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Research Article

## Ontological Insecurity in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing*

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### Abstract

Through her novel *The Grass Is Singing*, Doris Lessing has questioned the stereotypical outlook of our society and politics. In this novel, she deals with the human psyche focusing on Mary Turner's character by portraying a vivid picture of the psychological struggles that she goes through since her childhood. While Mary is struggling inwardly, her memory has been playing a pivotal role in her psyche – her unhappy childhood memories and her memories of city life – and all these put a profound impact upon her psyche, creating a false-self and leading her towards 'ontological insecurity'. Based on the psychopathological and sociological analysis provided by Dr. R.D. Laing and Anthony Giddens respectively, this paper examines Lessing's projection of the character Mary as an ontologically insecure person by delving deep into Mary's psyche. The study explores three stages of anxiety in Mary's psyche induced by ontological insecurity, putting memories and societal factors as the threshold of her psychosomatic sufferings and shows how Mary despite her psychological sufferings struggles to assert her sense of self by constructing, reconstructing and deconstructing her false-self.

**Keywords:** Psychological distress, memory, false-self, ontological insecurity

### Introduction

Doris Lessing (1930-2001) is one of the most iconoclastic feminist writers in the modern era of British literature. Her unique sensitivity and personal intense experience make her novels experimental and exploratory. Though labeled as a feminist, ex-communist political enthusiast, anti-racist, she is also a "‘inner-space’ cultist with apocalyptic vision" (Marchino 252). In one of her essays, American writer Joyce Carol Oates, while talking about Lessing, claims, "Never superficially experimental – Mrs. Lessing's writing is profoundly experimental – exploratory – in its effort to alter our expectation about life and about the range of our own consciousness". In each of her novel, there is a "wonderful exploration of souls", be it Martha Quest or Mary or

*Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. Her characters are the substantiation of her craftsmanship while curving out the inner consciousness of a human being and the character of Mary Turner is not exempted from this pattern. Recent scholars, such as Joy Wang, Michele Wender Zak and Gayle Greene, have reconsidered the female characters of Lessing's novels to examine their psychic condition from multiple perspectives, including postcolonial guilt, society, memory and emotion. While talking about "the abject dimension of white female interracial desire" (38), Joy Wang argues that it is not only the abjection of desire but "an expression of agency, power, and political redemption" (Wang 38). Another scholar and American literary critic Gayle Greene talks about Lessing's treatment of memory. She argues about importance of memory "at particular cultural moment" by suggesting "distinction between memory and nostalgia" (292). Furthermore, Michele Wender Zak talks about "schizophrenic impoverishment" of female protagonist Mary by referring the idea of false-self rendered by Dr. R. D. Laing. Building a connection with these scholarly researches, my paper shows the inner struggles of Mary drawing out the strings from psychiatric studies positing memory and society as the threshold of it. Building on these scholarly approaches, my paper shows the inner struggles of Mary to understand her psyche drawing out the strings from psychiatric and sociological studies on ontological insecurity positing memory and society as the threshold of it and will assert the existence of Mary's strong sense of self.

The novel begins with a newspaper clipping titled "murder mystery" and briskly takes the reader to Mary's childhood, her adolescence, her professional and marital life and ends with her death. Lessing's interpretation of Mary's psyche covers her memories, flashbacks and dreams to describe the psychological tension of Mary. Throughout the novel, it is seen that Mary's psychological distress is the result of her unhappy childhood memories and her surrounding society. Since her childhood she rarely visits her parents' house and has little attachment with them. She prefers to stay in boarding house than her home. After completing her education, she joins a company at the city of Southern Rhodesia and still lives at the boarding house. Till thirty, she never develops any sort of relationship with anyone; but after overhearing a conversation between her own friends regarding her sexless life, she forces herself to get married with a man named Dick Turner, whom she has met just twice. Though both of their intention of getting married is to remove their loneliness, unfortunately, their conjugal relationship has failed to remove their loneliness and turns into a cold and distant relationship. As time progresses, the poor farming life of Dick and his consecutive failed project widen their distance even more. Moreover, her coincidental contact with the natives has convinced her that he is not unlucky, rather he is incompetence and has encouraged her more to interfere in his farm life. But she could not continue it for long as she ends up striking one of the natives with sjambok. However, she continues to interfere indirectly and manages him to go with tobacco farming for their immediate profit. When the tobacco farming proves to be a failure, Mary's psychological distress takes into a severe turn and it intensifies more when a houseboy called Moses comes to work for them whom she has struck previously. All these incidents have put severe impact upon her psyche leading her towards an unnatural relationship with Moses and ultimately ended with Mary being murdered by him.

