The Grass Is Singing Study Guide

The Grass Is Singing by Doris Lessing

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BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

This novel, written almost entirely in the form of an extended flashback, details the mental, spiritual, financial and marital disintegrations of the lives of Dick and Mary Turner, white farmers struggling to make a living off a sun-baked farm in South Africa. Set in the days of apartheid (institutionalized racism), the novel explores themes relating to the effect of apartheid on the day-to-day lives of individuals both black and white, as well as the slow simmering nature of revenge and an individual's need for self-delusion to avoid facing uncomfortable truths.

The first chapter of the novel describes events and circumstances immediately following the discovery of the body of Mary Turner, stabbed to death on her own veranda. These events include the immediate and painless surrender of her alleged murderer, a black servant named Moses, and the mental disintegration of Mary's husband, Dick. The initial investigation is conducted by a patronizing police inspector called Denham, brought onto the Turner farm by a suspicious but strangely compassionate neighbor named Charlie Slatter. Slatter and Denham both regard the farm's assistant manager, Tony Marston, with a degree of contempt, but are nonetheless intrigued when he says he witnessed circumstances that he says might shed some light on the killing. Denham tells him that unless he has cold, hard facts, he (Denham) isn't interested in hearing anything. Marston feels snubbed, remaining silent as Mary's body and Dick Turner are both taken away.

The life, experiences and feelings of Mary Turner are the focus of the rest of the novel, which is set in the days, weeks, months and years before the murder. The second chapter focuses on Mary's childhood with a father who was abusive and an alcoholic, a troubled mother, and two older siblings who died during childhood. Mary leaves home as soon as she can, eventually obtaining a secretarial job in the city and creating a life for herself that she believes is happy and fulfilled. However, her manner of dress is girlish, her desire for the opposite sex is minimal, and her relationships with her friends are one-sided—they reveal themselves to her but she never reveals herself to anyone.

One day, as the result of a combination of circumstances, she realizes her life isn't as happy as she thinks it is, and becomes obsessed with the idea of getting married. She finds herself drawn to a farmer named Dick Turner, and after a very brief courtship followed by a civil wedding, she joins him on his farm.

Mary soon discovers that marriage is not going to be the life-fulfilling prospect she had imagined. Over the course of time, Dick proves himself to be unfocused and unreliable, the weather is unbearable, and Mary's relations with the black laborers, both in the home and in the fields, prove difficult. Meanwhile, her pride gets in the way of establishing any kind of friendship with her neighbors, particularly Charlie Slatter and his wife, who eventually stop attempting to be friendly. Over the years Mary's spiritual condition steadily and deeply deteriorates, to the point where she makes an attempt to leave the farm and return to her life in the city—only to find that it's moved on without

her, and she's no longer welcome there. She has no choice but to return to her marriage.

Shortly after Mary's return, Dick falls ill with malaria. After nursing him out of his fever and while he's regaining his strength, she takes over the running of the farm. Much more organized and far stricter than her husband, Mary soon runs afoul of the much more easy-going natives, going as far as striking one of them with a whip. When Dick is up and about again, she makes an effort to get him to streamline his working methods, but her efforts (and his) fail. Some time later, after several house servants have left as a result of Mary's constant hostility, the field worker that she whipped-a man named Moses—comes into the house to work as a house servant. Mary's fear of blacks in general, and of Moses in particular, makes her act even sharper and more aggressively with him—an aggressiveness that doesn't abate even as he begins to take particular care of her when Dick has another attack of malaria.

Some time later, after Dick has recovered from his second bout with malaria, Charlie Slatter pays a visit to the Turner farm and is shocked to see how run down the farm and its inhabitants are. He's more shocked, however, to see the insolence with which Moses treats Mary and the almost flirtatious intimacy with which Mary responds. Slatter takes matters in hand and bullies Dick into hiring a manager and taking Mary away on a holiday. Slatter even hires the manager, Tony Marston, and Dick and Mary reluctantly make plans to go away. However, on the night before they are to leave, Mary (who has by this point almost completely lost her mind) is murdered by Moses, an act of long simmering revenge for her having struck him. At the conclusion of the novel, Moses settles down to await the arrival of the police ... and his punishment.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The chapter begins with a clipping from a local newspaper, announcing the murder of Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner. The clipping also reveals that the houseboy (whose name is later revealed to be Moses) has been arrested and charged with the crime. Later narration reveals that the Turners are white and Moses is black.

The chapter proper begins with a brief account of how members of the white community in which the Turners lived reacted to news of the murder—with surprise but without shock and without grief, since the Turners were generally disliked because they lived their lives separate from the rest of the (minority) white community. Narration recounts how several questions were asked in the community in the wake of the murder. Why, for example, did one of the Turners' farm-boys run to a neighbor, Charlie Slatter, instead of the Turners' much closer assistant, Tony Marston, for help? Why did Slatter send a note to the superintendent of police, Sergeant Denham, rather than calling him? Why did Moses offer no resistance to the police when they came to arrest him? Why has Richard (Dick) Turner gone mad?

At one point, the narrative shifts focus, following the actions of Charlie Slatter as he rushes to the Turner farm, confronts Tony Marston, and is shown the body of Mary Turner. Narration recounts how he looks at her with hatred and disgust in his face, a look that Marston misses—he's too busy fretting inwardly about how the story of how he discovered the body is going to be received by the judgmental Slatter.

Slatter, in turn, listens with barely concealed contempt as Marston explains how he slept late that morning, discovered the body, and moved it from the veranda where it lay because the farm dogs were licking it. Conversation between Marston and Slatter, as well as narration, indicates that Marston knows more about the murder and about the relationships between the Turners and Moses than he's letting on. It's also revealed, however, that Marston is afraid to speak up because the attitude of the more experienced Slatter indicates that he doesn't want to hear from someone as young and inexperienced in South African life and culture as Marston is.

When Sergeant Denham arrives, Marston senses the same sort of patronizing attitude from him and is surprised to see hatred and disgust in his face when he looks at Mary Turner's body (the narrator is careful to point out that Slatter and Denham look at her in exactly the same way; Marston, however, sees only Denham). Denham interrogates Marston, and their conversation reveals that Marston doesn't live in the same house as the Turners but has a hut of his own a short distance away. At the conclusion of the interrogation, Marston, angry at the patronizing way in which Denham is treating him, blurts out that he's aware of some unusual things going on at the farm, and can form a theory about why Mary Turner was killed. Denham curtly tells him he doesn't want theories, only facts. Marston suggests that both Slatter and Denham know that what

happened on the farm isn't about facts—it isn't that "black and white" (this is one of several occasions in this chapter that this phrase is used to describe the circumstances of the case). Marston realizes that neither Slatter nor Denham is interested in hearing what he has to say, and resolves to wash his hands completely of the whole matter. He watches as Mary's body is loaded into Denham's car, Dick Turner is shut into the back of Slatter's car, and Moses is forced to walk to town, to jail and ultimately to his execution.

After watching everyone leave, Marston is left alone. As he takes a couple hefty swallows of brandy, he wonders what kind of people the Turners and Moses were before the Turners arrived in South Africa. Narration then recounts how, in the days, weeks and months after the murder, Marston drifted aimlessly from job to job, eventually settling in the kind of desk job he promised himself he would never take. Narration also describes how, for the people in the community, Marston became "the young man from England who hadn't the guts" to stick it out.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This novel functions on two core levels: as a murder mystery and as a psychological study. These two areas of function are far from mutually exclusive—the exploration of the latter provides the explanation for the former, while the fact of the former lends an engaging sense of suspense to the latter.

That being said, the emphasis in this first chapter is on the novel's mystery, as it sets up the key situation that will ultimately be explained in the chapters that follow. The suspense here is developed in two main ways. First, several questions are posed, most of which are answered later in the novel: Is Moses guilty? If so, why did he do it? What did Tony Marston see that makes him so sure he understands what happened? Why do Denham, and particularly Slatter, look on Mary's body with such contempt? Why does Dick Turner go mad? Why does Moses surrender?

Other questions posed in this chapter are not explicitly answered here or later in the novel, but the answers are inferred by the writing. For example, the reason that the farm-boys run to Slatter rather than to Marston is because Marston is new to the farm and new to relationships with blacks. Slatter, although unscrupulous, has been around much longer and is a known quantity. In other words, he can be trusted—only to a point, but it is possible. Also, the reason he sends a note to summon Denham rather than telephoning him is, as the narration recounts, that the phone lines function on a party line system. This means that all the phone subscribers use the same line. Anyone nosy or curious about the goings on in their neighbors' lives need do nothing more than simply pick up the phone whenever it tinged to indicate the line was in use. In other words, anyone and everyone could listen to everyone else's business. Slatter, for reasons referred to later in the novel (Chapter 10) has a strange kind of loyalty to Dick Turner, and as a result wants to protect him from gossip as much as possible, so he sends a note rather than uses his telephone.

The second technique used to develop suspense in this chapter is foreshadowing—it might not be going too far, in fact, to suggest that the entire chapter is foreshadowing, since it is the end result of events that the novel recounts. Each of these events, therefore, is foreshadowed by the occurrences in this chapter. The structural technique employed here—opening the story with what is essentially the climax and then using the rest of the story to explore how that climax was reached—is often used in suspense or murder stories, in that it gives each moment in the main story, each confrontation, each moment of revelation, additional narrative weight. What, the reader then asks at each and every point in the novel, does this have to do with the murder?

That being said, there are a few specific moments of foreshadowing worthy of particular note. The first is the reference to the sjambok, which plays an essential role in creating the circumstances that eventually lead to the murder (see Chapter 8). The second is the narrator's passing reference to the ant-hill (see "Quotes", p. 6), which foreshadows Moses' sitting on an ant-hill at the end of the book—a moment that, in combination with the reference here, can be seen as an explanation of why he surrenders. The third specific piece of foreshadowing here is the repeated use of the phrase "black and white" in reference to the causes of the murder (as in "the explanation isn't black and white," meaning obvious or simple). This piece of foreshadowing is heavily ironic, in that the institutionalized racist attitudes of white to black and vice versa, as played out between Moses and Mary, are *exactly* the reason for the murder. These attitudes, and the relationships that result from them, are at the heart of the novel's central theme, which explores the potentially explosive dynamics of black/white relationships in mid-apartheid South Africa (apartheid being the official term for such institutionalized racism).

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The first half of this chapter focuses on Mary Turner's childhood, youth, and young womanhood. There is extensive detail here about her relationships with her parents—her drunken, absent minded, always-at-work father and her bitter, resentful, hard-spirited mother. There is also extensive detail about her feelings about the stores in the many communities where she grew up—how they were always exactly the same in each community, how they initially became a refuge for her (looking at the pretty beads and fabrics and candies), and eventually became a source of fear and disgust (see "Quotes", p. 104-105).

Narration recounts how Mary recalls the happiest time of her childhood is the year when her two older sisters died, and her parents comforted and liked each other ... for a while. She is also happy when she goes away to boarding school, happier still when her mother dies and her father moves far away, and the happiest yet when her father dies, leaving her completely alone in the world. She goes to secretarial school at sixteen, gets herself a job, and over the course of fourteen years rises through the ranks of the other secretaries, eventually obtaining a position as administrative assistant to the head of the company. In all this time she doesn't change her manner of dress or grooming, considering that the way she made herself look when she was a teenager was the most flattering she would ever look, and keeping herself that way (see "Quotes", p. 37). She becomes a friend and confidante to both the people at work and in the boarding house in which she stays, but never reveals anything of herself—an aspect of her life which, at times, leads to resentment from others.

One night, shortly after her thirtieth birthday, Mary overhears some of her "friends" criticizing her dress, laughing about her appearance and joking about how unlikely she is to get married. She takes these comments to heart, spends more and more time criticizing herself, drastically changes her appearance, and begins to look for a husband. Her first opportunity comes by way of a widower in his fifties with two children, but his initial attempts at kissing her repulse her so much that she runs out of his home, through town, and back to the boarding house (see "Quotes", p. 38). The situation upsets her so much that her usually perfect work suffers, her boss tells her to take some time off, and she begins to suffer a nervous breakdown.

