

# *Doris Lessing's Colonial Ambiguities:*

*A Study of Colonial Tropes in Her Works*

## 多丽斯·莱辛的殖民模糊性

对莱辛作品中的殖民比喻的研究

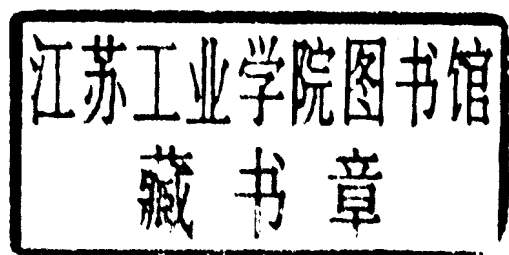
陈璟霞 著

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## 内容简介

多丽斯·莱辛是一位一直活跃于英国文坛的著名女性作家。她生于1919年,在英国的前殖民地南罗得西亚生活了近三十年,于1949年回英国定居,1950年以《草儿在歌唱》(*The Grass Is Singing*,国内另有《野草在歌唱》、《青草在歌唱》等译法,均指此书。——编者注)在英国文坛崭露头角,被喻为一位“反种族歧视”的作家。莱辛经历了两次世界大战,她称自己这一代人为“暴力的儿女”。她的生活经历和创作生涯与大英帝国和英国的殖民统治密切相关。多年来,评论界认为她在作品中深刻地剖析了种族主义和殖民主义的罪恶,是一位坚定的反种族主义和反殖民主义的斗士。

本书试图从殖民主义和后殖民主义的视角来重新解读莱辛,在肯定其对批判殖民主义罪恶所作出的贡献的前提下,揭示莱辛在写作中如何无意识地运用殖民比喻来勾画非洲的政治、地理和想象的空间;如何来刻画非洲人民和他们的殖民遭遇;如何在作品中实现地理和文化意义上的从边缘向中心的位移;如何在其科幻作品中重建一个永远辉煌的帝国。这些殖民比喻与性别、阶级和种族相互作用,在她的作品中起到了巩固帝国统治和加强殖民意识的作用。在莱辛以非洲为背景的作品、以伦敦为背景的作品以及科幻作品中,殖民意象比比皆是。本书分析的这三类作品代表了莱辛的三个创作阶段。第一阶段的创作以非洲为背景,莱辛以现实主义的手法描写了在殖民地生活的白人移民的际遇。第二阶段的作品以战后的伦敦为背景,描摹了一幅战后英国的社会图景,表现出莱辛的神秘主义倾向和对重建英国国民性所作出的努力。20世纪70年代末,莱辛开始了科幻作品的创作,在其科幻系列中建立了一个星际帝国。与现有的只关注莱辛非洲作

品的评论不同,本书对其三个阶段的主要作品进行了系统的殖民比喻研究,以殖民比喻的类别为依据将全书划分为五个章节;通过对莱辛的非洲作品、伦敦作品和科幻作品中的神秘比喻、性别比喻、域限比喻、身份建构比喻和拯救比喻的分析,揭示了莱辛在对殖民主义进行批判的同时又有所保留。这种批判的不彻底性暴露了她对殖民统治的矛盾心态,以及在作品中与殖民主义形成的一种无意识的共谋关系。

本书在对莱辛的主要作品进行深入的分析、研究后,指出莱辛在作品中反复运用殖民比喻是因为她无法摆脱殖民者的视角,无法跳出宗主国的中心来进行创作。她的文学想象被打上了殖民意识的烙印。

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## Introduction

Doris Lessing (1919 – ), with her two quintets: *Children of Violence* (1952 – 1969), and *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979 – 1982), and a single massive novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962), for which she was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996, plays and other fictional and non-fictional works, has been regarded as one of the most important postwar writers in English and an insightful prophet of her times. She has also enjoyed an international celebrity. *In Pursuit of Doris Lessing: Nine Nations Reading*<sup>①</sup> charts her critical reception in the Africa and United States, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, etc. Writing about most of the social concerns of the day, she presents to the reader a multifarious fictional world with impressive range and depth; expressing a shared experience of her contemporaries, her works have caused immense resonance.

