Why is she strict towards the native workers and lenient with Moses? Why does she show ambivalence towards Moses and why does he become so furious at her? What role do Charlie Slatter, Tony Marston and Dick Turner play in the events of the novel? These are the questions or issues that this article deals with.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article relies on library study, textual discussion and analysis. It follows the descriptive and the analytical method. Naturalism is the main theoretical model.

## **HEREDITY, ENVIRONMENT AND COMPETITION: CONCEPTS**

Naturalism in literature refers to a literary movement that emerged in France in the nineteenth century. It is an extreme form of realism that aims at writing drama or fiction with scientific objectivity, observation and experiment in the portrayal of characters who are shown to be motivated by biological, economic and social forces or determinism. It is a product of post-Darwinian biology which holds "that a human being exists entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond nature... whose character and behavior are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment" (Abrams 175). It insists that heredity and environment are so powerful that they determine the course of human action and that there is no free choice.

Heredity is the process of passing on of physical or mental (or genetic) features and characteristics from parent to their children before the children are born. A person inherits inevitable instincts by birth or nature, such as, hunger, sexuality and desire for possessing things and, as Abrams adduces, he/she is also subject to the economic, social, cultural and political forces in the family, the class and the society or the environment into which he/she is born (175). Instinct is the natural in born tendency that a person or animal has to behave or react in a certain way without reasoning or training. Rosenthal and Yudin view that instinctive behavior is characteristics of animals based on biological forms of existence developed in the process of adaption to the environment (218). Likewise, Young claims that instinctive behavior is "a behavior in which innate structure plays a dominant role, activation typically comes from the environmental conditions combined with internal psychological factors" (69). The family is the first influential environment in which an individual can mature oneself personally and socially. Self and society are reverse sides of each other. Freud classifies instinct as love instinct and death instinct in his "Instincts." He holds that the former establishes greater unities to preserve them or to bind together whereas the latter destroys things rather than connecting. The death instinct is destructive, which reduces living things to an organic state.

Instinctual or biological (natural / hereditary) and socioeconomic (environmental) influences are considered to be more powerful than human will. This notion carries the idea of determinism, which holds that every event has its antecedent cause or that certain set of factors are responsible in the occurrences of any event or action. For instance, a lion is destined to be a beast of prey and cannot make up its mind to be a vegetarian (Gaarder 253). Emile Zola, the French novelist, during the 1870s developed the theory of naturalism and naturalistic determinism by depicting his characters' behavior in the mode of scientific experiment.

Naturalism is claimed to be more accurate in its depiction of life than is realism. Realism is opposed to romanticism. Romantic dramas/novels are adventurous, fantastic, heroic and picturesque than realistic ones. Realism represents life as it really is. It evokes the sense that such things might happen and such characters might really exist. The texts and the characters seem to reflect everyday reality.

Naturalism concerns the reality of the sensory world or the nature, pertaining to instincts or the natural phenomena, not the world of reason or idealism or the divine.

By "naturalistic" Gaarder means a sense of reality that "accepts no other reality than the nature and the sensory world...considers mankind to be part of nature" and relies "on natural phenomena – not on either rationalistic suppositions or any form of divine revelation" (406). Emile Zola's novels represent naturalistic mode of writing. He was the leading figure of French naturalism that laid emphasis on the characters' behavior as influenced by heredity and environment. His essay "The Experimental Novel" (1880) became the seminal manifesto of naturalism. Zola views that "the naturalistic novels observe and experiment; ... the idea of experiment carries with it the idea of modification" (647). He views literature not merely an expression of the writer's mentality or personality but the higher law of truth and nature, the return to nature and the naturalistic evolution. A naturalistic writer is not a photographer or copyist of nature.

