# CHAPTER - II
# THIS WAS THE OLD CHIEF'S COUNTRY

This chapter takes up ten African short-stories included in the first volume of Doris Lessing's Collected African Stories for analysis in the light of colonialism, recialism and African landscape. The stories included in this volume are:

The Old Chief Mshlanga

A Sunrise on the Veld

No Witchcraft for Sale

The Second Hut

The Nuisance

The De Wets come to Kloof Grange

Little Tembi

Old John's Place

'Leopard' George

Winter in July.

The theme of the individual's collision with an oppressive environment characterises all these stories.

The very first story 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' explores all the thematic concerns of Lessing in a nutshell. As Lessing firmly believes:

> *Novels, stories, plays, can convey the truth about personal relations, emotions, and attitudes of which the people subject to them are perhaps unaware, or only partly aware: literature comes out of atmospheres,*

> *climates of opinion, everything that can not be described by the economic, the sociological approaches.*[1]

The purpose of this and other African stories was to convey 'something about what it feels like to live in Rhodesia, and in the South African Republic ... the two countries are similar in atmosphere and political structure. The social conditions out of which they were written exist now.' Lessing's approach in 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' is through an alien, but not yet alienated consciousness. She takes us first into the fantasy of a lonely, imaginative white girl. To her the medieval legends of chill Europe are more real than the veld and the African sun. In narrating this story of discovery and revelation Lessing switches from an objective account of what is perhaps a typical child's experience to describe the brash girl's encounter with the courteous old chief in the 'I' form. Living romance enters her life when she realizes 'This was the Old Chief's Country,' but it is hard to fit this knowledge together with the discovery that the chief's son and heir is her father's cook 'boy.' One day she follows beyond the farm's boundaries the path to the chief's kraal, a path trodden only by Africans. It is a journey into the past of Mashonaland, where she discovers a rooted people living a simple, ancenstral life. She asks to see the Chief: 'they did not understand what I wanted. I did not understand myself' — a striking

moment of inconprehension. What she does learn is that, in this 'village of ancients and children and women,' there is no place for her; one cannot 'discuss the past with a smile in an easy gush of feeling, saying: I could not help it. I am also a victim.' The serpent of fear and loneliness chills her delight in this paradisal green valley, she is the outcast, she and her race, and that is the deep impression that remains with us despite the sequel when, after a quarrel with her father, the Chief and his kraal are moved to a Reserve two hundred miles away. Their rich land would fall to a new white settler, who would 'wonder what unsuspected vein of richness he had struck' — a vein, we reflect, symbolizing the deprivation of the dispossessed. The sensitive, brooding girl of 'The Old Chief Mshlanga' is of course not typical, which makes her ignorant acceptance of the assumptions of white mastery all the more disturbing: only the 'personal relation' can break this, yet from it must come a nagging consciousness of her inherited guilt for the dispossession. An active concern beyond such fleeting insights is an even rarer life story.

In this story, the young white girl (sleeping princess) is held in thrall by her European fairy tales — she quotes Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shallot,' the moment of rebellion when the mirror cracks from side to side. Numb to the flora and fauna of the African veld and the

common humanity of its natives, she has a chance encounter on a footpath with an African Chief. This jerks her out of her dream, casting a spell on her from an anterior source. She compulsively travels to this kraal through a landscape which is now Edenic, replete with groves, vines and exotic animals. Qualities of the 'Old and evil,' 'big and dark and angry' predominate. But with positive connotations, for it is made clear that the 'terror and panic' and 'meaninglessness' she experiences enroute are challenging and constructive emotions, and they serve to structure a new vision via a version of the Fortunate Fall. The closing incidents demonstrate her new ability to understand her parents, the African and herself: she is left wondering at the 'unsuspected vein of richness [she] has struck.'[2]

This story presents a perspective on the colonials' sense of their place in Africa and of proper black-white relationships. Herein Lessing shows us a peculiarly colonial kind of 'dislocation' in a child. The child is not alive to her environment as she does not engage with what is around her, being wholly caught up in her imaginative life which is stocked with European material.[3]

An account of the child's early life is given partly by distanced, critical summary. For example:

> *... she knew ... the names of the little creatures that lived in English streams, when the words 'the veld' meant strangeness, though she could remembernothing else.*[4]

The girl's first encounter with the Chief characterizes a different response where she explains:

> *A Chief! I thought, understanding the pride that made the old man stand before me like an equal — more than an equal, for he showed courtesy and I showed none.*[5]

After this encounter with the old Chief, the girl reads about the history of land control and she reconsiders what she had been taught about 'natives' and their qualities and rights. She moves to the position where she realizes: '... this is my heritage, too; I was bred here: it is my country as well as a black men's country ...'[6] The wisdom of hindsight colours the narrator's introduction of the girl's solution:

> *It <u>seemed it was only necessary</u> to let free that respect I felt when I was talking with the Old Chief Mshlanga, to let both black and white people meet gently, with tolerance for each other's differences: <u>it seemed</u> quite easy.*[7]

It transpires that neither the resolve nor the goodwill visit prompted by it constitutes the catalyst she had hoped for. She does not use her insight as a basis for challenging her parent's position. She reports her mother's continued abrasiveness and added strictness in her handling

of the Chief's son, as well as her father's and the policeman's responses to the Chief's requests, but there is report of over criticism or defiant action by the girl. Her silence hints at many things.

To show the relations of servants with their white master the writer says:

> *The black people on the farm were as remote as the trees and the rocks. They were as amorphous black mass, mingling and thinning and massing like tadpoles, faceless, who existed merely to serve, to say 'yes, Bass,' take their money and go.*[8]

Even the small white girl is told to consider the natives inferior to her. The child also takes them for granted:

> *The child was taught to take them for granted: the servants in the house would come running a hundred yards to pick up a book if she dropped it. She was called 'Nkosikaas' — Chieftainess, even by the black, children her own age.*[9]

> *On the rare occasions when white children met together they could amuse themselves by hailing a passing native in order to make a buffoon of him; they could set the dogs on him and watch him run; they could tease a small black child as if he were a puppy — save that they would not throw stones and sticks at a dog without a sense of guilt.*[10]

The small girl carries a gun and two dogs when she wanders from vlei to vlei, from kopje to kopje. The dogs and the gun are an armour against fear. She is also not allowed to have friendly relations with natives. If a servant makes a mistake in his English or fails to understand an order, they laugh at the servant. There is also a custom to stand off a path to give way to whites.