Since the publication of her first novel *The Grass Is Singing* in 1950, Lessing has maintained a great momentum in her literary career. With the emergence of every new piece, she shocks the critical world and prompts the critics to revise their previous assertions of her work. In her experiment with different genres, and exploration of multifarious themes, Lessing keeps rebelling against various labels attached to her by scholars and critics; Marxist writer, feminist, Jungian believer, fabulist, Sufi disciple ... None of the labels can epitomize her fascinating literary endeavor. Lessing herself makes it

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① As a very insightful collection of essays, the book provides rich sources of articles and important comments on Lessing's reception in different countries.

explicit in an interview that it is unreasonable to judge a writer with the standard and opinion he or she had years ago (Ingersoll 72). Thus, it is understandable that readers must evolve with the author and be prepared to encounter multifarious facets of the author. The rich, multifaceted nature of Lessing's work also encourages various interpretations.

The success of *The Grass Is Singing*, which explores many of the themes that later frequent her works, drew Lessing a great critical attention as a promising "color bar"<sup>①</sup> writer. The subsequent publication of her African stories and the *Children of Violence* series established her as an important literary figure in the postwar era. This massive literary entity, including *The Grass Is Singing*, the first three books of the *Children of Violence* series (*Martha Quest* [1952], *A Proper Marriage* [1954], *A Ripple from the Storm* [1958]) and collections of African stories, all having an African background, associates Lessing with realistic and cross color bar writing,<sup>②</sup> which is also certified by her reverence for realism asserted in "A Small Personal Voice":

For me the highest point of literature was the novel of the nineteenth century, the work of Tolstoy, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Turgenev, Chekhov; the work of the great realists . . . I hold the view that the realist novel, the realist story, is the highest form of prose writing; higher than and out of the reach of any comparison with expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, naturalism, or any other ism. (Schlueter 4)

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① "Colour bar" is also known as apartheid.

② Michael Thorpe regards the period, 1950 - 1958, as Lessing's "African" period, "when her work drew most intensively upon her African experience and involvement" (20).



Thus the earlier reception of Lessing's fiction tended to stress her work as a critique of social ills, mainly apartheid and racial discrimination in Africa.

The publication of her most celebrated novel *The Golden Notebook* in 1962 associates Lessing with the feminist movement. And her own Jungian psychotherapy experience diverts the critical attention to the psychoanalytic perspective of her work. What's more, the in-depth exploration of fragmentation and madness enables the critics to link her with R. D. Laing, whose existential psychology became very popular in the 1960s. The novel also marked her mystic turn. Thus, *The Golden Notebook* is a watershed, followed with more books focusing on the mystic experience and evolution of human beings under the influence of Sufism. Novels such as *The Four-Gated City* (1969), *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971), and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) are categorized as inner space fiction by Roberta Rubenstein, for these works explore the deep recesses of the characters, bearing the influence of both psychoanalysis and Eastern mysticism. Lessing's literary works produced in the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s have England as their social milieu. The writing of this period is metropolitan writing,<sup>①</sup> termed Londonscape stories in the present dissertation.

From the late 1970s, Lessing started writing her *Canopus in Argos: Archives* series, in which she constructed an impressive galactic empire in the outer space. She becomes more cosmic conscious

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① Metropolitan writing is in opposition to colonial writing. It is about metropolis. The publication of *Orientalism* (1978), however, "has transformed the way in which metropolitan writing is read too—even that metropolitan writing (canonical or non-canonical) that has no ostensible reference to empire, race, nation, colonialism, and anti-colonialism" (Lazarus 2004: 15). Therefore, metropolitan writing is also examined in its potential relation to empire, race, nation, colonialism, and anti-colonialism.

and her concern with man acquires a larger dimension, with speculation on the relationship between man and cosmos. Therefore, Lessing's writing has a remarkable "locale" characteristic: Africa, London, and fictional outer space.

Lessing's constant experiment with different themes, genres, and techniques, and the shift from "realistic writing to fantasy writing or visionary writing" (Kaplan and Rose 1988:1), to a certain degree, inspire "a body of comment and analysis that is broad in scope, multifaceted in approach, cooperative in nature, and continually evolving" (Ibid. 1988:10). After her relatively undeserved negligence in the 1960s, we have seen a proliferation of criticism on Doris Lessing since the 1970s, with the successive PLMA special sessions on her, the establishment of Doris Lessing Society, and the publication of *Doris Lessing Newsletters*, which started in 1976. *Contemporary Literature* (Autumn 1973), and *Modern Fiction Studies* (Spring 1980) published special issues devoted entirely to Lessing criticism. A veritable legion of scholars and common readers have produced numerous monographs, dissertations, and articles on her work.

