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## A COMMUNIST LOVE STORY

### ABSTRACT

*This paper tries to illustrate some autobiographical elements in Doris Lessing's novel, **A Ripple from the Storm**. This idea came to me because the autobiographical elements of her novels have always been hunted by readers, critics and reviewers and they have always haunted her creation. Doris Lessing herself was much annoyed when hearing the omnipresent question: is this an autobiographical novel?*

*What I focus on are the real autobiographical elements, i.e. those highlighted by the writer herself or those that appear both in her autobiography and in her novels and not in the star-system kind of biography.*

**KEYWORDS:** *communist*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the novel *A Ripple from the Storm*, I have studied Martha's political involvement compared to Doris Lessing's political life and the relationship between Martha and Anton, compared to the one of Doris and Gottfried.

This novel was declared to contain most autobiographical elements because here the Communist Martha is the image of the Communist Doris, Martha's relationship and marriage to Anton Hesse copies the story of Doris and Gottfried Lessing. The only difference is that the Lessings had had only one child, Peter, while the Hesses did not have any. I concluded that contrary to what many critics assumed as granted, the writer was not a careless and indifferent mother, the idea of not wanting to hurt another child can be a reliable one.

### 2. REAL LIFE AND FICTION

At the beginning of the novel, Martha and Anton are only members of the same group but their relationship begins when she is sick and he comes to take care of her:

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*"She looked through her fever at the stiff controlled face, now softened with a small paternal smile, and thought: he may not know it himself, but he's attracted to me."* (p. 121)

Although, she is very ill and she has fever, she realizes that he behaves differently, affectionately with her:

*"She was aware that he had again kissed her forehead and hot nausea came with the thought: Well, that means now Anton and I will be together. She did not define how they would be together."* (p. 127)

When she recovers and she goes again to the meetings, the entire group was already aware that Martha and Anton were together:

*"It was now accepted that Martha and Anton were a couple."* (p. 131)

When they begin their sexual life, Martha is again disappointed and after some nights she realizes that:

*"Anton was hopeless." Or, to salvage her image of the man: "We are sexually incompatible."* (p. 202)

Martha and Anton's sexual life has the same problems as Doris and Gottfried's. Doris Lessing confesses in her autobiography, *Under My Skin*:

*"Our sexual life was sad. He was deeply puritanical and inhibited. I could have believed he was a virgin, but that was obviously impossible. ... For one thing, we were not going to stay married. But suppose I had never had a sexual partner? Suppose I had not already had enjoyable sex? I would have believed that Gottfried's unhappiness, my unhappiness, in bed, was all my fault. But now I am haunted by thoughts of the girls – thousands of them – or millions? – married off to men they don't know and with whom they may be mismatched. Everywhere, all over the world, silent misery, deserts of unhappiness...*

*Very well then, we were mismatched."* (*Under My Skin*, p. 303)

Martha is an autodidactic person: she wants to know the cause of everything. That is why, she studies a book on sex and she finds out the cause of their unhappy sexual life:

*"Anton was suffering from something called premature ejaculation."* (p. 294)

We can come to the conclusion that this was also the reason for Doris and Gottfried's "sad" sexual life.

After a short period, Martha feels she does not love Anton and they should not be together. Again, as during her relationship with Douglas, she feels "caged":

*"Why should I be so afraid to face Anton now? It's absurd to feel caged. It might have been any one of these men, any one, it was simply luck, or some kind of choice I don't understand. But not my choice. If Jasmine had been sick, Anton would have – kissed her on the forehead, and I would be thinking of Jasmine now as she is thinking of me - **Don't be a fool.**"* (p.222)

Here, the writer uses again the theme of fatality, of doom which seems to follow Martha all her life. She does not choose anything but all kind of things happen to her because they were meant to happen. "With surprising frequency, Lessing looks back on her life and attributes her actions to Fate, to mother nature, to the Zeitgeist, or a hidden force or an era's commanding flow. Such passive yielding to higher powers is hard to understand in

someone so fiercely determined to do things her way, and so self-absorbed. It is an attitude, however, that perhaps also allows one to evade responsibility for many of one's actions: if you are not in control of events, you can't be faulted for their outcomes either." (Klein, 2000: p. 71)

She decides they should break up, but when Anton comes, he tells her he has problems because being considered an "enemy alien" he was warned that he should not have an affair with a British woman.

Martha, as always, is ready to help the person next to her and she decides to marry Anton so that he would not have problems any longer:

*"She thought: Andrew could marry Maisie to help her out – that was a good thing to do, everyone feels it. (She did not remind herself now that everyone felt it except Anton.) And if I marry Anton, and it's nothing but a formality after all, it will make things easy for him."* (p. 225)

The act of marriage between Doris and Gottfried is not presented in *Under My Skin* because the writer makes reference to *A Ripple from the Storm*:

*"... and my being sick in bed led to the magistrates' court and quick marriage, a scene described more or less in **A Ripple from the Storm.**"* (*Under My Skin*, p. 298)

"Doris Taylor Wisdom and Gottfried Lessing were married in 1943 at a magistrate office during a break between two Communist committee meetings. The wedding day and the events leading up to it, says Doris Lessing, are described with uncomfortable accuracy in *A Ripple from the Storm*. "(Klein, 2000: p. 71)

As Anton and Martha, Doris and Gottfried got married forced by the same circumstances and they decided they would stay married until the end of the war:

*"It was my revolutionary duty to marry him. ... We knew we were not well suited. We said, It doesn't matter, we will just get divorced when the war is over."* (*Under My Skin*, p.293)

By the end of the novel we find out that the group has arrived to an end, after functioning for two years. The same period is declared by Doris Lessing in her autobiography:

*"We were a real Communist group for, I think, eighteen months, not much more. When I say 'real', we had nothing in common with real Communist Parties in Europe. Ours was the authentic flame, the spirit of Lenin lived in us, we lived and talked as if tomorrow we might face the firing squad. 'A Communist is a dead man on leave' – we would offer each other such phrases without irony. For a short time we did."* (*Under My Skin*, p. 277)

In this paragraph, Doris Lessing explains their kind of communism and she admits that their party had nothing in common with the European Communist Parties. We notice that she uses as an example, the phrase used by Anton Hesse in *A Ripple from the Storm*: "A Communist is a dead man on leave" and she explains that they used such phrases without irony. For every reader, this phrase is quite funny. Their whole group seemed like theatre puppets that starred in a play for children, telling them sweet words about fairy tale countries where equality reigns.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

"Reminded by an interviewer that she once thought she could change society through her writing, she answers with more repudiation of a former self: She was very young when she had such thoughts. No one changes anything in the world, no matter how rational one's arguments are." (op. cit, p. 63)

After reading *Under My Skin* and *A Ripple from the Storm*, every reader can discover that this one is an autobiographical book. The novel presents the flavour of a dark time, that of the World War II.

The novel as a whole is an interesting one, except, the passages on communism which are funny for every contemporary reader, helping us to light up some of Doris Lessing's life parts which remained shadowy after reading her autobiographies *Under My Skin* and *Walking in the Shade*. This is a fascinating and idealistic book and it is the last autobiographical one in the sequence *Children of Violence*.

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