The narrative then shifts focus to Dick Turner, who is described in some detail as a hard-working, almost obsessive, but always unsuccessful farmer. Dick has the dream of getting married and raising children, but spends so much time struggling to get his farm to produce that he's not able to look for the wife of his dreams. Finally, on a casual visit to the city, he accompanies a friend to the movies and, because he's bored with the film (which he considers superficial and silly), he starts looking at the other people in the crowd. He sees Mary, her face strangely (and beautifully) lit by the light from the movie screen. When the movie is over he struggles to find her in the crowd, but the friend he

went to the movies with is able to tell him her first name. When Dick gets back home, he quickly becomes deeply obsessed with Mary, attempting to push her out of his mind but having no luck. Eventually he goes back into town with the express purpose of finding her. He tracks her down and the couple goes on an unsuccessful date, and Dick returns to his farm.

The narrative shifts focus back to Mary, who quickly becomes as obsessed with Dick as he has become with her, each thinking of the other as the idealized answer to all their fantasies and problems. Dick, however, is reluctant to take the relationship further, and keeps the increasingly despairing Mary waiting for months until he finally comes back to town and proposes marriage to her. When she accepts, they marry quickly and have no honeymoon.

Chapter 2 Analysis

With this chapter, as is the case with most of the following chapters, the novel's focus shifts to a psychological study of its two central characters, Dick and Mary Turner. Of these two, Mary receives by far the most attention, with the narrative pattern of this chapter setting the precedent for many of those that follow: detailed examination of Mary, a brief but telling glimpse at Dick, equally telling glimpses of the two of them together, and a return to focus on Mary. The groundwork for several key aspects of her eventual emotional breakdown is carefully laid here—the difficult relationship with her parents, her unhappy memories of the store, her obsession with preserving herself physically as she was in her teens when she was happiest, and the disruption of her illusions by the sudden interference of reality. This last point, represented in this chapter by Mary's overhearing the conversation of her friends, is a dramatization of the novel's key secondary theme, the role played by self-delusion in the lives of its characters. Mary's life from this point on follows the delusion-reliant pattern established by this chapter: she creates a delusion, obsessively maintains and strengthens it over a period of time, experiences a sudden intrusion from reality that causes the delusion to shatter, and then goes through a period of depression. This is followed by the creation of a new delusion and the re-initiation of the cycle. It's important to note that the pattern also plays out in the life and experience of Dick Turner, as indicated by the narrative in this chapter describing his infatuation with the beautiful girl he sees only once, and then at a distance. He too has his delusions destroyed, but as the action of the novel proves he reacts to his delusions being shattered in a completely different way—by rebuilding them and clinging onto them even more strongly. It's important to note that there are delusions at work in the lives of all the principal white characters, not just the Turners. Slatter and Marston both have delusions about themselves and their goals, only to have them destroyed. The black characters, by contrast, seem to have no delusions, functioning on an instinctive, natural (albeit resentful and, in Moses' case, very patient) way.

This chapter contains the first of several important hints about Mary's sexuality. This can be found in the context of her aborted "affair" with the widower, specifically in her reaction to him (see "Quotes", p. 38). These can be considered alongside her reactions

to sex with Dick (Chapter 3), her growing awareness of the physical power and presence of Moses and the other black workers (several chapters, but particularly Chapters 9 and 10), and Tony Marston's reflections on sexual relationships between blacks and whites (see "Quotes" p.220), to create hints of significant sexual dysfunction. This may or may not play a role in the way her relationship develops with Moses later in the book.

There are several important pieces of foreshadowing in this chapter. The detailed discussion of Mary's feelings about the stores foreshadows her resentment when Dick sets up a store of his own (Chapter 6), and the moment at the novel's climax when she fearfully encounters Moses in the shell of that store (Chapter 11). The comments about the inappropriateness and strangeness of her clothes foreshadow the moment in Chapter 10 when she dresses the same way she did as a teenager to impress Slatter, and he reacts in a similar way to her friends here. The reference to Dick's dream of having children foreshadows the painful moment at which the lonely and desperate Mary pleads to have a child but Dick refuses (Chapter 8).

Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

These two brief chapters chronicle the early days of the marriage of Mary and Dick.

Chapter 3

This brief chapter describes Mary's first experiences of Dick's farm. Arriving at night, she's somewhat frightened by the endless sky, the rows of squat, the shadowy trees, and the strange sounds of night animals. She becomes even more uncomfortable when she goes into the house and sees how crudely made and furnished it is, becoming more and more upset as she listens to Dick, unaware of her discomfort, speak proudly of how he built everything himself (see "Quotes, p. 56). She interrupts his stories with an abrupt insistence that they go into the bedroom, where she sees the large, impressive new bed he's bought and realizes that the time has come for them to consummate their marriage. Dick goes out of the room to undress so Mary can have some privacy, berating himself for not being more sensitive to her, considering her citified dress and appearance, and worrying that she's not going to fit in. When he returns to the bedroom, he finds her lying on the bed with her back to him. They make love (see "Quotes", p.57), and afterwards he again berates himself for not being more sensitive. For her part, Mary feels a strange sort of tenderness towards the man to whom she's given her body and her life (see "Quotes", p. 58).

Chapter 4

The first morning of their marriage, Mary and Dick speak to each other quite formally; narration comments that it was as though the intimacies of the previous night hadn't happened. Dick introduces Mary to the house native, Samson, and then quickly goes out to start work on the lands. Mary takes a brief tour around the house and is shown into the kitchen by Samson, who tells her that Dick keeps the keys to the storage bins (see "Quotes", p. 61). Mary realizes that this is a precaution against stealing, but also realizes that such a precaution is unnecessary, given that Dick always puts out a third more of whatever is being served or used so that Samson can take it. As a result of this realization, her feelings towards Dick take on their first hint of resentment while her feelings towards Samson darken. Dick returns for his breakfast, complaining that Samson let the dogs out of their kennel to forage for food, rather than feeding them himself. He also tells her of the many odd jobs he has to do that day. After breakfast, he goes back out and Mary finds a cookbook and starts experimenting in the kitchen, interrupted halfway through the morning by the return of Dick's dogs. Later she settles down with a book from which she hopes to learn to speak Kaffir, the language spoken by Samson.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

There are two key functions to these two brief chapters. First, they lay the groundwork for two key elements of tension and eventual confrontation—specifically, Mary's lack of sexual interest and the very different attitudes towards the black servants she and Dick take. The latter plays a particularly important role in later developments in the narrative, meaning that the seed of resentment planted here foreshadows moments later in the novel when that seed grows and flowers into full-blown rage.

The second key function to this short section is the way in which it dramatizes the secondary theme of self-delusion. Mary's delusions about the home and life she's moving to are seriously shaken, illustrating the way self-delusions are dangerous. This doesn't mean she is without the ability or desire to bring them back to life, as illustrated by her actions in the beginning of the following chapter. Her actions reinforce the thematic point made by Dick's pride in his home in this chapter that sometimes, self-delusion is necessary for survival. In other words, the only way he's able to survive this life is to believe what he thinks he needs to believe. If he didn't believe things were wonderful, reality would become too much for him and the psyche that eventually proves to be quite fragile.

Mary's moment of comfort and relative peace at the end of the chapter (see "Quotes, p. 58) foreshadows several other occasions throughout the book where she treats, and regards, Dick as being little more than a child to be led, instructed, and scolded.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

During the first month of her marriage, Mary fills her days with redecorating the house, whitewashing the walls, replacing curtains made of sacking with actual cloth, sewing a new wardrobe for herself, and carefully embroidering her underwear—all with her own money. When these chores are complete, she finds herself bored and tries to fill her time by re-reading favorite books she had read several times in the days before her marriage. These, however, she finds boring and soon puts them all away.

She finds herself being made increasingly uncomfortable by the heat, asking Dick whether it's possible for him to put ceilings on the house instead of the corrugated iron that now constitutes the roof, which absorbs the heat and amplifies it within the house. He tells her ceilings are too expensive, but suggests that if the farm does well the following year it might be possible. Meanwhile, Samson is becoming increasingly resentful of Mary's ironhanded control of supplies in the kitchen, and one day offers his resignation. Dick is surprised and initially reluctant to accept it, but Samson insists. Mary becomes angry that Dick is taking Samson's departure so badly and hinting that she's in some way responsible for it. Dick attempts to explain to her that there are ways and means of dealing with natives (see "Quotes", p. 69) but Mary, with increasing anger, refuses to listen.

After Samson leaves, Mary soon engages a new black servant, who leaves after one day. She then engages a third servant, who's better at communicating with Mary but whom she still watches with intense suspicion. Dick, in the hopes of easing the situation, invites Mary to tour the lands with him. Mary, however, is constantly preoccupied with fears of what's going on back at the house and, when he asks whether she'd like to come down with him every day, refuses. Relationships become more and more tense between them, particularly because Mary seems completely uninterested in a sexual relationship and Dick is becoming more and more exasperated by their lack of physical intimacy. For the most part, however, he swallows his resentment out of guilt over bringing her to what she obviously feels is a deeply uncomfortable situation (see "Quotes", p. 70).

The tension between Dick and Mary continues to build and finally erupts when Dick discovers Mary has been having water brought from the well to cool herself with during the high heat of the day. He calls it a waste but she calls it a necessity, and they argue bitterly without resolving the situation, each carrying resentment of the other into the days and weeks that follow. When he suggests that she fill the bathtub with water once a week and use it just to lie in to cool herself off, she loses her temper, saying that the bathtub is filthy. Dick refuses to allow her to use any more water than is strictly necessary. The next day Mary sets the houseboy to scrubbing the bathtub, and keeps him at it all day but to no effect. That night Dick tells her the bathtub is made of zinc, and will always look that way because of oxidization. Mary refuses to believe him and tells

the houseboy to keep scrubbing. The houseboy almost leaves because of her harsh insistence, but Dick talks him into staying, angering Mary even more.

A visit from Charlie Slatter and his wife deepens the mutual resentment between Mary and Dick, as Mary reacts badly to what she perceives as patronizing kindness from Mrs. Slatter and to the insensitive obsession with which Slatter and Dick talk about farming. Later, she responds to an invitation from the Slatters with cold formality, leading Slatter to comfort the affronted Mrs. Slatter with the opinion that both Mary and Dick have unrealistic expectations of what life on the farm is, and need to be left alone to figure out how to live that life.

The chapter concludes with a reference to Dick's hope that soon, he and Mary will have children (see "Quotes, p. 90). He works harder than ever, doing his best to ignore the fact that Mary seems utterly unable to get along with the black servants (who, over the course of time, never seem to last in their jobs more than a month) but continuing to blame him-self for her irritation. It was he, after all, who brought her into this life.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Mary's actions at the beginning of this chapter, her efforts to make her home and life pretty and comfortable, constitute her attempt to keep her delusion of a happy, productive marriage alive. This delusion, however, becomes repeatedly and deeply worn away by the ongoing arguments with Dick, eventually leaving her spiritually empty and emotionally numb. At the same time, Dick's delusions about Mary's beauty and desirability are also being worn away, a process that continues in tandem with the wearing away of his delusions and dreams about his ideal life on the farm and which concludes, as has been seen in Chapter 1, with his eventual madness.

The mutual wearing away process is particularly caused by Mary and Dick's disagreements over how to handle Samson and the other servants. Mary's increasing animosity towards the natives in this chapter foreshadows the way that animosity increases even more over the chapters that follow, finally culminating in her striking the field worker (who turns out to be Moses) in Chapter 7. Here, however, her attitude is represented by her insistence on the clean bathtub, an action that dramatizes a key aspect of the novel's core thematic point about race relations—the white belief, in apartheid-era South Africa, that whites have the right to complete superiority and control. In its unchangeability, however, the bathtub can be seen as symbolizing not only the constant resistance of blacks to white control, but also the unchangeable nature of life in South Africa (the difficult climate against which Mary constantly struggles) and the nature of Dick's personality and delusions, none of which can be altered. The pressure all these resistances create on Mary is symbolized throughout the book by the house in which she and Dick make their "home." In particular, the corrugated iron ceilings keep in and amplify the heat in the same way as white beliefs about race and amplify tension, resentment, and fear, and in the same way that Mary's ultimate resentment of Dick is also bottled in, constantly building in tension. In other words, Mary's home is a physical, emotional, and spiritual pressure cooker of an

environment. The narrative through-line of the book explores how her psyche eventually deteriorates completely in that environment.

Finally, the reference to Dick's desire for children again foreshadows the moment later in the book (Chapter 8) when Mary, ironically, pleads for a child.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Mary and Dick pay one of their monthly shopping visits to the local store. Mary fights down her childhood-old repugnance towards the store and everything it represents as she and Dick shop. Later, she idly flips through a pamphlet about raising bees as she listens to one of Dick's neighbors teasing him, with something like contempt in his voice, about whether he's having a good or bad year. She listens with more attention as Dick tells him, with a false pleasure in his voice, that the year has been good, and listens as he later swears with what seems like unreasonable anger after accidentally bumping his knee. As they drive back to the farm, Mary considers the neighbor's attitude, Dick's answer, and her own hitherto unquestioned belief that Dick was a good farmer.

