

## **Alienation and Feminism in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*: A Comparative Study**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to focus on the investigation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* in the perspective of alienation and feminism. It aims at examining mainly Shakespeare's and Lessing's treatment of women in the light of the social system of 16<sup>th</sup>-century England and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Africa, respectively. It proposes to incorporate a wide variety of related, but diverse and even contradictory elements, centering on the subject of gender, social, political, economic, and cultural issues, fragmentation of society, love and marriage, psychological conflict, divorce, and sexuality. Both Shakespeare's and Lessing's texts are analyzed within the parameters of these issues. It throws a new light on the critical comments made by critics, scholars, and reviewers with a view to analyzing the complex ramifications of the theory of alienation and feminism. It also attempts to examine outlooks, autobiographical elements, writing forms, similarities and differences in various phases of the two writers. In this way, it aims to prove a concluding remark that a symbiotic relationship of the theorists and the authors is not only self-perpetuating, but also important for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century English literature.

**Keywords:** Alienation; Feminism; Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*



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### **1. Introduction**

Writers of two different centuries, 16<sup>th</sup>-century England and 20<sup>th</sup>-century England and Africa, with a huge gap of four hundred years, both writing in English, [Shakespeare \(1996\)](#) as well as [Lessing \(1950\)](#) are the most leading authors around the world; one is a playwright and another is a novelist and story writer, respectively. Shakespeare's drama is the mirror of human life. He is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet who holds up to his readers as a faithful index of manners and of life. His creation of women characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpracticed by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers, or the accidents of transient fashion or temporary opinions; and his women are the genius progeny of common humanity. (Lall 18)

Shakespeare's representation of women, and the ways in which his female roles are interpreted have become the topics of scholarly interests. His women encompass a wide range of characterizations and types. Within the gallery of feminist interpretation, Shakespeare's women characters display great intelligence, vitality, and a strong sense of personal independence. These qualities have led some critics to consider Shakespeare as a champion of womankind and an innovator who departed sharply from flat, stereotyped characterizations of women common to his contemporaries and earlier dramatists. Contrastingly, other commentators note that even his women possess characters that are tempered by negative qualities. They suggest that Shakespeare was not free from woman-hatred attitudes in the culture of his country and age. Shakespeare lived during the Elizabethan period and wrote all his works based on societal system. The Elizabethan Period was a time when women were portrayed to be more inferior to men. During that time, it was said that "women are to be seen, and not heard" ([Hossain, 2014](#)).

On the other hand, Doris Lessing is a major force of post war English fiction, holding a unique position as an iconoclastic, an outspoken critic of society and politics with a sage like a magisterial status for the sheer number, variety and scope of her work. In terms of literary justice, Lessing, a British Nobel laureate novelist, poet, playwright, and story writer, focuses on the feminist themes and social alienation of the age. She is rightly regarded as a fearless female writer in the world unabashed ex-communist and uncompromising feminist. She distinguishes herself as one of the most well-reputed writers of any era as an influential force in the development of postmodern literature. She gains a reputation as the topmost writer of serious potential with an interest in social and feminist style.

However, both Shakespeare and Lessing shed a new light on many aspects faced by women of the age: the conflict between marriage, love, and alienation of a single career woman. Their works are of confrontation of women towards an unfairness of the traditional authority. They focus feminist concerns on men-women interaction which represent an alienated trauma in attitudes and values among characters. Their works reflect women's perfect social circumstances as well as personal contradictory alienations as they become career-oriented and assume the roles assigned to men. They also emphasize the importance of power, freedom, and assertion of women's right to combine their identities.

Both Shakespeare and Lessing represent women in various social problems and with various perspectives of male against female. They reflect social forces which shape women's activities and aspirations where they are the symbol of power, identity, and freedom. They allow their readers to behold the arguments concerning woman's

perspective, both their own and those of characters, some of whom mature from the romantic dependence on man as an imagined vehicle of fulfillment to achieve both a sense of self and freedom from the male ego's limited perception. Their female characters are pre-eminent in merit, intelligence, firmness, and integrity. They have given women vigorous and strong voice through creating powerful women, like Lady Macbeth of *Macbeth* (1606) and Mary Turner of *The Grass Is Singing* (1950). Both Shakespeare and Lessing aim to look at alienating attitudes, inner conflicts, and psychological dilemma of the age through their treatment of women. However, this study examines the theme of Alienation and Feminism through Shakespeare's and Lessing's art of characterization, plot-construction, sequence, setting and situations.

## 2. Alienation

Alienation is a mental or emotional detachment; the critical detachment with which, Bertolt Brecht, audience and actors should regard a play, considering action and dialogue and the ideas in the drama without emotional involvement (Anderson, 2005).

A dictionary of literary terms defines as: "Alienation is the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind".

Encyclopedia Britannica defines alienation as "the state of feeling estranged or separated from ones milieu, work, and products of work or self" (Karen, 1988).

