

# Doris Lessing as an African Diasporic Writer and the “Africanness” in *The Grass Is Singing*: Based on Chinese African Literaturology

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**Abstract** From the perspective of Chinese African literature, with the core concepts of the “Four Major Diasporas” and theories related to “Africanness,” the famous writer Doris Lessing is more of an African writer than a British writer. The characterisation, narrative setting and thematic implications of novels such as her masterpiece *The Grass Is Singing* are closely focused on Africa, making them typical African literary works. The multiple literary imaginations of Africa in the work reflect the spiritual sustenance and meaning of life of African colonisers, and the characteristics of the era and regional characteristics are reflected in the novel’s author, characters and value identification. This typical African and diasporic nature is an important reason why Lessing’s novels are among the classics of world literature.

**Keywords** Doris Lessing; *The Grass Is Singing*; Chinese African Literaturology; colonial diaspora; Africanness

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## **Introduction**

Doris Lessing (1919-2013), winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature, is an outstanding African diasporic writer, although she can also be considered as a British writer. Her novel *The Grass Is Singing* is a story about colonialism as well as the loss and degradation of human emotions, but more essentially it is an exposé on the disintegrated and crumbling mentality of white colonists in the context of

colonization. Lessing took the title of the novel from *The Waste Land* (1922) by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) with a clear intent to reinforce her message with the metaphorical implication of “the Waste Land,” namely, the spiritual world of both the colonized people in Africa and the white colonists moved, step by step, towards a suffocating spiritual wasteland during the Western colonization. Needless to say, Lessing’s selection of the title inculcated more significance into the theme of her writings about colonial diasporas.

### **Doris Lessing: As an African Diasporic Writer**

In recent years, with the migration waves surging around the world, more and more scholars have defined and described the concept of “diaspora” from different perspectives. The connotation and extension of the concept have been deepening and expanding to the extent that now it may mean “any group of migrants and their descendants who maintain ties with their original homeland” (Bakewell 5). As for the term “diaspora literature,” it in the usual sense refers to “all kinds of literary works that are created by diasporic writers with personal experience of diasporic living and that reflect artistically the phenomenon of diasporic culture and the facts of its formation and change, expressing the lives of individuals or groups in diasporic communities” (Yang 168).

While the term “diaspora” can be used to refer to such groups scattering across the globe, little attention has been paid to the diasporas on the African continent. Africa has been represented as a continent that produces diasporas, rather than a place where diasporas can be found. Then, how should we identify diasporas? How can they be distinguished from other migrant groups or other groups engaged in transnational activities? William Safran (1930- ), a professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, Robin Cohen (1944- ), a social scientist at Oxford University working in the field of globalization, migration and diaspora studies, and Dr. Oliver Bakewell at Manchester University have provided their input, defining the relationship between diasporas and homeland, i.e., homeland orientation, as one of the representations of diaspora. Born in Persia (now Iran) in 1919, Lessing moved with her family, at the age of five, to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), a British colony, and spent her childhood and adolescence in Africa before settling down in England in 1949. Having spent 25 years of her life and formed her values in southern Africa, Lessing had a strong sense of belonging to African culture. She writes in “The Old Chief Mshlanga,” “this is my heritage, too; I was bred here; it is my country as well as the black man’s country” (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief’s Country* 17). Unlike Camus, Lessing did not come to the

Third World from a First-World country as an adult, instead she was born and raised right here in Africa with a deep identification with African culture. In this sense, though Lessing is commonly regarded as one of the most important contemporary writers of England, judging from the theories of Africanness<sup>1</sup> and the four major diasporas<sup>2</sup> proposed by Prof. Zhu Zhenwu [朱振武], however, Lessing is, first of all, an African writer because one may find so much evidence of her novels focusing on Africa in the characterisation, narrative setting and thematic implications. Her masterpiece *The Grass Is Singing* is one of case which makes it typical African literary work.

Set in South Rhodesia, a former British colony, it is Lessing's debut novel completed right before her move from Africa to England. Also, it is the novel that made her famous and fully demonstrated the "Africanness" of African literature by sharing her observations on the diasporic mentality of the colonizers and the colonized in the context of colonial culture and prompting her readers to reflect on the history of colonization.