To describe the colonial atmosphere Lessing rightly puts:

> *Because of this, for many years, it was the veld that seemed unreal; the sun was a foreign sun, and the wind spoke a strange language.*[11]

At the end of the story, when the Old Chief says that this land, that the white people call theirs belongs to black people; after some time, Chief Mshlanga and his people are moved two hundred miles east, to a proper native reserve and the Government land is opened up for white settlement soon. Through this Lessing acquaints us with an oppressive environment of colonialism. The native people cannot afford to lose their twenty goats because of their poverty. The girl's father demands two hundred pounds as restitution and if the Chief pays it, he will give them goats back. Thus the poverty of the native black people is highlighted in this story.

Lessing uses landscape to strengthen her

exploration of black-white relationship by describing the prestigious but tragic condition of Africa:

> *I had read of this feeling, how the bigness and silence of Africa, under the ancient sun, grows dense and takes shape in the mind, till even the birds seem to call menacingly, and a deadly spirit comes out of the trees and the rocks. You move warily, as if your very passing disturbs something old and evil, something dark and big and angry that might suddenly rear and strike from behind. You look at groves of entwined trees, and picture the animals that might be lurking there, you look at the river running slowly, dropping from level to level through the vlei, spreading into pools where at night the buck come to drink, and the crocodiles rise and drag them by their soft noses into underwater caves ...*[12]

When there is heated argument between the Old Chief Mshlanga and the girl's father, Lessing uses landscape to suggest that something wrong is going to happen through the argument:

> *It was now in the late sunset, the sky a welter of colours, the birds singing their last songs, and the cattle, lowing peacefully, moving past us towards their sheds for the nights. It was the hour Africa is most beautiful; and here was this pathetic, ugly scene, doing no one any good.*[13]

'The Second Hut' is an another powerful story

by Doris Lessing in which she explores the individual's relations with the African environment. In this story Lessing depicts pathetic individual lives of people who, however, vehemently they seek to claim Africa as their own, will remain forever alien. The themes of 'The Second Hut' are closely paralleled in The Grass is Singing. Again a setting is a doomed farm, run by the British immigrant Major Carruthers, whose wife has become an invalid through 'heartbreak over the conditions they lived in.' The story develops a triangle consisting of Carruthers, his native employee, and the Dutch assistant, Van Heerden. All three belong to the groups crippled by socioeconomic circumstance. The malnourished natives live in squalor. The British immigrant is broken by debt and farming failures. Van Heerden, finally, represents the Africaners or Boers, Dutch settlers who were decimated by the British in the Boer War (1899-1902) and thereafter often descended into the despised class of the 'poor white.' The time is 1931, when severe depression has left thousands of Boers unemployed. Van Heerden comes to Carruthers after he has spent three-fourths of a year camping with his wife and nine children on the veld.

Poverty is the moving force in this constellation of oppressed groups. It makes the three proponents of the triangle who, for historical reasons, are irreconciliable enemies dependent on each, since Carruthers needs

workers and an assistant, and these in turn need employment. But their tenuous truce is upset when Carruthers imposes on his native workers, when Van Heerden maltreats, to build a larger hut for the Boer family. This they do, only to burn it down again, fatally burning the youngest Boer child. The natives join forces with the elements, in the form of fire, to express their collective hatred of the Bores; Van Heerden, in turn, has also observed the tradition of animosity and accepts their revenge as its natural consequence. He further accepts the child's death without great ado — it is soon to be replaced by a premature tenth baby. But Carruthers, whose initiative brings such catastrophic results, realizes to what dire extent the combined factors of collective hatred and poverty can undermine the ethical sense in human beings. Rather risk this kind of moral decay, he capitulates and plans his return to England. The story's essence is comparable to that of the first novel of Lessing. The individual's hopeless struggle against his surroundings is determined first by poverty, then by a transgression against the social code. Already weakened by economic circumstance, Carruthers seals his fate when he forcefully disrupts the hierarchy of the oppressed by trying to better the position of one pole — the Dutch through the goodwill of the other — the natives. This confining social nexus plays a decisive part in many of the stories. It demands respect for the mechanism of oppression, observance of

the colour bar, and conformity to role stereotypes.

In 'The Second Hut' Lessing's interest is again in those on the border of failure: Major Carruthers, 'a gentleman farmer going to seed,' his wife heartbroken 'over the conditions they lived in,' the Afrikaans assistant, Van Heerden, down on his luck and obliged to engage himself to a 'traditional enemy.' The story ironically turns upon racial distinctions cut even finer than the Major is aware of. The dilapidated hut is the only accomodation he will offer Van Heerden, since he will not offer an uncouth being 'a corner in his house' as he would willingly have done for a fellow Englishman, yet he frets under a hardened feeling, caused by 'his being responsible for another human being having to suffer such conditions.' When he makes the worse discovery that Van Heerden is not, as he had been led to believe, a single man, but that he has a wife and nine children, the Major's worst fears have come alive:

> *Fear rose high in him. For a few moments he inhabited the landscape of his dreams, grey country full of sucking menace, where he suffered what he would not allow himself to think of while awake: the grim poverty that could overtake him if his luck did not turn, and if he refused to submit to his brother and return to England.*
>
> *Walking through the fields, where maize was now waving over his head, pale gold with a froth of white, the sharp dead*

> *leaves saying crisply against the wind, he could see nothing but that black foetid hut and the pathetic futureless children. That was the lowest he could bring his own children to! He felt moorless, helpless, afraid: his sweat ran cold on him. And he did not hesitate in his mind; driven by fear and anger, he told himself to be hard; he was searching in his mind for the words with which he would dismiss the Dutch man who had brought his worst nightmares to life, on his own farm, in glaring daylight, where they were inescapable.*[14]