As the novel travels through Mary's memory, with the course of this traveling, it is found that she has gone through various forms of anxiety since her childhood. While other researchers have talked about the facts liable for Mary's psychological insanity, my paper argues about Mary's strong sense of self or being and her utmost struggle to search it and preserve it from the lenses of psychopathological interpretation given by Dr. Laing and the sociological theory of Anthony Giddens. While talking about the search of self,

Dr. Laing, one of the best-known psychiatrists of modern times, in his text *The Politics of Experience*, states: “[T]he life I am trying to grasp is the me that is trying to grasp it” (190). This search of self is more elaborately discussed in his text *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, in which he coins a new psychological term ‘ontological insecurity’. The term refers to having no sense of healthy or vital self. He presents the idea by focusing the light upon the definition of ontological security. He states: “Such a basically ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people’s reality and identity” (*The Divided* 39). According to Dr. Laing, the term ‘ontology’ is used in its present empirical sense. When a baby is born, it is born with its own biological entity. It has “its own ways, real and alive” (41). Gradually, the child perceives itself as an individual entity and simultaneously sees other human beings as individual, real and alive. And these are the “self-validating data of experience” (41). If there is the partial or complete absence of experiences, its primary ontological security will be intruded by anxieties and dangers and shall give rise to primary ontological insecurity which will be followed by the projection of false-self. This theorization of ontological insecurity is given from the context of schizophrenia and other schizophrenia spectrum disorder. Later, Anthony Giddens adopts this theory and decontextualizes it. According to Giddens, ontological insecurity does not necessarily develop in an individual with schizophrenia. It can occur to anyone who does not have a positive view of self. In his book *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Later Modern Age*, he claims: “[A] lifestyle involves a cluster of habits and orientations, and hence has a certain unity - important to a continuing sense of ontological security - that connects options in a more or less ordered pattern” (36). When this ordered pattern is disrupted, a negative essence develops inside our self and causes ontological insecurity. Now, implying these context and theory upon Mary’s psyche, I intend to show that Mary’s surrounding social and psychological structure has played an important role to destroy her vital self and has created a false-self which has developed an ontological insecurity inside her psyche leading her towards her psychological distress and will further validate the existence of her strong sense of self by scrutinizing her psychological struggle. Based on the qualitative approach, my paper deals with the psychopathological and sociological theory on ontological insecurity to examine the psychological distress of Mary. All the data used in this paper is secondary, drawn from books, interviews and contemporary critical studies.

### **Memory and Society as Decimating Force on Mary’s false-self**

Human psyche is structured upon the basis of memory and it is considered as an inevitable fact that human life is enwrapped by memories. It is something which may affect our every deed, every thought process and our very psyche. It “revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies; it includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops, according to imperatives of its own” (Greene 294). In Lessing’s novels, memory tends to play a pivotal role in restructuring the characters’ psyche. Her *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *The Diaries of Jane Somer* (1984), *The Grass Is Singing* (1950) and *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973), all these fictional works thematize the idea of memory through revisiting the past events to construct the characters. Thus, the protagonist of *The Grass Is Singing*, Mary, is also a character who constructs and reconstructs her self through her constant revisiting into her past memories. In this text, Lessing uses memory as a “means of connecting past and present and constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with” (Greene 293). Therefore, Mary’s false-self is the offspring of her own memories.