In fact, Lessing has been listed among African writers for decades. In 1973, Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* was included in *The Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS)*<sup>3</sup>, a book series published by the famous publishing company, Heinemann. In 1987, Lessing was selected as one of the Zimbabwean writers in *Tabex Encyclopedia Zimbabwe*<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, it seems to make more sense to study Lessing as an African writer because it will help us better understand the complexity and uniqueness of her novels. What is so unique about her novel writing, then? Why did her novels win the Nobel Prize for Literature and other prestigious awards? A major reason is their representations of colonial diaspora. The term "colonial diaspora" refers mainly to the white settlers' and their descendants' culture and mindset, which are paradoxically comparable to the Third-World

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1 See Zhu Zhenwu and Li Dan, "The Africanness of African Literatures and New Patterns in Human Civilization." *Social Sciences in China*, 2022, no.3, pp.113-27. The authors point out that the Africanness of African literature refers to the deep identification of African and Afro-descendant people with the history and culture of the African continent and their deep attachment to their homeland, that is, their cultural commitment to upholding selfhood, bridging the gaps, and remembering history but always looking to the future.

2 See Zhu Zhenwu and Yuan Junqing, "Diasporic Literature as A Reflection of the Age and Its World Significance: A Case Study of African Literature in English." *Social Sciences in China* (Chinese Edition) 2019, no. 7, pp.135-58.

3 See Doris Lessing, *The grass is singing*. London: Heinemann, 1973.

4 See Anthony Chennells, "Reading Doris Lessing's Rhodesian Stories in Zimbabwe." *In Pursuit of Doris Lessing: Nine Nations Reading*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990, pp. 17-40.

diasporas, due to their mixed feelings toward the imperial past during, and after the collapse of, the colonization (Zhu and Yuan 144). Lessing, who lived in Africa, mostly in Zimbabwe, for 25 years, clearly knew such an experience well. Her novels, especially, *The Grass Is Singing*, have all the distinctive features normally associated with the representation of colonial diaspora.

Lessing once said in an interview that her mother was not a fan of stories like *The Grass Is Singing*. As a matter of fact, white people did not like her stories, either. They even called Lessing “a traitor to the white cause and a nigger lover” (Wachtel 146). This is because in her writings Lessing addresses themes that are different from those of other diasporic writers. Usually, traditional European colonial novelists portray Africa as a primitive continent and a place of adventures. Fellow colonial diaspora writer, J. M. Coetzee (1940- ), portrays the images of early colonists with a pioneering colonial mentality in *Dusk Lands* (1974); another colonial diaspora writer from South Africa, Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014), was a staunch anti-apartheid activist whose novels profoundly expose the harm that apartheid caused to blacks and to whites themselves. Lessing, on the other hand, is more of a writer struggling with a dual identity as an insider and an outsider and being torn between colonial and noncolonial cultures. Judging by her life and writing career, Lessing’s cultural psyche and spiritual quest did not completely transcend the tradition of Western values. Unlike Gordimer, who maintained her citizenship of South Africa and dedicated herself to writing and activism there, Lessing never intended to stay in Rhodesia forever. As a descendant of white settlers living in the colony, Lessing was both an outsider in African culture and an insider on the outside. Her dual identity offered her a double perspective looking at the gains and losses of one culture from the standpoint of another, but it also forced her into an intense psychological conflict and identity crisis between the two different cultural worldviews. As she admitted once, she had “a particular perspective, a kind of double-vision as the daughter of British settlers in Southern Rhodesia,” and she had a sense of “absolutely belonging and absolutely not belonging,” which “is extremely valuable for a writer” (Wachtel 143). The sense of absolute belonging and absolute not belonging is what drives Lessing’s African-themed novels and embodies the most distinctive feature of her writings about colonial diasporas.

### ***The Grass Is Singing: The African Imagination of a Diasporic Writer***

In Lessing’s African-themed novels, people, events and scenes from Africa are depicted. More often than not, Lessing’s works depict the white colonial diasporas’ pursuit and disillusionment between their imagination of their homeland and

their fantasies of life in the colonies. According to Safran, diasporas “regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate” (Safran 83). For this reason, they clung to the British way of life, recreational activities, and eating habits, and tried to turn the colony into their hometown by replicating their British habitat in Africa. They “built prim little houses with hedged gardens full of English flowers for preference” (Lessing 44) or created an English garden on an isolated African farm, just like Mrs. Gale in “The De Wets Come to Kloof Grange,” with “her flowering African shrubs, her vivid English lawns, her water-garden with the goldfish and water lilies” (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* 80). In “A Home for the Highland Cattle,” the whites built their houses in Africa with the same architectural style in London. Their adherence to the English way of life emulates the white South Africans’ diasporic sense of a yearning for England and an alienation from Africa. More importantly, it is their way of coping with and dissolving the loneliness, isolation, hostility, and all the other imperfect conditions of life that they faced in the country of their settlement.