To elaborate the term, 'alienation', this study attempts to highlight the critical views of some critics as follows:

The term 'alienation' causes considerable difficulty, partly because it "is used to refer both to a personal psychological state and to a type of social relationship" (Roberts, 1987). Melvin Seeman was a part of the surge in alienation research prominent in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> -century when he published a paper on "On the Meaning of Alienation, in the American Sociological Review", followed by "Alienation, Membership, and Political Knowledge: A Comparative Study," Seeman (1959) writes:

At the present time, in all the social sciences, the various synonyms of alienation have the foremost place in studies of human relations. Investigations of the 'unattached', the 'marginal', the 'obsessive', the 'normless', and the 'isolated' individual all testify to the central place occupied by the hypothesis of alienation in contemporary social science. (783)

Finkelstein (1965) defines alienation as "a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself which is linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defense but an impoverishment of oneself. (Finkelstein) According to Robert T. Tally, "The term alienation has its simple meaning—a condition of being estranged from someone or something, but it also has technical meanings. Thomas Jefferson's famous rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are so tied to the essence of mankind to be 'inalienable' right in social psychology, alienation refers to a person's psychological withdrawal from society. In this sense, the alienated individual is isolated from other people; taken to an extreme, such psychological isolation expresses itself in neurosis. In critical social theory, alienation has an additional sense of separating an individual from his or herself, a fragmentation of one's self through work. (202)

## 3. Feminism

What is feminism? Who is a feminist? How do we understand feminism across national boundaries, across cultures, across centuries? These questions and their corollaries are raised every day in home and abroad, by the activists of the contemporary women's movement, by scholars, in the press, and in informal conversation. Everyone seems to have different answers, and every answer is infused with a political and emotional charge. To many people, inside and outside of the academy, the word 'feminism' continues to inspire controversy and to arouse a visceral response—indeed, even to evoke fear among a sizable portion of the general public. If words and the concepts they convey can be said to be dangerous, then 'feminism' and 'feminist' must be dangerous words, representing dangerous concepts.

As scholars in women's studies who demand the label of feminism, we owe it to the public and to one another to respond to these questions and to address the fear that induces would-be supporters to disclaim the label of feminism when they support what we would consider feminist goals. We need to understand of the term 'feminism' so that we can come to a realization. it should reflect the acquired knowledge we have acquired about the historical development of the critique and of program for the socio-political change in women's issues in a variety of cultures. In other words, it must be not only historically sound, but comparatively grounded in order to be illuminated. Feminism is a "critical project," which seeks to "identify those elements that might be oppressive and suggests alternatives". The critical component analyzes the values and presuppositions of social roles, customs, laws, and linguistic theory as well as advocate concrete changes in practice. The feminist component carries out this critical task in these areas insofar as they negatively affect the lives of women.

In this regards, I would like to mention some prominent feminist critics and scholars who have contributed to feminist issues in different ways.

An important precursor in feminist criticism was Virginia Woolf, who wrote *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and her famous essays on women authors and on cultural, economic, and educational disabilities within what Woolf called a "patriarchal" society that have hindered or prevented women from realizing their creative possibilities. (Abrams, 1999).

Moreover, Toril Moi comments: “We define feminism as a political position and femaleness as a matter of biology, we are still confronted with the problem of how to define femininity” (Kemp and Judith, 1997).

‘Femininity’ is a cultural construct: “One isn’t born a woman, one becomes one”, as Beauvoir writes this sentence in her controversial feminist document, *The Second Sex*, patriarchal domination focuses on imposing social standards of femininity on biological women to make us believe that the standards for ‘femininity’ are natural. (247)

Bold, illuminating, and indispensable, Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* (1962) is also a powerful document of a woman searching for her personal and political identity, negotiating the trauma of emotional rejection and sexual betrayal, professional anxieties, and the tension of friendship and family.

According to Tandon (2008), feminism is “a theory of the political, economic and social equalities of the sexes” (26). From this definition, it is clear that feminists called for women’s equality from different angles: their economic situation, the right to hold a position in the political scene and the equality in the social treatment between males and females. In addition, literary criticism inspects the ways literature reinforces, or undermines economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. One of the scholars who were interested in studying the feminist approach in literature is Bowlby. She views that immasculation is “the process whereby traditionally women have been brought to read culture like men, accepting male attitudes and understanding their own” (29). From this definition, it is understood that women call for changing the male perspective of their lives since men have been brought up with this negative perspective toward women in patriarchal society. In her examination of the literary texts, she asks the reader to resist the common perspective toward women even in the way women are represented in a literary work. She asks them to avoid the male view which also exists in literary works where women are portrayed as the catalyst behind the brutal treatment inflicted on them. Since women are living in a patriarchal society which believes in male power and domination in all aspects of life, feminists start to work in order to eliminate all aspects of discrimination between man and woman. Even in 21<sup>st</sup>-century, feminists call for women’s liberation, freedom of getting abortion, freedom of choice, equal jobs and payments, empowerment to bring an end to the oppression they suffer from.

Clearly, we can understand that feminists play an important role in changing the patriarchal society’s beliefs toward women’s rights which include social, economic, and political justice regarding the biological and personal differences between male and female. This is best clarified in Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2006), “It is the philosophy of equality between women and men that involves both attitudes and actions. Feminists call for equality by appreciating the existence of individual differences and personal accomplishments regardless of gender” (448).