Naturalistic mode of writing is a reaction against the excesses of Romanticism and philosophical idealism. The idealistic writers, Zola argues, "cast aside observation and experiment, and base their works on the super-natural and the irrational, who admit...the power of mysterious forces outside of the determinism of the phenomena" (649). The naturalistic writing does not recognize the supernatural, the irrational and the mysterious but the laws of nature, the environmental and the psychological. Habib claims that naturalism takes its name from its scientific impulse to base its events, characters and explanations on natural rather than supernatural or divine causes (478). The metaphysical man is dead and the focus of the naturalistic mode is diverted to the physiological man (Adams 644).

Zola holds that idealistic novels are morally harmful as they dwell in the strange, the occult, the religious and philosophical prejudices with the premise that they are more beautiful and nobler than the known (Habib 481). The naturalistic writers, such as Emile Zola, Jack London, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser and William Dean Howells present their writing with scientific objectivity and exhibit strong animal instincts of their characters, such as, sexual desire and greed. Their characters become victims of biological (hereditary) within and environmental (social, economical, cultural) pressures without. They portray naturalistic or instinctual combined with environmental determinism, not divine.

Moreover, these characters are influenced by complex forces and their behavior/character cannot be easily explained or judged and there is a sense of uncertainty. They are, as Strindberg describes, influenced by "a whole series of motives rather than by any single or simple purpose" (qtd in Scholes et al. 793). It is not only the readers/spectators who cannot account for their actions but also the characters themselves cannot perceive the forces imposed upon them. Likewise, their situation is so complex that we cannot make clear-cut moral judgment about the characters as we do in romance and satire. Strindberg argues "vice has a reverse side very much like virtue;" and "thus, naturalistic drama leaves us with a problematic view of human experience" (794). Similarly, there is no clear-cut resolution in such modes of dramas, unlike the ones that we find in comedy and tragedy.

The characters may try to change their situation or give in to it or lose control of the situation or sit making judgment upon them. Miss Julie gradually loses control of her circumstance and is supposed to kill herself. Jacobus claims, "naturalism was dedicated to representing life with as much simple fidelity to facts as possible...as if they were slices of life" (462). The ending is usually tragic but not in the classical or the romantic way, in which the struggle is heroic but losing due to some tragic flaw. In the naturalistic mode of drama the protagonist is not so heroic, but a pawn to multiple compulsions or forces.

The setting, the characters and the language used in the naturalistic drama are contemporary, realistic and familiar. The characters normally comprise of the lower or the middle class people. The language is colloquial prose which is used by them in their real life. Jacobus holds, "In Strindberg's time naturalism was thought to be synonymous with vulgarity, an explicit insult to polite society" (462). Such dramas would by necessity include trivial conversation and random dialogue. They told a modern story in modern ways with modern frankness. They searched into the psychological lives of the characters onstage.

Jack London, like other naturalistic writers, denies the existence of free will. He sees life as a struggle for existence in which the stronger can survive and the weaker is wiped out. In this sense the thought of the naturalistic mode of writers is linked to Darwin's theory of natural selection or the survival of the fittest. Walcott holds that the world is like a jungle and human nature is like that of wild beasts "where men grapple with one another for life and its accessories, murder and are in turn murdered, fly after pleasure, and resign themselves" (93).

Charles Darwin (1809–82), a biologist, natural scientist and writer, discovered the theory of organic evolution, natural selection and the survival of the fittest, and expressed his ideas through his *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871). He argued that mankind had developed from animals and rejected the scriptures' view of the creation of man and beast. He distanced God from the act of creation. In *The Origin of Species* he presented his theories of biological evolution as the result of natural selection or the preservation of races in the struggle for life. He held that "all existing vegetable and animal forms were descended from earlier, more primitive forms by way of a biological evolution" and "that evolution was the result of natural selection" (Gaarder 409). He took the idea of biological evolution from his own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, and the French zoologist Lamarck.