Not simply guilt, but a desire to erect a bulwark, however frail, against the slide into poverty he foresees for his own family, causes the Major to decide to provide the Van Heerdens with a second hut. The unforeseen clash this brings with his hitherto pliable workers, who loathe Van Heerden for brutal salve -driving, but must build that hut, is a form of rough, ironic justice. The Major is entangled in a web of 'fine feelings': the codes of the English 'gentleman,' the white man in exile, the paternal master will not mix. Van Heerden has committed the white's unforgivable sin of 'going native,' which really means slipping into the poverty endured by the native. A poverty, and this is another irony, not felt by the Major to be attuned to African nature beneath 'the wide hall of fresh blue sky':

> *The beautiful clear weather that he usually loved so much. Many weather, sharpened by cold, and crisp under deep clear skies, pungent with gusts of wind from the dying leaves and grasses of the veld, was spoilt for him this year: something was going to happen.*[15]

Yet Van Heerden's reaction after the burning of the hut, presumably by a resentful African, and the death of a child, shows him to be not only in tune with the harsh demands of a native life but capable of a tender albeit rough concern for his wife and children akin in a positive sense to that of the beast the Major has taken him for. It is this revelation that defeats the Major and shows his and his fretful wife's unfitness for a life they have chosen with so faint a heart.

Doris Lessing, in this story, gives an account of the white family which lives in economically wretched conditions. Major Carruthers is not successful as a farmer. His wife is laying ill. The house in which they live is described by Lessing, thus:

> *The house had that brave, worn appearance of those struggling to keep up appearances. It was a four-roomed shack, its red roof dulling to streaky brown. It was the sort of house apprentice farmer builds as a temporary shelter till he can afford better. Inside, good but battered furniture stood over worn places in the rugs: the piano was out of tune and the*

> *notes stuck; the silver tea things from the big narrow house in England where his brother (a lawyer) now lived were used as ornaments, and inside were bits of paper, accounts, rubber rings, old corks.*[16]

When the natives burn down the second hut, Major decides to leave Africa and get a job in England. He realizes that his condition will not improve in Africa.

Lessing gives the three diamensional relationship between Major Carruthers (the British), Van Heerden (the Dutch) and the African natives. Major Carruthers tries to do favour to Van Heerden by bulding the second hut. At the same time he tries to suppress the feelings of the natives by asking them to build the hut. But the Dutchman is always hostile to the natives. He beats, slaps and kicks the natives. He physically tortures the native labourers. According to the natives the Dutchmen are not good. He treats them brutally like dogs. So in the end, the second hut is burnt down by the natives. The natives who are 'black' try to show their collective strength by burning the hut and the youngest child of Van Heerden. The Existence of black strength is narrated by Lessing like:

> *... The childen were playing nereby, their hands and faces <u>black</u>, their rags clothing <u>black</u> everything seemed patched and smugged with <u>black</u>, and on one side the trees hung withered and grimy and the soil was hot underfoot.*[17]

Major Carruthers who tries to keep harmony between these poles, in the end decides to leave the country as he fails to strike his roots in the African soil. Thus Major Carruthers is also, in the end, affected by the colour-bar and black-white hostility.

A man-woman relationship can be analysed with the help of the relationship between Major Carruthers and his wife as well as Van Heerden and his wife. Major Carruthers who has been a soldier in Army starts his life as a farmer. She, who has married him for he is a soldier, is not happy with him as a farmer's wife. She is always ill through heart-break. Their life as husband and wife is not healthy and happy. As Lessing states it:

> *The room where his wife lay, in a greenish sun-lanced gloom, was a place of seedy misery. The doctor said it was her heart; and Major Carruthers know this was true: she had broken down through heart-break over the conditions they live in. She did not want to get better. The harsh light from outside was shut out with dark blinds, and she turned her face to the wall and lay there, hours after hours, inert and uncomplaining, in a stoicism of defeat nothing could penetrate. Even children hardly moved her. It was as if she had said to herself: 'If I cannot have what I wanted for them, then I wash my hands of life.'*[18]

As far the relationship between Van Heerden and his wife is typical one. His wife lives isolated in the hut cooking something all the time. They have nine children. There is nothing significant about them.

'A Sunrise on the Veld' is about the enlightenment of a child and the birth of a young man. At the beginning, the child's feeling of himself at the centre of his environment gives him a sense of exultation and power. Antithetical to that vision reality emerges in the form of a buck being killed by some ants and, thus, he gains the knowledge of suffering, death, his own impotence, and finally his own responsibility. He is divided between the childish state of innocence and the adult state of knowledge and responsibility for that knowledge. He is in need of reconciliation in order for him to see life steadily and whole as before the encounter. At the end of the story, he is neither reconciled with himself nor in his relationship to the world around him but after his initial rejection of the responsibility; he commits himself to think about the knowledge and its implications for him. This final commitment to recocili-ation of the boy initiated into a man's world is strengthened by the sun rising over the veld which symbolizes the birth and growth of the enlightened man into the conscious and integrated person.

In 'A Sunrise on the Veld', Lessing first

establishes the boy's idealistic view of himself as omnipotent and central to the world and united with it. The boy feels himself in control of his brain and his body, rising at 4.30 every morning, noiselessly leaving his parents' house on feet that could walk all day without tiring. As he walks through the pre-dawn starlit veld of shoulder high grasses, he feels impervious to the landscape. This unthreatening environment is the paradisaical African veld of 'trees showering a faint silver rain', a field filmed over with fresh spider webs, 'acres of long pale grass that sent back a hollowing gleam of light to a satiny sky', awakened by the shrill songs of guinea fowl and other birds. He thinks briefly that he could break his ankle any moment, in the thick tangled grass, but does not believe such a thing could happen to him. The boy feels himself in control not only of himself but of his environment, the world, and the universe as well:

> *There was nothing he couldn't do, nothing! A vision came to him, as he stood there, like when a child hears the word 'eternity' and tries to understand it, and time takes possession of the mind. He felt his life ahead of him as a great and wonderful thing, something that was his; and he said aloud, with the blood rising to his head: all the great men of the world have been as I am now, and there is nothing I can't become, nothing I can't do; there is no country in the world I cannot make part*