Mona Knapp's *Doris Lessing* (1984) is "an intelligent and comprehensive general introduction to Lessing's fiction through Volume V of *Canopus in Argos* . . . It is particularly helpful in showing thematic and structural relationship among Lessing's many works," including her plays, poetry and nonfiction (Fishburn 1987: 26). Other general studies on Lessing include Lorna Sage's *Doris Lessing* (1983), Jeannette Kings's *Doris Lessing* (1989), Jean Pickering's *Understanding Doris Lessing* (1990), and Margaret Moan Rowe's *Doris Lessing* (Women Writers, 1994).

The 1990s relished a large production of book-length criticism on Doris Lessing. Anita Myles's *Doris Lessing: A Novelist with Organic Sensibility* (1991) praises Lessing for "[leaving] behind the

established ways and means of dealing with subjects of this kind and [having] changed the ‘incipient clichés of the mid-century experience’ by evolving a form that would express the major themes” (vi). It offers a detailed discussion on “the thematic evolution of the novelist from microcosmic understanding to a sense of macrocosmic awareness,” focusing on the four themes—“apartheid, love, view of life and the vision of history”—which “constitute the fabric of her fictive universe” (vi – vii).

Among the numerous criticisms arranging widely in the theoretical milieu, approaches such as feminist theory, Marxist perspective, psychoanalysis (Jungian and Freud theory, and the existential theory of R. D. Laing), mystic perspective,<sup>①</sup> colonial/postcolonial perspective, and critical focus on aesthetics and narrative techniques stand out as very productive, although Lessing herself, not pleased with these compartmental academic readings, observes, “The critics slap labels on you and then expect you to talk inside their terms.”<sup>②</sup>

The first fruitful approach to interpreting Lessing’s work is feminism. Lessing is noted for her exploration of “philosophical questions through the medium of female experience” (Kaplan and Rose 1988: 3). Regarded as the equivalent of *The Second Sex* in English, *The Golden Notebook*,<sup>③</sup> is placed on the pedestal as a creed of “fe-

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① The two introductory articles “Lessing and Her Readers: Celebrating Differences” and “A Genealogy of Readings: The Seventies, and the Eighties,” collected in *Doris Lessing: The Alchemy of Survival* edited by Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose, give us a very brief and comprehensive critical review of Doris Lessing from the 1960s to 1980s.

② “Doris Lessing on Feminism, Communism and Space Fiction,” 25 Oct. 2005, <<http://mural.uv.es/vemivein/feminismcommunism.htm>>.

③ There is corpus of scholarly and critical material published on *The Golden Notebook*. *Approaches to Lessing’s The Golden Notebook* is “a rich mélange” of criticism on this masterpiece, “composed of political history, literary history, critical theory, personal experience, and practical exercise” (4).

male self-discovery and self scrutiny" (Showalter 298). Roberta Rubenstein, an authoritative Lessing scholar, regards this masterpiece as "one of the most profound explorations of a woman's complex consciousness that exists in fiction" (Sprague 1987: 83). A magisterial reading in the feminist context is Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), in which an assumption is generated within feminist criticism that women writers consciously position themselves in a unitary tradition of writing (Taylor 213). Judith Kegan Gardiner's *Rhys, Stead, Lessing, and the Politics of Empathy* (1989) analyses Lessing's empathetic engagement in her writing as a woman writer. Critical exploration of women's search for identity as a crucial theme in Lessing's work includes Catharine R. Stimpson's "Doris Lessing and the Parable of Growth," Patricia Meyer Spacks's "Free Women," and some insightful essays collected in *Doris Lessing: The Alchemy of Survival* (1988) and books such as Carol P. Christ's *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (1980), Roxanne J. Fand's *Reconstructing Subjectivity in Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood* (1999), and Inta Ezergailis's *The Divided Self: Analysis of Novels by Christa Wolf, Ingeborg Bachmann, Doris Lessing and Others* (1982). However, critical responses to Lessing in the feminist context are not monotonous. Ruth Whittaker's observation on the reception of *The Golden Notebook* serves as a proof:

The pendulum swings from the lack of feminist response to the novel on its publication in 1962 (since the climate for such a response did not then exist), to its adoption as a central text of the Women's Movement, and now to its rejection by feminists as an inadequate statement of their use. (9)

As to the change in the critical reception, Whittaker observes, "The truth is that [Lessing] has never been a feminist. She is a woman novelist whose antennae sensed the crucial issues of feminism and wrote about them long before they were common currency" (9).