He got the idea for natural selection or the struggle for existence or the survival of the fittest from *Essay on Population* (1798) a book by Thomas R. Malthus (1766–1834), the specialist in population studies. Malthus had his idea from Benjamin Franklin that species keep each other in balance. Malthus compared mankind's ability to procreate and to produce food, and expressed that the production of food cannot keep pace with the increase in population and that in the struggle for survival those who are best survive to grow up whereas the unfit in the struggle extinct. Malthus, thus, provided with the hint of how evolution happens. Gaarder explains, "It was due to natural selection in the struggle for life, in which those that were best adapted to their surroundings would survive and perpetuate the race" (415). This was the theory that Darwin developed and expressed in *The Origin of Species*.

Darwin further held that the struggle for life is hardest among species of the same type because they have to fight for the same food. The harder the struggle the quicker will be the evolution of new species or variation appears into its own type, and the very best adapted will survive while the others will be extinct. Fitness for survival is not only related to the question of food. It is also equally important to have the ability to avoid being eaten by others, run quickly, recognize enemies, camouflage or hide oneself and have repellent taste to harmful food. Another significant ability for the perpetuation of one's race is to have the ability to reproduce. Furthermore, species required other characteristics to prove best for survival, such as, resistance to diseases and the ability to adapt to a particular environment and different conditions of life. Darwin "became quite sure that", Thornley and Roberts adduce, "plants and animals

which suited their surroundings were more likely to live than those which did not" (137). Adaptability is one of the fundamental features of those who survive.

Colonization of nations and/or imperialism can be interpreted from the perspective of Darwinism or as a part of the natural struggle for position or evolution or survival. Although Rudyard Kipling puts forward his ideas of imperialism on moral grounds, as expressed in his poem "The White Man's Burden", that imperialism liberates the colonized people from their backward ignorance and brings to them the blessings of a superior civilization, liberal economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo argue that imperialism only benefits a small group, and Bacon, Hitler, Machiavelli and Mussolini see imperialism from the perspective of social Darwinism, as part of the natural struggle for survival (Habib 738). Social Darwinists hold that, like individuals or species, nations are in competitions, and those, that have greater power and resources, subjugate the weaker ones.

The colonization of nations is a part of the struggle of groups and their evolution into greater power/strength or fall. Marxists see imperialism, Habib asserts, as a late stage of capitalism, which forces home markets to subjugate to foreign markets to accommodate their overproduction and surplus capital (738). Similarly, the struggles of many nations in the "tri-continent" (Asia, Africa and Latin America) and elsewhere for independence from colonial rule can be understood as the struggle for existence or position or evolution.

The growth of industrialism created condition that led to Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution. The capitalists, who were most successful in limiting their competitors, justified their actions by appealing to the concepts of free competition and the survival of the fittest. The industrial revolution led to the almost universal ideas about human nature and society. Adam Smith (1723–90), an Scottish philosopher and economist, in his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), made an inquiry into, as Daches puts forward, "the nature of economic activity and organization, which founded the science of political economy and had an immense influence on economic and behavior throughout the nineteenth century" (806). His economic doctrine of *laissez faire* and middle-class liberalism influenced the freeing of the individual from undue government interference. He believed that the free play of individualism always worked out for the best. He holds that all human efforts are based on self interest which is expressed through competitions. Doren asserts, "Adam Smith was among the first to realize that in the new world the industrial revolution was creating ... life consisted in buying and selling ... money was the lifeblood of the market ... the goal of all striving" (253). Smith holds that competition between manufacturers to capture the market for themselves regulates the economy and establishes the best balance between the sellers' profit and the buyers' expense for goods of quality. This ideas of Adam Smith influenced Malthus and other economists.

Charles Darwin revealed and forced us to see our nature and one of the basic mechanisms of biological change. He revealed that all living things have changes over millions of years. Although some of his ideas have been questioned, his fundamental evolutionary proposition is evident and has liberated mankind from their ignorance. As animals evolve in the process of competition or natural selection, countries evolve in the process of responding to challenges from other nations and from nature. Likewise, individuals or species survive or are wiped out according to their ability or disability to prove themselves in the competition or their adaptability to their environment.