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In the novel, the character of Mary possesses an extremely vacillating idea of self and as mentioned above, her idea of self is the corollary of the bitter memories of her past life. While talking about ontological insecurity, Anthony Giddens states:

The notion of ontological security ties in closely to the tacit character of practical consciousness -- or, in phenomenological terms, to the 'bracketings' presumed by the 'natural attitude' in everyday life. On the other side of what might appear to be quite trivial aspects of day-to-day action and discourse, chaos lurks. And this chaos is not just disorganization, but the loss of a sense of the very reality of things and of other persons. (Giddens 36)

An alcoholic father, spending his last penny for drinking; a scornful mother, who ridicules her husband and shows complete indifference to him; two siblings, who die of dysentery and the perpetual financial crisis – all these issues have always been prevailing across her childhood memories. As a British settler, Mary never visits England but always connects England to her idea of 'home', thus creating a false-self inside her psyche. Since her childhood, there is always a desperate urge to escape her family, which is groaning under the mortar of financial crisis. For this reason, when Mary was "sent to boarding school, her life changed. She was extremely happy, so happy that she dreaded going home at holiday times to her fuddled father, her bitter mother and the fly-away little house that was like a small wooden box on stilts" (*The Grass* 34-35). Thus, all the memories of Mary's childhood assert the fact that there is a lack of family bondage which continues and intensifies throughout her adolescence and creates a sense of nothingness, anxiety and danger inside her psyche, constructing false-self and leads her towards primary ontological insecurity.

At the age of sixteen, Mary leaves her school and takes a job in an office town and in her professional life; she seems quite happy or maybe she tries to be happy. She maintains a very busy schedule, a patterned lifestyle – waking up in the morning, heading towards her office, typing and bookkeeping, playing tennis or hockey with her friends, swimming, partying till midnight, going into the bed and restarting the cycle afresh. Her "pursuit of artificially framed styles of life" (Giddens 198) has enabled Mary to preserve her self. Meanwhile, during her away from home, her parents die and these deaths put little impact upon her life. The unpleasant childhood memories, numbing her familial attachment, turn her into such an escapist that it seems she has been all along waiting for the death of her parents. Hence, when her mother dies, the narrator remarks the situation by stating: "She hardly saw him (Mary's father): he was proud of her, but left her alone. They did not even write; they were not the writing sort. Mary was pleased to be rid of him. Being alone in the world had no terrors for her at all, she liked it" (35). Finally, when her father dies, she, after completing all the formalities, reinstates herself in her regular schedule with which she is accustomed to. After the death of her father, Mary's desperate desire to escape her childhood, her loosely connected family bondage and the never-ending financial crisis as the narrator says, "Then the father died. That removed the last link that bound her to a childhood she hated to remember. There was nothing left to connect her with the sordid little house on stilts, the screaming of trains, the dust, and the strife between her parents. Nothing at all! She was free" (36). The aforementioned facts assert that there is always a lack of validating data of experience in Mary's life which develops a negative view in her mind about her self. Moreover, there is not only the lack of family bondage, but also there is no trace of a healthy love relationship between her parents. To make it more complex, at the end of the novel, we find that Mary is sexually abused by her father. All these partial or complete nothingness in her empirical sense, create a sense of anxiety and sense of false-self leading her towards the disruption of her primary ontological security and as Dr. Laing suggests,

It is, of course, inevitable that an individual whose experience of himself [herself] is of this order can no more live in a 'secure' world than he can be secure in himself. The whole physiognomy of his world will be correspondingly different from that of the individual whose sense of self is securely established in its health and validity. (*The Divided* 42)

