

# The Emergence of New World of Equality in Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor*

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## Abstract

As many readers and critics viewed, Doris Lessing's works are autobiographical as her novels are closely related to her own life. She is interested in public or political events only so far as imposed upon the individual's consciousness. Lessing would never come to politics, and she would have written about it in her novels if she had not grown up in Rhodesia. The autobiographical material in her works is subtly fictionalized, which is often transmuted beyond recognition. Lessing is a novelist whose personal novels unite with the political, and the individual is rarely inseparable from the group. Lessing is intensely entrenched in the socio-political environment of her time; she was ahead of her generation in many respects. She wrote on issues that were to become significant concerns years later with great conviction.

The objective of this paper is to explore how Lessing's novel *The Memoirs of a Survivor* has succeeded in depicting the new world, which is based on equality, selflessness, feelings of responsibility, care, and cooperation, and also which is free from technological pollution in general where everyone gets breathable air. Lessing's theme is generally an exploration of the human psyche, a coming to terms with their inner drives and tensions.

**Keywords:** equality, degeneration, new world, responsibility, individualism

## Introduction

Doris Lessing depicts the degeneration of civilization among young children who can look after themselves and connect with others only for their selfish means. This novel shows that the children have lost respect for others, and their language has broken down. In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Emily's guardian, the woman narrator, does all the chores, plans for the girl's future, and worries for Emily like any mother of an adolescent. Emily, anxious and troubled, nurses a sick waif, June Ryan, back to health. But June presents a perfect example of the new breed without conscience, joins a group of women moving on. Impulse and inconsequence take the place of natural feeling, and Emily is bereft. At the end of the novel, the collapsed world is left behind as the narrator steps through the wall. She takes Emily, Gerald, and their group of youngsters and Hugo, transformed from an ugly beast into something shining with hope and promise.

Though unconvincing, the novel's ending confirms Lessing's fundamental belief that the present chaos is only the birth pangs of humanity to emerge in a new order of things where caring and cooperation will be the norm, individualism and private interest be removed. Individualism and personal interest are the causes of disparity. She reaffirmed her faith in the inevitability of change, hope in humanity's future, and her belief that society will not be based upon individualism. The subjugation themes, alienation, search for identity and realization of self, economic inequality, and the unhealthy relationship between men and women have been the chief causes of women's oppression.

## Doris Lessing Towards a New World

A novelist, essayist, critic, and short story writer, Lessing is deeply concerned with the enlightening discriminations of her native land. It is this uniqueness of observation that she has been widely acclaimed. Doris Lessing is the most extraordinary woman writer of the twentieth century. Lessing has extended the boundaries of fiction both thematically and technically. Her work explores the nature and mechanism of change, and she uses both realism and "fantasy" for this task. Her novels deal with the external realities of everyday life and simultaneously with what she has called inner space, the complementary and often irrational workings of the unconscious mind. Considered among the most significant writers, Lessing explores many important ideologies and social issues of the twentieth century in her prolific work, especially novels. She began her career mainly writing fiction in the realist mode that focused on racial injustice. Through her work, Lessing has had a profound, lasting influence on both men and women in the past four decades. Her books' critical acclaim has grown to the point where she has been frequently nominated for the Nobel Prize. She has spoken out courageously in her work for the humanist vision she associates with the significant nineteenth-century writers and, more recently, for inner psychic phenomena and mysticism. Over the years, in the novels of the nineteenth century, Lessing has attempted to present the climate of ethical judgment and tried to accommodate the demands of the twentieth century, which are the ideas about time and consciousness.

Lessing is a complex and prolific writer, always restless, moving, probing, testing the limits of the possible, and seeking new possibilities – searching for "something new" against the "nightmare repetition" of the past. A study of her forty-odd-year writing

career does not yield easy generalizations, for she was not easy in any sense – not easy to characterize and not always easy to take. In her long and varied career, her fiction has progressed through dramatically different stages, passing from realism through post-modernism, fantasy, and "space fiction," and back to authenticity – formal moves that correspond to philosophical shifts from Marxism and feminism through Sufism that have bewildered, alienated, and at times even lost her readers. When she feels trapped by readers' expectations or her earlier practices, she invents a new form or springs for a new identity, always describing such moves as liberating, always searching for "freedom."