**INSTANCES OF THE EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENT, INSTINCT AND COMPETITION IN  
*THE GRASS IS SINGING***

This textual analysis section of the article explores firstly, the effect of family and school environment on Mary; secondly, it focuses on Mary's life after marriage that depicts a conflict between environment and instinct; thirdly, it relates the relation between Moses and Mary, which concerns the conflict between race plus class sentiment and instinct; fourthly, it deals with Darwinian competition between Charlie Slatter and Dick Turner; fifthly, it discusses and analyses Mary's murder as the consequence of environment and instinct; and lastly, it draws the conclusion.

**Parents, Family and School Life: Effect of their Environment on Mary**

The central character Mary was born in a quarrelsome family. Her father, a petty railway official, was alcoholic, male chauvinistic and negligent about family needs. Her mother used to shout at him and she was very unhappy. Lessing writes, "sometimes her mother... walked up to the barman, complaining that she could not make ends meet, while her husband squandered his salary in drink" (32-33). For both the mother and the daughter, the house was like a hell. The couple quarreled for money. Before she went to school, her family had to change three houses as they were expelled for not paying the rent. Mary wanted to run away from her parents. She was very badly affected by the environment of the family. She developed a hatred not only towards her father but also towards all men. Her decision at the time was never to marry. But when she was sent to a boarding school, she felt happy.

When she was sixteen she left school and took a job of typing, shorthand and book-keeping in an office in town. By the time she was twenty, her mother died and she was alone. Her father was now five hundred miles away, having been transferred to another place. By getting rid of him, Lessing writes, "She seemed to be avenging her mother's suffering" (35). Her father died when she was twenty five and now there was nothing left to connect her with her gloomy house. She was free. She lived a comfortable carefree life of a single woman in South Africa. She had inherited feminism from her mother.

By her thirtieth birthday she became the personal secretary of her employer and was earning good money. She could have lived by herself running her own car. But she lived in a girls' club, opened to help poor women. Her life here reminded her of school life which she liked much the crowds of girls. Her friends got married and she had been bridesmaid many times. When she thought of marriage her father's red eyes and fuddle due to alcohol came to her mind. She saw her mother's face anguished at her children's funeral when she thought of children. As her instinct or biological need for sex started to emerge, she felt sentimental at wedding but the memory of her mother's trouble would bring a profound distaste for sex. There was not privacy between her parents that was hidden from her. She knew about the forceful acts of her father against her mother which she wanted to forget but she would not.

But her life is influenced by different forces and she has to follow them. She has no free will. She does not like to have marital relation but her decision is changed by the environment of the city life. Her friends and colleagues gossip about her spinsterhood and comment that a man of fifty, years older than herself, old enough to be her father, will suit to marry her (Lessing 41). She looks sad to hear the conversation of people behind her back. This makes her think about a man for marriage. Before sleep she thinks of her life. She feels strong pressure to get married. But she is scared of sexual affair and



ardent love embraces. Therefore, she decides to marry a widower of fifty five with children because, she thinks his attitude towards her will be almost fatherly. But contrary to her expectation, he begins to kiss her while sitting in the drawing room. She runs out of his house at night all the way to the club, falls on the bed and weeps. She is confused about what she should do and what she needs. She regrets for her action as her mind is now changed. She apologizes to him for her wrong activity yet their relation ends.

Those who knew her laugh at the ridiculous story of a young woman of thirty behaving like that. After that she assesses herself and feels that she needs a youngman to love her. Lessing notes, "She had run from him because he was an old man... and avoided men over thirty" (43). Thus, Mary looks fickle and ridiculous, the result of the conflict between sexual instinct and environment. She demonstrates sexual gaucherie. Unconsciously she looks for a young husband but does not find as desired and shows physical and mental change. She looks ill, nervous and loses balance of mind. She is fickle and has no strong conviction. She acts sometimes in response to her gossiping friends and sometimes to her biological instinct/sexual desire. Sometimes she reacts against her father's relation with her mother and other times in response to her friends and her own unconscious instinct.