Still, Mary has been preserving her false-self by maintaining a patterned lifestyle to protect her cocooned ontological security. Unfortunately, Mary accidentally overhears a conversation between her friends, where she finds her self-identity and self-esteem being cruelly pulled down. Her "'business as usual' attitude that is so important to that cocoon is inevitably broken through" (Giddens 114). At this point, she "must launch out into something new, knowing that . . . it will be thereafter to revert to the old paths" (Giddens 114). All these psychological distresses of Mary confirm the decimating force of society on her sense of self. She, who never has the time to think of her own false-self, after witnessing the spiteful traits of her friends, now starts to ask herself: "Why did they say those things? What is the matter with me?" (*The Grass* 41). Moreover, as a person with ontological insecurity, her false-self is threatened by it and could not be remolded by her own self. Consequently, she immediately preoccupies herself with preserving her self rather than gratifying it. This psychological form is described by Dr. Laing something like this: "If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or other alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself losing his self" (*The Divided* 42). In order to do so, Mary immediately seeks after a potential husband with whom she can live with, not to have her own family but to stop the vicious tongues of the society and to preserve her false-self. At this point, her ontological security is threatened not only by her memories but also by the society. Her "pathetic attempt to find a 'real' self to replace the 'existentially true' one" (Zak 486) asserts her inner struggle to secure her sense of self or being.

### **Anxiety in Mary's Psyche and Her Inner Struggle**

While discussing Mary's psyche in relation to her inner struggle, a question arises here: how the anxiety of an ontologically insecure person puts on its impact upon the psychology of that individual? In relation to this question, Dr. Laing explores three forms of anxiety encountered by an ontologically insecure person: engulfment, implosion and petrification. While talking about engulfment, Dr. Laing claims: "In this the individual dreads relatedness as such, with anyone on anything or, indeed, even with himself, because his uncertainty about the stability of his autonomy lays him open to the dread lest in any relationship, he will lose his autonomy and identity" (*The Divided* 44). In view of this theory, if we correlate Mary's life, a similar form of anxiety is not possible. As, since her childhood, she has been experiencing a perpetual financial crisis which is exacerbated by the extreme hot and sweaty weather of South Africa, there is an extreme urge in Mary to escape her past memories. All these past memories "recede as Mary enters into the superficially centered existence of a single young woman in one of South Africa's larger towns. But the permanent psychological dislocation as a result of the dismal childhood implicitly continues" (Zak 484). She involves herself in multiple groups of people – colleagues, friends, coworkers, girls from her boarding school – but not in any sort of serious relationship. She has many friends but not that much close one. Her regular patterned lifestyle ensures her existence of false-self secured. Any sort of intervention seems to her as a potential threat to her preserved false-self and it can destroy her autonomy. Hence, after the revelation of her friends' true nature as an envoy

of societal factors, she dreads to meet people. In order to safeguard her preserved self, she always maintains an aloofness, and keeps herself safe from any sort of emotional distress. Here, Dr. Laing suggests: "Engulfment is felt as a risk in being understood (thus, grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply being seen" (*The Divided* 44).

For this reason, Mary's multiple attempts to reserve her true emotions can be observed in the novel. Even, after overhearing her friends' conversation, she represses her true feelings and composed her false-self accordingly in front of them. Not only that, when she sees Dick in front of her door, after waiting for long two months, she controls her emotions. It is very evident that Mary's psychology is encountered with the anxiety and danger from two levels- one is her memories and another one is the society. That's why, though Mary's ontological insecurity leads her psyche to "preserve identity under pressure from the dread of engulfment is isolation" (44), but still she is simultaneously pressured by societal factors to prove herself and to recreate herself according to the interest of the society. Consequently, we see Mary getting married to Dick driven by social pressure, but still remains in isolation.

After the full execution of engulfment in Mary's psyche, there starts the second form of anxiety, as stated by Dr. Laing that is implosion. According to Dr. Laing, implosion is the feeling of terror that an ontologically insecure individual goes through. In this case, he claims:

The individual feels that, like the vacuum, he is empty. But this emptiness is him. Although in other ways he longs for the emptiness to be filled, he dreads the possibility of this happening because he has come to feel that all he can be is the awful nothingness a just this very vacuum. Any 'contact' with reality is then in itself experienced as a dreadful threat because reality, as experienced from this position, is necessarily implosive and thus, as was relatedness in engulfment, in itself a threat to what identity the individual is able to suppose himself to have. (45-46)

In the case of Mary, the implosion does not occur in her psychology right away. Throughout her inner struggle, there are multiple attempts to preserve her self. After the first disruption of her false-self or her primary ontological insecurity, she attempts to readjust herself and reconstruct her self accordingly and this attempt leads her into a hasty relationship with first a fifty years old widower and finally with Dick. Again, all her attempts turn into a fiasco because of the unconscious intervention of her grim childhood memories.