Back at the farm, Mary has cause to question this belief even further as the result of what happens when Dick reads the pamphlet about bees and becomes eagerly enthusiastic about the money that can be made. When she questions some of his theories, he fends her off with brief, ill considered answers, puts his hands in his pockets, and goes out of the house, whistling (see "Quotes", p. 94-95). He goes down to spend some quiet time in the grove of trees he planted (see "Quotes," p. 95), but after a while realizes he has responsibilities to the farm he has to attend to and reluctantly heads down to the lands.

Over the next few weeks Mary watches helplessly as Dick, with ever increasing enthusiasm, spends a great deal of money, time and energy creating a bee farm, a project that ultimately ends in failure. Mary's suspicion that that her husband is a failure as a farmer as well as a man, deepens into a realization as the months go by and Dick thoughtlessly attempts to farm pigs and then turkeys. Both endeavors, like that with the bees, end in failure. When he proposes farming rabbits, Mary loses her temper completely, raging at him in anger and frustration. After she's spent her temper and is sitting on the couch sobbing, Dick merely says "Okay, boss" in a very sarcastic tone—and Mary realizes that the quality of their relationship has changed permanently, and not for the better (see "Quotes", p. 99).

Soon afterwards, Dick decides to open a kaffir store, a store for the native workers and their families. Mary is sickened by the idea, partly because it strikes her as another scheme like that involving the bees, pigs, turkeys and rabbits and partly because of her childhood memories (see "Quotes", p. 104-105). Dick browbeats her into minding the counter. Her manner towards her potential customers (all of whom are black) is curt and dismissive, and they don't do a great deal of business—enough to break even, but not enough to make a great deal of profit. Frustrated, lonely and tired, Mary takes refuge more and more often in daydreams of her old life in the city, at one point actually leaving the farm in an attempt to get her old job back. In this, she receives reluctant, sardonic help from Charlie Slatter who, narration reveals, is planning to take over Dick's farm once Dick finally goes bankrupt.

When she gets to the city, Mary experiences joyful freedom, dismay when she sees how things have changed (the boarding house where she used to live won't let her stay there because they don't house married women), and anger when she's rejected by her former boss, whom she believes is lying when he says there's no job available. Mary also experiences dismay at how she's physically changed; looking at herself in the hotel room mirror she sees, as though for the first time, her work-and-weather worn hands, her sun-darkened skin, the white lines of wrinkles around her eyes, her unkempt hair, dusty shoes, and tatty dress. She tries to convince herself that she hasn't really changed all that much, but when she realizes she doesn't have the money to pay the hotel bill she realizes that she can never go back to her old life.

Dick arrives, having found her and hoping to take her home. He quietly asks her to not leave him, but she responds with her usual sharpness. Everything is back to normal. She returns to the farm and returns to her old routine, without even her dreams to sustain her. At the close of the chapter, narration comments that if things hadn't happened the way they did, Mary might have died young like her mother, or tried to run away again, but then, "a few months after she had run away, and six years after she had married him, Dick got ill, for the first time."

Chapter 6, Analysis

At the core of the various actions and reactions of this chapter is an exploration of the novel's secondary theme relating to the power of, necessity for, and ultimate failings of self-delusion. This exploration takes place principally through Mary, whose successive delusions (about her husband's ability to farm, the freedom offered by city life, her own self image) are themselves successively destroyed, leaving her with practically nothing in the way of hope. However, just as this theme is reaching its most vividly defined point, when Mary is bereft of the delusions she had counted on to keep her alive, an external event (a plot point) occurs that gives her an opportunity to develop a new one. The plot point is Dick's illness, a circumstance that plays out to its full effect in the following chapter. This is an excellent example of the way plot and theme can intertwine to give a story fuller narrative power, to strengthen and reinforce both elements, and to test characters to the limits of their feelings, resources, and determinations.

Other than that, there are two other key elements in this chapter. The first is a reiteration of a previously discussed motif, or a repeated image or emotional state. The motif here can be discerned in the detailing of Mary's reactions to both the store at the be-ginning of the chapter and the store she and Dick set up later. These reactions are part of the motif in question, as they reinforce her previously referred to, and increasingly painful, relations with both her past and her present—in particular, her dealings with the store's almost exclusively black customers. This is particularly notable in that without overt, significantly developed confrontation, it keeps both the central conflict in the central character and the novel's central theme alive in the action and in the reader's mind. The recurrence of the store motif here foreshadows the moment in the final chapter when she, in her near-madness, visits the abandoned store and sees Moses there, apparently waiting for her.

The other key element in this chapter, introduced for the first time, is the reference to Charlie Slatter's desire to take over the Turners' farm. The apparent greed and ruthlessness of his portrayal here are a contrast to the references to him in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 10, in which he's portrayed as having a kind of compassion for Dick Turner. At this point in the novel it seems like a strange combination of traits, but in Chapter 10 it becomes clear that this compassion is based on something other than Dick's well-intentioned but foolhardy attempts at farming: Slatter's determination that on some level, white people have to stick together.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Mary revels in the coolness of the winter, which in the part of South Africa where she lives is at its peak in June. Her manner is calmer and more relaxed, and she even goes with Dick to look at the lands, something she usually refuses to do. They laugh together over the unlikelyness of the frost that has settled over the fields, and for a moment it seems as though things might be easing between them (see "Quotes", p. 119). However,soon afterwards Dick becomes ill with malaria and remains bedridden for several weeks. A doctor visits and tells Mary that she's unwell and needs to spend three months in the healthier environment of the coast. She reflects angrily that the doctor has not even the remotest understanding of her situation, and reacts with bitter gratitude when he refuses to accept payment. She grudgingly accepts very little help from Mrs. Slatter, but resolves only to call on her in the direst emergency.

She nurses Dick, who has never been ill before, and quickly becomes irritated by his childishness, weak-voiced fretting and depression. She soon realizes that because Dick hasn't been there to supervise, work on the farm has probably been neglected by the native workers, and she has to go down and supervise in his place. Her fear of natives returns, and she makes repeated excuses to delay her departure. As she finally leaves the house, she sees the sjambok hanging over the door, takes it down, and carries it with her when she goes down to the compound to get the natives back to work.

Mary is shocked and repulsed by the ramshackle conditions she finds at the compound, becoming more and more upset as she encounters what she sees as the insolence and laziness of the workers. She orders them back on the job in ten minutes, threatening to fire anyone who doesn't turn up. She watches with increasing anger as only a few of the contracted workers leave their huts and families and make their way to the fields. As she watches them work, she becomes aware of the powerful physicality and muscularity of the men, hating them the whole while.

As the days and weeks pass, as Dick continues his convalescence and Mary continues to take his place in the fields, Mary becomes more and more comfortable. She continues to carry the sjambok with her at all times but begins to actually enjoy having authority over the men. She also takes the time and effort to examine the operations of the farm in detail and discovers that Dick is, in short, completely incompetent. She resolves to talk to him once he's better and convince him to start doing things in a more profitable, efficient manner. In the meantime the workers are growing more and more resentful of her. At one point one of them stops work, refuses to start again after several angry outbursts from Mary, and finally tells her (in English, which Mary takes as a great insult) that he wants water. In a fury, Mary strikes him with the sjambok, drawing blood. For a moment she's terrified that he's going to strike her back, but he slowly and silently returns to work. Her hatred of the workers, and of black people in general, surges violently (see "Quotes", p.130), but she nevertheless rejoices in what she sees as a

victory. In the following chapter it's revealed that the yard worker is Moses, the man who in Chapter 1 confessed to killing her.

A short time later, when Dick is again up and about, Mary sits down with him and goes through all her observations and plans about the farm, its inefficiencies and its potential for improvement. As she speaks in a cool, impersonal, but undeniably accurate tone, Dick goes through a range of emotions. He feels shame, respect, indecisiveness, resentment, and above all grief that the land he loves so much, and the way of life he loves so much and feels so strongly connected to, isn't respected by his wife in the same way. She attempts to convince him to grow tobacco, a profitable crop for many of their neighbors. In his mind he resists, thinking of all the inconveniences and difficulties that growing such a crop involves. He also recalls his still-flickering hope for children, but becomes upset when he realizes that Mary's plans for making money off tobacco farming are aimed towards leaving the farm and moving to the city. Outwardly, however, he agrees to her demands, calling her "boss." Angrily she tells him she hates it when he calls her that, and storms off to bed. Narration recounts how, two days later, he makes arrangements to build the barns necessary for tobacco harvesting, sees the triumph and hope in his wife's eyes, "and [thinks] with disquiet what it would mean to her if he failed this time."

Chapter 7 Analysis

For a few brief moments at the beginning of this chapter, it almost seems as though there's a possibility Mary and Dick might come to some kind of mutual understanding and respect, that even though love seems beyond their reach or capacity they can still find enough joy and common perspective to make their marriage successful. However, Dick's reaction to the malaria and Mary's reaction to Dick's illness drives them further apart; when she goes out into the fields, her delusions about her husband and her life are once again dispelled as she discovers how incompetent a farmer her husband is. This is perhaps the low point of their relationship, the point in the novel when she is most disgusted and disappointed with him. This situation might, in turn, provide at least a partial explanation of why she becomes so determined to exert such iron control over the native workers—she channels her anger at her husband into anger at them. The irony here is that the control she thinks she has over the natives is as much of a delusion as her belief in her husband.

At the same time Mary's fear of natives (and perhaps her sublimated sexual desire for them) drives her into the delusory belief not only that she can control them, but that she's also better and more capable of running the farm than Dick. In this context there are a number of important things to note. The first is that there are no hints that this belief *is* in fact a delusion until later in the book—specifically, the point at which Moses comes into the house as a house-servant (Chapter 8). From that moment on, Mary's control over blacks is revealed for the delusion it is, born in part because of her fear and partly because of her internalization of white society's belief that theirs is the absolute *right* to control. All of this means that Mary's journey, from fear to delusory control back to fear, makes the thematically relevant point that white control as a whole is a delusion.

Given the time at which this novel was written, in the middle of apartheid in South Africa, Mary's fate can be seen as a vivid warning of the potential fate awaiting all white people who believe as she does—a warning that anger, resentment, and a slow-burning lust for revenge will ultimately bring destruction. This point is reinforced by another aspect of Mary's journey. As the delusion takes hold in Mary's mind, it leads to violence (the attack on Moses), which in turn leads to Mary's emotional and mental breakdown, and ultimately to her death. This chain of events can be seen as embodying the ultimate point of the novel's thematic statement about delusions: if they're believed in too intensely or for too long, they can end in suffering and tragedy.

Meanwhile, the novel's focus on self-delusions takes a different tack in its brief examination of Dick's response to Mary's harangue on how the farm should be run. In this sequence, his delusions are taken from him in the same way as Mary's are; or at least that's how it seems. As previously discussed and as later chapters prove, his reaction to the attack on his delusions is different from hers—where she replaces hers with others, his hold on his deepens and becomes more stubborn. Yes, he gives in to her determination and starts farming tobacco, but underneath this apparent acquiescence is still a determination to farm his own way, love his land his own way, and live his life his own way. Proof of this can be found in his refusal to turn his entire farm over to tobacco and his decision to raise only two tobacco barns. He will, he decides, continue to farm on his own terms and live his dream, which, as the story eventually reveals, is a delusion. The loss of which, at the end of the novel, leads to his complete mental breakdown. Here again is a warning about the dangers of clinging too closely to delusions.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

After laying down the law to Dick, Mary leaves him alone with his work, partly out of a reluctance to put him on the defensive, partly because she dislikes being around the actual workings of the farm more than ever, and partly because of her need for a strong husband (see "Quotes", p. 145). She watches the construction of the tobacco barns and the preparing of the tobacco fields with an ever increasing hope that borders on fantasy, hoping that the tobacco will make them a great deal of money and after the end of the growing season they'll be able to move to the city. Within a few months, however, after the rainy season eases seamlessly into drought, it soon becomes apparent to Mary that the tobacco crops are ruined, that there will be no money, and there will be no escape from the farm for the foreseeable future. Over the course of time, Mary sinks deeply into depression. She spends her days in an almost catatonic state, sitting on the settee for hours at a time. Finally, she pleads with Dick to have a child, and in spite of his lingering dream of being a father Dick tells her in no uncertain terms that they're too poor to have a child. "And that," narration comments, "was the last time a child was ever mentioned."