#### **Mary's Life after Marriage: a Conflict between Environment and Instinct**

Mary goes on searching for a husband. She meets and marries Dick Turner, a farmer, grown up in rural area, who likes to live in the country and dislikes the town. He is not the type of man she has been looking for but she is compelled to compromise with the situation as she does not find a man of her choice. Mary loves the town and feels safe there as she has been living a comfortable life with a good job for many years, as a free woman with a feeling of superiority to men. Her way of life is different from Dick's. Therefore, the conjugal life is not happy one. Mary is frustrated to find everything against her will. She dislikes the primitive type of tiny and ugly farm house with low ceiling, the filthy and bad smelling atmosphere, and Dick's traditional farmer's life style. She dislikes his language which is like the native/black worker's language. He spends most of the time with the native workers who smell like animals. He has always been in their contact but she has never come into the contact of the native workers before. Mary feels alien and she cannot fit herself with the situation.

Her mother forbade her to talk with her servants but now she has to deal with them. She cannot behave properly towards them as her manners are based on her superior complex as to her race and class. She fires the native boys for small mistakes or they leave the work in the house. Dick does not like the way Mary treats the boys and Mary too dislikes Dick's way of dealing with them. Conflict arises between the husband and the wife as to managing the workers. Mary dislikes Dick showing sympathy on Samson whom she has dismissed from the work of the house. She accuses the workers of stealing things and being shift and dishonest for not looking at her. She does not understand that "it was part of the native code of politeness not to look a superior in the face" (68). She makes a houseboy scrub the bath the whole morning without giving him any food. She cannot get on with them and a cook or a houseboy never lasts longer than a month.

Mary's situation in the house does not improve. Dick is not ready to improve the facilities in the house. The smothering heat and the oppressive loneliness of a busy farmer's wife become inhospitable for Mary. She wants to hurt Dick and speaks to him in the tone of her mother, the voice of the suffering female. On the other hand, Dick advises her to fill the bath tub with water and get into it for bathing, instead of throw-

ing it away each time because it costs him money. Dick is an unsuccessful farmer who is in debt. He refuses to follow other's advice to plant tobacco and earn money, instead of mealies, little crops (beans, cotton and sunhemp) and planting trees. He is wasting money. He tries for bee-keeping, pig farming, turnkeys, chickens, bicycles, etc. but he has no patience to continue with the work started and quickly shifts from one work to another and fails to produce a desired result. Contradiction rises between Mary and Dick as to the manner of farming and the loss. He does not follow her advice. She loses her temper destructively.

Fed up with Dick and the life in his farmhouse, Mary gets nostalgic about her beautiful town life and her friends, and decides to go back to her old job. When Dick is in his farm, she leaves a note to him and goes to the town. But to her frustration, the new matron in the Girls' Club tells her that they do not take married women there. In her nervousness, Mary has forgotten this fact. She stays at an hotel. Then she goes to her old office to ask for a job but her job has been taken by somebody else and no other post is lying vacant for her. The dreams of her last few weeks vanish in a moment. Everybody who knew her get stunned to see great change in her. She has no money for beauty shop and looks like a poor farmer's filthy wife. She looks humiliated and faced by obstacles. She has no money even for hotel bill. When Dick appears, she shows no opposition and no hatred but only resignation. As he appeals her to go back, she instantly gets ready as if it is a planned journey. They go back to the farm and Mary feels a situation of tired stoicism and numbness, with no power to feel, let alone fighting.

Mary feels healed, energetic and brisk as before again. Dick looks gentle and tolerant, not spiteful. He feels a need to be near her lest she may run away again. However, she refuses to help him in the farm. He even thinks of putting ceilings for her sake but he cannot manage it as he has been facing hard time.