In *The Grass Is Singing*, most of the white colonists portrayed by Lessing have an anxious yearning for a return to England and live in a temporary residence in South Africa with a sojourner mentality since in their belief their home is still located in the distant Europe. As we see in a revealing scene after Mary’s death, Tony looks at her room feeling complete baffled: “How those two, Mary and Dick Turner, could have borne to live in such a place, year in and year out, for so long ... Why did they go on without even so much as putting in ceilings?” (Lessing 23). In “A Home for the Highland Cattle,” Mrs. Bond paints the walls in the house, fixes the broken places, and spends some money on a beautiful cupboard, only to disappoint everyone else and become ostracized by other housewives for, in their opinion, they can’t fix things, even door handles, because “If I start doing the place up, it means I’m here forever” (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* 252). The white settlers’ inattention to their houses symbolizes their desire for a return and their predicament of having to constantly go through the sorrow of parting from their home.

As Oliver Bakewell points out, diasporas retain in their minds “a collective myth of an ideal ancestral home” (Bakewell 11), which makes them often idealize their so-called initial home and tend to reconstruct or write about imaginary homes from a nostalgic perspective. Mary, the heroine in *The Grass Is Singing*, is a perfect example. Although her parents are South Africans and have never been to England, “For Mary, the word ‘Home’, spoken nostalgically, meant England” (Lessing 28). Whenever she goes to the shop to pick up the mail, she always sees some trucks

loaded with goods, letters, and magazines from overseas. Just as the Jews’ “Promised Land” must be flowing with milk and honey, Mary’s ideal image of her motherland is a place with a wide array of goods and a life of elegance and abundance.

Diaspora members, as Robin Cohen suggests, “demonstrate an affinity with other members of the group dispersed to other place” (Cohen 1). Apart from mailing goods and magazines, writing letters is the best way to get connected emotionally. When ranchers arrive at the grocery store from miles away to read letters sent from their homeland, they would be:

Momentarily oblivious to the sun, the square of red dust where the dogs lay scattered like flies on meat and the groups of starting natives—momentarily transported back to the country for which they were so bitterly homesick, but where they would not choose to live again: “South Africa gets into you,” these self-exiled people would say, ruefully. (Lessing 28)

Here we see that, like the Third-World diaspora groups, colonial diasporas share the same sense of rootlessness and nostalgic sadness when they think of their home countries. But unlike the Third-World diasporas, who were often forced into dispersion, wandering, or even exile, many colonial diasporas went to colonies voluntarily to participate in colonial expansion activities. Among the types of diasporas listed by Cohen, such as victim diaspora, labor diaspora, imperial diaspora, and trade diaspora, imperial diaspora refers to those settlers who were “sent abroad to protect trade, exploit resources and local labor, and consolidate the power of an expanding empire” (Cohen 13). In fact, some 22 million settlers left the British Isles between 1815 and 1914. Most of them were sent to the United States and a few to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, and South Africa. Some of these people became colonists and willingly collaborated with the imperial colonial expansion for a better livelihood, while others were exiled vagrants, criminals, and idlers. Those diasporas who voluntarily joined the hegemonic expansion in colonies for their own better livelihood became both the colonists and wanderers of the Empire the moment they set foot on the African continent. The African continent in front of them was nothing more than a place of self-exile. Therefore, the nostalgia for a home to which they cannot return and the feeling of being exiled in the country of their settlement are the lingering nightmares of colonial diasporas. That is why we often come across various contradictory mindsets and entangled emotions delineated by writers with diasporic experiences, like Lessing, while reading through their novels.