#### 4. Women in Shakespeare’s Times

Although there were no immediate evident to modern critics and scholars, Shakespeare was in many ways a 16<sup>th</sup>-century feminist playwright. He concealed pro-woman philosophies, especially in his comedies, writing in a period when speech was heavily censored. His plays met the standards of the Master of the Revels through the blasphemous language. Elizabethan society did not give value women’s liberty. Shakespeare is not regarded as a feminist playwright by modern critics and scholars. There were two social positions for Elizabethan women, like marriage and entering a convent. The middle and upper class women stressed the teaching of household chores; and female values of chastity, obedience, and silence (Levine, 1998).

Shakespeare was a humanist dramatist who explored the best and worst qualities of both male and female. His women act like real women, whether they display bravery and wit, repulsive ambition, selfish impulsiveness or pitiable naivety. He wanted us to judge them on their actions, not their gender. In this regard, Virginia Woolf’s comment on women’s social position of Shakespeare’s England may be mentioned:

If a woman in Shakespeare’s day had had Shakespeare’s genius.... any woman born with a great gift in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard feared and mocked at. [...] Had she survived whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination (Gariti, 2011).

Woolf was not to the point when she assumes that there were no British women playwrights or authors in Shakespeare’s age. His age was one of great transition, especially for women. A female monarch as well as rapid expanding globalization was increasing women’s horizons and placing more value on their decisions. In 21<sup>st</sup>-century literary canon, Elizabethan society’s treatment of women was barbaric but, at the time, the advances occurring were monumental. In 16<sup>th</sup>-century England, a law was passed that allowed men and women to marry without their parent’s consent. Such marriages were ill-advised as the key to the success of a newly formed family was their parents’ financial backing. A negligible number of women were wealthy. Inheritance laws dictated that property be passed to the eldest son. No matter how many daughters a family had, it was the son the inherited, regardless of age; a family could have a 25 year old daughter and an infant son, but it would be the son who inherited the family property. However, in case of the total absence of male heirs, it would be the eldest daughter who would inherit though she could never inherit a title. Daughters were eligible to inherit around 20%-25% of the property. Despite, in late 16<sup>th</sup>-century, only about 5% of daughters of the elite were inheriting. While women could inherit in some cases, their inheriting was frowned upon and avoided at all costs. For a clear indication of the lengths, people went to find male heirs, look no further than King Henry VIII who rejected marriage and ended a second with a short sharp shock before finding a wife who could bear him a son and killed her (Bateman). On the whole, women’s only means had been through men who provided for them. In childhood and adolescence, a woman was to rely on her father, who protected and financially backed her. When she grew to adulthood, her responsibility would be attributed on her husband, who took on a similar role financially. A woman who did not get married into destitution and was like a witch. The only viable way for her who did not want to get married was to enter the sisterhood of the

nuns. Her maidenhood on her wedding night which was considered important. A father's duty towards his daughter was to marry her off and to protect her honor. If her honor was scandalized before her wedding, her father was the one held responsible and the crime was associated with incest (Grendler).

Women were not allowed an education. Only boys were admitted into grammar school; some girls were allowed to enter school as early as the mid-1500s, but those girls were not allowed to proceed to university, nor work in professional fields. Rather than history, grammar, and logic, most Elizabethan women were given instructions in piety, chastity, and home economics. A school teacher, Richard Mulcaster uttered the prevailing opinion when he said that a woman should learn "to govern and direct her household, to look to her house and family ... to know the force of her kitchen...." Another cook book warned "Let no body loathe the name of the kitchen" (Bantam). Her primary occupation was keeping house and looking and sounding pleasant. Women were the greatest admirers of books and reading for pleasure. In Shakespeare's times, 80% of books were purchased for and read by women. Women were bleak. Their lives were dull and hard, with successive childbirth making them old before their time and leading to premature death. It is for this reason that Shakespeare's portrayal of women as brilliant, rebellious, three-dimensional characters is so extraordinary and highly valued even today around the globe. Marriage was the prime concern for Elizabethan women. A wife's task was to maintain the household affairs. The tasks of a farmer's wife were to go to the market to sell butter, cheese, milk, eggs, and chickens. To buy necessary things belonging to a household. (Bateman) The shopkeeper's wife would help in shop through keeping account books; and poor women's job was spinning and weaving. Moreover, upper-class women with a houseful of servants would tend to domestic matters, and they had much more free time. The most popular activities of such women were writing letters, singing, dancing, strolling in the garden, playing with dainty little pet dogs, and poring over needlework. Although women subsisted on the pious diet of religious sermons and the Bible, Upper-class woman spent an entire evening in her husband's chamber reading Turkish history and the poetry of Chaucer (Levine, 1998).

However, Shakespeare chose to write plays about two forms of revolutionary women, supporting feminism at a time when it was not widely accepted. He disguised feminist ideas in his plays, not only for entertainment's sake, but because of everything he wrote was censored by the government. Women were not supposed to step out of line in 16<sup>th</sup>-century English social system, because it was thought to threaten the stability of the state. (Levine, 1998), By writing his literary works, Shakespeare took the risk of expressing feminist issues during 16<sup>th</sup>-century England.