> *of myself, if I choose. I contain the world. I can make of it what I want. If I choose, I can change everything that is going to happen: it depends on me, and what I decide now ... That was what he was! — he sang, if he chose; and the world had to answer him.*[19]

Having established that vision of exultation and power, Lessing introduces the antithesis which causes the conflict and the need for reconciliation. An initiation occurs of the child into the knowledge of reality including suffering and death. The doy's illusory sense of power fails showing him his total lack of strength when he finds himself alone, without the dogs or the supporting song of the world in response to his own and hears a scream. A real vision intrudes into his idealized one:

> *There, between two trees, against a background of gaunt black rocks, was a figure from a dream, a strange beast that was horned and drunken-legged, but like something he had never even imagined. It seemed to be ragged. It looked like a small buck that had black ragged tufts of fur standing up irregularly all over it, with patches of raw flesh beneath ... but the patches of rawness were disappearing under moving black and came again elsewhere; and all the time the creature screamed, in small gasping screams, and leaped drunkenly from side to side, as if it were blind.*[20]

It is a young buck being consumed alive by huge, African black ants. Whereas the buck is as if blind, the ants after consuming it stand and gaze up at the boy with small glittering eyes. They are intruders upon the buck's paradise as this whole horrifying scene is upon the boy's paradise. The eyes represent that intrusion. The intrusion of knowledge expels him from the paradise of his illusion about the world around him as well as from the paradise of his illusion about himself in relation to that world. He learns of his impotence in relation to it. His pity for the animal in pain and terror seizes him as the buck continues to scream, but when he tries to shoot the buck to end its misery, he can't. It is already dead.

> *But it was not that which made him put down the gun. It was a swelling feeling of rage and misery and protest that expressed itself in the thought :: if I had not come it would have died like this: so why should I interfere?*[21]

His relationship with nature at this point is that he is separate and ineffective as opposed to his feeling of omnipotence and centrality. As the sun rises he is being enlightened by his knowledge, but he reacts with rage and recognition of his impotence.

> *... this is how life goes on, by living things dying in anguish. ... [he] set his teeth, and said over and over again under*

> *his breath: I can't stop it, I can't stop it. There is nothing I can do.*
>
> *It was right and nothing could alter it.*[22]

He is neither in control of the natural world of the buck and the ants nor of himself after this event.

> *The knowledge of fatality, of what has to be, had gripped him and for the first time in his life ... It had entered his flesh and his bones and grown in to the farthest corners of his brain and would never leave him. And at that moment he could not have performed the smallest action of mercy, knowing as he did, having lived on it all his life, the vast unalterable, cruel veld, where at any moment one might stumble over a skull or crush the skeleton of some small creature.*[23]

The boy on the veld is shocked and penetrated by the violent death of the buck. Even though he rages against the knowledge he tries to reconcile himself to it by accepting stoicly. '... grimly satisfied with his new stoicism ... [he] reminded himself; the ants must eat too!'[24]

Having reconciled his impotence with his original vision of omnipotence in relation to the workings of nature, the boy sees life steadily and whole in the light of his new-found stoicism.

But his curiosity and the reality he discovers,

unsettle him again, and require new effort to reconcile the recognition of the responsibility resulting from his newest knowledge with the recently achieved masculine stoicism. Wondering about the reason for the buck's inability to escape the ants, the boy discovers its leg undoubtedly broken by natives throwing stones at the animal to kill it for meat. He also realizes that, in his drunken joy of life, he must have inflicted the wound that predetermined a painful death similar to the one he had just witnessed.

The dawning consciousness of the newly born man sees his effect on the world, but the boy rejects responsibility for it.

> *For a moment he could not face it. He was a small boy again, kicking sulkily at the skeleton, hanging his head, refusing to accept the responsibility.*[25]

He is refusing to accept the responsibility not for the death of this particular animal, but for the death of what it represents. It represents other animals whose death the boy has caused, and it represents the boy in two ways. First, it represents the boy in his relationship to nature. As he realizes for the first time, he could die in the same way the buck did, if he broke his ankle among the tangled grasses and was unable to escape the ants. The previously paradisical environment has become a hostile one to which he is vulnerable.

He is vulerable to physical nature as well as to the nature of psychological development. The child's innocence is to the child what the broken leg is to the buck: the buck represents the child's psychological development. His innocence in ignorance in any growing child is that factor which makes him vulnerable to the first encounter with reality and dies in it. The innocence dies in the birth of the recognition of reality's demand for responsibility. While the death of the buck represents the death of the child's innocence, the sunrise represents the birth of the man who promises to be responsible for reconciliation.

> *He walked heavily, not looking where he put his feet. When he came within sight of his home he stopped, knitting his brows. There was something he had to think out. The death of that small animal was a thing that concerned him, and he was by no means finished with it. It lay at the back of his mind uncomfortably.*
>
> *Soon, the very next morning, he would get clear of everybody and go to the bush and think about it.*[26]

This very last line of the story shows, in the commitment of the boy to think about reconciliation, that the man has been born. The young man's commitment is motivated by his desire to see life steadily and whole which sight he has lost through the death of the child and the birth of the man in an initiation experience

symbolized by the sunrise on the veld.

'Sunrise on the Veld' establishes an intrinsic tie between a fifteen-year-old boy and the entire African landscape, through which he roams in the early morning hours. It traces the boy's three steps towards mature vision, expressed by the symmetrically placed words 'eternity,' 'fatality,' and 'responsibility.' The first section is devoted to the boy's exultant sense of power as he bounds over the waking veld. The sight of a buck being eaten alive by ants fills him with a distinct sense of fatality. Only on closer inspection of the animal's soon clean-picked carcass, whose broken leg bone must have prevented its escape from the ants, does it dawn on the boy that he himself took a potshot at just such a young buck some morning past. He realizes that, in his drunken joy of life, he must have inflicted the wound that predetermined a painful death. In short, Lessing draws a thumbnail sketch of the cycle of life, suffering and death, and hinges the whole picture on the consciousness of one adolescent: who may or may not, in time, rework the incident into ethical conviction. The child on the veld represents the yet-intact bond between human beings and nature, an ideal aspired to by most of Lessing's characters.