Dick catches malaria. She nurses him. She looks miserable as her pride is frustrated because she has no money to pay the doctor's fee for Dick's treatment. As he becomes weak and depressed, she drives to the land to supervise the workers. She finds that since Dick's illness they have not been working. After her arrival, only half of them arrive and start to work reluctantly. She feels that they have resented a woman supervising their work and makes them work hard and keeps them until the sunset. She feels good after being boss of eighty workers and making them do as she wanted. She thinks that the native workers are all spoilt. She hates and treats them severely. Now she takes interest in the farm and understands that Dick's failure is due to incompetence, not bad luck. She finds that he begins things and leaves unfinished.

When Dick recovers from illness, she suggests him growing tobacco, earn money, pay debt and live a civilized life but he hates the idea of tobacco. He wants Mary to go to the farm and advise him when he needs. But she refuses to do so because firstly she dislikes the farm and its problem and secondly, she wants to see in Dick a strong and confident man, stronger than herself, achieving success on his own account. But "he was behaving foolishly spending money on unnecessary things" (127-8). The more she withdraws, the more he fails. Mary day-dreams about working in the city as before as an efficient secretary and the friendly affection of men free from danger. Her life with Dick is between hope and despair. The drought ruins the tobacco. Mary suggests trying it for another year too but Dick suspects of bankruptcy. The thought of the terrible next year horrifies Mary and she feels sick, suffers nightmares at night, spends days restlessly, nags and speaks in irritating voice to the natives.



As she has nothing to do, she wishes for a child but Dick thinks that she is desiring a child for her own sake, takes no interest in him, does not have any contact with the neighbours, even does not know their names, has never become part of the life of the district and has isolated herself. He thinks also that if she has children, her concern will be completely with them. Moreover, he thinks of the expenses for a child: boarding fees, books, train fares, clothes, etc. Therefore, he is not ready to let her beget children. He tries to convince her by citing the example of the poverty-stricken life of Charlie's assistant due to children. Mary's desire is not fulfilled and, she identifies herself with her mother. She imagines her own small daughter comforting her as she used to comfort her mother (135). Mary looks furious at his callous injustice and almost blazes into anger but subsides again. Wearily she says that she is nearly forty and very soon she will not be able to have a child at all. He says that he is against borrowing loan or asking for charity for his self-respect. Thus, there is a conflict between a woman's impulse for motherhood and a man's sense of pride or honour.

When Dick asks Mary to accompany him to the farm, she goes with him in order to sustain him with her presence. But he does not care about her advice. He is obstinate. He does not see his mistakes which she sees. It fills her with despair. It is a hopeless situation for her. She thinks now that he has no common sense and it is useless making suggestions. As a last resort she advises him to get big crops or mealies instead of the little crops. In response he shouts at her angrily expressing his grievance against her for losing twenty best boys due to her bad temper. He reacts against the government for not understanding the worries of the white farmers and supporting the native workers under the influence of negro lovers from England. He expresses also his anger against the black workers for being insolent and dishonest. He becomes a chain-smoker because of his worries.

Dick starts shouting at the houseboy and mistreating the workers who come to meet him. Mary finds that Dick looks and behaves like the native workers. His colour is like theirs and blows his nose on his fingers into a bush like them. Now she sees him only for five minutes in the morning and half an hour at night and go to bed exhausted.

#### **Moses and Mary: Conflict between Race plus Class and Instinct**

Mary earns a bad name as a mistress among the house boys. She is so strict that no boy can stay with her longer than a month. When a boy leaves, it is difficult to find another one to work under her and she is left servantless for some days. One day Dick brings a farmboy, Moses, to work as a houseboy. He is the boy whom Mary had whipped two years before on the farm for insolence and who had got wound on his cheeks that bled. She feels uneasy to work with him and leaves him alone in the kitchen. She wants someone else. But Dick tells her that he is the best boy that he has come across. Later on, she finds that he is one of the best workers she has had. She is fascinated also by his tall, powerful and broad built body. Although she treats him with unjust rebukes, he accepts her without protest. She looks at him with hysterical emotion while he takes a bath, despite him. The formal pattern of black and white, or mistress and servant breaks by their personal relation.