Despite her poor family background, Mary, the heroine in *The Grass Is Singing*, has always longed to free herself from material poverty and spiritual repression. In her belief, she has achieved real freedom after the death of her parents. She enjoys the city life as she can watch movies, go to dances, swim, and make friends. It is evident that Mary used to be a confident, active, and independent woman with a decent immersion in humanism and many good expectations for the future, but at the same time Mary is naive and the freedom she appreciates is not the same thing as feminist freedom. Ultimately, she is forced into marriage by conventions. The dull life on the farm confines her in solitude, unable to integrate herself into the local white community, or make friends with anyone, or even find a dance party, which used to be a her favorite activity, anywhere. Besides, her wimpish husband makes her feel so helpless and the embarrassing living condition derived from their poverty drives her into hysteria all the time. When she was first married, Mary was angry with anyone who was not treating blacks as human beings. Later, however, she changed into a person who cannot help but feel a deep hatred and disgust in her heart at the thought of meeting them face to face. She enjoys the thrill of self-satisfaction by ordering black servants around but suffers a devastating psychological torture due to her perverse emotional attachment to Moses. As she succumbs herself to all the concepts regarding class affiliation and skin color, the concepts that she has embraced over the years, Mary is filled with hatred and fear simply because Moses is black and, eventually, left teetering on the verge of nervous breakdown and personality disorder.

Just as Mary imagines when she reflects on her life, in a moment of terminal lucidity, before her death, her feelings have always been “propelled by something she did not understand – cracked the wholeness of her vision” (Lessing 224). Through this novel, Lessing not only writes, with a touch of sensitivity, about Mary’s psychological journey from an innocent and simple woman to a melancholy and frustrated wife, but also reveals how the spiritual world of South African white women evolves from its ideal to a distortion and a disillusionment at the end under the unbearable pressure from Western colonialism and racial discrimination. The freedom, as defined by Mary, is quite unfeasible. In a way, her murder might be a blessing in disguise.

As white women gradually drift toward a spiritual disillusionment while searching for their lost homes and pursuing misplaced relationships, the white men in Lessing’s novel are just as likely becoming disenchanted with the evaporation of their ideals under harsh circumstances. Charlie Slatter, a seemingly successful farmer, is rude and brutal, hard-hearted, and dictatorial. He is harsh on his wife, his

children, and even harsher on the laborers at the farm. He uses a sjambok as a magic tool for suppression. When Dick started to run the farm, Charlie once told him to buy a sjambok first, and then a plow or a harrow. He has made a fortune through harsh suppression, hence becoming a model of success. Even though what he does represents the concept of pursuing money and material gains above everything else in colonial expansion and symbolizes the triumph of colonialist expansion overseas, he sees the pursuit of wealth as the sole purpose in his life, for which he pays the hefty price by alienating himself from a young man simply dreaming about being rich to an emotionless money-making machine and, worse, a victim of colonialism.

Tony Marston, a neighbor of Mary, is a 20-year-old daydreamer with traditional, progressive ideas about racial issues in Africa. He appears to have the same traits as an idealist does. After Mary's murder by Moses, Tony bows to his dreams in the face of realities and becomes a worker in a foreign country by taking up an office clerical job, the same job that he has tried to avoid by coming to Africa in the first place. Most of the colonial settlers who are chasing their dream of making a fortune in the colonies end up being impecunious farmers like Dick, who devotes himself to his farm completely. "He worked as only a man possessed by a vision can work, from six in the morning till seven at night, taking his meals on the lands, his whole being concentrated on the farm" (Lessing 46). However, due to his poor management, incompetence, and stubbornness, his farm is on the verge of bankruptcy, and eventually he himself has to endure the breakup and insanity in the family after being torn by the constant tussle between material greed and emotional desire.

Since the prevalence of postcolonial criticism, people have mostly focused on the living conditions and spiritual plight of the indigenous people in colonies and criticized the brutal imperialist and colonialist invasion on the political, economic, ecological, and cultural fronts, but they have totally overlooked a big group of marginalized settlers who are colonists or groups with colonial characteristics who went to Africa and their descendants. "Due to their colonial writing and complex complex about the empire's past after the collapse of the colony, they exhibit a culture and psychology similar to but also different from the diaspora in the third world," which defined by Prof. Zhu as "Colonial diaspora" (Zhu and Yuan 148). They answered the call of the Empire, believed in the propaganda of the government, and moved from their homeland to foreign countries in hope of living a peaceful life in a comfortable environment along with friendly neighbors. As a matter of fact, what they discovered in the colonies was the repetitive pattern of life and poverty as in the past. The life here failed to deliver the wealth they desired, but instead it obstructed their steps, inhibited their minds, and shattered their

fantasies. Lessing presented a credible account of the survival dilemma and mental depression behind their glamorous appearance so as to construct a complete and authentic view of the colonial world. Colonialism not only brought so much harm to the colonized people, but also devastated the colonists, most of whom were white settlers, or ordinary people, constantly chasing their illusion or succumbing to their disillusionment, but hardly achieving any spiritual breakthrough or sustenance.