In 'No Witchcraft for Sale', Lessing depicts the natural superiority and tenacity of the native Africans.

When Teddy, the son of the Farquars, is six, comes crying because of the snake-spat into his eyes. Such snake-spat makes child blind. Gideon, the cook of the Farquars, recovers him by chewing herbal root and spits hard again and again in one eye and then the other eye of Teddy. This story reaches town. One day the scientist comes with his team to the Farquars. They want to know about the herbal medicine used by Gideon to recover Teddy's eyes. The scientist talks about the medicine and its use to humanity, if it is discovered. Gideon makes all of them walk for two hours, but does not give information about the herbal medicine. Thus, it triumphantly demonstrates how white medical science proves no match for tribal sorcery.

The racial impact on people and even on the

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child is described through Teddy's character. When Teddy becomes six years old, he is given a scooter. He ~~is driving~~ drives it with a great speed. When Gideon's youngest son comes to see the scooter. Teddy drives the scooter in circle around the black child until he is frightened and flees back to the bush. Gideon asks Teddy why he frightens him. Teddy replies: 'He's only a black-boy.' Gideon feels very sad. He starts putting a distance between himself and Teddy, 'not because of resentment, but in the way a person accepts something inevitable.' Lessing describes the change in Gideon:

> *Now Gideon would not let his flesh touch the flesh of the white child. He was kind, but there was a grave formality in his voice that made Teddy pout and sulk away. Also, it made him into a man: with Gideon he was polite, and carried himself formally, and if he came into the kitchen to ask for something, it was in the way a white man uses towards a servant, expecting to be obeyed.*[27]

Lessing depicts a significant example of racialism and colour-bar by analysing the relationship between Gideon and Teddy. Gideon saves Teddy by using herbal medicine. Later Teddy as a school-boy calls Gideon 'Old rescal' for making all of them walk miles all over the veld in search of the plant. Tears come in his eyes when Gideon says:

> *'Ah, Little Yellow Head, how you have grown! Soon you will be grown up with a farm of your own ...'*[28]

Thus Lessing shows that even the child is aware of the master-servant relationship and black-white colour-bar. Gideon and his mistress watch 'a small piccanniny' gazing in wonder at 'the little white boy with his miraculous fair hair and Northern blue eyes':

> *Gideon, who was watching, shook his head wonderingly, and said: 'Ah, missus, these are both children, and one will grow up to be a bass, and one will be a servant';*

> *and Mrs. Farquar smiled and said sadly, 'Yes, Gideon, I was thinking the same.'*[29]

Africa is full of secrets like the herbal medicine, Lessing writes about black people's belief regarding its secrecy:

> *The bush is full of secrets. No one can live in Africa, or at least on the veld, without learning very soon that there is an ancient wisdom of leaf and soil and season — and, too, perhaps most important of all, of the darker tracts of the human mind — which is the black man's heritage. Up and down the district people were telling anecdotes, reminding each other of things that happened to them.*[30]

Landscape is described skillfully as a background to create a proper impact. When the scientist and the Farquars go to search the plant:

> *It was a blazing December afternoon, with the sky full of hot rain-clouds. Everything was hot: the sun was like a bronze tray whirling overhead, there was a heat shimmer over the fields, the soil was scorching underfoot, the dusty wind blow gritty thick and warm in their faces. It was a terrible day, fit only reclining on a veranda with iced drinks, which is where they would normally have been at the hour.*[31]

'The Nuisance' is about the native driver called 'The Long One' and his wife, 'The Cross-eyed One.' 'The

Cross-eyed One' lags behind the other woman on the road, either by herself, or in charge of the older children, when they go to draw water at the well. She does her washing unaided and without laughter. She is the oldest wife of 'The Long One,' who is the most skillful driver. His appearance is:

> *The expression of the face was always violent, whether he was angry, laughing, or — most usually — sardonically critical. He had a tongue that was feared by every labourer on the farm. ...'He's a man, that native. One must respect him, after all. He never lets you get away with anything.'*[32]
>
> *'He knows how to handle oxen, but he can't handle his women.'*[33]

He has three wives. They give him trouble. He complains that the youngest wife is flirting with the bossboy from the neighbouring compound. He wants the old wife, the Cross-eyed one to go back home to her own people as she spoils his food. She grumbles and sulks. But there are complications. The two younger women hate each other but they think that the old wife should stay because she looks after the children; she does hoeing in the garden; she picks up relishes from the veld. After some week/ 'The Long One' tells the father that she has gone away without saying anything. Later, her dead body is found in the well nearby. 'The Long One' says/ 'she might have slipped and fallen.' The employer of the Long One

wonders:

> *... how odd it was that natives should commit suicide; it seemed almost like an impertinence, as if they were claiming to have the same delicate feelings as ours.*[34]

Thus the white people do not consider that the natives have feelings like them. They find the act of suicide very strange.

'The Long One' is shown so cruel that he does not feel odd because of the death of his wife. Thus Leesing shows, here, that the Africans don't hesitate to take revenge on their own people.