## 5. Women in Lessing's Times

If African women of 20<sup>th</sup>-century should stop and think when the "rain started beating us" quoting Chinua Achebe's well-known proverb, it will be when the men galloped away, enveloped as they were in the colonialists' new culture of religion, education, and money driven economy. Women were left behind to mind homes, children and farms. Their dependence on men deepened as their consumerist status heightened. Men had money and power. We blame colonialism as a whip-horse, but it is colonialism that offered the beacon of light of women's western education and exposure which propels us to the outer globe and recognition of the commonality of women's subjugation world-wide. Women in Africa have joined in other nations in quest of right, opportunity, relevance and recognition (Chidam'odzi, 1994),

In African societies, women were seen as subordinate to men. Their role was to run domestic work, including child rearing, seeing to the well-being, feeding and taking care of the family. They were not expected to concern themselves with matters outside home. Economic activity beyond home was acceptable, but were not considered 'feminine.' With the increase of industrial economy, the growth of towns and the development of the migrant labor system, the role of women came to be overthrown (Nnolim, 2000),

Black women in the traditional African societies; and similarly, white women in settler society, were subordinate to men. Women's position was inferior. Male took major decisions both in society and family. Motherhood was their prime role. They had to raise children, to care for home and to see to the family's necessity. Women were expected to undertake agricultural tasks to help to feed family members. Others took in laundry to provide extra income while some entered the labor market as domestic servants. In settler society, it was not considered feminine to work beyond home although some did so to supplement family income and help to put food on the table (Aidoo and Modupe, 2002), Many African women began to consider the alternative of moving into locations near to towns, which provided the opportunity to take in laundry, or opt for employment as domestic servants. In towns women grew more independent and assertive; they became more politically aware and less compliant with harsh through discriminatory restrictions placed on them (Hooks, 1984),

African society remains a pluralist one with huge cultural diversities, and there are many challenges ahead. Moreover, in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Africa, women are faced with a wide range of issues, such as high crime rate, domestic violence, child abuse, HIV/AIDS, poverty, poor local government delivery and unemployment. Motherhood is still central to most women's lives across the board and their role in family life is still the basis of a morally sound, orderly society. Women have shaken off the shackles of the past and in their determined struggle against political oppression and gender inequality in Africa. In January 2006 Africa's first female elected Head of State, Ellen Johnson-Surleaf of Liberia, was about to take office in Monrovia. In the 50 year commemoration of the Women's March of 1956 by celebrating the role, women played in the making of modern Africa and look towards their future role with confidence (Andrade, 2002), From Lessing's times to the present, feminism is not found only among the city-dwellers and educated women, but among the rural and unlettered women. Male exaggeration makes no such distinction. Both categories of women are confined to the masculine yoke. The only difference is that the educated women are able to get themselves rid from the masculine yoke due to economic empowerment. Both man and woman have to come together in mutuality; and work out their differences (Hassim, 2005),

## 6. Alienation and Feminism in *Macbeth*

Conflict comes in many forms. Individuals may be poised against society, themselves, supernatural forces, or other individuals. Conflict itself can be subdivided into emotional states and temperaments. Jealousy may be expressed within the context of a conflict, as might greed or ambition. One particular feature of much conflict is alienation. An individual alienated from a particular desirable aspect of his or her life is placed in a position of need, and therefore, of conflict. An individual isolated from others may desire love or power. An individual isolated from his or her selfhood may desire self-awareness.

Alienation means separation between persons or group, or a feeling lonely. There are different reasons, which make a man feel lonely and alienated. An example of this may be when a man goes into his emotional despair and melancholy, because he feels isolated from society and family. He has material pleasures he wants, but one thing he wants the most, he may not have, which is happiness, which comes from satisfaction within oneself and being satisfied with what one has done in one's life. Evidence in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, demonstrates this quite clearly that Lady Macbeth's alienation originates her from guilt, high ambition, and greed.

Lady Macbeth has both shown guilt, but at different stages in the play. Alienating guilty feelings only begins to alienate her from the world around her. Macbeth is the first to feel guilt at the beginning of the play, but towards the end he has nothing but alienation. Lady Macbeth has both alienation and guilt. High ambitions pave the way to alienation. When she becomes high ambitious about anything, she begins to absorb into ambition until the rest of the world does not matter anymore. Macbeth also becomes as ambitious as Lady Macbeth at the beginning of the second act. Macbeth is not quite sure if the murder brings happiness for him, or hell on earth. Both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth give up the souls from freedom to alienation from murdering the King Duncan.

Greed is another factor for which alienation is happened. It comes from one's own power, demanding everything. Macbeth wants power and security more than anything costs everything. Macbeth says:

Grapple you to the heart and love of us, who wears his health but sickly in his life, which in his death were perfect. (Act III, i, 120-122)

Macbeth has become so greedy, he would murder the King Duncan, for self-interest. He believes that the murder of the King is not enough to make him happy as he said, "We have scorched the snake not killed it" (Act III, ii, 15). His greed grows much greater when he orders the murder of Macduff's innocent family. Macbeth says, "And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death, out, out brief candle!" (Act V, v, 24-25). He shows how he is no longer has emotion and remorse towards death and suffering. His life has become meaningless and alienated.

