

## Article

# Racial Issues in Doris Lessing's "Victoria and The Staveney's"

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### < Abstract >

In recent years, movements such as "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) have been active, with people around the world gathering in cities to claim equal rights and an end to racism. Nobel-Prize winning author, Doris Lessing has long given voice to her black characters in her writing career. In comparison with her earlier novels and short stories set in Africa, people's attitudes seem to have improved, leading towards a more harmonized society in her 2003 short story, "Victoria and the Staveney's." However, Lessing reveals in her works that superficially liberal characters and readers lack both genuine sympathy and an understanding of the underprivileged. She stresses the importance of compassionate and sustained attention towards minorities and the underprivileged. Social inequalities caused by the colour of one's skin will not be alleviated without solving other aspects of inequality based on perceived differences of social class.

Keywords: Doris Lessing, "Victoria and The Staveney's," race, BLM, British literature

## 1. Introduction

In 2020, amid the coronavirus pandemic and in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, people around the world gathered in cities to claim equal rights and an end to racism. It is often pointed out that "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) movements are different from those in the past in terms of the larger scale of involvement of multiracial participants. Not only black, but also white communities are paying more attention to this cause and in this sense, it shows that despite some inequality in society, attitudes are improving towards a more harmonized society.

"Victoria and The Staveney's" is one of four short stories in Doris Lessing's *The Grandmothers*<sup>1</sup> published in 2003. It starts from the scene when nine-year-old Victoria is taken after school to the Staveney's house. Victoria is poor and black whereas the Staveney's are white and well off. At age nineteen,

Victoria grows up to be a beautiful woman, and has a short affair with Thomas, the second son of the Staveney family. After their separation, Victoria realizes that she is pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl, Mary. Then, Victoria marries a black musician, Sam, and they have a baby boy, Dickson. Following her husband's fatal car accident when Mary is six years old, a recently widowed Victoria seeks a better education for her children and tells Thomas about the existence of their biological daughter for the first time. The Staveney's consider themselves liberal and are eager to invite Mary to family outings and vacations. Soon after, they offer to send Mary to a good school dominated by white privileged students. Victoria's dream comes true, but she feels sad seeing her daughter become estranged from her.

In his 2007 Nobel-Prize award ceremony speech, writer Per Erik Wästberg describes their choice of Lessing in the Literature category thus, "she [Lessing]

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has given voice to the silent and the refugees and homeless of our century from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe.”<sup>2</sup> “Victoria and The Staveney’s” is not an exception. It shows the working-class black people’s struggle along with privileged white middle-class people’s attitudes. From the view point of a working class black single mother, the complexity of the hierarchal system is exposed.

There have been many studies done on Lessing’s earlier novels and short stories set in Africa in terms of Lessing’s attitude on race and racial discrimination. However, little has been discussed about the legacy of slavery and colonialism in contemporary Britain in Lessing’s works. Thus, it seems worth re-reading “Victoria and The Staveney’s” in the light of the rise of BLM now.

## 2. Invisible Black Skin

In “Victoria and The Staveney’s,” a third-person narrator portrays the inner feelings of its black central character, Victoria. The beginning of the story is well described by gradually shifting its focus to Victoria, who is initially invisible to other people in the darkness:

Cold dark was already drizzling into the playground; the voices of two groups of children told people arriving at the great gate where they must direct their gaze: it was already hard to make out who was who. (VS, 59)<sup>3</sup>

Following the quotation above, Thomas is described, as “A little boy” (VS, 59) whereas Victoria as “She” (VS, 59) when they are both left alone after the other kids have been collected and taken home. Finally, their names are officially introduced when “A little boy” becomes Thomas and “She” becomes Victoria. Thomas is taken home by his older brother, Edward, and the scene goes on:

It was cold. Victoria’s clothes were not enough. . . . The school caretaker emerged from the dark, pulled the gates together, and locked them. He had not seen her either. She wore dark brown trousers and a black jacket and was a darker

spot in the swirling gloom of the playground: the wind was getting up. (VS, 60)

In this part, having been left totally alone, Victoria, who is invisible to the janitor, is locked inside her school. From this paragraph, the readers understand that Victoria is the central character of the story. The omniscient narrator now starts focusing on her background and her feelings, directing the readers to sympathise with her. However, the fact that she is black is only revealed a few paragraphs later when Victoria meets Edward again:

Edward was saying, ‘I’m so sorry. I was supposed to pick you up, with my brother.’