'The De Wets come to Kloof Grange' narrates the relation between the Gales and the De Wets. The Gales have settled in Southern Rhodesia successfully as farmers. As they are making progress, they need an assistant to manage the farming. Since when they have received a letter from the assistant, they are not happy with their traditional enemy. Mrs. Gale thinks that, now, another woman is going to invade her life on the farm. Even though the De Wets arrive late than given time, they do not apologize. Mrs. Gale is dismayed to see their behaviour as they are not polite. The incident of Mrs. De Wets hiding under the bed upsets her. When Mrs. Gale scolds De Wet for beating his pregnant wife, he asks her to get out of his house:

> *'Go away now, Mrs. Major,' ... 'get out of here. You've done enough damage.'*[35]

At last, Mrs. Gale tells her husband that next time he should not keep an assistant like De Wet:

> *'Next time you get an assistant,' ... 'get people of our kind. These might be sevages, the way they behave.'*
>
> *And that was the last word she would ever say on the subject.*[36]

Mrs. Gale is self-aware woman. She plans everything according to her own vision. She does not imagine being neglected by Mr. De Wet. As for Major Gale nothing exists for him outside his farm. He is not conscious of Mrs. Gale's existence. Lessing puts their relations:

> *Now they were friends and could forget each other. What a relief when he no longer 'loved' her! (That was how she put it.) Ah, that 'love' — she thought of it with a small humorous distate. Growing old had its advantage.*[37]

Their relations are formal. The relationship between De Wet and his wife is quite significant. They have married just a week ago. They met in the theatre and then got married immediately. When they first arrived on the farm, Mrs. Gale thought Mrs. De Wet to be a daughter of Mr. De Wet: as she was eighteen and De Wet looked like a middle aged man. They got married only to have

a baby.

Again, in this story, it is shown that the two poles: the English and the Dutch cannot come together for the good of each other. They cannot live together disturbing each other's lives. Mrs. Gale finds the name De Wet 'hard on the tongue,' and after the incident of Mrs. De Wet's hiding when De Wet tells her to 'get out,' she asks her husband to get people of their 'kind.'

In the story, the settler community is shown in a familiar closing ranks against social or moral threats, but the more disturbing, psychic threat is that which comes from the land. Mrs. Gale, a middle-aged woman who has found her consolations for the aridity of her well-heeled farm life in her English-type garden, sits gazing at the mountains which lie beyond a deep, rocky gorge. She feels that these mountains have 'crystallised her lonliness into a strength.'[38] In order to gaze at them she has had to learn to ignore the intervening gorge which, with its sudden descent into tropical palms, slow from river and crocodiles, speaks of a life she has been denied and of which she cannot afford to be reminded. She allows hereself the daily pleasure of sitting in her expensive garden and gazing at 'her mountains.'[39] Then the De Wets arrive. They are young and caught in the turmoil of turning sexual passion into married love. In her sympathy for the girl who does not like her husband's

recipe for the transformation—children—Mrs. Gale offers to show her 'my mountains.'[40] Her consternation, when her guest fails to see the mountains but responds with delight to the view of 'my river,'[41] makes Lessing's point clear. Landscape is seen selectively through the distortions of need. Mrs. Gale has emotional attachment with her garden. She is 'relying on the effect of her garden.'[42]

In 'Little Tembi' the McClusters have no child for two years. When little Tembi is brought into her clinic, Jane recovers him and starts loving him affectionately. Little Tembi grows up; and starts giving them troubles. He demands increase in wages. Later he starts stealing various articles from their house. Besides all these things, Jane loves him. In the end, when he appears again on the farm, knowing that he has done the thefts in the district, they decide to call police. Jane cannot understand, why Tembi has behaved like that and what he wants from them.

'Little Tembi' is an ironic exposure of white paternalism in one of its more seductive forms. Jane McCluster, the nurse who sacrifices her time and energies in a patient, unsentimental way to improve the health and conditions of her husdand's workers, surely does as much to pay her moral dues to a subject people as could be expected of anyone — short, that is, of the

personal relation. Except in the case of Little Tembi: her mistake is to give him the pathetic little sufferer, the kind of love she would later give her children, but, after his recovery to withdraw into a normal relationship: Little Tembi's reaction, to try and re-establish the first warm relationship by means that are amusing, then irritating and, finally, extranging — when he turns petty criminal to gain attention — reveals a pathetic, twisted desire to be possessed. The McClusters, only willing to give so much, resort to the pat answer: 'Jane ... was now feeling that she had "spoiled" Tembi, that he had "got above himself."[43] Tembi, for his part, had come to regard himself 'as an apostle of the white man's way of life.' He is a misfit made with the best intentions; the McClusters can only respond with futile, self-betraying exclamations of incomprehension: 'Tembi behaves as if he had some sort of claim on us,'[44] and at last, when Tembi surrenders himself as passively as Moses in The Grass is Singing, to the white man's justice: 'What did he want, Willie? What is it he was wanting, all this time?'[45] It was nothing thus, or anyone in their situation, could have given him; white and black are vexed alike by a thwarted need of true kinship neither can gratify, of which neither is fully aware.

Lessing portrays somewhat diluted kind of racial atmosphere on the farm of the McClusters. Jane takes

care of every labourer on the farm. But when robberies take place in the district, people start suspecting the native servants. They suppose that the native servants are giving information of the thieves. The white people now treat their servants harshly. There is hatred in the white people's voices when they address their servants:

> *The most trusted servant could turn out to be a thief. During these months when the unknown gang terrorized the district, unpleasant things happened; people were fined more often for beating their natives; a greater number of labourers than usual ran away over the border to Portuguese territory; the dangerous simmering anger was like heat growing in the air.*[46]

Even Jane also gets upset one day:

> *'... Look now I spend my time nursing and helping these natives! What thanks I get? They aren't greateful for anything we do for them.'*[47]

The white people start saying Africa 'the damned country.' When Police take Little Tembi to prison, in the end, Jane cries and feels sorry. At that time Willie says:

> *'They don't think anything of prison. It isn't disgrace as it is for us.'*[48]

The white people in Africa don't consider seriously about an imprisonment for the native.

Kate Cope, the central figure in 'Old John's

Place,' is confronted with two different models of womanliness, and, by extension, two different models of acceptable behaviour between men and women. The Sinclairs and Laceys, successive owners of Old John's Place, disrupt the normal, comfortable channels of social traffic and their useful but unacknowledged byways.