### **The “Africanness” in *The Grass Is Singing***

According to Prof. Zhu, “Africanness” refers to the deep-rooted identity of Africa and people of African descent with the history and culture that originated from the African continent, as well as their deep attachment to that homeland (Zhu and Li 163). It is a cultural trait that upholds self-identity, bridges divides, remembers history, but also looks to the future. Africanness has a variety of cultural connotations in contemporary African writing, and decolonisation, diaspora and hybridity are all cultural representations. In Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, this representation is highlighted by the work’s portrayal of diaspora, and this diaspora is “not just ‘geographical migration’ or changes in occupation, identity, or intention. More significantly, it is the conflict of heterogeneous cultures and its impact on the body and soul of diasporas” (Zhu and Yuan 153). Throughout her writing career, Lessing consistently dedicated her novel writing to exploring the domain of spirituality. As a person who had experienced spiritual crisis and disillusioned with her ideals, Lessing knew better that while critiquing the realities in the world, she ought to pay close attention to the spiritual world of the marginalized individuals who were struggling between overcoming their despair and seeking a new hope, and she proved her special expertise in depicting women’s inner workings of mind in terms of gender, race, and class stratification.

The phenomenon of diaspora goes hand in hand with the crisis of diasporas’ cultural identity. For diasporas, they often have a dual cultural identity, which is prone to change. The British cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1932-2014) argues that there are at least two different positions on “cultural identity” among diasporas: The first position defines “cultural identity” in terms of “one shared culture, hiding inside the heart of the other” (Hall 223), the second is “a sort of collective one true self, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall 223). Other scholars, however, recognized that, “as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’” (Hall 225). As a writer with a cross-cultural background, Lessing’s work describes the clash between

civilizations and her own anxiety of being caught in the midst of it.

She did an amazing job of incorporating her personal experiences into the portrayal of the little white girl in the short story *The Old Chief Mshlanga*. Unlike the colonists who did not understand Africa but looked down at African culture with a condescending attitude, the little girl in the novel loved the natural landscape of Africa and celebrated the enchanting grasslands and animals. She respected African cultural traditions and appreciated the traditional architecture of the indigenous people. She was anxious to make friends with the people there, so when the Chief greeted her, she would respond politely. As someone born in Africa, she could see the sparsely wooded grasslands of southern Africa whenever she opened her eyes. What is amazing is that she could name the small creatures in the streams back in England, but she didn't know much about the word “veld,” and she couldn't distinguish the msasa trees from the thorn trees in the grasslands. To her, “the sun was a foreign sun, and the wind spoke a strange language” (Lessing, *This Was the Old Chief's Country* 14). Colonial diasporas remained “outsiders” to African culture because they were unable to reach its core all along.

While moving from one country to another, colonial migrants sought to settle down in their new land, but they were still unable to see the place of their sojourn as their native place. With their native place on one side and the land of their survival on the other, they were dangling between two cultures searching arduously for their self-identity. Most of the time, they believed that “they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it” (Safran 83). If such kind of psychological anxiety or disconnection induced in the face of a heterogeneous culture is also a common experience for foreign diasporas, then colonial diasporas in Africa might encounter two other specific situations.

While living in Africa, Lessing joined a small white left-wing group participating actively in local politics and coming into contact with Marxism, for which she was ostracized by the local mainstream white society and, after her move to England, was banned by its government from entering Rhodesia for 25 years. But, as Lu Jing put it well, the group's “activities did not gain the trust of the blacks, nor did they integrate with the local blacks. They continued to act within the small group of white leftists and therefore were ‘rootless’” (Lu 151). Later, Lessing joined the British Communist Party, but dropped out of it shortly afterwards. Beset by the racist mindset, whites and blacks are always divided by an unbridgeable gap. Such a multiple identity, which made Lessing feel not only so perplexed about being shunned by the mainstream white society and misunderstood by the blacks

simultaneously, but also so distressed about the contradiction between her affiliation with the colonists and her resentment toward their evil and immorality, deeply affected her novel writing.