‘Didn’t you see me?’ asked Victoria, accusing him.

And now Edward was scarlet, he positively writhed. This was the burning focus of his self-accusation. He had in fact seen a little black girl, but he had been told to collect a little girl, and for some reason had not thought this black child could be his charge. He could make all kinds of excuses for himself: the confusion as the other children were running off to the gate, the noise, Thomas’s bad behaviour, but the fact was, the absolute bottom line, he had not really seen her because Victoria was black. (VS, 62)

The way the narrator introduces Victoria perhaps exposes readers’ unconscious degrees of discrimination towards other races, too, if they have been imagining a white girl for the short story set in England. The narrator goes on to show that it is not only the darkness of the day and Victoria’s outfit, but also her skin colour that causes Edward to fail to consider Victoria as his responsibility to take care of. In other words, because Victoria was black, Edward “had not really seen her” as someone entitled to his care and attention. As for the process of Victoria being collected by Edward:

The deputy secretary rang the Staveney number and got Jessy Staveney [Edward and Thomas’s mother], who told her son [Edward] to collect a little girl at the same time as he did Thomas.

The deputy secretary had not said that Victoria was black, but why should she? There were more black or brown children at the school than white, and she herself was brown, since her parents had come from Uganda, when the Indians were thrown out. (VS, 66)

This exposes different degrees of recognition between the coloured community and the white community. The fact that the white people need to be reminded of the existence of the black people perhaps shows an unconscious level of arrogance.

Lessing is known for her unease with many forms of ideology. Disappointed by socialism, Lessing herself left the Communist Party in 1954. She had often criticized people who were driven by ideological concepts in her works. For example, in *The Golden Notebook*<sup>4</sup>, the main protagonist has a nervous breakdown partly due to experiencing systemic hypocrisy and arrogance in the communist movement. Moreover, her own reiterated disavowals of being a feminist, coupled with her criticism of feminism itself, have always been controversial topics among her readership. Through her works, she makes the point that ideology does not always solve the problems of reality. She frequently writes characters with strong idealistic motivations who ultimately fail to put into practice their ideology in a crucial moment. Thus, Lessing reveals how easily people whose initial intentions were good yield to their weakness, prejudices and ego.

For example, in her first novel, *The Grass is Singing*<sup>5</sup>, when the new settler, Tony Marston witnesses an intimate moment between the white heroine Mary and her black servant Moses, his thoughts are conflicted:

He had been in the country long enough to be shocked; at the same time his 'progressiveness' was deliciously flattered by this evidence of white ruling-class hypocrisy. (GS, 185-186)

However, when he hears the fact that a number of white women have relations with black men, he "felt it would be rather like having a relationship with an animal, in spite of his 'progressiveness'" (GS, 186).<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, in her short story, "A Home for the Highland Cattle,"<sup>7</sup> the heroine, who is the wife of a newcomer to Southern Rhodesia, tries very hard to improve her black servant's life. This makes her infamous among her white neighbours.<sup>8</sup> However, at the end, she loses interest in this cause while thinking of a new table to buy, and as a result, lets an African man who looks like her servant be sent to prison because of her gift she has stolen for him. The following quotation describes how easily she convinces herself to prioritize her convenience over her servant's life. She sees a line of handcuffed Africans and thought of her servant:

Then she thought: Nonsense, I'm seeing things, of course it can't be Charlie [the heroine's servant], he must have reached home by now . . . And she went into the shop to buy her table.<sup>9</sup>

In "Victoria and The Staveney's," Edward is similar to these cases. In the earlier scene in which Edward failed to collect Victoria, he is terribly ashamed when he realizes his unconscious level of ignorance towards Victoria who should have been looked after by him.