Mary starts to demonstrate emotional perversion. There is conflict inside her between her instinctual attraction towards the black boy and her sense of honour (pertaining to her race and class) imbedded in her by her environment or culture. Lessing describes, "she lost her balance of mind and could not control ever her actions ...

she imagined him... standing silent at the door in the sun... but there was nothing” (145-6). She suffers nervousness and hallucination, and vacillates between hatred and fondness for him. At first she shows her hatred towards him, then becomes aware of her irrational anger, and after that she feels weak as if she has been ill. Dick watches her irrational behaviour and thinks that it is due to her dislike of the boy. Therefore, he tries to bring her into normalcy by telling her about the boy’s efficiency and his inability of changing servants. But he is wrong to think so. She keeps Moses working as long as she can. He looks calm and obeys her orders. She shows contradictory behavior. She wants to see him for a long time by keeping him near her as she is attracted towards him but she nags at him in high nervous voice.

She becomes forgetful, leaves the chickens die unfed, utters incomplete sentences not knowing what she wants to say, talks to herself loudly and angrily like a mad woman. At the end of the month, Moses calmly and hesitatingly tells her that he wants to leave his job. To the wonder of the boy and contrary to his expectation, she sobs and entreats, “You mustn’t go!” And she wept on, repeating over and over again, ‘You must stay! You must stay!’ And all the time she was filled with shame and mortification because he was seeing her cry” (Lessing 151). She used to explode with other boys leaving the house. Moses brings a glass of water and passes it to her but she does not take it. He puts it to her lips then she holds it and takes a gulp. Despite her attitude of dignity, she looks at him pleadingly. Lessing writes again, “‘Drink,’ he said, simply, as if he were speaking to one of his own women; and she drank” (151). Moses does not leave her but stays after this, without protest.

Mary feels his power and a new relation develops between them. She feels some dark attraction and weeping before him as an act of resignation of her authority. Now she stops inspecting his work and even leaves the keys on the shelf. She feels that he is not accepting but challenging her rebukes. He begins to ask questions about war, killing people, racism and forces her to treat him as a human being. She starts dreaming about him and wakes in terror when he touches her. She becomes lenient to him and he becomes helpful to her.

#### **Charlie Slatter and Dick Turner: Darwinian Competition**

There is a race division between the black and the white in Rhodesia on the one hand and between the African white (old settlers) and the British white (colonizers) on the basis of wealth and/or power on the other hand. Charlie is from London and Dick is a poor African. Charlie is a shrewd, watchful and cunning farmer who is successful in farming as he applies different tricks and methods. He does not mind killing a native if it is necessary for him. The racial and colonial government would fine the white 30 pounds for killing a black native (14). But Dick is an unsuccessful farmer who is in debt as he applies traditional/primitive method of farming. Mr. Slatter wants to grab his land by turning him bankrupt and compelling him to sell his land to him. He has been searching opportunity and planning for years to see Dick go bankrupt. He needs the land for tobacco and grazing (110). For that he wants to give Dick loan and suggests ways of farming. But Dick ignores his advice.

In the struggle for survival or earning wealth Charlie proves successful whereas Dick is unsuccessful. One day Charlie advises Dick to sell his land to him and leave the place for the welfare of the couple as he knows that Dick and Mary are not happy. But when Dick ignores Charlie’s advice to change method of farming or take loan from him

or sell the land to him, he seeks an opportunity for his tragedy and to force Dick to go away. Charlie is responsible in some way in the tragedy of the Turners. Lessing notes, "It was he, who, from the beginning of the tragedy to its end... touches the story at half a dozen points; without him things would not have happened quite as they did, though sooner or later, in one way or another, the Turners were bound to come to grief" (13). Charlie suspects Moses's relation with Mary. He finds that Mary is speaking to Moses with flirtatious coyness and sees something wrong about the demeanour of Moses with Mary. Then he advises Dick and Mary to get rid of Moses. Once again Charlie tells Dick to sell his land to him and work there as his manager. But Dick is not ready for it. Then Charlie seeks help of Tony Marston, who has just come from England and who is in need of a job, to convince Dick to sell his land. Tony becomes successful in persuading Dick to the necessity of leaving that place for Mary's sake but he will not leave at once. Charlie buys his land and books the railway journey with truck for three weeks ahead of what Dick wished. Thus, Charlie becomes able to oust the Turners from their land.