The opening paragraphs, provides a contrast between the established farmers and the newcomers. Here the narrative is coloured by echoes of the collective voice of 'the people of the district, mostly solidly established farmers.' The second perspective is found in the reported actions and thought of the Sinclairs. The third is that of Kate Cope, who is to be the figural consciousness in this story. She is introduced as wandering between the two separate groups of men and women. From similar experiences in the past, she has learned a good deal about the patterns and mores of such gatherings. The narrator reports these observations using Kate's terminology at first, then comments on them, using an analogy that might or might not be Kate's and finally comment which is in the narrator's rather than the child's kind of phrasing:

> *... the change in the atmosphere took place which Kate acknowledged by the phrase: 'It is breaking up.' The sharply-defined family units began to dissolve ... This pattern was to Kate as if a veil had been gently removed from the daytime life of*

> *the district, revealing another truth, and one that was bare and brutal.*[49]

Kate can see the pattern because she is outside it. She overhears criticised by the Sinclairs and watches it disrupted by the Laceys. She is made to feel very uncomfortable by the hypocrisy which the 'people of the district' do not even recognise as such. It is evident not only at parties, but also in the overheard conversations on the verandas about both sets of residents at 'Old Jonh's Place.' The victims of these comments are not free of hypocrisy either. The child hears the distructive comments and sees the subsequent masking politeness.

The cross-currents running within the settled community and between it and the 'footloose and fancy-free' owners of 'Old John's Place' are seen through Kate's eyes, but presented largely as her reported thoughts since there is no one else she can talk to about them. When she does try to say 'these unsayable things' she is not understood. There are also things which, we are told, Kate does not understand. With one or two exceptions the narrator does not elaborate on them but leaves the reader to make deductions from their context. She relies instead on ironic summary of the adult behaviour that the child witnesses and on a sympathetic account of the psychologically isolated child's attempt to come to terms with the tensions surrounding her.

> *Kate Cope is: too old to be put to bed with the infants, and too young to join the party; unable to read because that we considered; unable to do anything but loiter on the edge of each group in turn, until an impatient look warned her that something was being suppressed for her benefit that would otherwise add to the gaiety of the occasion. As the evening advanced and the liquor fell in the bottles, these looks became more frequent.*[50]

As she no longer indentifies with children, she feels uncomfortable in the places assigned by custom to children. Because she is not accepted as an adult, she feels uncomfortable in places assumed by that group. Thus at the parties given first by the Sinclairs and then by the Laceys, Kate drifts from the kitchen to the bedroom to her parents' car. As she wanders between adult rooms and nurseries, she overhears enough and sees enough to understand two disturbing facts that carry her out of childhood into adolescent. She discovers that, despite their staid external lives, few of the farmers of her district really share her father's rigid sexual morality and that further, even with these aberrations, their lives are still dull and provincial compared to the glittering vitality of people like the Laceys, the new couple in the district. Her physical no man's land reflects her psychological and emotional no man's land. She feels hereself drifting in and out of four groups, or two pairs of groups: child-adult, conservative-adventurous. When

she sees that Rosalind Lacey is pointedly excluded from the circle of women at her mother's Sunday lunch, she knows finally that she must direct her loyalty either to the mores of her own district or to those of Mrs. Lacey.

Doris Lessing vividly narrates colonial life. Nobody is ever successful on Old John's Place. The Sinclairs also face failure; Mrs. Sinclair is always attracted towards town and so they leave the place. In colonies there are different kind of parties. The colonial culture is exposed in such farewell and Sundary parties. At certain stage, elder family members of one flirt with another family members i.e. 'family units dissolve': Andrew Wheatly and Nan Fowler; and Mrs. Hackett and Mrs. Lacey flirt with each other; and an elderly farmer also flirts with Mrs. Wheatly. The people like the Sinclairs and the Laceys are not fit for such life:

> *The people of the district, mostly solidly established farmers who intended to live and die on their land, had become used to a certain kind of person buying a farm, setting on it with a vegabond excitement, but with one eye always on the attractions of the nearest town, and then flying off again after a year or so, leaving behind them a sense of puzzled failure, a desolation even worse than usual, for the reason that they had taken no more than a vagabond's interest in homestead and stock and land.*[51]

Mrs. Lacey has an excellent nursery having a baby at the crawling stage. His nanny is a very clean white aproned native girl who sits several places away from the child and watches him. The nanny has orders not to touch the baby. She is acting just as a guard to the baby for Mrs. Lacey it is against the principle of of bringing the child up that the germs should come anywhere near him. It is supposed that germs infect every native, washed or not. The natives are supposed to be dirty and Mrs. Lacey does not allow her baby's nanny to touch him. In the end, Kate tells mrs. Lacey that she cannot come again to her for her parents do not like it. The neighbours of the Laceys don't accept the Laceys. So Kate says to Mrs. Lacey:

> *'You ought to go somewhere where ... that has your kind of people'*[52]

George Chester is called 'Leopard' George because of his passion for hunting leopards, when he returns to Southern Rhodesia for farming. After both the wars young men like George Chester started coming to Africa. They come to make their career but turn this 'adventurous country into a sluggish one':

> *... there has been a sudden appearance of restless youngmen whose phrases: 'I want to be my own boss,' and 'I'm not going to spend my life wearing out the seat of my trousers on a stool,' though cliches, still express the spirit that opened*

> *up the country in the first place. Between wars there is a different kind of immigrant, who use their money as spades to dig warm corners to sleep in. ... because of the memory of something different, restless young men find there is no need to apologize for striking out for themselves. It is as if they are regarded as a sort of flag, or even a conscience.*[53]

After seeing number of farms George chooses Four Winds which is rocky out crops, scrubby trees and shimmering grass. The nearest neighbour to this farm is fifteen miles away. He likes Four Winds because he has certain ideas regarding his farm as:

> *... White men coming to Africa take not only what is there, but also impose on it a pattern of their own, from other countries. This accounts for the fine range of variation one can find in a day's travelling from farm to farm across any district. Each house will be different, suggesting a different country, climate, or way of speech.*[54]

Soon Old Smoke comes to know about his old master's arrival in the country. He comes with his twenty men and his other brothers also join him. This is strange kind of relationship among Africans. George has now, no worry about labourers and he makes progress in farming. But his relations with women become problematic. He flirts with both the daughters of Mrs. Whately; and he has relations with Old Smoke's daughter. But when she dares

to leave the compound during the day and reveal her status to her master's white guests, she is sent to the mission school fifty miles away, at George's expense, against the pleading of Old Smoke, the faithful family servant. George calls such relations as the 'arrangement.' The new wife of Old Smoke does not get satisfaction from him so she comes to George but later when Geroge comes to know that she is Old Smoke's young wife he tells her to go back. But later she is found killed by 'the leopard.' The Old Smoke then leaves the farm as George betrays him. He says 'he is too old now to work for the Old Baas's son.' George also repents of what he has done. In the end George finds his farm half-empty within few days. He realizes that 'an era was finished for him.' Now he is in the position of his neighbours.