Soon afterwards, Dick makes an attempt to draw Mary out of her shell by asking her to visit the lands with him and saying he enjoys her company. At first she refuses, but his naked pleading leads her to go out with him, even though she hates it, and even though, as the weeks pass, she comes to realize how bad a farmer Dick is and how there's no hope of them ever leaving the farm. She tries to talk herself into seeing Dick as a nice, good human being, but ends up still considering him hopeless. She asks him to plant a different crop, but he angrily refuses, eventually losing his temper and complaining about the way white farmers like him are treated by the government, which he says is more interested in being soft on the natives. Shortly after this outburst, Mary stops accompanying him on his rounds about the lands, sinking deeper into silent depression.

A few months after the confrontation about the crops, the current house servant leaves. Narration reveals that potential replacements refused to work at the house because they'd heard too much about how hard Mary is to work for. Finally, Dick brings home one of his field workers to work in the house, and Mary is shocked to see that it's the one she struck across the face with the sjambok (who, narration later reveals, is Moses, the alleged killer from Chapter 1). She is immediately struck with renewed guilt about what she did, and attempts to get Dick to take him back to the fields, but Dick refuses, saying Moses is the best house servant they've ever had. Mary is forced to accept the situation, and for a while treats Moses as badly as she treated the other servants. However, as she becomes aware of his humanity (after accidentally catching sight of him shaving) and develops a keen, sensitive awareness of the powerful musculature of his body, she treats him even more harshly, inventing unnecessary jobs for him to do. Moses accepts all her comments, criticisms and orders silently, doing everything he's asked to do and doing it well. Dick realizes she's being harsher to Moses than she ever

was to the others, and insists that she treat himbetter. Sullenly, Mary agrees and then returns to her habit of sleeping for hours to while away the time.

Chapter 8 Analysis

All the novel's principal threads converge in this chapter—the psychological study, the murder mystery, the theme of racism and the theme of delusion. It's even possible that the theme of revenge begins to play out here as well, if the assumption is made that Moses takes the job in the house as part of his plan to take revenge on Mary for striking and humiliating him (Chapter 7). That being said, the dominant elements are still the psychological analysis of the characters and the self-delusion theme, both of which dominate the action of this chapter up to the point at which Moses joins the household.

In terms of the study of the characters' psychology, Mary is once again the primary focus of the narrative, particularly when she makes her desperate plea to Dick for a child. It's important to note here that the attitudes in their conversation are a complete reversal of their attitudes up to this point; Mary has been consistently portrayed as being completely resistant, almost repulsed by the idea of having children, while Dick has been portrayed as being consistently attracted to the idea, with both of them coming across as almost obsessed. Here, however, Mary's desperate need for meaning in her life leads her to reverse her position. On the other hand, Dick's refusal is perhaps less clearly motivated. He says it's because they can't afford it, but being unable to afford something has never stopped him from doing it before. It is possible that he's refusing Mary's request out of a desire for revenge, out of anger at her continued attempts to take control of the farm and undermine his dream of living the way he wants. This possibility is never explored out-right, but given that a sub-theme of the novel has to do with revenge it's a possibility that must be considered.

In the final third of the chapter the murder mystery moves back into focus. It doesn't take complete focus, given that the other aspects of the novel are still very much in play. That being said, the sense of suspense that comes into the reader's mind when it's revealed that not only is the new house-boy the same one that Mary struck but also Moses (the alleged murderer from Chapter 1) must, on some level, be similar to that experienced by Mary when she sees him for the first time. Also at this point, the racism theme takes greater focus, given that the conflict between Moses and Mary is, on some level, a microcosmic portrayal of the cultural, racial war between black and white in South Africa.

Finally, there are again hints in this chapter (in the references to Mary's awareness of Moses' body) that at least part of her psychological condition involves sexual awareness of him, her own sexual repression, and the conflict between the two. The question, of course, is how much is Moses aware of? Does he know she's aware of his physical (and presumably sexual) power? Does he manipulate that in her? Given the events in the following chapters, particularly the scene of her being dressed by him that Marston witnesses in Chapter 10, suggests that he's all too aware of his power.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

As the days, weeks and months pass, Mary becomes more and more fearfully obsessed with Moses' presence in the house. She stops paying attention to her chickens, which die off from lack of food and water. She even stops obsessively locking the storage cupboard, afraid of antagonizing Moses by making him think she suspects him of stealing. One day, Moses tells her of his plan to leave at the end of the month. Mary, dreading a confrontation with Dick, pleads with Moses to stay, after a moment starting to cry. As she gives in to her embarrassed, confused anger and frustration, she is surprised when Moses brings her a glass of water, gently commands her to drink, and then gently propels her into her bedroom (see "Quotes, p 175). There she lies down and sleeps.

The next morning Mary forces herself to behave normally around Moses and for several days things are relatively calm. One day, however, as Mary is berating him in her usual way, he tells her with calm bluntness that he stayed because Mary begged him to, but if she keeps on at him he'll leave. Mary begins to realize that her relationship with Moses is changing, a realization that becomes more certain as Moses begins bringing her proper meals to eat on trays decorated with little vases of flowers. Her dreams begin to reflect this realization, as they include increasingly physical manifestations of Moses and his hulking, powerful body.

In the middle of the hot season, Dick suffers another attack of malaria, and Mary suffers another patronizing visit from the doctor (who was brought to the farm by Charlie Slatter, who, as is revealed in brief narration, continues to make plans for what he'll do with Dick's farm once Dick gives up once and for all). Mary sits with Dick throughout his illness, which is more serious than the first attack. She goes without sleeping and eating for several nights, until Moses finally offers to keep watch over Dick so that Mary can sleep. At first Mary refuses, but Moses insists. Mary lies down on the sofa, while Moses sits on the floor in Dick's room.

That night is a long and difficult one for Mary; lying on the sofa, she's painfully aware that if the wall wasn't between them, she and Moses would only be six inches from each other. She drifts into an uneasy sleep, made frightening by a dream in which she catches glimpses of her father and mother being playful and physical with each other, and by another in which a game of hide and seek is interrupted by her father teasingly holding her head in his crotch. Finally, she has a third dream, one so real that she's partly convinced she's awake. In the dream she believes that Dick has died, so she goes into the bedroom to find out the truth—having to step over the out-stretched leg of the sleeping Moses in the process. She bends over Dick's body to see if he's still breathing, but before she can find out anything becomes aware that Moses has awakened ... is approaching her ... is reaching for her ... and is touching her arm in a gesture of comfort. She screams herself awake, discovering that it's morning and that

Moses is standing over her with tea, telling her Dick is asleep and asking quietly whether she's afraid of him. She tells him she's not, and then is "furious with herself for denying something whose possibility should never even be admitted." Moses calmly asks her why, again she says she's not, and then Moses leaves the room.

For the rest of the day Mary stays in the living room, leaving only once to check on Dick (who seems better). She doesn't go out to check the lands, she doesn't go into the kitchen to check on Moses, and that night locks all the doors of the house, presumably so Moses can't get in. Dick is back at work in a week and spends longer and longer days there as he gets better and better. During these days, Mary does what she can to avoid Moses, but is constantly aware of him (see "Quotes", p. 195).

Chapter 9 Analysis

The convergence of plots and themes continues in this chapter, as does the novel's slowly but steadily increasing sense of suspense. Tension is slowly but intensely building to-wards the climax, the ending foretold by the story's beginning—the murder of Mary Turner. Specifically, the sexual and psychological tensions fuelling both the psychological study of the characters and the murder mystery intertwine as they, in turn, dramatize the thematically relevant, but subtly played out, frictions between black and white. The character of Moses is particularly well developed in this section, as his undeniably seductive actions both titillate and terrify the increasingly vulnerable Mary. Meanwhile, her mounting anxiety and instability is equally well portrayed, as she struggles with an overwhelming, irrational fear that seems more and more to have a sub-textual (unspoken) sexual context.

In terms of the self-delusion theme, it seems that Mary's near-hysteria is the result of her having no delusions left. She doesn't believe in her husband, she doesn't believe in herself, she doesn't believe in their life together—and it's becoming more and more apparent to her that she can't believe in her own superiority any more, since Moses is clearly taking control. Meanwhile, it's interesting to note that at this point in the novel Dick is almost a non-entity, disappearing almost entirely from the action. He returns to the scene, however, in the following chapter where he plays an important role in events.

One question that might be asked at this point is what, exactly, is Moses up to? One answer might be found in consideration of the events of Chapter 11, in which Moses kills Mary in revenge for striking him (Chapter 7). In that context, his actions here can be interpreted as being part of his plan—to destroy Mary psychologically before he destroys her physically. Given the era in which this novel was written (the mid-apartheid 1940s), these actions can also be interpreted as symbolizing the larger, thematically relevant issue of how the black race in general might one day respond to self-satisfied, blindly secure and undeniably arrogant white control. It could be argued that Moses' actions, and by extension the novel, are in fact playing into white fears of the time. It could, in fact, be saying to white readers: "See? This is what happens to you if you don't control your black servants with an iron hand." Given the narrative's portrayal of the various blacks beaten and attacked and abused by Mary (and, to a lesser degree, by

the other characters), it's far more likely that the novel's attitude is, in fact, anti-white supremacy and anti-apartheid.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The chapter begins with a narrative explanation of how Dick and Mary Turner became the subject of increasingly malicious, increasingly far fetched gossip over the years, some of which was started or repeated by Mrs. Slatter, fed up at always being dismissed by Mary. Charlie Slatter, however, continues to develop plans for what he'll do with Dick's land once he sells out, but becomes increasingly frustrated and bewildered by Dick's continued working the land. One day he pays a call on the Turners, seeing them for the first time in what he realizes is close to two years. He sees the mess Dick is making of his potentially useful land and attempts to persuade him to sell. Dick, still profoundly attached to his land, obstinately refuses, but invites Slatter to stay for dinner. At first Slatter refuses, but quickly changes his mind when he realizes that he's curious to see Mary and the house.

As Slatter and Dick approach, they see lights in the house go on. Shortly afterwards, Mary comes out onto the veranda, and Slatter is shocked to see how thin she's become, how badly kept her hair is, how sunburned she is and how she's dressed herself in a completely inappropriate way, a way similar to the immature, girlish, flirtatious way she dressed when she was a single girl in the city. Slatter notes with increasing distaste that her manner is equally as girlish, even with Moses, who responds to her orders with sullen insolence. Slatter's temper finally gets the better of him (see "Quotes", pp. 207 and 210) and he forces Dick to go outside with him, where he insistently tells Dick to take his wife on a holiday and to sell him the farm once and for all. Dick continues to resist but Slatter wears him down, telling him he can stay on the land as manager and supervisor. Dick finally agrees, unhappiness evident in his eyes.

Over the next few weeks Slatter makes arrangements for the sale and for a manager to come and oversee the operation while Dick is away. Slatter eventually connects with Tony Marston, who's only too eager to accumulate some experience on a mixed farm before, as narration reveals, starting a large tobacco farm and making as much money as his very successful cousin. Marston arrives on the farm and, like Slatter, is shocked at what he finds: the strangely flirtatious Mary, the grieving and physically frail Dick, and the appallingly maintained farm. Marston also watches the relationship between the Turners and Moses with interest, having developed liberal ideas on the relationships between the races. These ideals are severely tested, however, when one night he sees Moses helping Mary put on a dress before dinner. Moses and Mary both become aware of him; Moses regards him with murderous insolence, while Mary regards him with fear. Her fear intensifies when Marston angrily orders Moses to leave, but when she realizes he actually means his order, she tearfully asks why he made Moses leave. Speaking incoherently, she refers back to the way her friends from her single days used to joke about her not being the marrying kind, and then starts recalling how long she's been on the farm, how she should have left years ago, and then accusing Marston of ruining everything and saying it was all right before he came. Moses comes back, asking Mary

whether it's true she's leaving the farm. As Marston tries to force him to leave, Mary confesses that she's leaving and Moses disappears. Mary again shouts at Marston, blaming him for Moses leaving. Dick returns, and in spite of Mary's fear that he'll be upset, takes the news of Moses leaving with relative calm.

Narration reveals how, the next day, Marston went out onto the lands as usual. It was the day before the Turners were to leave, and there was a great deal to do.