. . . Edward was the child of a liberal house, and he was in fact in the throes of a passionate identification with all the sorrows of the Third World. At his school, much superior to the one here, though he had attended it, long ago, 'projects' of all kinds enlightened him and his fellow pupils. He collected money for the victims of AIDS and of famine, he wrote essays about these and many others of the world's wrongs, his mother Jessy was 'into' every kind of good cause. (VS, 62)

. . . it had better be said now that he was on the verge of an adolescence so conscience-driven, agonized, accusatory of his own world, passionately admiring of anything not Britain, so devoted to every kind of good cause, so angry with his mother, who in some way saw as embodying all the forces of reaction, so sick to death with his father, who represented frivolity

and indifference to suffering . . . (VS, 64-65)

Later on, he actually becomes a successful lawyer specializing in the social-welfare systems of developing countries. However, in his real life he appears to be the most conservative middle-class member of his family, and initially he is skeptical of Victoria's motives and reluctant to help her. For instance, he is the one who suspects Victoria's introduction of Mary to the Staveney's as blackmail and insists on the DNA test. Even after Mary is admitted to the family, he advises the family to exclude Mary's brother from the family's care. It is ironic that Edward, who as a teenager was gentle to Victoria, is one reason Victoria has a baby with his younger brother, Thomas. However, as seen above, Edward's attitude to Victoria becomes the coldest of the family after all.

In the preface for her 1973 work *This Was The Old Chief's Country: Collected African Stories vol.1*, Lessing says, "Truly to understand, we have to lose the arrogance that is the white man's burden, to stop feeling superior."<sup>10</sup> Although she is talking about the necessity of understanding complex societies in the colonies, it is important to note that Edward's earlier interest and sympathy toward the poor does not connect with his attitude toward the underprivileged black mother related to his own family.

### 3. Emphasis on Black Skin

In *Racism: A Short History*, George M. Fredrickson describes today's phenomenon of racism as thus:

What has been called "the new racism" in the United States, Great Britain, and France is a way of thinking about difference that reifies and essentializes culture rather than genetic endowment, or in other words makes culture do the work of race. The arrival of large numbers of immigrants from former colonies in England and France has encouraged the use of "culture" as a way of distinguishing unwelcome newcomers for those who are genuinely "British" or "French." In Britain skin color and

culture remain closely associated, and it is often assumed that ways of life are as unchangeable as pigmentation.<sup>11</sup>

In this section, I will examine the Staveney's attitude towards Victoria and diversity in Britain in general.

The Staveney family's attitude to black people superficially looks very favorable. When the mother, Jessy, first meets Victoria:

She was pleased, rather than not, that the little girl was black because, as she never stopped complaining to Edward, his friends were all much too white, now that we lived in a multicultural society. (VS, 67)

The family's acceptance of multiculturalism can even be seen through the leftover food in the kitchen on Victoria's first visit to their house; "Thai takeaway that Jessy had brought home, stuffed tomatoes from last night's supper, and leftover savoury rice" (VS, 67). Moreover, when Thomas first introduces his daughter, Mary, to the family, Jessy says, "I have always wanted a black grandchild" (VS, 106). Much earlier in the story, when nine-year-old Victoria has been rescued by twelve-year-old Edward and she is undressing for bed in the Staveney's house, Edward "thought, how pretty [her underwear is] on that dark skin" (VS, 71). And the narrator adds, "[h]e didn't know if this was a politically correct thought, or not" (VS, 71). Because of the influence of his mother and Edward, Thomas becomes interested in African music and eventually its women.

The secret torments of teenage lust were all directed towards one black charmer after another. He said openly and often that he thought white skins were insipid, and he wishes he had been born black. (VS, 92)

The boy's father, Lionel, adores Mary and calls her "my little crème caramel, my little chocolate éclair" (VS, 111) and he says "[i]f I say I am going to eat you all up . . . you must not take it as more than a legitimate expression of my sincere devotion" (VS, 112). Edward later warns his father, "[i]f you can't

see why you shouldn't call her a chocolate anything, then you are a bit out of step with the times" (VS, 112). In fact, the family's repeated emphasis on Mary's skin colour give us the impression that they are in a sense commodifying the black girl.