Days after days, Mary tries to preserve her own self. Her surroundings, who have inflicted her upon the issue of her sexuality, have cornered her and pressured her to recreate her self. Moreover, Mary has been trying really hard as it is described, "She said to herself, with determination to face it, that she would 'get close to nature'" (*The Grass* 51). Unfortunately, getting married to Dick, compels Mary to take a u-turn from her superficially contented life in a larger town to her receding unhappy and bitter childhood memories. Once again, her psychology is stricken by engulfment and again she attempts to remodel her false-self. This time, in order to avoid her surroundings connected to her early childhood memories, she tries to keep herself busy with sewing, embroidering and redecorating the house. This notion of Mary's psychology is confirmed when the narrator says: "She has settled easily into the new rhythm. She found the change so embracing that it was as if she was an entirely a new person. Every morning she woke up with the clanging of the plough disk, and drank tea in bed with Dick. . . . She sewed all morning, till lunchtime; sewed after lunch, and went to bed immediately after supper" (61). Evidently, Mary's psychological corollary of ontological insecurity creates a sense of

engulfment that leaves her into a complete isolation and causes implosion into her psyche.

This process of keeping herself absorbed into something or anything at some point comes to an end as there is nothing else for Mary to do. Gradually, her all sense of self starts to decline and she realizes that she must surrender herself to the life of extreme heat and poverty-stricken farmer's wife. Still, as Michele Wender Zak remarks, "[W]ithout an operational sense of self, she withdraws increasingly from normal intercourse with the surrounding farm families, for isolation provides at once her only safety from threat of engulfment and ultimate destruction" (487). Even, when Mrs. Slatter visits her for the first time, she fails to engage herself into any sort of conversation to her. Moreover, being in the state of perpetual isolation or loneliness since her childhood, she is accustomed to the idea of loneliness in such a way that her definition of loneliness is unlike the usual emotion connected to it. To her, "Loneliness, 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" (*The Grass* 77). This particular aspect again asserts the fact that Mary's psyche is inflicted with ontological insecurity and her psychological engulfment and extreme isolation are the forms of anxiety that create implosion inside her psyche. Once again, Mary attempts to preserve her self and this time her effort to resist her self from the engulfment brings her close in contact with Dick's farm life as Noah. She tries to reconstruct another false-self by directly involving herself into kaffir store, a store for the natives, which is associated to the "greyness and misery of her childhood" (94). Not only that, Mary even tries to forcefully engage herself with all those failed projects of Dick – beekeeping, pig farming, turkey farming – even though she is uncomfortable with these issues. Then we see a first glimpse of implosion in Mary's psyche when she, after experiencing several failures of Dick, tries to get away from this farm life and reinstates herself into her previous life. Consecutive failed projects of him appear to her as a strong blow upon her self-assuring thought of the ultimate end of the financial crisis that they are going through and she bursts inwardly. This psychological implosion results into her desperate urge to return to her previous life where she has no connection to her childhood memories. This could preserve her ontological security by restoring her previous state in the society. However, it comes back to her as another shock as she finds out that her place has been long gone and every area and every sphere of the society that has been trod by her is replaced and there is no place for her to get herself fit into it. As Michele Wender Zak comments: "Mary attempts, abortively, a return to her life. She leaves Dick and visits both her old employer and the girls' club where she has lived. Greeted on the one hand by shocked pity at her changed appearance and on the other hand by curious stares of strangers, she withdraws in defeat" (487). This psychological withdrawal of Mary ultimately forces her to surrender again to the gloomy and unsuccessful life of Dick by returning back to her married life and fulfills Dr. Laing's second stage of psychological anxiety created by ontological insecurity – implosion.