Chapter 10 Analysis

There are several important elements to note about this chapter. The first is related to developments in the murder mystery aspect of the story, as the narrative describes how Tony Marston (last seen in Chapter 1) came into the picture. It's at this point that the suspicious circumstance moment referred to by Marston at that point is explained—the moment at which Moses helps Mary put on her dress, a moment of intimacy between a black man and a white woman that, in apartheid-era South Africa, should never have been allowed to take place. It's also at this point that the nature of Marston's self-delusion becomes apparent, and it becomes clear that in his actions and beliefs he too is dramatizing one of the novel's key themes. This occurs in the sequence in which his origins are described, his idealistic (delusional) dreams about moneymaking farm life are detailed, and his racism-based delusions about what relations between black and white are irrevocably challenged. In the following chapter the sources of these delusions are defined, in the moments when Mary laughingly looks through all the research-based books on racism and farm life that Marston brought with him.

There are other developments in the murder mystery plot; specifically, the decision of the Turners to leave the farm and Marston's dismissal of Moses. The novel never explicitly says so, but both these situations put pressure on Moses to complete his plan. If he's no longer to work in the house, and indeed if the Turners are gone, it reduces his opportunities to both psychologically seduce Mary and kill her. Therefore, he has to move fast—either that, or rely on the psychological damage he's already inflicted on Mary to at least do some of the work for him. Both elements play out in the next, climactic chapter that sees his plan come to fruition. Also in terms of the murder mystery laid out in Chapter 1, the seeds of Dick's reaction to events are planted in this chapter as he gives in to Slatter's plans. Dick is once and for all being manipulated into giving up his dreams and delusions, belief in which had been the only part of his life that he believed in and that kept him going. His lack of energy and drive here foreshadows his complete breakdown, as foretold at the end of Chapter 1.

Another important element in this chapter is the deepening psychological exploration of Mary—specifically, her pathetic attempt to return to her pretty, popular, immature and unworried self, and the increasing intimacy of her relationship with Moses. The inference of the moment in which he helps her put on her dress is clear: it's only a matter of time before the relationship becomes sexually intimate. This is what Marston realizes, this is what Slatter realizes, and this is what causes Slatter to push Dick harder than ever to abandon the farm. This latter is yet another important element to note

about this chapter, in that a possible core motivation (other than greed) is presented for Slatter's actions. In his terse insistence that Dick sell, it almost seems as though white solidarity is more important to him (Slatter) than greed and personal ambition. If this is in fact the case, it can be seen as a dramatization of both the novel's core themes, relating to racism and self-delusion. Specifically, Slatter's insistence on white power is a manifestation of the core beliefs at the heart of the conflict (that whites are, and always will be, the dominant race). This is *his* delusion—the intensity of his insistence suggests that, like Mary's insistence that the uncleanable bathtub be made spotless, that insistence is a self-defining fantasy that can't be let go, out of fear that the hitherto unshakeable truth of life will fall apart.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The next morning, Mary awakes at sunrise. In the quiet and glimmering beauty of the moments before dawn, she feels a kind of peace and happiness that she hasn't felt in years, a peace momentarily disrupted by a half-awake question from Dick, but when he goes back to sleep, Mary's happiness returns. She in fact finds herself able to feel a few moments of pity for him, but they soon pass; narration comments that she feels a flicker of terror, "an intimation of that terror which would later engulf her. She knew it: she felt transparent, clairvoyant, containing all things." Narration recounts how she doesn't ever think of Dick again.

As Mary gets out of bed and watches the sunrise, she "clutches on to her last remnants of happiness, her mind as clear as the sky itself." However, even as her happiness deepens, she becomes aware of the sound of the heat-mad cicadas, whispering and shrilling, a sound that Mary begins to believe is the sound of the sun itself. The sun then rises fully, bringing with it the ever-oppressive heat and immediately sending Mary into her usual state of disassociation and depression. She goes through her morning routine of sending Dick off to the field almost as a sleepwalker, barely aware of anything she's doing or of anything he (or Marston, who has joined them for breakfast) is doing. The only thing she *is* aware of is the lurking presence of Moses, whom she knows is out there on the farm somewhere. As she wanders in and out of the house, in and out of conscious awareness, she develops a deep, intense, imaginative fantasy that the farm will be eaten alive by trees, plants and rats once she's gone. She wanders about the farm, half-imagining that she'll find Moses and everything will be over. At one point she's suddenly and soundlessly terrified by the appearance of a native boy at the house, but when she realizes it's not Moses she sinks again into lethargy. The boy hands her a note from Dick asking her to prepare tea and sandwiches for his lunch, but Mary is so removed from reality that she has to be reminded two or three times to make the tea and forgets completely about the sandwiches.

After she's sent the boy back to Dick, Mary wanders into Tony Marston's room and is surprised into laughter by the sight of his immaculately polished shoes and the collection of books on race relations he's brought with him. She doesn't stay there for long, however. She's more interested in finding Moses. Eventually she finds him in the long-abandoned store she and Dick built. She's aware enough to realize the irony of finding him there, in the building that holds so many memories of her difficult childhood and relationship with her parents, but her growing fear overwhelms her. She runs out and encounters Marston, whom for a moment she imagines to be Dick, recalling how a long time ago she had turned to another young man with hope of help—but now, she realizes, there's nothing to be done; she's going to have to go through with her death. Marston tries to convince her to let Dick take her to a doctor, because to him (Marston) she seems ill. She confesses that she's always been ill, in her heart, and then goes into the house, facing the long vigil of her death.

When he returns from the lands, Dick tries to get her to finish packing; they are, after all, to leave the next day. She laughs, and he leaves her alone, commenting that it might rain. She comments that it will rain after she's dead, and then lets herself be led to bed, commenting that "he's" outside. Dick doesn't understand what she means, has to remind her to undress, and like Marston tries to talk her into seeing a doctor. As she said to Marston, she tells Dick she knows she's ill in her heart, and always has been. She lies down and nears sleep, but is woken by a thunderstorm and by the conviction that Moses is outside waiting for her. Moving like someone half-asleep she gets out of bed, walks through the house, goes out onto the veranda—and in a flash of lightning sees Moses coming towards her. For a moment she believes she might be able to live if she has a chance to explain, but before she can say anything Moses is gagging her with his hand and stabbing her to death. "And then the bush avenged itself: that was her last thought."

Moses watches her fall to the floor, and then lets his self-made weapon also fall. He immediately picks it up, holds it out in the rain until it's clean, and then prepares to go to his hut in preparation for protesting his innocence the next day. He goes out into the rain and is halfway to his hut when he looks back and sees Mary's huddled body on the veranda. Then, as a flash of lightning illuminates the scene, he realizes two things: he has achieved his ultimate triumph, and he must face the ultimate consequence (see "Quotes", p. 245).

Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter contains the climaxes of the novel's two principal narrative lines (the murder mystery and the psychological study) and its three thematic lines (racism, self-delusion, revenge), all of which reach their high points at exactly the same moment—Moses' murder of Mary Turner. The murder mystery is resolved, the psychological study comes to its torturous conclusion, the theme about the destructive power of self-delusion is powerfully dramatized, and so is the theme about the dangers of racism. The secondary theme about the nature of revenge, subtly developed throughout the novel and increasing in sub-textual tension throughout the last two chapters, reaches its murderous end as Moses uses his homemade weapon (presumably a knife of some kind) to punish the white woman who punished him. All in all, the novel's climax is an excellent example of the way plot, character and theme can all intertwine to great, and mutually beneficial effect. The murder plot would not be as suspenseful without the psychological study, neither would exist without the revenge theme, and neither would be as potentially moving without the presence of the racism and/or the self-delusion theme.

An interesting question to consider is whether Mary, when she sees Moses in the store, is actually seeing him or is seeing an illusion conjured up by her fragmented mind. It's perfectly possible that he is physically there; he does, after all, need someplace to hide nearby as he waits for his opportunity to achieve his goal of killing Mary. It must be remembered, however, that throughout the novel the store, both the store on the farm and the store as idea, manifested in every store Mary ever enters, represents her

unhappy childhood, her oppressed lack of identity, and her fear of those more powerful than she. If Moses isn't real, if she's only imagining him, he then becomes a further projection of all those feelings, of everyone and everything that oppressed her and made her fearful. This, of course, might hold true in either case, if he's there or he isn't. Either way, her seeing him in the store is a powerful symbol of her fear, powerlessness, and vulnerability.

The novel's final moments, in which Moses decides to not pretend that he's innocent, refers back to narration back in Chapter 1 (see "Quotes", p. 6) referring to the way natives lived in the days before white civilization. Specifically, the almost-in-passing reference to his settling on an anthill refers to the punishment meted out to offenders in those days, and suggests that Moses, like his ancestors, is aware of his guilt and prepared to take his punishment. This, therefore, can be seen as the explanation for why he turns himself in to the police in Chapter 1 (one of the questions posed in that mystery-oriented first chapter).

This chapter's opening paragraphs, in which Mary, for a few brief moments, has a happy peaceful relationship with nature, may be the source of the novel's title. The particular phrase "the grass is singing" is found nowhere in the book; however, this nature-happy moment seems to be the only point at which the grass *might* be singing. If this is in fact the case, and this moment of harmony between Mary and nature is the source of the title, then the title can definitely be interpreted as ironic, given that Mary's moments of peace and joy are in fact the precursors to her moments of ultimate terror, and her death.

Characters

Mary Turner

Mary is the central character, or protagonist, of this novel. Her actions, reactions, psychological and emotional state of being, complete mental and spiritual deterioration, and ultimately her death that drive both the narrative action and the development of the novel's central themes. What's particularly interesting about this character is that she is both archetypal, in that she represents a certain set of consistent characteristics within a certain group of people, and highly individualized, given that her particular circumstances are equally important in defining her identity. In terms of the former, she has many of the characteristics of individuals within her situation—white people in mid-apartheid South Africa. These characteristics mostly develop in relation to black people—specifically, from the unshakeable belief that whites are, in every way, superior to blacks, that they have the right to feel and act superior, and they have the right to act with physical, emotional, spiritual and financial violence in order to preserve their status.

These characteristics lead Mary to ill-considered acts of verbal and physical violence towards the black people around her, one of which leads eventually to her murder. That being said, in Mary's case (and perhaps in all whites in that situation) these beliefs seem to be grounded in fear of the larger numbers of black people, of their physical power—an important point in this book), and of what is unknown and different about them. In terms of being individualized, Mary's childhood and young adulthood (as defined in Chapter 2), and in particular her difficult relationship with her parents and their life as a family, also play a key role in defining the causes and course of her breakdown through-out the novel. She is in many ways an immature, emotionally malnourished, and at times even pathetic figure. Her anger at her husband and fearful rages at the black people around her is, essentially, a mask to cover up her deep-rooted insecurity and inability to face her feelings. These two weaknesses are the particular sources of her ultimate mental and emotional collapse, and also her outburst of violent fury against Moses early in the book, which, eventually, leads him to kill her in revenge.

Richard (Dick) Turner

Dick is Mary's husband, a man who first appears to her like a kind of hero or rescuer who can take her from the life she has come to hate, and to consider inferior, and into a life of freedom and emotional fulfillment. As she comes to discover, to her intense dismay and increasing anger, Dick is as emotionally under-developed as she is. His one goal, his dream, his ambition, is to live a life of quiet productivity on the farm-land he has come to know and love as a source of spiritual truth and fulfillment. Ultimately, however, both his and Mary's dreams come to naught because Dick is ineffectual, inefficient, disorganized, and completely deluded about his abilities. Like his wife, his psyche is too fragile to be able to incorporate that which doesn't fit into his self-sustaining belief system. When evidence mounts that his delusions (about his farm and

also about the potential for happiness in his marriage) are in fact delusions, he clings to them more strongly than ever rather than making changes in his life and relationships to make a truer, more fulfilling existence possible. When it comes to the point at the end of the novel when he can no longer sustain his delusions in any way, he has a complete emotional and mental breakdown.

Charlie Slatter

Slatter is the Turners' nearest neighbor, a ruthless farmer who exploits his land and his workers to the fullest, harshest degree in order to make as much money as he can. Throughout the novel, he has plans to take over the Turner farm when Dick's plans fall apart once and for all. Also throughout the novel, he displays a strange degree of compassion towards Dick. It is strange because it seems at odds with his increasingly frustrated hopes that Dick will finally fail once and for all. This compassion, however, is eventually revealed to not be quite as admirable as it seems. Ultimately, it springs from an angry, racist-oriented determination that white men like Slatter and Dick should never be taken advantage of either by blacks or by women, as Dick seems to be. In other words, Slatter feels a harsh kind of pity for Dick, since he's taken advantage of by both his black workers and his wife.