In addition, there was a special group of white settlers, like Mary and Dick from *The Grass Is Singing*, living in southern Africa. Ostensibly, the novel writes about a failed marriage, hidden relationships, and the racial conflict between whites and blacks, but it also shows how white settlers in Africa struggle to integrate into the British society through multigenerational effort. The novel is set in Southern Rhodesia between the two world wars during the 1920s and 1940s, where the gap between the rich and the poor was relative narrow because there were not many businesses that could make a huge fortune overnight like the tobacco barons. Within the African colonial society at that time, the consciousness of class stratification was generally abated among the colonists who saw the black-white tension as the only division they faced. On the farm where Mary lives, white families live far from each other, a preference that is quite different from the middle-class way of life in England. So, they rarely have the opportunity to meet and are “hungry for contact with their own kind” (Lessing 2). Mary and Dick live in poverty and shabby conditions. As colonial masters, they have their own black servants, yet in the eyes of other white settlers, they are just “poor whites.” The so-called “poor whites” originally refers to the white South Africans, an ethnic group descended from predominantly Dutch settlers who first arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, but not the British. What is a poor white? It was mainly determined by the way one lived. “The small community of Afrikaners had their own lives, and the Britishers ignored them. ‘Poor whites’ were Afrikaners, never British” (Lessing 3). For poor whites like Mary, what is awkward is that they have grown up in a foreign country, but they have imbibed their parents’ memories of their home country, read a lot of books ordered from England, and developed a strong conviction that they are still purely civilized British subjects with an inseparable identity from their home country. However, in the eyes of their wealthy compatriots in the colony, they have already been excluded from the British circle as outsiders or the marginalized members of the colonial community without a sense of belonging. This kind of colonial diaspora has become a unique cultural landscape, and has contributed to the cultural representation and unique aesthetic implications that are characteristic of African English-language literature.

## **Conclusion**

In Lessing’s novels, white colonists retain not only a deep sense of attachment

to their homeland, but also the unspeakable pain from being exiled. They come to a foreign country with dreams, and then fade away in disillusionment and helplessness. They have to deal with the alienation from the colonized on the one hand and, on the other, find it hard to abandon their identification with the culture of the country they live in. Lessing's works illustrate colonial diasporas' predicament of rootless existence, in which, technically, they are not “exiles” but face more hardships than real “exiles” do, and they have a place to live but have no one to rely on. Lessing is not the only writer who produced narratives about colonial diasporas. As the connotation of postcolonialism continues to expand, colonial diaspora writing has become a common phenomenon in global diaspora literature, and Lessing is just a typical representative. Like Lessing, the diasporic writers who have cross-cultural experiences and strong identification with colonial culture, and have been using colonial life as an important source of creative material, all have more or less similar tactics in their representation of colonial diasporas. Leading African diasporic writers, such as Camus, Gordimer, and Coetzee, need no introduction, but there are more colonial diaspora writers in North America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, and the Caribbean. Australian writers, such as Patrick White (1912-1990) and Gail Jones (1955-), and Canadian writer Alice Munro (1931-2024) have exerted a major impact on literature around the world by expressing the feelings of nostalgia and exile based on their deep cultural recollection, depicting the quest for cultural roots, tracing the cause of spiritual wandering, and discovering the sense of belonging in the memory of history.

As a unique shining spot in diasporic literature, the writers of colonial diaspora in African literature differ from both white British and black African native writers in terms of value identification and cultural identity, but they are definitely commensurable to their counterparts elsewhere in terms of high aesthetic standard and artistic sophistication. The writing of African colonial diaspora has created a special aesthetic paradigm and atmosphere, enriched world literature with more diversities, and thereby provided greater potential for the mutual appreciation between civilizations. For many years, African literature has not truly been presented to us in its entirety. Most of the time, it is “first and foremost the African literature seen by the West, and in particular the British and American world” (Zhu 54). As Chinese scholars, our foreign literature research must “get out of a state of unconsciousness” (Zhu 53) and “have its own knowledge structure and system of judgment” (Zhu 53). Only in this way can we absorb the outstanding cultural traditions of various countries in a balanced way and achieve a truly equal dialogue in world literature.

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