This psychological implosion of Mary drives her towards the next stage of her anxiety which Dr. Laing has termed as 'petrification and depersonalization'. Both the terms, as referred by Dr. Laing, have their meaning embedded into themselves. Petrification can be understood as a psychological state triggered by terror losing all the emotional traits and turning into a dead thing without subjectivity. The second term, depersonalization means a psychological maneuver of evading one's own feeling and turning oneself into an 'it'. Here, contingency of complete depersonalization may rise into a greater risk in case of an ontologically insecure person as this particular person experiences this risk in highly potentiated form. Evidently, after Mary's shocking

experience at her old city life, there is a strong trace of emotional petrification in her psyche as the narrator says,

Dick's entrance did not change her face. For a moment they said nothing. Then he appealed to her, holding out his arms: 'Mary, don't leave me.' She sighed, stood up, automatically adjusted her skirt and smoothed her hair. She gave the impression of starting off a planned journey. Seeing her pose, and her face, which showed no opposition or hatred, only resignation, Dick dropped his arms. (*The Grass* 101)

The situation that has been portrayed clearly posits Mary's psyche in the state emotional petrification and also indicates her tendency to disregard other's feeling. With further development of the novel, it can be seen that her psychological petrification intensifies more and more. At that crucial moment, Dick's physical condition deteriorates that brings her close in contact with the natives and, as Sartre, a notable western philosopher, in his ground-breaking text, *Being and Nothingness*, suggests: "One may find oneself enlivened and the sense of one's own being enhanced by the other" (408), her sense of self reignites. Subsequently, Mary is again dragged back to her childhood memories of dirty niggers again and incite her long lost hatred towards the natives and her sense of superiority. This time, she manages to take her last attempt to save her self by deconstructing it and in spite of her horrible emotion towards the natives, she decides to dictate them in her own way. This sense of superiority empowers her in front of all the natives and encourages her to hold the authoritative power not only over the natives but also over the husband. She plans to "sit like a queen bee in this house and force him to do what she wanted" (*The Grass* 121). Fortunately, her first plan works out very well. She manages to convince Dick to go with tobacco farming, and she metaphorically starts to live on their two barns of tobacco. Eventually, this momentary success has failed to save Mary from her ultimate petrification and depersonalization as very soon she realizes that her "ship from Exile" is far away from the reality. In narrator's word, "For even daydreams need an element of hope to give satisfaction to the dreamer. . . . There was nothing. Nil. Emptiness" (*The Grass* 132). To make the situation worse, Dick hires a new houseboy to their house named Moses, whom Mary struck with sjambok some years ago. Having a man around herself upon whom she had once exerts her authoritative power, now triggers a sense of fear in her psyche. This strong emotion of fear, as time passes by, stirs up her ontological insecurity and gives the reader a vivid view to her childhood memories through her dreams. At this point, Lessing uses dream as a "something of a discipline" (Brewster 30) and she gives the reader full access to Mary's memory through it. After scrutinizing Lessing's works, it is a noticeable fact that her handling of dream is "typically practical, rational and even mechanical" (Sukenic 530). In one of her interviews, she admits it by saying, "Dreams have always been important to me. The hidden domain of our mind communicates with us through dreams" (Raskin 172). Mary's hidden memories connect us with her dreams and in her dream memories, she is seen as a small girl, abused by "her father, menacing, horrible, who touched her in desire" (*The Grass* 165). Mary's present feeling of terror is not just a situational occurrence, rather it is the culmination of her dark childhood memories.