Mrs. Slatter

This relatively minor character is Charlie Slatter's wife, a good-hearted woman whose attempts to rescue Mary Turner from her lonely, isolated, frustrated life on Dick's farm are continually rejected. Mrs. Slatter eventually gives up, abandons her sense of compassion for Mary and Dick, and turns to spreading gossip about them in revenge for being continually rebuffed. This action is a manifestation of one of the novel's secondary themes exploring revenge—in her own way, Mrs. Slatter acts as destructively towards the Turners as Moses, Mary's killer, does.

Tony Marston

This character is a young Englishman recently arrived in South Africa, full of ideals and theories about farm life and about the racial situation. In his own way he is as unrealistic about life and the way it ought to be lived as the Turners, begins to become just as disillusioned. In this sense, he and his experiences are manifestations of one of the novel's principal themes, relating to the power and danger of personal delusion. As the brief outline of his later life at the end of Chapter 1 suggests, he avoids dealing with the realities he encounters by working in a job he despises simply to fill his mind with something other than his painful, troubling memories of his time on the Turner farm.

Sergeant Denham

This character is the district police officer summoned in Chapter 1 by Charlie Slatter to investigate the murder of Mary Turner. Denham and Slatter share a similar perspective on the Turners as a couple (they both pity them and view them as strange objects of curiosity) and on Mary Turner as an individual (they deeply resent her). Denham treats Marston patronizingly and Moses roughly, and as such represents and embodies the attitudes of more experienced South-Africaners towards both newcomers and blacks.

Moses

Moses is the black servant who, at the beginning of the novel, confesses to the murder of Mary Turner and surrenders without a fuss. He is later revealed to have been the yard worker struck by Mary in a fit of anger (Chapter 7). Shortly afterwards Moses becomes a house servant, evidently with the intention of making Mary suffer emotionally in a similar way she made him suffer physically, and also with the intention of eventually killing her, which he does at the end of the book. His actions and attitudes embody and dramatize the novel's secondary theme relating to the nature of revenge.

Mary's Parents

These characters appear prominently in Chapter 2, as the primary formative influences on many of Mary's attitudes—towards herself, towards sex, and perhaps most importantly towards the many stores in her life (see "Objects/Places - The Store"). Both parents were, according to the novel, deeply troubled people, their individual dysfunctions damaging significantly their daughter and her potential for a happy, fulfilling life.

Samson

This relatively minor character is the house servant employed by Dick at the time when his marriage to Mary begins, and she comes to live with him. Indications are that Samson and Dick have a relatively casual, comfortably secret-keeping relationship; that is, Samson steals and Dick knows he steals, but because Samson never steals too much and Dick is essentially non-confrontational, it's allowed to slide. However, because Mary has very strict rules and is *quite* confrontational, when she arrives Samson no longer has the freedom he once had and quits soon afterwards. He is the first of a string of house servants driven out of the house by Mary's anger and attitudes.

The Doctor

This un-named character appears on the two occasions in which Dick is laid low with malaria. On both occasions he urges Dick and Mary to reconsider their lifestyle by

working less, working more wisely, and to take a holiday for their mental and/or physical health. On both occasions he is ignored, and goes away angry and frustrated. While he plays a relatively small role in the action he is a complex individual, with a gruff, angry exterior considering a deeply understanding and compassionate heart—after both of his visits, he refuses to send the obviously poverty stricken Turners a bill.

Objects/Places

South Africa

The novel is set in this country, which at the time the action unfolds was populated and governed according to the rules of apartheid, institutionalized racism in which the white minority was socially, legally, and politically dominant over the black majority. See "Style - Setting" for a detailed exploration of this setting's thematic and dramatic importance to the novel's atmosphere, story, thematic development, and meaning.

The Turner Home

The house in which Dick and Mary Turner live is little more than a shack: flimsy walls, no proper ceiling (it has instead a roof of heat-magnifying corrugated iron), and little or no interior decoration. In many ways, it's seen by other whites in the community (and by Mary Turner herself) as indicating that the Turners have a much lower standard of living than that lived by other whites in the community. In this house they are poor in pocketbook and in spirit. The house has an important symbolic value, in that its capacity for retaining and even amplifying the torturous South African heat represents Mary Turner's capacity for retaining and amplifying her anger at, and fear of, black people in general and of Moses in particular. It also represents her capacity for retaining and amplifying her frustration and unhappiness with herself (for living such an un-fulfilled, miserable life) and with her husband (for, as she sees it, being the primary reason she's *liviing* that life).

Ant Hills

Ant hills are mentioned twice in the novel, once at the beginning and once at the end. On both occasions they are referred to as means of punishment. Chapter 1 describes how in the days before white settlement transgressing blacks were punished by, for example, being tied to an ant-hill and being stung, bitten, and made generally uncomfortable. The key point in this reference is that in many cases, those being punished admitted their wrongdoing and accepted their punishment without argument. This reference fore-shadows and sets the stage for the reference at the end of the book, in which Moses enacts that ancient experience; he knows he's done wrong, and settles down on top of an ant-hill to await his punishment.

The Sjambok

A South African whip, described in Chapter 1 as hanging over the front door of the Turner home like a motto: "You shall not mind killing if it is necessary." This reference foreshadows events in Chapter 7 when Mary, fearful of the black yard workers but having no choice but to supervise them when Dick falls ill, takes the sjambok out to the

fields with her, loses her temper, and uses it to strike Moses. The sjambok is a symbol of Mary's attitude towards blacks, and the white attitude towards blacks in general—that of justified domination, maintained by violence if necessary.

The Store

The "store" is a term to describe an archetypal structure/business found, in the novel at least, in farming communities throughout South Africa. All the stores are described as having essentially the same layout and selling essentially the same goods. This means that Mary, who associates the many stores of her childhood with painful family memories, carries those associations with her into the stores she encounters in her adult-hood, both the stores she shops in and the store she and Dick start on their farm. In the novel's final chapter, as Mary draws closer to the moment of her death, she encounters the cause of that death, Moses, in her long abandoned store. Moses here is the embodiment of the destructive power represented by the store throughout the book. Moses destroys Mary physically in the same way her experiences of, memories of, and feelings about "the store" contribute to her being destroyed emotionally.

The City

Following the death of her parents, Mary escapes into the un-named city, where she develops a life of freedom, independence, and what she considers to be joy. After several years there, however, she discovers that her beliefs about the city and what it means to her are in fact a delusion, and she hurries into a marriage with Dick in order to escape. When she discovers that the marriage is itself based on a delusion, or more accurately a pair of delusions (hers and Dick's), she slowly reformulates her delusion about the opportunities for happiness and fulfillment offered by the city. At one point she runs away to try and capitalize on those opportunities, but because both she and the city have changed drastically her delusions are again destroyed. She never visits the city again.

Mary's Clothes

Mary's clothes are a particular manifestation of her inner state of being. When she's in the city, she dresses in a girlish, inappropriate way that symbolizes her emotional, spiritual and sexual immaturity. When she moves onto the farm she attempts to make herself some clothes that are both prettier and more functional, as representative of what she believes to be her new life, but as her awareness of how hard and unfulfilling that life truly is, her clothes become increasingly drab, dull, and tattered—exactly the way her spirit does. Late in the book, when Charlie Slatter pays an unexpected visit and Mary dresses herself in some of the clothes from her youth, it represents her desperate attempt to recapture the delusional happiness and joy of her youth. Both the clothes and the inappropriately flirty manner she adopts when wearing them are pathetic and embarrassing, revealing the desperation in her soul.

Dick's Farm

The farm performs a similar function for Dick as the city performs for Mary. It is his refuge and his dream, the source of his life force and the place where he feels he belongs. However, also like the city is for Mary, the farm is the source of Dick's delusions. His idealization of it keeps him from seeing the reality and truth of his incompetence and foolish-ness in the same way as Mary's idealization of the city keeps her from seeing her own reality and the truth of her lack of emotional development.

Dick's Trees

(See "Quotes, p. 95) The trees are perhaps the only thing about the farm that Dick gets right. This effort to redress past wrongs is a manifestation of the sense of connection he feels to the land, and at the same time is a symbol of his dream of contentment. The reference to them in Chapter 6 is also a foreshadowing of his attitude towards Mary. In the same way as he tries to correct the mistakes of the mining company by planning the trees, he continually tries to correct his mistakes with Mary by doing what she wants (or, in most cases, demands).

The Bathtub

The oxidized (and therefore stained) zinc bathtub in the Turner home appears in Chapter 5 as a focus of Mary's feelings towards both her home and the black servants that assist in its running. It's a symbol and embodiment of the unchanging, constantly irritating aspects of life in South Africa against which Mary struggles with increasing anger and resentment—what she perceives as the persistent insolence of the blacks that she feels she has the right to dominate, the consistently intolerable climate, and the foolish nature of Dick's personality and delusions. None of these can be altered, in the same way as the bathtub's condition cannot be altered no matter how much Mary rages.

Social Sensitivity

This first novel by a prolific contemporary writer who has written for more than fifty years offers exploration of a number of recurring themes that appear in her fictional work. By thoroughly exploring various power struggles on the African continent of the early twentieth century, Doris Lessing established herself as a writer known for her politics. Not only does Lessing clearly delineate the typical racial relationship between white farmers and their native workers, she addresses how and why the whites continued to oppress the native workers and allowed few variances in the unequal balance of power. Raised in Southern Rhodesia, the author intimately knew such relationships and recognized the injustices.

Her autobiographies, Under My Skin (1995) and Walking in the Shade (1997), have indicated that she particularly drew upon her personal experiences to develop the characters and issues of her early stories.

Lessing further explores power relationships between males and females, particularly courtship and the institution of marriage. Because of the issues she raises about a white, patriarchal society's oppression of such victims as women and the poor, many Marxist and feminist readers have embraced her works. At the time of her earliest publications, including The Grass Is Singing, Lessing was an active supporter of the Communist Party, as were many of the intelligentsia.

The Grass Is Singing explores how Mary Turner's relationships with her husband, the servants, and the neighbors ultimately produce little grief at her murder, other than that provided by the outsider, Tony Marston. The newly arrived assistant on the Turner's farm, Marston responds as much from his horror at the manifestation of murder as for any personal feelings for the woman herself. Whether the Turners ignored or defied the "esprit de corps which is the first rule of South African society," the neighbors despised them for their resistance to the group's code of action. In the first chapter, the narrator directs the reader's focus to include the peripheral characters' points of view: The more one thinks about it, the more extraordinary the case becomes. Not the murder Itself; but the way people felt about it, the way they pitied Dick Turner with a fine fierce indignation against Mary, as if she were something unpleasant and unclean, and it served her right to get murdered. But they did not ask questions.

Clearly this narrative statement indicates Lessing's interest in how individuals who support the hegemony's point of view perceive the victim of a violent death. Lessing has continued to question such assumptions in both her fiction and non-fiction writing.

Not only has Lessing repeatedly pushed against the boundaries established by the ruling society in her writings, but she has also addressed characters who battle with mental instability as their sense of self and their relationships to others are shattered.

Mary Turner is the first of a number of women characters whom Lessing develops fully to explore the issues relating to mental breakdown and its oftentimes life-threatening consequences.

Techniques

Using a newspaper article to document the murder of a white farmer's wife by her native servant, Lessing addresses the human tendency to generalize, sensationalize, and confirm their worst assumptions, fears, and beliefs. The article clipping itself is followed by the narrator's exploration of the situation following the murder before the reader even encounters the characters' points of view. These narrative explorations throughout the remainder of chapter one direct the reader to the primary issues surrounding the murder and the society in which it takes place. In the end, all of the participants implicate themselves in wrongdoing and lack of respect for human dignity.

The rest of the novel provides extended flashbacks up to murder. Chapter two returns to Mary's childhood, and she remains the focus of more chapters than other characters. Most importantly, Lessing shows how successfully Mary lives in the city by herself and returns to it when she temporarily flees her husband.

The distinctive omniscient narrative voice encourages readers to interpret the events from an ever-widening understanding of viewpoints. Sometimes Lessing uses this narrative device to comment on a political situation or people's attitudes and beliefs, for example, in the beginning of chapter ten: People who live to themselves, whether from necessity or choice, and who do not trouble themselves about their neighbors' affairs, are always disquieted and uneasy if by some chance they come to know that other people discuss them. It is as though a sleeping man should awake and find round his bed a circle of strangers staring at him.