Lady Macbeth is the most evil feminine creation. Her satanic prayer to the forces of darkness is chilling to the postmodern readers and it would have been terrifying to Jacobean groundlings watching the horror unfold in the Globe Theatre. Most critical analysis of Lady Macbeth regards her as a catalyst for Macbeth's first murder, that of Duncan, and the progression of her deteriorating mental state, and culminating in her sleep-walking scene. She is distinguished from her husband, Macbeth by an inflexibility of will that appears to hold imagination, feeling, and judgment in self-control (Bradley, 1992). To her, the prophecy of supernatural elements, like three Witches become the strong will that they shall be: Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be What thou art promised. (I, ii, 108)

In this regard, we can accept Hazlitt's contrast between Lady Macbeth and the three Witches. Her solid passion and uncontrollable eagerness of anticipation makes her husband predict of the witches; she shows a striking contrast to the malignity of the witches who are instrumental in urging Macbeth to destiny. The witches persuade Macbeth to evil plan due to their love of mischief and motiveless delight in cruelty. Her fault seems to have been an excess of the strong principle of self-interest and family advancement which does not recognize the feelings of compassion and justice. Her passing, on the resemblance of the sleeping Duncan to her father, prevents her from murdering Duncan with her own hand (Lall, 1999).

However, we cannot deny the fact that Lady Macbeth is one of the most famous female characters in Shakespearean plays. She is smart, ambitious, and brave. She is undone by her ambition and by her utter ruthlessness. Alienation is her driving force: She is willing to give her feminine qualities in order to become a Queen of Scotland, which seems to offer her everything she wishes for greatness and glory, "sovereign sway and martyrdom" (Act I, v, 70). She shows great strength of will. Her motive to see her husband and herself on the throne cannot be crossed by any scruples. Her will-power is ruled by alienation. Her ambition holds sway over her mind. She does not think of her fate and her husband's deeds; everything that appears to help her to get closer to their target comes in handy. She is neither prone to reflect on the past events, nor to take into account the outcome of her actions; her philosophy of life is rather simple and short-sighted. When she learns about the witches' prophecies, she decides to catch the way and incite her husband to murder Duncan. She conjures up the dark spirit to free her of womanly tenderness and compassion:

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here;  
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood. (Act I, v, 40-42)

To her, womanly features are simply troublesome. She wants to rid herself of the maternal functions of her body. She does not ask the evil spirit to take away her mother's milk and free her from any nurturing ability, but she wants her milk to be poisoned. As a result, her female features remain within her, but their life-giving and nourishing properties have become the opposite; and are perverted. Her invocation shows that she is well-aware of her femininity, which she fears might interfere her if she does not contrive to get rid of it. She knows that she is not as

self-determined as to be able to act according to her purposes. She needs to call upon the dark spirits to take away her sympathy. Her conscience does not torture her; no moral scruples hinder her from giving herself over to the murdering ministers. She appeals to them for bold resolution and cruelty to make her immune to womanly regrets.

Lady Macbeth plays a role of the “most kind hostess” (Act II, i, 16) when she welcomes Duncan in her castle. Her speech is highly articulate and artful, which seems the more ironic, considering her murderous intent. She wants to live up to her perception, which is alienated; she does not master completely; her womanly feelings cannot be wiped out. Before the murder of Duncan, she discloses that she has been drinking alcohol to pluck up courage. She convinces herself of her courage. She is nervous and anxious. She never succeeds in becoming a demoniac creature. It is her human nature that hinders her from acting out of cruelty even though she were willing to murder the King herself. But she admits that she cannot kill the sleeping Duncan herself since he reminds her of her father: Her threats of violence are empty fantasies.

Lady Macbeth’s self-discipline is outstanding. She is resourceful and quick-witted, for which she remains in control. This helps her to save appearances and dispel suspicion whenever Macbeth runs the risk of giving himself away. When the murder of Duncan is discovered, Macbeth betrays himself. If Lady Macbeth feigns to pass out, she does so to draw any attention away from him at Duncan’s death. On the other hand, her response to the news of Duncan’s murder is a mistake in acting. After the murder of Duncan, she is in a desolate and hopeless state of mind for which she feels despair, depression, and alienation.

She realizes that her evil deeds have not rewarded them with pleasure and happiness they had been craving for; she is totally alienated. The expressions of ‘destruction’ and ‘doubtful joy’ indicate a trace of alienation. She loses her strength and influence; her efforts to master the banquet exhaust her last resources. She is only a shade of her former self, and in the sleep walking scene, her feminine characteristics reassert themselves; she has nothing to set against them. She tries to banish her feminine nature and seems to be ‘tougher’ and less emotional than her husband must yield to her nature. Suffering from an emotional alienation, she loses her mind and consciousness, and never regains it. She is driven insane, haunted by nightmares, unable to stand reality and the confrontation with herself. She can neither bear darkness, even though she conjured up the night to be her ally. Her former presence of mind and self-restraint have given way to an encompassing alienation. She takes refuge in cutting herself off from reality by ceasing to perceive any occurrence around her and falling into emotional alienation. She is tortured by the fact that she cannot flee from the memory of the murder. She verbalizes the different remembrances and conceptions as they come to her confused and dreaming mind:

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One, two; why then  
‘tis time to don’t. Hell is murky.

Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? (Act V, i, 32-34)

Her words reflect a strange mixture between her vain attempts to reassure herself and her admission that she is in hell. In her trance-like state, she is going through the past events. She tries to clean her hands from Duncan’s blood as her thoughtless brushing aside of the consequences of the murder “A little water clears us of the deed” (Act II, ii, 67) proves her alienation. She seems to hear the death bell for Duncan and discusses her reproaches with Macbeth, the ideas that encourage and persuade her husband to commit the murder. She tries to put up confidence by affirming that they are not assailable. She does not feel even the slightest trace of remorse about the murder, instead, she ponders over the effects on her, as she cannot wash away Duncan’s blood from her hands. She does not want to undo the crimes, but to be purified of their unpleasant aspects and consequences:

Here’s the smell of the blood still.

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh! (Act V, i, 46.)

By recalling her anger about her husband’s frenzy during the banquet, she wishes to relive the situation, but she enables to stop her husband from arousing suspicion and spoiling everything, so that they might succeed. In the sleep-walking scene, Lady Macbeth cannot stand the strain any longer, she collapses and drops all pretense she had contrived to hold up. In a way she ‘dissolves’; she is not aware of her present situation any longer, time loses its shape for her: Being imprisoned in herself and tormented by the past events, she realizes that “What’s done cannot be undone” (Act V, i, 61), which contrasts sharply with her view. She is going through an eternal hell that destroys her life forever.

Lady Macbeth’s actions account for her own alienation. Her ambition is different from high ambition, which takes her to feelings of alienation. Her greed turns her into alienation. When she wants everything, and she gets it, her happiness slips away while she has nothing to do. Her guilt leads to alienation of her soul for which she murders the King Duncan to get the throne. Her high ambition, greed, and guilt come from her ego and beyond the world. In this regards, we can remember a wise saying: “Greed begets sin, sin begets death.” In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, we realize that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are victim of premature death due to their greed, high ambition, and guilt.

Lady Macbeth’s tragic alienation leads to despair, to violence, to the tragic irony of a cruel act based on wrong information, to spiritual estrangement and to self-destruction. At the root of tragic alienation is an assumption that what is isolated will be made isolated for the sake of restoring society to balance. Society seeks order, and this order exists on a hierarchical plane which is valued more highly than the individual. In this way, this paper examines Lady Macbeth’s character in the light of alienation and feminism, who find herself cut off from other characters, removed from society, isolated from true nature, placed herself in opposition to what she desires.

## 7. Feminism and Alienation in *the Grass Is Singing*

Lessing was a witness of alienation and conflict between the natives and their masters in Rhodesian society (now Zimbabwe) since she spent her childhood there; therefore, she has the ability to reflect an alienation through her work which would be reliable since she virtually lived through her alienation. This always reminds her of the inhumane treatment natives have received. She has addressed alienation in many of her works, especially her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, depicting the relationship between man and woman.

Lessing does not only focus on conveying her view about conflict and alienation, but she also uses her artistic device which makes her reader accept. Since Lessing has addressed 'Alienation' which concerns people around the world. She is the spokeswoman who makes people aware of loneliness and at the same time, she makes people under solitary oppression speak up without any fear since they appear or should be equal to other people. Moreover, one can consider Lessing as a brave writer, because she dares to raise open questions between man and woman.

Mary Turner's life is very rich in psychological isolation which has accompanied her until her death. At the beginning of the novel, Mary did not have any psychological problems since she led a happier life. The narrators say, "Till she was twenty-five nothing happened to break the smooth and comfortable life she led" (33). She experiences her first shock when she knows the truth about herself from people she considers close to her. She thinks that her life goes as she hopes since she is young, beautiful, and her friends like her. She is friend to half the town. She always goes to sundowner parties that prolongs themselves till midnight, or dances, or goes to the pictures. When she hears them talking about her clothes and age, she realizes an image what she sees herself differs from that of reality. She starts to work hard to compromise between what she wishes; and what the society dictates. She starts to make changes in her life in order to obey the societal norms for a woman in her age. These changes include small things, such as her clothes and hairstyle which do not leave any great effect on her life. There are also radical changes, such as looking for a husband to get married before it is too late. This psychological change triggers her alienation, because it creates two types of conflicts: internal and external. The external conflict is clear through conflict with her husband, Dick, as they have opposite attitudes each other. One of the conflicts between Mary and her husband is to treat each other. Mary begins to question him closely as to why he is needed; but Dick touches her arm warningly and shakes his head *Bahlaq Alia'a Yousef (2011)*.

"Why shouldn't I ask him?" she demanded. "He's lying, isn't he?"

"Of course he's lying," said Dick irritably. "Of course. That is not the point. You can't keep him against his will."

"Why should I accept a lie?" said Mary. "Why should I? Why can't he say straight out that he doesn't like working for me, instead of lying about his kraal?" (67-68)

They have different lifestyles, futures, and dreams. Their opinions about the servant are clarified from their conversation. She is astonished with rage. When Dick returns, she stands on the veranda with her hands clenches and her face set.

"How dare you!" she said, her voice stifled.

"If you must do these things, then you must take the consequences," said Dick wearily. "He's a human being, isn't he? He's got to eat. Why must that bath be done all at once? It can be done over several days, if it means all that to you."

"It's my house," said Mary. "He's my boy, not yours. Don't interfere."