Victoria reports to her friend Bessie, "I wouldn't have thought they'd be so pleased to have a black grandchild" (VS, 114). Bessie responds, "[s]he's not black, she's more caramel . . . If she was my colour I bet they wouldn't be so pleased" (VS, 114). An interesting paragraph follows this conversation:

The question of colour - no, it couldn't be evaded - though Victoria could be pardoned for thinking that the Staveney's, except for Thomas of course, had never noticed that colour could be a differentiator, often enough a contumacious one, believing that whatever had happened - regrettably - in the past, was no longer a force in human affairs. (VS, 114)

This paragraph illustrates that even liberal families have unconscious levels of discrimination with regard to pigmentation/skin colour. In fact, except for Jessy, the Staveney's do not show any interest in inviting Mary's little brother, Dickson, to their home. Although the Staveney's indifference can be excused by the fact that Dickson is not kin to the family and he is extremely difficult to handle. Following the paragraph above, the narrator states, "Dickson was black, black as boot polish or piano keys" (VS, 114).

Let me go back to the Fredrickson's point at the beginning of this section. The Staveney's appreciations of different "culture" seem to be in conflict with an "unwelcome" attitude. However, they draw lines based on the biological and physical features of Dickson. In short, from the vantage point within their privileged status, the Staveney's seem to be enjoying consuming different "culture"s.

Furthermore, as for the difficulties of overcoming racism in the world today, Fredrickson asserts:

Along with the dissemination of the truth about human physical differences, the struggle against racism also requires that stigmatized

groups have enforceable civil rights, political empowerment in proportion to their numbers, and equal opportunity in education and employment (which may require special efforts to compensate for disadvantages inherited from the past).<sup>12</sup>

The Staveney's is a progressive family and they believe themselves not to be racist. Jessy is willing to involve black people in her children's circle of friends and later welcomes Mary into her family. Lionel loves Mary and openly admires her colour. However, it is ironic that the Staveney's overly-felt or expressed favoritism of black people and their "culture" can be seen as evidence of a discrepancy in life between black working-class people and white middle-class people. The Staveney's fail to recognize this mismatch because they benefit from it. A study in *The Guardian* reports that;

. . . almost two-thirds of the population think there is a "fair amount" or "great deal" of racism in British society today, but black respondents are twice as likely as white respondents to say the problem is very widespread.<sup>13</sup>

This shows that racial discrimination still exists in Britain, and white people tend to overlook the phenomenon. In the society of "Victoria and The Staveney's," people are divided into different classes although skin colour is not the only reason for separation. The colonial period has had a considerable influence on the social class divisions and contemporary people's unconscious level of discrimination. Only when Fredrickson's suggested social benefits are truly given to black people and racism is eliminated, one should openly admire physical and cultural differences.

#### 4.The Struggles of Black People

The importance of education is Lessing's life-long theme. In her last novel, *Alfred & Emily*, she writes about her mother and shows her gratitude and respect: "The real Emily McVeagh was an educator, who told stories and brought me books. That is how

I want to remember her” (*AE*, 192).

Lessing thinks education is the key to success in life. In an interview after having won the Nobel Prize in 2007, she talks about students in Zimbabwe who are desperate to read books, but cannot access them in comparison to privileged students in exclusive schools in England who waste the opportunity to read.<sup>14</sup>

Likewise, one of the important themes of “Victoria and the Staveney” is the importance of education and the dilemma of a poor black mother who has to give up her daughter so that her daughter can ascend the social ladder to a better life. As the title of this story indicates, it is not a love story between Victoria and her former lover, Thomas Staveney. It is a story of two different worlds, working class and upper-middle class Britain. The education they receive is so different, and it is natural that Victoria, now a widowed mother of two young children, imagines the benefits of having an upper-middle class father for her children, Mary and Dickson:

And these two children, Mary and Dickson, would emerge from school even more ignorant than she had been. Would Mary ever learn enough to be a nurse, like Bessie [Victoria’s best friend]? And Sam [Victoria’s dead husband]’s son, if he didn’t have some music in him from his father, what would he be?