This episode of Mary's psyche brings the last blow upon her. The financial crisis, failure farming life of Dick, hatred towards natives and finally the continuous sense of terror incapacitates her to reconstruct or deconstruct her false-self and abolishes her authority as a master into her house and finally turns the table upside down. She gradually loses her subjectivity as well as her authority fulfilling the psychic stages of depersonalization. Her last stage of psychological anxiety works like a double-edged knife. Her "obsessive fear of Moses" is accompanied by her equivocal desire for a strong



and secure man which ultimately creates a sexual undertone inside her psyche and makes her submit herself as an object of Moses. As a result, in the final part of the novel, Mary is found as the most dormant character where "She seemed to be sunk fathoms deep in some dream of her own. She only came to life, only noticed what she was doing, when the native came in to do some little things in the room" (179). This editorialization of the narrator clearly validates her final "relinquishment of self" (Zak 488).

Though Tony Marston's interference in Mary and Moses' undeclared and unnatural treaty of the master-servant relationship, happens to have retracted the deranged Mary ephemerally, eventually she realizes at the final moments of her life that by acquiescing "reflexively to that enforcement of 'other people's standards'" (Zak 489), Mary has betrayed Moses, her master; she has been disloyal to him. The final moments of Mary's life exhibit a strong notion of depersonalization where she desperately tells to Tony Marston: "They said I was not like that, not like that, not like that" (*The Grass* 187). As the final form of anxiety, depersonalization may take its turn into a suicidal act. Dr. Laing has put the idea by stating, "[I]f one experiences the other as a free agent, one is open to the possibility of experiencing oneself as an object of his experience and thereby of feeling one's own subjectivity drained away. . . . In terms of such anxiety, the very act of experiencing the other as a person is felt as virtually suicidal" (*The Divided* 47). At the end of the novel, thus, though there is no trace of suicidal attempt from Mary's side, there is a 'terror-stricken willingness' of her to be killed by Moses. It seems that she has been waiting all day to be encountered by Moses and receive her punishment for disloyalty. Finally, fulfilling all the stages of anxiety encountered by an ontologically insecure person, she surrenders herself to Moses after losing her sanity.

### Conclusion

Referring to the above-mentioned psychopathological analysis of Mary, we can deduce that the ontological insecurity, theorized by Dr. Laing and adopted by Anthony Giddens, has played an important role in forming Mary's self. Mary's loveless and loosely connected childhood and her notorious memories of financial crisis and sexual harassment by her father have breached her ontological security and have developed a negative view of self into her psyche. This negativity of self has destroyed her vital self and generated a false-self inside her. As per Anthony Giddens' theory, the socio-economic circumstances of Mary have planted the seed of ontological insecurity. Later, we have shown in this paper how her ontological insecurity has developed three forms of anxiety from the psychiatric analysis of Dr. Laing- engulfment, implosion and depersonalization. Our discussion started with a question about the psychological distress of Mary where we have seen her questing for the reason of her distress. This quest of Mary has induced us to quest for her self and led us to look into her psyche. While searching for her self, we have shown that the reasons behind her psychic distress are memory, her surrounding society and her experiences. We have seen that there is always a negative force working inside her self. Her unhappy family life and her memory of molestation have removed all those positive essences of self and have obstructed her capabilities to love or being loved. In addition, when she is forced by the society to get married, we have seen her another failure to get involved into the marital relationship. While she has continuously been forced to reconstruct and deconstruct herself according to the society, the psychological anxiety begins to take over her psyche and develops three forms as mentioned above. Every time, she tries to construct and preserve her self but ultimately ends up with being threatened and destroyed. For that reason, Mary's first phase of anxiety- engulfment lasts longer than the usual and asserts her strong sense of self. As all her psychological sufferings have been presented by a third person narrator,

the authenticity of her emotion can be questioned because it is impossible to encapsulate the inner thoughts of one by the other. But in Mary's psyche we can find that she has been suffering inwardly since her childhood and her final quest regarding the reasons of her suffering ensures the existence of her anxiety. Thus, though the narrator's perspective is questionable, Mary's sufferings are real. Her ontological insecurity is the culmination of the destruction of her vital self and formation of the false-self and anxieties that has led her towards the verge of insanity.

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