"Listen to me," said Dick curtly. "I work hard enough, don't I? All day I am down on the lands with these lazy black savages, fighting them to get some work out of them. (84)

They both live and love different places. Mary lived in the town all her life where she enjoyed her life with her friends and at her work while Dick spent his life in the farm where he sees it as a place he could live in. Dick cannot imagine his life outside the farm, because it is his own property and does not have to ask anyone's help. Another reason of alienation between Mary and Dick is that they have different outlooks. For example, Mary dreams of leaving the farm to live in the town where she can work. On the other hand, Dick sees his existence to be rooted in the farm. These conflicting senses lead to alienation between them. Mary's dream has been destroyed and Dick gets completely mad. Loneliness and conflict between Mary and Dick causes trauma and paranoia since both of them are dissatisfied with life. Thus Lessing clarifies the negative impact of marriage upon Mary since she never puts in her mind the necessity of getting married. (63-64)

Society starts to be an abstraction in Mary's life when she realizes that she has to live in a way what society accepts. In this way, the novelist portrays where she sees social alienation: "It is terrible to destroy a person's picture of himself in the interests of truth or some other abstractions" (42). The individual-society relationship is a key factor to determine her chances of joy or misery.

Mary also wants to choose her clothes according to her taste and the most important thing is to stay single, so she never thinks of getting married. This conflict between what she wants and what society accepts is the factor that persuades her alienated. This alienation has harmful effect on her miserable life. This is so because she lives a life opposite to what she wants to do. Through her few years of marriage, she passes through many changes which have great effect upon her life. These alienation stems from the fact that she is not ready to change her life. For instance, before marriage she used to read a lot; lately she seems to be reluctant to hold a book. Other evidence of her change is how she turns from an extrovert person to an introvert, self-centered who is unwilling to communicate with anyone, even her husband. Because she isolates herself from others, and she cannot express her feeling to anyone; she represses her feelings which subverts her psychology. Furthermore, her unsuccessful marriage makes her pessimistic view of life. She loses hope in future; and the possibility of regaining her a former mode of life which makes her surrender to her a dire future. Her pessimism leads to depression where she stops to talk because she

knows that nothing will change her lonely life. (65-66) Furthermore, there are many factors behind her alienation. The most influential factor is the continuous clash between her and her husband. The conflict makes her exhausted which is obvious through their conversation between Dick and Mary:

Dick saw that her thin, sun-crinkled hand was shaking. He said again, after a silence, his voice ugly with hostility: "I can't stand any more changing of servants. I've had enough. I'm warning you, Mary." And again she did not reply; she was weak with the tears and anger of the morning, and afraid that if she opened her mouth she might weep anew. (167)

For instance, at the beginning of her marriage, she keeps asking him to change the servants according to her wishes, but before her death, she could not ask him to change one of them even though that servant, Moses is the greater cause of her alienation. These outer and inner alienations she undergoes are the outcomes of her surrender to the obligations of society.

Dress is another reason of Mary's psychological alienation. Tony sees the servant to help Mary in her dress, a situation gets him annoyed. She is terrified from Moses before taking Tony as her shield to protect her against Moses' cruelty. She is anxious; she even cannot sleep, because she believes that Moses will kill her during the night. The people around her notice her breakdown, especially Dick and Tony. Dick notices how she becomes nervous; and he is afraid of her lonely mind. Moreover, Tony also tells Dick that Mary needs to see a psychiatrist. The narrator clarifies Tony's opinion about Mary's solitude: "As for Mary, while he was sorry for her, what could be said about a woman who simply wasn't there? "A case for a psychologist," he said again, trying to reassure himself" (212). This shows how severe her solitary state is and how worry-inspiring are its effects on those surrounding her. She chooses what she wants to see and hear because she does not want to be harmed. She is unaware of people's opinion about her life and appearance. She thinks that people around her like her and her lifestyle. She wants to forget things because of loneliness and her inability to cope with her environment. She keeps avoiding certain places and people since they remind her past events. She lived a happy life and is aware that she cannot get that life again. She avoids her friends, the Slatter's Family and her town, because that may produce an inner alienation between how she imagines her life and her actual one.

From the beginning of the novel, Mary lives in denial, beginning from her denial of her age down to her girlish clothes and hairstyles. She also keeps denying the servant's control of her life by ordering him to show her authority over him. The master-slave relationship have raised here underlies a profound lonely attitudes in revealing the master's sense of self-assertion and superiority compared to others. She dislikes a physical relationship with her husband, because it may produce feelings that she does not want to experience, such as the feeling of love toward him. She thinks her life resembles her mother: "Mary, with the memory of her own mother recurring more and more frequently, like an older, sardonic double of herself walking beside her, followed the course her upbringing made inevitable" (98). She connects fatherly image with that of the servant as the narrator indicates: "They advanced together, one person, and she could smell, but the unwashed smell of her father" (188). She represses her feeling of hate to Dick through keeping such a feeling away from society and her friends, because she does not want them to see her failure.