Thomas’s children, when he had them, and Edward’s, they would be writing letters to the papers that would be printed. And they might turn out famous, like Jessy and Lionel and Edward. (*VS*, 102)

Considering the benefits to her children given by the Staveney’s influence and support, Victoria decides to tell Thomas that he is Mary’s father, the product of their short-term love affair six years earlier.

According to the narrator, Lionel Staveney is “an old-fashioned romantic socialist. He had insisted on both his boys going to ordinary schools, as then was common among his kind” (*VS*, 107)<sup>15</sup> and therefore, before transferring to a better school both Edward and Thomas briefly went to Beowulf, the

same “ordinary” school that Victoria went to until she was forced to drop out due to her aunt’s illness. The more time the Staveney’s spend with Victoria’s daughter, Mary, the more they come to love her. They are so attached to her that they offer to finance her transfer to a better school. Lionel leads this idea. It can be said that the “old-fashioned romantic socialist”’s motive to protect his children in the privileged world is confirmed by this incident.

Before Victoria made the final decision, she consults Bessie. There are interesting descriptions of Mary’s challenges if she goes to a good school in terms of her accent and dialect.

For one thing, it was Mary’s way of speaking, which was very far from the Staveney’s. Thomas might speak badly, his phoney American, or his cockney, as he called it, but she had never heard a cockney – who were they when they were at home? – talk like that. And the Staveney’s spoke posh, and Thomas too, most of the time. Mary’s voice was ugly compared to theirs. (*VS*, 127)

This is reported as one of the discussions Victoria and Bessie made on the matter. However, Lessing’s voice is indirectly heard. “[W]ho were they when they were at home?” is clearly Lessing’s ironical comment on the usage of Cockney. People who speak RP<sup>16</sup> may call working-class London Eastenders Cockney; however, when you live there, you will not call yourselves Cockney. The adjectives such as “posh” for the Staveney’s English, and “ugly” for Mary’s English are subjective. The descriptions above are supposed to reflect Victoria’s and Bessie’s attitudes, but it sounds more like the voice of a white middle-class narrator derived from the author’s sense of values. If Victoria actually thinks Mary’s English is “ugly,” her values can be said to be formed by middle-class people who speak RP English. It perhaps reminds us of some black people’s feelings of being inferior, as seen in, for example, Tony Morrison’s *The Bluest Eyes*.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, mockery of language diversity/proficiency has often been linked to racism. For example, in the relation to colonialists’ attitudes to their language being spoken by the local

people, Frantz Fanon<sup>18</sup> uses a French company's advertisement as a symbolic image of racism. The advertisement presents the image of an African soldier offering a chocolate drink by saying "y'a bon Banania!". With the use of incorrect French grammar, the advertisement emphasizes Africans' incomplete French language skills.<sup>19</sup>

Victoria accepts the Staveney's offer because it seems to be the best outcome for her daughter and imagines the future as thus:

Mary would go to that good school where most girls were white. She would have many battles to fight, of a different sort from the rough-housing of Beowulf. The Staveney's would be Mary's best support. Probably, when the girl was about thirteen, the Staveney's would ask if she, Victoria, could consider Mary going to boarding school. Neither they nor Mary would have to spell out the reasons why Mary must find things easier, for she would no longer have to fit herself into two different worlds, every day. Victoria would say yes, and that would be that. (VS, 128)

This scene describes very well the struggle of adjusting to social difference from the personal point of view of Victoria and her daughter. Although offering a better education is regarded as the ultimate solution to reducing inequality in society, this scene shows us a more realistic view of the struggles of black people negotiating social and racial barriers.