From this point on, readers see Mary's quickening disintegration in her growing dreams and visions of plants overtaking the farm.

Only in the last chapter do readers encounter the key player's actions leading up to the murder. Mary is seen knowingly awaiting her fate, and finally the murderer's last actions and the details of what happened are revealed. The narrator warns, however, that personal emotions are impossible to decipher and so Moses's motives for the murder remain ambiguous.

His actions are viewed from the standpoint of someone observing another than from within his mind.

Themes

Themes

Lessing's political knowledge appears throughout The Grass Is Singing, but most clearly in how she develops characters who represent various roles of farming in third world countries during the early twentieth century. Although Charlie Slatter is the successful farmer who takes over the land by the end of the story, sympathy is not directed toward him. Dick Turner appears as the tragic character who gains readers' sympathy because not only does he want to own the land but also because he defines his own self-worth by it. Both of these men, as are all white farmers of that time in that location, however, are hampered by their oppressive use of natives for labor.

Even though Dick Turner treats the natives more humanely than most, the injustices are enhanced by his wife's treatment of the natives. Oblivious to the ways of the farm and working with natives, Mary Turner enters her marriage and discovers how much she dislikes farming and the presence of natives. That Dick overlooks his wife's treatment of the natives indicates both marriage concerns and perpetuating practices of injustice.

Lessing further delineates the hierarchy of social order in this farming community by identifying the other farmer's interest in the outcome of the Turner's growing poverty. When Charlie insists that Dick leave the farm, the narrator tells readers that Charlie: was fighting to prevent another recruit to the growing army of poor whites, who seem to respectable white people so much more shocking (though not pathetic, for they are despised and hated for their betrayal of white standards, rather than pitied) than all the millions of black people who are crowded into the slums or on the dwindling land reserves of their own country.

Because they do not follow the codes of the group and value the same things, their neighbors will not support the Turners.

Most of the novel seems to support a fatalistic view that regardless of his or her goals and desires, the individual will fold under the pressure of societal codes of conduct. Breaking out of them will eventually result in despair and disintegration of the individual. The demands of society will often lead to mental breakdown, as Marston realizes when he considers "What is madness but a refuge, a retreating from the world?"

That Mary recognizes too late that she has fallen into the same situation as her mother causes greater hopelessness and distance between them. As their spousal relationship grows more distant and they vie for power, Mary hides the changing interaction occurring between her and Moses, particularly as the ambiguous sexual undercurrent grows.

Throughout, Lessing threads together images from T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, from which she quotes as the frontispiece of her book, but none so clearly as the last chapters as Mary loses touch with those around her and retreats into her dream world.

Although always aggravated by the heat of the climate and the shrill sounds of the cicadas reminding her of nature about to overtake her own possession of the land, Mary's senses are enhanced as her personal disintegration occurs. The visual imagery of her dreams takes over until "her mind was filled with green, wet branches, thick wet grassland thrusting bushes." Just as Mary cannot prevent the grass of the veld and bush from overtaking her household, Dick, too, considers attempting to take more control by lighting the grass on fire during their last day on the farm as they prepare to leave. Tragically, at the end, Mary recognizes her erroneous ways and embraces her final annihilation.

Relationships between Blacks and Whites

The novel's principal thematic focus, as well as its central narrative line, are constructed around the issue of racism—in this case, the institutionalized racism of apartheid. As has been previously discussed, the relationships between the Turners and their black workers, particularly the field-hand-turned-house servant Moses, are a microcosm of the relation-ships between blacks and whites in the South Africa of the time. These relationships in turn were founded upon hatred and resentment on both sides, reluctant need on the side of the whites, and increasing frustration and resentment on the side of the blacks. That being said, there are several sides of the white perspective presented here.

While all the white characters essentially despise the black people they are connected with (it was simply the way things were to feel that way), there are varying degrees of aggression with which those feelings are expressed. Mary, her racism intensified by fear (and perhaps illicit attraction) uses verbal violence and, on one ultimately fatal occasion, physical violence. Slatter uses emotional violence, the power of contempt and dismissiveness, to keep blacks in their place. Dick, by contrast, feels a degree of compassion and genuine warmth towards the blacks in his employ, particularly to the house servant Samson.

The point must be made, however, that that compassion is grounded in the patronizing, typical apartheid/white attitude that blacks were essentially stupid and lazy, and must be treated like children if anything is to be accomplished. The ultimate eruption of Moses into long dormant violence, in this context, can be seen as symbolizing and embodying a reaction to these various attitudes that, perhaps, is/was an ideal to many blacks. It doesn't matter what punishment he receives; he's stood up for himself and his people, and that's what counts. In exploring the various manifestations of all these attitudes, the novel's core thematic point is that racism, particularly the societal approved racism of apartheid, is soul-and-life destroying to any and all who live within the system that fostered it.

The Power and Dangers of Self-Delusion

Where the novel's core theme of racism has societal over/undertones, its other core theme (relating to the nature and dangers of self-delusion) has a much more personal, individualized sensibility. The plot of the novel, its action, is driven by the way that the white characters, particularly Mary and Dick Turner, undergo a series of challenges to their precious beliefs about themselves and about their lives and struggle to, in Mary's case, find new delusional beliefs or, in Dick's case, hold onto the original beliefs. As the repeated pattern of new belief, disillusion, new belief to replace the old belief, disillusion repeats itself, the novel defines its thematic perspective that such delusions and the need to hold onto them are dangerous and ultimately destructive. Mary's life, both physical and emotional, end up completely destroyed as the result of her increasingly desperate dependence upon her delusions, the most notable of which is that black people are disgusting.

This delusion is challenged by the evident tenderness with which she's treated by Moses in the novel's later chapters (that is, in the weeks before he murders her). What the action of the novel reveals is that she holds to that delusion so tightly that having it shattered proves shattering to her psyche—she loses her mind completely. The same thing happens to Dick. He survives several of Mary's attempts to make him alter his perspective on his beloved farm by clinging ever more strongly to his beliefs, eventually shutting out any other perspective and/or opportunity for happiness and/or fulfillment he might have. When he eventually loses the farm, the only element of his life that brought him real, consistent pleasure, he too loses his mind—and here too is the novel's thematic warning about the dangers of holding too tightly to one's delusions. The irony in all of this is that neither Dick nor Mary could survive their lives if they didn't *have* their delusions. This situation suggests that ultimately both characters are profoundly unrealistic. This means that the natural extension of the warning against delusion is a warning to be realistic in one's perspectives and attitudes; otherwise, destruction will be the inevitable result.

Revenge

This secondary theme plays out primarily through developments in the character of Moses, whose decision to join the Turner household and ingratiate himself with both Dick and Mary has one purpose only: to get revenge on Mary for hitting him with the sjambok. The point must be made that when he first appears in the house (Chapter 8), it's never explicitly stated that that's why he's here. It becomes possible to draw the inference, however, as the result of his confession in Chapter 1 to having killed Mary. It's by no means certain when he appears in Chapter 8 that he actually did kill her—it could still be, at that point, that he's covering up for someone else for some reason;.but as the events of Chapter 11 make undeniably clear, his was the hand that held the knife that ended Mary's life and that he did what he did because of what she did to him. That being said, the revenge theme is also developed in some less obvious but no less telling ways—specifically, in the actions of the Slatters.

Charlie Slatter's determination to take over Dick Turner's farm is, on some level, an act of revenge for Dick being a bad example of what a white farmer should be, being a bad neighbor, and for not selling him the farm when the offer was first made. In the same way, Mrs. Slatter's spreading of gossip about the Turners is an act of revenge for Mary's continued snubbing of her efforts at making friends and providing support. There is even the possibility that in a larger context the actions of Moses and the Slatters can be interpreted as societal revenge on those who are determined to act on their own, independently of tradition, community, and accepted rules of behavior.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written from the third person omniscient point of view, albeit with a some-what limited perspective. To be specific, the narration focuses with almost complete exclusivity on the thoughts, feelings and motivations of its white characters. The black characters, who are admittedly secondary in narrative importance, receive little or no attention from the narration, their thoughts, feelings and motivations are, for the most part, not entered into. The most notable exception to this general rule is at the novel's close, at which point the narration explores the psyche of the killer, the black servant Moses. This approach to point of view has a definite resonance with one of the novel's key themes, the exploration of the relations between black and white. In short, the novel's focus on the white characters is a manifestation of the characters' limited awareness—they're fully aware of *only* themselves, with the black characters being perceived solely through that awareness. This is particularly true of Mary, the novel's central character upon whom the narrative's focus mostly falls. The self-absorbed nature of her deeply ingrained racism is stylistically echoed in the narrative's almost total absorption with her particular thoughts, feelings, attitudes and reactions.

All that being said, the shift of focus at the end to Moses' point of view can, in this context, be per-ceived as equally thematically relevant - the black man, by his action, has made his own identity manifest. It's only logical, therefore, that the narrative should at last include an exploration of that identity, however brief and however colored by the murderous circumstances in which it takes place. These points are not made to suggest that the narrative is itself racist—on the contrary. In its stylistic choice to limit the novel's narrative perspective, the author reinforces its thematic point in a subtle, but undeniably effective, way.

Setting

The setting in *The Grass is Singing* plays an inextricably vital role in the action, and manifests on several levels, the first being political and social. At the time and in the place where the novel is set (late 1940's South Africa), the day-to-day life of the country and its inhabitants was governed by apartheid, a system of institutionalized racism that gave the minority white population power over the majority black population. This power manifested on every level—economic, political, and inter-personal. The relationships and attitudes of the white and black characters in *The Grass is Singing* are, therefore, a microcosm of pervasive societal attitudes that, in general, fostered hatred, fear, resentment and anguish on both sides.

It's these feelings that lead to the deterioration of all the principal relationships in the novel, and ultimately to the murder with which the novel begins and ends. The other levels of manifestation of the novel's setting are in climate and physical environment,

which have direct impact on the mental, emotional, and spiritual developmentof its central characters, in particular on its protagonist, Mary Turner. In particular, the omnipresent heat and dryness of rural South Africa prove extremely challenging to Mary, to the point that they become oppressive, her struggles to overcome them (or at least make herself comfortable) become obsessive, and she eventually finds herself overpowered. This last point, that she is in effect conquered by the climate, can also be made of the first level of the novel's setting. The lives of Mary, her husband and her killer are all essentially destroyed, in a metaphorical way, by apartheid—its rules, its attitudes, and its spiritually corrosive capacity for hatred.

Language and Meaning

The language in *The Grass is Singing* conveys the very strong sense that the author has extensive understanding of the physical and social environment being written about: there is, in particular, a feeling of casual, informed knowledge about many of the novel's details. The contents of Mary's various stories and the attitudes of those who shop there, the oppressive climate, the ever-present and multi-faceted racism—all are defined with a pointedly observant sensibility that seems to have not only examined these things but to some extent lived them. In other words, there is the very clear sense of the narrative taking place within an existing reality, rather than creating a reality of its own (a narrative style that can be found in several literary works outside the realm of fantasy and/or speculative fiction).

This sense of veracity creates the impression that the action of the novel (the breakdowns suffered by its lead white characters, the eruption of violence in its principal black character) has, at least to some degree, a similar base in realism. The point is not made to suggest that the novel's plot was inspired by actual events. The language does, however, give the very strong impression that it was inspired by actual circumstances and/or feelings. White women probably did live in fear of, and perhaps sexual fascination with, their black servants, while those servants in their turn probably did harbor ever increasing resentment of their "masters," and in all likelihood on occasion became martyrs to that resentment, exploding in violence and suffering the consequences in exactly the same process of events as the novel recounts. This sense of realism in action and motivation, in turn, adds weight to the novel's thematic meaning, in that its thematic points about delusion, racism and revenge seem to be grounded in realistic, all-too-human experiences and failings.

Structure

The novel's structure is similar to that of other stories that have a murder mystery component; it starts with the murder, or in this case its immediate aftermath, and then examines in detail the circumstances, relationships, and incidents that led to it. In general, the purpose of this structural technique is to create a powerful sense of curiosity in the reader right from the beginning. He or she is, on some level, impelled to read further into the novel in order to answer the questions posed by its beginning—who

is the guilty party, why did the murder happen, and what is relevant about the obviously carefully chosen details/clues that have been laid down.