Mary dreams twice that the native touches her, a thing which horrifies her. The narrator says that he approaches slowly, obscene and powerful, and it is not only he, but her father who threatens her. This incident is based on fear of being touched by a black man. Moses touches her once when he helps her to take some rest when Dick is sick. After this incident, she dreams that he touches her. In the dream, she plays with her siblings, then her father comes and holds her mother in his arms so that Mary runs away. Moreover, one of the dreams that causes her to become scared of being left alone is the dream when she imagines Dick's death and her isolation from the servant. In this dream, she becomes happy at his death and at the same time, she has a sense of guilt for indulging in such a sort of happiness. (70)

In this regard, one of Lessing's critics, O'Neil (2004) comments regarding Mary's character may be mentioned:

Lessing's characters, many of them women, are in the process of change and development. Describing the world intricately from their point of view enables the reader to understand how and why change occurs in women's attitudes and opinions. (790)

From O'Neil's opinion we should pay attention to the change that Mary passes through and her attitude about married women before and after getting married.

Doris Lessing is a feminist novelist who is interested in isolated attitudes of her characters which is obvious through her creation of Mary's character. Lessing believes that any character should have a loneliness and conflicts since human life is the stimulus that moves him to react in a certain way. In the feminist novel, *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing succeeds in depicting Mary's alienation and relating her mind-set minutely. As already discussed above, this analysis of Mary's alienation is justified as the book highlights her conflict and loneliness, repressed mental satisfaction.

## 8. Similarities and Differences

Though Shakespeare's treatment of alienation and feminism is different from Lessing's, but, I think that in some aspects there is a similarity between the two writers. We know that Shakespeare was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Elizabethan playwright; and Lessing, a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Nobel laureate novelist. Through their philological writings, both writers hope to focus on women's situations as well as their mood of alienation of the age. Shakespeare is not a feminist playwright, but Lessing, a feminist novelist. His women are powerful, ambitious, uncontrollable, despotic, and outrageous, who demand more than male. But Lessing's women are very fragile, right deprived, male dominated and inferior women of the age. Her women bear the testimony of pessimistic view of life. Shakespeare wants to focus on

power, domination, and freedom of his women. On the other hand, Lessing wants to highlight how a woman is cocooned with and confined to the four walls of the patriarchal system, and at the same time, we see how a woman falls victim of racial conflict. I think, Shakespeare, thinking of 16<sup>th</sup>-century women's position, wants to give them 'empowerment' and also it is noticeable the fact that how a woman is segregated from her society, family, and community.

Shakespeare, in the play, *Macbeth*, wants to show that Lady Macbeth is high ambitious and unbound person. She kills King Duncan to get the throne. But her dream remains a dream. She is a villainous character and one of the most highly ambitious and powerful female characters of his plays.

However, from social point view, it can be said that both Lady Macbeth and Mary Turner live in a solitary state of mind without giving birth any offspring; they are far away from mental peace and satisfaction. In the novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, Mary is shown as a 'disenfranchised' woman of the age, on the contrary, in the play, *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth is a possessor of aerial castle, who kills an innocent King with a dagger, who came to her house as an invited guest. But, in fact, has she got peace in her mind to quit the King's life? We will say 'no' in response. She wants to wash her hands with the Arabian perfume to remove the blood- smell from her body, but it is never possible for her, because she commits a hideous and heinous 'Guilt' from an ethical point of view. So no lawyer or justice can pardon her.

Again, in *The Grass Is Singing*, Mary Turner loses her confidence in herself. In her first married life, the physical demand, which she expects from Dick, never gets; her inner conflicts increase, and she never dares to share with anybody with the society around her. Yet she lives with him; in the long run, Dick dies like a coward. And, for the second time, she gets married Moses, whom she once whipped, now he comes to her life as a life-partner, who is a black in caste. But she tries to carry her familial life with him; but, at the end of the novel, we realize that he kills her for a single cause. From both families, she does not get peace and happiness, her life is totally alienated; she hardly thinks of social life. Before her marriage, she experiences bitterly from her parents' conflicts and depression. Her mother was an alienated being, she had to tolerate her husband's pangs and agonies daily, but she had no ability to protest due to social pressure. Mary never wants this life like her mother. She is an ill-fated woman. From her birth to death, she has to endure a bitter experience; only death saves her from alienation.

Anyway, from Shakespeare's and Lessing's treatment of alienation and feminism, we can understand that how both Lady Macbeth and Mary Turner fight for living, they never leg behind to hold right, power, and freedom. Lady Macbeth lives in a palatial life, but contrarily, Mary lives in a lonely life. Both of them are unhappy. Their lifestyle is completely different from each other. One fights to live like a 'queen,' though she hardly satisfies. Another fights to exist just for a simple life, but she is also defeated. But we cannot deny the fact that loneliness exists in their mind. In this regard, a scientific analogy can be argued that if their lives' predicaments are measured by a balance, it will seem to us that differences are heavier than similarities. Thus, my research paper aims at examining Shakespeare's and Lessing's treatment of alienation and feminism as shown in the courtly tragic play, *Macbeth* and in the domestic-tragic novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, respectively, portraying the characters of Lady Macbeth and Mary Turner.

## 9. Conclusion

The researcher is of the view that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* contribute to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century philological fields so that we can examine alienating and feminist issues, analyzing the characters of Lady Macbeth and Mary Turner who survive and exert their presence in today's society in different phases of human life. Through their words and action, each of major female characters in Shakespeare's and Lessing's texts, appears as representatives of the age.

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