Feminist approach discloses Lessing's ambiguous stance in feminist issues, however, it has some limitations: (1) this reading only focuses on Lessing's feminist texts, neglecting a large portion of her corpus such as space fiction. It tends to dismiss the richness in Lessing's writing. Responding to the dominant feminist reading of her novels, Lessing remarks, "The feminists claimed me for one of theirs, which made me very angry because I don't like this separation off into sheep and goats. And I've never written specially either for men or women" (Ingersoll 224). Therefore, in the 1971 Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing tried hard to divert readers' attention to one of the salient aspects of the novel: the form. (2) Feminist reading neglects the influence of Lessing's experience as an ex-colonial, failing to expose Lessing's Eurocentric stance in her description of female's quest for identity.

The second operative theoretical paradigm to understand Doris Lessing's works is Marxist criticism. Most critical production at the time lays stress on the relationship between the individual and the collective, regarded as a recurrent theme by Lessing herself, "this is a study of the individual conscience in its relation with the collective" (Schlueter 12). Lessing insists on her commitment to literature for the enhancement of the social consciousness of the masses and the betterment of society. Some critics criticize her novels as explicitly socialist, replete with didactic messages. James Gordin points out in *Postwar British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes* (1962), "Lessing's kind of intensity is simultaneously her greatest distinction and her principal defect" (86). Essays collected in *Doris Lessing: The*

*Alchemy of Survival* unravel the differences between critics with a Marxist approach to Lessing. Frederick C. Stern argues that "the subject matter of her novels is, in large part, the politics of the periods through which her characters live" (Kaplan and Rose 1988: 43); Molly Hite remarks that Lessing "uses an essentially Marxist theoretical framework unself-consciously" (Ibid. 14). Michele Zak argues, in "*The Grass Is Singing*: A Little Novel about the Emotions," that "the emotions portrayed in this work are not purely personal emotions rooted in psychological conflict but the products of society" (Cederstrom 18) and that Lessing "portray[s] the dialectical relationship that Marxism insists always exists between the individual circumstances of one's life and the material nature of the social and economic system with which one lives" (Pratt 64). Jean Pickering's "Marxism and Madness: The Two Faces of Doris Lessing's Myth" is an argumentation of "salvation through Marxism and salvation through madness," "which are two manifestations of the underlying image that structures [Lessing's] entire world view" (18).

However, if this criticism has some validity in analyzing Lessing's early strongly socially-oriented works, it proves invalid when applied to the inner space novels, which dive deep into the psychic recesses of the characters. It fails to perceive the subtle psychological complexities that permeate Lessing's later works such as *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, *The Summer Before the Dark*, *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, in which dreams become more salient as a vehicle of disclosing the meaning of the protagonists' waking life and the ways to self-healing.

The third is Jungian/psychoanalysis perspective—Freudian and Jungian approaches and existential theory of R. D. Laing. Jung's influence on Lessing has been convincingly assumed by some American critics (Sprague 1987: 3). Such a critical approach echoes Lessing's

assertion in the Epigraph to *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* that “there is never anywhere to go but in” (i).

Rubenstein’s study in *The Novelistic Vision of Doris Lessing: Breaking the Forms of Consciousness* (1979) shows that “the centre of Lessing’s fictional universe is the perceiving mind as it translates the phenomenal world through its own experience” (3). Critics note Lessing’s internalization of Jung’s concept of “individuation,” “the process by which an individual works towards ‘wholeness’ through acknowledgement and incorporation of the different aspects of personality” (Whittaker 10). Lorelei Cederstrom’s book *Fine-Tuning the Feminine Psyche: Jungian Patterns in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (1990) discusses Jungian archetypal patterns and symbols in Lessing’s works and analyzes “the significance of the individual in effecting social change, which is decidedly Jungian view” in Lessing’s work (5). In her essay “The Principal Archetypal Elements of *The Golden Notebook*,” Cederstrom reads the novel as “the depiction of an archetypal rite of passage” (50). Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis’s nine-essay collection *Spiritual Exploration in the Works of Doris Lessing* (1999) is an enlightening entity of the exploration of Lessing’s spirituality. Carol Christ adapts “the mythic paradigms of Jung, Campbell, and Frye” to “elucidate the particular dimensions of women’s spiritual quest.” Sydney Janet Kaplan identifies “an archetypal quest motif” in Lessing’s work (Kaplan and Rose 1988: 22).