#### **Mary's Murder: the Consequence of Environment and Instinct**

Mary's activities are influenced by her past environment, the immediate situation and her instinct. She starts behaving oddly. Tony thinks that she is leaving for a holiday for the first time and is happy to know it. But, just opposite to his expectation, he finds that she is making no preparation for it. About a week before they are due to leave, Dick tells Mary to start packing but she shows no interest. She shows complete nervous breakdown. Intimacy has been developed between Mary and Moses. To his astonishment, one day Tony sees Moses helping Mary, from behind, dress and undress her. Tony thinks about many white women having relations with black men and his knowledge from books on psychology the jealousy of the white man for the superior sexual potency of the native (186). Moses takes delight in doing that job of dressing and undressing Mary and she also enjoys it in the absence of her husband.

But when Tony reminds her of the custom of the white, she regrets for it. She says to him, "I don't understand, why is all this happening? I didn't mean it to happen. But he won't go away" (187). Moses is looking at them and hearing what they were saying from the doorway. His face looks wickedly malevolent. Mary has lost the power of command at Moses. But now she asserts herself using Tony's presence as a shield to get back her command and tells Moses to go away. Moses is grieved to know that Mary is leaving the place. He comes again to ask her if she is leaving and never coming back. Contrary to Moses's expectation, she answers him in a screaming tone and orders him to go away. She is not consistent in her dealings. It hurts Moses. Tony too shouts at him and demonstrates a demeanour as if he is going to squeeze his throat to kill. Then the boy disappears.

Mary is ambivalent. She sobs and cries with relief for his departure. Then suddenly as a mad woman she pushes Tony away and expresses her anger against him for sending Moses away. She says that things were all right before he came but now she will not see Moses again. Then she starts weeping. She vacillates between her instinct (emotion) towards Moses and her environment (White culture). She is now afraid of the black boy doing some mischief against her for taking support of Tony to drive him away from her house. She thinks of taking Tony's help against her danger. Moses takes Tony as his enemy for being instrumental to break his relation with Mary. He thinks to outwit him by avenging his wounded human affection by murdering Mary.

Thus, Moses, the houseboy, comes at night to the Turners' house and murders

Mary. He gets arrested to be ruined in jail. Dick Turner becomes lonely and miserable, and Mary loses her life. Thus, this novel depicts the adverse effects of heredity or instinct and environment, and Darwinian competition for survival.

## CONCLUSION

The central character, Mary Turner, is influenced by her childhood environment of her house, her school life and that of her office where she worked before her marriage. Her father's behavior towards her mother makes her hate men and decide never to marry. But the environment of the office makes her change her decision and she marries. However, she is ambivalent and runs away from her husband's house. Then again she seeks a husband in response to her sexual instinct. But when she remembers her mother's trouble with her father she feels a distaste for sexual relation. She vacillates. At first she suppresses her sexual instinct but later on as her sexual urge emerges she marries. But the environment in her husband's house does not match with her previous environment and she is dissatisfied. She reacts in response to her instinct and imbibed socio-cultural environment. Her vacillation between the honour of the white race or culture and her intimacy with her houseboy due to her instinct creates conflict and her life collapses.

Thus, the Turner family bears the adverse effect of environment and instinct. All the characters in the novel, likewise, suffer due to the adverse effect of instinct and environment. The novel presents also the struggle for survival and the survival of the fittest through Charlie Slatter and Dick Turner. Dick is a misfit. On the whole, this article explores that Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* dramatizes the effect of the environment of family, class, race, male chauvinism, colonialism and Darwinism on the one hand and the effect of heredity or human impulse for accumulation, sexuality and motherhood on the other hand.

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