This general purpose is specifically fulfilled in *The Grass is Singing*, as the narration's opening comments on the circumstances of the Turners and of their allegedly murderous servant Moses create a sufficiently intriguing sense of mystery that effectively draws the reader into the following chapter and the chapters beyond. Within the first of those chapters, there are relatively few obvious developments in the murder mystery, as the narrative focus shifts for an extended stretch to a psychological study of the murder victim, Mary Turner. The pattern or structure of that study is repeated in several chapters, in that a detailed exploration and/or narrative focusing on Mary is followed by a brief but detailed telling glimpse into the psyche of her husband Dick, which is followed by similarly evocative narratives of the two of them together. The pattern concludes, usually, with a return to focus on Mary.

This sense of internal structure helps to create a sense of momentum—as Mary goes through the same pattern of experience, her frustration and instability grow, triggering increasing suspense in the reader about when she will either explode or break down completely. This structurally enhanced sense of suspense is further heightened with the entrance of Moses into the house and Mary's realization that he is the farm worker she struck earlier. In short, the murder mystery re-enters the action at exactly the right structural moment to heighten considerably the tension in the psychological study and drive the story, both in terms of the mystery and the psychological study, towards its inevitable, murderous end.

Quotes

"People all over the country ... felt a little spurt of anger mingled with what was almost satisfaction, as if some belief had been confirmed ... when natives steal, murder or rape, that is the feeling white people have." Chapter 1, p. 1.

"... [in the old society] everyone knew what they could or could not do. If someone did an unforgiveable thing, like touching one of the King's women, he would submit fatalistically to punishment, which was likely to be impalement over an ant heap on a stake, or something equally unpleasant. 'I have done wrong, and I know it,' he might say, 'therefore let me be punished.'" Chapter 1, p. 6.

"...looking back over the last few days [Marston] could see that something like this was bound to happen ... some kind of violence or ugliness. Anger, violence, death, seemed natural to this vast, harsh country ..." Chapter 1, p.13

"If [Mary] had been left alone she would have gone on, in her own way, enjoying herself thoroughly, until people found one day that she had turned imperceptibly into one of those women who have become old without ever having been middle-aged: a little withered, a little acid, hard as nails, sentimentally kindhearted, and addicted to religion or small dogs." Chapter 2, p. 37.

"[Mary] felt sentimental at weddings, but she had a profound distaste for sex; there had been little privacy in her home and there were things she did not care to remember; she had taken good care to forget them years ago." Chapter 2, p. 38.

"...[Mary] began to feel, slowly, that it was not in [Dick's] house she was sitting, with her husband, but back with her mother, watching her endlessly contrive and patch and mend ... possessed with the thought that her father, from his grave, had sent out his will and forced her [Mary] back into the kind of life he had made her mother lead..." Chapter 3, p. 56.

"Women have an extraordinary ability to withdraw from the sexual relationship, to immunize themselves against it, in such a way that their men can be left feeling let down and insulted without having anything tangible to complain of. Mary did not have to learn this, because it was natural to her, and because she had expected nothing ..." Chapter 3, p. 57.

"[Mary] fell asleep holding his hand protectively, as she might have held a child's whom she had wounded." Chapter 3, p. 58.

"[Mary] was afraid of [the natives], of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be ... she had been told in the furtive, lowered, but matter-of-fact voice she associated with her mother, that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her." Chapter 4, p. 61.

"[Dick] knew how to get on with natives; dealing with them was a sometimes amusing, sometimes annoying game in which both sides followed certain unwritten rules." Chapter 5, p. 69.

"[Dick's] craving for forgiveness, and his abasement before her was the greatest satisfaction she knew, although she despised him for it." Chapter 5, p. 70.

"Loneliness, [Mary] thought, was craving for other people's company. But she did not know that loneliness can be an unnoticed cramping of the spirit for lack of companionship." Chapter 5, p. 84.

"Children were what [Dick] wanted now that his marriage was a failure and seemed impossible to right. Children would bring them close together and break down this invisible barrier ..." Chapter 5, p. 90.

"...that whistle ... was a trick of [Dick's]; he stuck his hands in his pockets, little boy fashion, and whistled with a pathetic jauntiness when she lost her temper and raged at him because of the house, or because of the clumsiness of the water arrangements. It always made her feel quite mad with irritation, because he could not stand up to her and hold his own." Chapter 6, p. 94-95.

"[Dick] had planted [the trees] apparently on an impulse; but it was really the fruition of a dream of his. Years before he bought the farm, some mining company had cut out every tree on the place ... it wasn't much, planting a hundred acres of good trees that would grow into straight, white stemmed giants; but it was a small retribution; and this was his favorite place on the farm. When he was particularly worried, or had quarreled with Mary, or wanted to think clearly, he stood and looked at his trees ..." Chapter 6, p. 95.

"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 ... her formerly pleasant but formless face was setting into lines of endurance ..." Chapter 6, p. 99.

"[Mary] could not explain to Dick how that store smell made her remember the way she had stood, a a very small girl, looking fearfully up at the rows of bottles on the shelves, wondering which of them her father would handle that night; the way her mother had taken coins out of his pockets ... and how the next day she would be sent up to the store to buy food that would not appear on the account at the month's end." Chapter 6, p. 104-105.

"They were moving gently toward a new relation; they were more truly together than they had ever been. But then it was that he became ill; and the new tenderness between them, which might have grown into something that saved them both, was not yet strong enough to survive this fresh trouble." Chapter 7, p. 119."

"The phrases of this little lecture came naturally to [Mary's] lips ... she had heard them so often from her father, when he was lecturing his native servants, that they welled up from the part of her brain that held her earliest memories." Chapter 7, p. 129.

"[Mary] hated it when they spoke to each other in dialects she did not understand ... she hated their half-naked, thick-muscled black bodies stooping in the mindless rhythm of their work. She hated their sullenness, their averted eyes when they spoke to her, their veiled insolence; and she hated more than anything, with a violent physical repulsion, the heavy smell that came from the, a hot, sour animal smell." Chapter 7, p. 130.

"[Mary] needed to think of Dick, the man to whom she was irrevocably married, as a person on his own account, a success from his own efforts. When she saw him weak and goal-less, and pitiful, she hated him, and the hate turned in on herself. She needed a man stronger than herself, and she was trying to create one out of Dick." Chapter 8, p. 145.

"It was like a nightmare where one is powerless against horror: the touch of this black man's hand on her shoulder filled her with nausea; she had never, not once in her whole life, touched the flesh of a native. As they approached the bed, the soft touch still on her shoulder, she felt her head beginning to swim and her bones going soft." Chapter 9, p. 175.

"... [Mary] felt as if she were in a dark tunnel, nearing something final, something she could not visualize, but which waited for her inexorably, inescapably. And in the attitude of Moses, in the way he moved or spoke, with that easy, confident, bullying insolence, she could see he was waiting too." Chapter 9, p. 196.

"[Charlie] had been shocked out of self-interest. It was not even pity for Dick that moved him. He was obeying the dictate of the first law of white South Africa, which is: 'Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are.'" Chapter 10, p. 210.

"[Tony] had read enough about psychology to understand the sexual aspect of the color bar, one of whose foundations is the jealousy of the white man for the superior sexual potency of the native; and he was surprised at one of the guarded, a white woman, so easily evading this barrier. Yet he had met a doctor on the boat coming out ... who had told him he would be surprised to know the number of white woman who had relations with black me. Tony felt at the time ... it would be rather like having a relationship with an animal ..." Chapter 10, p.220.

"... what thoughts of regret, or pity, or perhaps even wounded human affection were compounded with the satisfaction of [Moses'] completed revenge, it is impossible to say. For, when he had gone perhaps a couple of hundred yards through the soaking bush he stopped, turned aside, and leaned against a tree on an ant heap. And there he would remain, until his pursuers, in their turn, came to find him." Chapter 11, p. 245.

Key Questions

Introducing so many of Lessing's recurring themes, The Grass Is Singing remains a solid selection to explore the issues surrounding them and how they have changed over the last fifty years.

1. Lessing provides two epigraphs to the novel. One is an excerpt from T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land and the other is from an unknown author: "It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weaknesses."

How does Lessing's novel reflect the epigraphs that she chooses to precede it?

2. Why is the title fitting in this story? 3. Is this novel still relevant in depicting racial relationships or does it represent a period of history that no longer exists?

4. Is this novel a tragedy? If so, who is the tragic figure?

5. How does the novel support the dictum "the personal is the political"?

Topics for Discussion

Consider the various forms of racial and/or ethnic and/or spiritual discrimination in the world. Is it still possible for someone to feel about another race or another group of individuals the same way Mary, Dick and the other white people in this book feel about blacks? Do those feelings continue to manifest in the same kind of financial, emotional and physical violence? Provide examples.

Discuss the extent to which Mary's feelings about male natives and about Moses in particular might be colored by her repressed sexuality. Consider in this context Dick's attitudes towards sexuality and children: How do his desires compliment and/or challenge hers?

Consider the way that almost all of the principal white characters—Mary, Dick, Marston and Slatter—all have deluded themselves, one way or another, while none of the black characters (particularly Moses, but also the briefly glimpsed field hands) have any delusions at all. In this key difference, is there a manifestation of the book's thematic point about race relations? If not, what is a possible explanation for this situation?

Consider the quote on p. 84 relating to loneliness. Discuss the role that spiritual and/or emotional and/or physical loneliness played in the psychological development of the three principal characters: Mary Turner, Dick Turner, and Moses.

Discuss the character of Dick Turner. Is he *childlike*, in that his beliefs, actions and feelings are simple, innocent, and idealistic? Or is he *childish*, in that what he does, thinks and feels is based on selfishness, insensitivity, or a "me first" sensibility? Is he a combination of both? What parts of him fall into each/either category?

Discuss Moses' motivations and circumstances at the point of his surrender. How much of what he does is a reaction to the knowledge of his inevitable arrest, and how much is the result, as the narrative suggests (in Chapter 1 and at the end of Chapter 11), of an inwardly directed, ancient sense of justice?

Imagine what might have happened if Mary had not been killed. What might have happened on her holiday with Dick—might have they come to some kind of reconciliation? If they did, how long would it have lasted? Would they have returned to their old ways at the same time as they returned to the farm? Or were their respective breakdowns inevitable—was it only a matter of time? Could either of their ancient emotional and/or spiritual wounds have been healed? For that matter, could Moses'?

Literary Precedents

Self-educated after the age of thirteen, Lessing largely read the classics. She has noted that the Russian novelists Fyodor Dostoevsky and Anton Chekhov most influenced her writing. Dostoevsky's books explore the emotional and spiritual mental states of individuals who are plagued by guilt for crimes or moral lassitude. The tension of the deceit, guilt, and retribution of the sexual triangle apparent in The Grass Is Singing appears in The Brothers Karamazov, although the moral codes being broken are between family members.

Both Dostoevsky's and Chekhov's exploration of relations between the sexes and issues of ownership and materialism appear in Lessing's work. Chekhov's The Cherry Tree raises the question of how much one could and should attempt to own. As part of the intelligentsia, Lessing actively embraced Communism until she recognized its shortcomings before World War II. Her political beliefs do appear quite frequently in the narrative voices of her earlier works.

One might also draw parallels from Mary to Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Henrik Johan Ibsen's Anna in A Doll's House, both works featuring protagonists who also find themselves in unhappy marriages. All three of the women break not only the codes but also the laws of their society by leaving their husbands and taking on other relations. Like Emma, Mary's dreams and expectations are not fulfilled when she finds herself living in the country. The tragedy for Mary, however, is that she does not have the strength to resist going back, where the lack of understanding one another's needs will slowly unravel the relationship with her husband.

Related Titles

African Stories, a collection of Lessing's short stories, followed soon after the publication of The Grass Is Singing and reflects many of the same issues in a different genre.

In her later books, such as The Summer before the Dark and The Golden Notebook, Lessing more thoroughly explores her theme of marriage and relationships. Only after she has finished raising her children and putting other people first does Kate Brown in The Summer before the Dark realize her lack of fulfillment in her marriage. Unlike Mary, after a momentary breakdown, Kate is able to define what she wants in her life and return to articulate that to her family.

As two divorced single mothers in The Golden Notebook, Anna and Molly attempt to raise children outside the traditional definition of family, yet they yearn for a close relationship with a man. Molly's ex-husband's new wife is just as unhappy in her marriage. After tragedy strikes and Anna experiences a mental breakdown, Molly does plan to marry again. Anna is more able to identify destructive relationships.

Mental breakdown reoccurs most often in Lessing's work. Although most recognized for The Golden Notebook, the "Martha Quest" novels also explore this theme. While some characters, such as Anna, find a way to reintegrate themselves into a new sense of self, others, such as Mary, become tragic figures.

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