## 5. Conclusion

In "Victoria and The Staveney's," the omniscient narrator dexterously mentions the fact that Victoria is black, exposing Edward's and possibly the readers' unconscious level of ignorance towards other races. We have also examined that Edward from "Victoria and The Staveney's" along with Tony Marston from *The Grass is Singing* and the heroine from "A Home for the Highland Cattle" in order to show how easily a liberal person's mind is swept away depending on their convenient situation. Lessing's works have shown that egalitarian education in one's early

years is not always practiced in reality. Moreover, potential discrimination towards black people even among the liberal minded in modern society has been displayed. Finally, the last section of this paper has shown the struggles of the descendants of the exploited class as they try to climb socially through education.

The words of a British writer, broadcaster, and former army officer Samuel Etienne reiterate Lessing's message in "Victoria and The Staveney's" thus:

To eliminate racism, the UK first needs to acknowledge that it exists, that it is systemic, and that it is affecting the lives and livelihoods of millions of Britons on a daily basis.<sup>20</sup>

It seems to be a positive phenomenon that today more and more white people are becoming members of equal rights groups and campaigns such as BLM. Although there are still cases of blatant racial discrimination, there are perhaps more people who seem to welcome diversity. On the other hand, Lessing's works warn us to beware that there are always hypocrites around who at first try to treat people from other racial backgrounds equally until their morality collapses at a critical moment. Moreover, those who are superficially liberal sometimes think their race to be superior to others, and may lack genuine sympathy and understanding of the underprivileged. Lessing stresses the importance of compassionate and sustained attention towards minorities and the underprivileged. Social inequalities caused by the colour of one's skin will not be alleviated without solving other aspects of inequality based on perceived differences of social class.

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1 Doris Lessing, *The Grandmothers* (London: Flamingo, 2003)

2 "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2007: Award Ceremony Speech" in *Nobel Foundation*. 10 December 2007. Quoted from 10 February 2022

<<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2007/ceremony-speech/>>.

3 Henceforward, page references to quotations from Doris Lessing's works are taken from the editions listed below. The following abbreviations have been used:

GS for *The Grass is Singing* (1950; London: Flamingo, 1994)

VS for *The Grandmothers* (London: Flamingo, 2003)

AE for *Alfred & Emily* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008)

4 Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962; London: Flamingo, 1993)

5 Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing* (1950; London: Flamingo, 1994)

*The Grass is Singing* (1950) set in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and later short story "Victoria and The Staveney's" (2003) set in England both have black characters who play central roles. These stories display the difficulty of overcoming perceived differences of ethnic background and social class. Spanning over half a century and geographically wide apart, some aspects of racial discrimination seem to be alleviated in Lessing's later work, but it also shows that degrees of inequality remain in the society where social differences exist.

6 In order to understand Marston's "progressiveness" which is emphasized twice here, we can look at an older settler, Charlie's ideas and the narrator's comments in the first chapter:

So many of them [like Marston] came from England to learn farming. They were usually ex-public school, very English, but extremely adaptable. From Charlie's point of view, the adaptability redeemed them. It was strange to see how quickly they accustomed themselves. At first they were diffident, though proud and withdrawn; cautiously learning the new ways, with a fine sensitiveness, an alert self-consciousness. . . . Most of these young men were brought up with vague ideas about equality. They were shocked, for the first week or so, by the way natives were treated. They were revolted a hundred times a day by the casual way they were spoken of, as if they were so many cattle; or by a blow, or a look. They had been prepared to treat them as human beings. But they could not stand out against the society they were joining. It did not take them long to change. It was hard, of course, becoming as bad oneself. But it



was not very long that they thought of it as ‘bad’. And anyway, what had one’s ideas amounted to? Abstract ideas about decency and goodwill, that was all: merely abstract ideas. When it came to the point, one never had contact with natives, except in the master-servant relationship. (GS, 17-18)

Here, Charlie, through the narrator, points out how easily “vague ideas about equality” and “[a]bstract ideas about decency and goodwill” give way to the racist environment in the colonial society. Marston, who is supposed to have come from a middle-class English background, must think of himself as being “progressive” in terms of his upbringing and his criticism of this aspect of colonialism. However, as Charlie foresees, Marston’s consciousness is “extremely adaptable” and finally, Marston sternly orders Moses to leave Mary alone.