George's guilty consciousness of having relations with the wife of his loyal native servant, the Old Smoke, is cleverly brought about by Lessing by describing the African landscape:

> *... there the familiar landscape was outside of him, and that something within him was pointing a finger at it. In the new strong sunlight he shivered again; and crossed his arms so that his hands cupped his shoulders: they felt oddly frail. Till lately they had included the pushing strength of mountains; till this morning his arms had been branches and the birds sang in*

> *them; within him had been that terror which now waited outside and which he must fight.*[55]

When Old Smoke leaves the farm, George fills his stables with horses. He becomes 'Leopard' George. His farm is a changed landscape now, Lessing describes:

> *... the landscape was simply a home for leopards. Every week-end his big house was filled with people, young and old, male and female, who came for various reasons; some for the hospitality, some for love of George, some indeed, for the fun of the Sunday's hunting, which was always followed by a gigantic feast of food and drink.*[56]

Quite soon George marries Mrs. Whately, a woman who has the intelligence to understand what she can and cannot do if she wishes to remain the mistress of Four Winds. Thus 'Leopard' George becomes 'a guilty party in the life-death cycle despite all his efforts to remain uninvolved.'[57]

'Winter in July' explores the triangular relationship between two half-brothers and a woman to whom both are, in effect, married. Tom, the titular husband, is slow, quiet, acceptant; Kenneth quick_ evasive, sceptical. Julia, held in 'Soft elastic tension' between them, offers them another, less manageable 'country' that they have made rich. Julia is never at ease in their country. The time comes when the elastic tension gives, and Kenneth

resolves to break away and take a wife, to bring a new English woman into this alien setting. The triangle, whose shape they have failed to grasp in emotional terms, is reduced to a bare geometrical figure beneath the 'arching, myriad-starred, chilly night' of African winter, no more comprehensible than the farm they have long called 'home.' It is a large, assertive barn of a place, with its area of shiny tin roof, the hard pink of the walls, the glinting angled shapes of the windows ... naked, raw, crude. Recognizing a crisis but unable to resolve it, Julia turns to 'her' country. Yet the land, though she has loved it, can offer no stay in her uncertain middle age for her unsatisfied spirit. The possibility is perhaps an illusion, open to the young.

> *She was suffering from an unfamiliar dryness of the senses, an unlocated, unfocused ache that, if she were young, would have formed itself about a person or place, 'but now remained locked within her. 'What am I?' she kept saying to herself as she walked through the veld, in the moving path of shade that fell from the large drooping hat. On either side the long grass moved and whispered sibilantly; the doves throbbed gently from the trees; the sky was a flower-blue arch over her - it was they say, a lovely morning. ...*[58]
>
> *... She walked slowly, trying to recover that soft wonder she had felt when she first arrived on the farm and learned how*

> *living in cities had cheated her of knowledge of the shapes of sky and land. ... The sky, the land, the swirling air, closed around her in an exchange of water and heat, and the deep multitudinous murmuring of living substance sounded like a humming in her blood. She listened, half-passively, half-rebelliously, and asked: 'What do I contribute to all this?'*
>
> *That afternoon she walked again, for hours; and throughout the following day; returning to the house punctually for meals, and greeting Tom across the distance that puts itself between people who try to support themselves with the mental knowledge of a country, and those who work in it.*[59]

The irony is not only the author's; it underlines the mood and the perception of African also. Julia knows that they are living mechanical, ingrown lives, rich and comfortable, but with no meaning outside themselves. There is no resolution, only disenchanted recognition of an unbreakable pattern. Kenneth's young wife from England will have to learn, in her turn, to live exiled from more than she will ever find words to express. In 'Winter in July' Africa is, as in all Lessing's African stories, not primarily an arena of racial conflict, but an adaptable setting which she exploits to underline from many sides that alienation — the dryness that cancels the green promise — which all experience but few can

voice. 'Julia said slowly and painfully: "I think it is terrible we shouldn't be able to explain what we feel or what we are".'

Julia is grappling with an unwelcome change in her domestic life. She stands in her garden looking back at the house in which she has lived with her husband and his brother for ten years, and notices that the 'large assertive barn of a place' looks 'naked, raw, crude.' It is a perception that leads her to acknowledge that 'There had always been times when Africa rejected her, when she felt like a critical ghost.'[60] The extreme consequences of an inability to relate are given in The Grass is Singing, where resistence culminates in Mary Turner's madness and her conception of her death as the bush avenging itself. The land and its creatures, to which the settlers dare not relate is not shown by Lessing to be potentially benign, any more than the settler's perception of its destructive powers, is presented as a full reality. When Kenneth leaves for town by his car to meet his fiancee; Tom and Julia are very restless. Lessing describes the landscape which expresses feelings of Tom and Julia:

> *The landscape was dulling for the dry season into olive green and thin yellows; there was that extraordinary contrast of limpid sparkling skies, with sunshine pouring down like a volatile spirit, and dry cold*

> *parching the face and hands that made Julia uneasy in winter. It was as if the dryness tightened the cold into rigid fetters on her, so that perpetual inner shivering had to be suppressed.*[61]

More impersonally narrated, 'Winter in July' is finely drawn, tense studies of the emotional deprivation borne by the innumerable lonely women sacrificed by their diseased menfolk to the all absorbing land. This is also, of course, a main theme of **The Grass is Singing**, but in 'Winter in July' Lessing takes her readers into the complex emotional world of three intimately bound people capable of a more subtle, searching response to their existence than the Turners.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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