Lessing’s writings are also influenced by Laing theory popular in the 1960s.<sup>①</sup> Jean Pickering acknowledges philosophical contexts for

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① Rubenstein suggests strong parallels between a case described in Laing’s *The Politics of Experience* and Lessing’s *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. The protagonists in the two books share the same name, and they undertake the same kind of psychic journey to a healing effect. On other occasions, Lessing admitted that she and an American writer, who is the prototype of Saul in *The Golden Notebook*, had close relations with Laing.

*The Golden Notebook*, namely “socialist realism, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and antipsychiatry” in her article (1989: 43). Marjorie Lightfoot argues that Lessing has fictionalized the main concepts of Laing's antipsychiatry in *The Golden Notebook* (60). Marion Vlastos concludes in “Doris Lessing and R. D. Laing: Psychopolitics and Prophecy” that “revolutionizing the consciousness of man” is a way to attack a social problem for Lessing (245).

As to the mystic perspective, the critical interest in Sufism in Lessing's work was partially aroused by the popularity of Sufism in the 1960s, which was the spiritual refill in the spiritually vacuum of the postwar years, and partially invoked by Lessing's persistent and enthusiastic announcement of mystical proclivities. Two important books are worthy of mentioning. Shadia S. Fahim's *Doris Lessing: Sufi Equilibrium and the Form of the Novel* (1994), an examination of the rationale of Lessing's development from the tradition of classical realism to mysticism and form of science fiction, which verges on myth and Oriental fables, discusses the unifying motifs which provide a coherent shape to her artistic vision in her consistent search for equilibrium. Muge Galin's book *Between East and West: Sufism in the Novels of Doris Lessing* (1997) is a study on how Lessing's “exposure to a particular aspect of the classical Sufi Way has shaped her work,” “pull[ing] together the fiction of Doris Lessing and the tradition of Sufism and mak[ing] these topics more mutually illuminating” (xvii). In “The More Recent Writings: Sufism, Mysticism and Politics,” Ann Scott regards Lessing's “use of religious symbolism” as “an attempt at transcending ordinary limitation in language by drawing on a variety of conceptual and written traditions and integrating facets of them in her fiction” (187). Ingrid Holmquist's published dissertation *From Society to Nature: A Study of Doris Lessing's Children of Violence* argues how social or sociological con-



sciousness is shifted to another form of consciousness termed nature versus culture by exploring “the female perspective which informs the two modes of consciousness” (1).

Besides the four theoretical approaches, critical attention to the techniques and aesthetics of Lessing's work proves to be fructifying. The 1971 Preface to *The Golden Notebook* facilitates the new and fruitful examination directed at “the meaning of the novel's shape.” Exploration of the dynamic relations between form and theme in Lessing's fiction becomes a new focus in criticism. Lessing's experiment with the form of novel is the direct result of her feel of “the poverty of language as an instrument” to explain things people experienced (Ingersoll 66). She admits that *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is a direct product of her “meditating about the inadequacy of language” (Ibid. 67). *The Golden Notebook*, generally thought to represent Lessing's furthest aesthetic reach, is critically acclaimed as the perfect combination of form and theme. Katherine Fishburn observes that “as these divisions suggest, [*The Golden Notebook*] itself is about wholeness and fragmentation, the need to avoid labels” (17). Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984) diverts critical attention to the metafictional clues scattered through Lessing's work and analyzes the self-reflexivity of her novel. In “Nostalgia and Irony: The Postmodern Order of *The Golden Notebook*,” Betsy Draine argues that “the form of [*The Golden Notebook*] responds to and expresses the dynamic interplay of order and chaos” (31). Gayle Greene draws parallels between Martha's quest for “something new” and Lessing's probing of new narrative form in *Landlocked*, a departure from the realistic mode characteristic of the first three novels in the *Children of Violence* series, concluding that the twofold quest, spiritual and formal, leads to Lessing's insight into Sufism. Claire Sprague's *Rereading*