There is an autobiographical strain in any writer's work, for one cannot be categorized separately and away from one's life experiences. Lessing's background and many incidents in her life shaped her as a writer. Vignettes of certain characters in her novels seem very similar to those she knew and lived with. Her information has been mainly based on her interviews and her essays. She has been very candid, and there is ample information available. A novel, says Lessing, should be read for illumination to enlarge one's perception of life. The writer should be committed and feel like an instrument of change for good or bad. If a novelist accepts this responsibility, he must see himself to use the socialist phrase, but if one is going to be an architect, one must have a vision to build towards, and that vision must spring from the nature of the world we live in. Chaos, violence, destruction, War, and degeneration are the main things in our world. All the early writings of Lessing were concerned with her basic themes such as social problems of the blacks and women, the generation gap, politics, and her commitment to colonial ideas.

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Lessing shows the connection between the individual and society, including the importance of responsibility. In this dystopian novel, the unnamed first-person narrator records her observations of a world in a state of cultural and social decline. In this novel, the Survivor, a middle-aged woman, takes up the responsibility of a pre-pubescent girl, Emily Cartwright, and her strange pet Hugo, an ugly cat/dog creature. The novel describes Emily's development through puberty and her connection with Gerald, a young gang leader. With Emily's help, he tries to rebuild a survival system in a degenerated society. From the window of her flat, the narrator watches how groups abandon the city. She witnesses the collapse of civilization demonstrated particularly in young children who only look for themselves and have fleeting connections to others for selfish gain. Among these children, respect for others and language itself has broken down.

Doris Lessing depicts the degeneration of civilization among young children who can look after themselves and connect with others only for their selfish means. This novel shows that the children have lost respect for others, and their language has broken down. *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) is about the entire human race's marginalization. In this novel, the Survivor, a middle-aged woman, takes up the responsibility of a pre-pubescent girl, Emily Cartwright, and her strange pet. The Survivor sees young Emily's life behind the walls and knows that they who ill-treat the child are mad because they prefer one and reject the other; they like the powerful and do away with the weak. In the present culture, men are chosen, and females are oppressed. Emily's little brother is fondled and caressed, but Emily is left in the cold and uncared. It is because of the economic production on the part of the males. The uncordial treatment towards a girl child can be seen through these lines:

Oh no, Nurse,' said the strong tower of a mother, taller than anything in the room, taller than the big nurse, almost as high as the ceiling: 'Oh no,' she said, smiling but with her lips tight, 'he's my baby.' 'No, this is my baby,' said the nurse, now rocking and crooning the infant; he's my darling baby, but the other one, she's your baby; Emily is yours, madam.' And she turned her back on the mother in a show of emotional independence while she loved and rocked the baby. At which the mother smiled; a smile different from the other (Lessing, 41)

By presenting the world as slipping into barbarism, Lessing, like Marx, emphasizes the faith that the old order, built upon personal interest and exploitation, will inevitably be destroyed, and a new order will emerge. However, it is difficult to determine the world she is trying to project as the future world through the Survivor. On one side, the whole citizens of the society gather on the pavement and move in gangs and depart to other areas; the narrator does not define the place; on the other side, there is the world beyond the wall where the narrator with Emily, Gerald, and his children move into, the dream world - neither world is specified. Her society, which is facing destruction, is a middle-class society, the "professor" and Mrs. Whites and the society of the flat dwellers. They had lived comfortable lives with all possible modern equipment.

Lessing believed that most of the people admitted to the hospitals are not mad but are only suffering from the stress and stress of modern life. In the Memoirs of a Survivor, the return is not ordinary life but a new world beyond the wall. This is how the Survivor reports about the modern world:

We were in that place which might present on with anything-rooms furnished this way or that and spanning the tastes and customs of millennia, walls broken, falling growing again; . . . a bright green lawn under thunderous and glaring clouds and on the lawn a giant black egg of pock-marked iron, but polished and glassy, around which and reflected in the black shine, stood Emily, Hugo, Gerald and her officer father, her large, laughing, gallant mother, and little Denis, the four year old criminal, clinging to Gerald's hand, clutching it and looking up into his face, smiling there they stood, looking at this iron egg until, broken by the force of their being there, it fell apart (Lessing,141).

## Conclusion

Doris Lessing has one of those acute, emotional intelligence whose stories provide the key to our dilemmas. For some, she is more: almost a seer, able to articulate widely- shared intuitions and fantasies that reach forward into the future's dark. In most of her works, Lessing's focus is on marginal characters, i.e., people living on the fringes of society. Her writing has uniformly alerted the fragmented individual to achieve wholeness, and her recent works have identified her as a kind of a prophet for the sensitive. Through the various incidents in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, the novelist depicts a clear picture of the harsh realities of a realistic society. In

the end, the narrator can traverse space and time by meditating on a specific wall in her flat. Through these events and incidents, we know Emily's sad childhood under the care of her harsh mother and distant father. Finally, at the end of the novel, the narrator's strange new family breaks through dimensional barriers via the wall and walks into a much better world.

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