- 7 Doris Lessing, *This Was The Old Chief’s Country: Collected African Stories vol.1* (1973; London: Flamingo, 2003)
- 8 In her autobiography, Lessing also reflects that “we paid them much more than the pitiful customary wage, and again white housewives arrived reproachfully or ferociously to say we were spoiling the natives.”  
Doris Lessing, *Under My skin: Volume one of my Autobiography* (New York: Herper Perennial, 1949), 241-242.
- 9 Lessing, *This Was The Old Chief’s Country: Collected African Stories vol.1*, 252.
- 10 Ibid., 9.
- 11 George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2002), 141-142.
- 12 Fredrickson, 147.
- 13 “Racism in the UK still rife, say majority of Britons” in The Guardian. 16 July 2020. Quoted from 20 January 2022  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/16/racism-in-the-uk-still-rife-say-majority-of-britons>>.
- 14 “A Hunger for Books” in The Guardian. 8 December 2007. Quoted from 14 March 2021  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/dec/08/nobelprize.classics>>.
- 15 In Lessing’s 2001 novel, *The Sweetest Dream*, its

protagonist’s ex-husband, Johnny Lennox is depicted as a deluded, irresponsible and self-righteous communist. Despite his criticism of his upper-class mother, he depends on her to pay for his children to go to very exclusive schools. Lessing uses her characters’ choice of children’s school as a device to show the hypocritic nature of her characters.

Doris Lessing, *The Sweetest Dream* (New York: HarperCollings, 2001)

- 16 *OALD* explains as “the abbreviation for ‘received pronunciation’ (the standard form of British pronunciation, based on educated speech in southern England).  
*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 9 th Edition* (Oxford: OUP, 2015)
- 17 Tony Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970; New York: Vantage, 2007)
- 18 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; New York: Grove Press, 2008)
- 19 For example. In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing describes white people’s way of treating black people as illiterate slaves in Rhodesia. They do not even teach them English and “most white people think it is ‘cheek’ if a native speaks English” (GS, 119). While working in the fields and when Moses asks for water in English, Mary lashes him with her whip. However, Moses is eventually released from physical work in the fields and chosen as a house servant partly because of his ability to speak English. In the house, Moses treats Mary with kindness despite her violence towards him in the fields. The power dynamic between Mary and Moses is turned and Moses “force[s] her now to treat him as a human being” (GS, 156).
- 20 “Britain developed structural racism, the US perfected it” in *Al Jazeera*. 17 July 2020. Quoted from 20 January 2022  
<<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/7/17/britain-developed-structural-racism-the-us-perfected-it>>.

## ドリス・レスリング『ヴィクトリアの運命』 — 人種問題を視座に入れて —

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### <要 旨>

近年 BLM など有色人種や社会的マイノリティーを擁護する運動が盛り上がりを見せている。ノーベル賞受賞作家、ドリス・レスリング自身も作家人生の中で、黒人の登場人物を度々登場させている。アフリカが舞台となっている初期の作品世界と比べると、2003 年に発表された短編『ヴィクトリアの運命』は舞台はイギリスで白人の登場人物たちの黒人への態度は一見、異文化への尊敬と親切心、同情心に満ちたものに映るかもしれない。しかしながら、自称「リベラル」な登場人物や読者に対して、レスリングは、表面化されない差別心、黒人の立場への無知について問いかけ、イギリスにおける黒人が今だに社会的に恵まれない境遇に置かれていることを露呈している。人種の差別がなくより良い社会とするためには、差別の歴史やその歴史の名残りとして残る社会的経済的不平等に目を向け、階級問題の改善に向けて戦うことが必要だとレスリングは伝えている。

キーワード：ドリス・レスリング、『ヴィクトリアの運命』、人種問題、BLM、英文学

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