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English: Literary Analysis

Doris Lessing is a famous author who was born in Persia, but she grew up in Rhodesia’s (known as Zimbabwe today) British colony. She wrote her famous story “The Old Chief Mshlanga” during 1950-1958. It is among the author’s first African stories in which she tells the story of a young white girl named Nkosikaas Jordan who is grown up in an alienated land and is taught to see herself superior to the natives and disrespect them and their culture. However, her views and perspectives are changed later and she starts to respect the natives and acquires much confidence.

**Literary Analysis**

The elements of Prejudice, English domination and oppression, abuse of territory, and incommunicability are seen in the story. The girl is brought up in a way that she has no regard or respect for the natives of the land and she has an expectation of deferential treatment from the natives. The domination of English is seen when the girl’s father demands the goats of Chief as a payment for the caused damage, though the chief grieves that his people would suffer starvation over the winter. The incommunicability can be observed on many occasions as it cannot take place between hostility and pride. “The old man spoke his own language.” It is clearly shown that there was a huge communication gap between the whites and the blacks.

The main characters in the story are the girl and the Old Chief Mshlanga. The parents of the girl and the cook are the minor characters. There is no physical description of any of the characters but the traits of their personalities and their behavior patterns are described by the writer. the figures of the girl and the Chief are dynamic characters. The parents of the girl mirror the whole English society and they represent the mentality of colonizing communities.

The author has used several literary devices in the story. He has made the best use of metaphors, similes, imagery, tone, personification, and alliteration. His use of similes is very much prominent in the story but the author has used them effectively. The distance and gap of the natives from the real world of the girl are described, “The black people on the farm were as remote as trees and the rocks.” On other occasions the writer uses similes to show that the whites used to associate the natives to animals, “they could tease a small back child as if he were a puppy,” “the dogs would flush him up a tree as if he were a bird.” These sentences show the extremely ill attitude of the white people towards the blacks. When the girl learns and understands the difference in the culture and life of the black people and realizes that she can never be a part of them she says, “I had learned that if one cannot call a country to heel like a dog, neither can on dismiss the past with a smile in an easy gush feeling.” Here she gets to understand that after an age of dictatorship, the past cannot be easily changed.

Another important literary device Personification has also been used by the author in this story. In personification, the abstract feelings or non-living things are given human-like qualities. The author gives human like qualities to the dignity, “The old man spoke again, wearing dignity like an inherited garment,……” Dignity is an abstract quality that is referred to a human who is wearing a garment.

The tone used by the author is not a general one, but a specific tone. It is because there is a use of particular terms or words of the native origins. Some of the words are “Nkosikaas” “Msasa Trees” “Kraal.” These words refers to the characteristic nouns or to the landscapes of the place used by the natives.

Rich diction is used in the story for describing the beautiful scenes of nature that are appealing to the aesthetic sense of the readers. The wonderful choice of words such as “a pale willowed river, a pale gleaming castle,” “the gnarled roots of an oak, snow falling thick and soft and white,” and many more create an amazing image of the author in the reader’s mind and makes the story worth reading.

Another literary device such as Alliteration has also been used by the writer in this story. Alliteration refers to the repetition of the beginning sounds in a sentence or a phrase. Several examples of alliteration can be seen in this story such as, “I followed unfamiliar paths past kopjes that till now had been part of the jagged horizon, hazed with distance.” The sound of /p/ is repeated and this repetition is known as alliteration. Another example of alliteration is the repetition of /f/ sound in this sentence, “……ranging the bush over her father’s farm which, like every white farm,…..”

**Conclusion**

The story is very well written by the author. The themes are very well explored and she has made use of the literary devices and techniques very carefully and effectively. The readers interpret the story as the writer wants them to interpret because of the powerful and influencing techniques used by the writer to give a deep impression of the English dominance and prejudices in the society. Hence, this story is a wonderful piece of writing by the author.

# Works Cited

Xiaolan, T., & Zhangzhou. (2007). The Pilots in the Process of Initiation——An Interpretation of Doris Lessing's The Old Chief Mshlanga. *Journal of Nanping Teachers College*. Retrieved from http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\_en/CJFDTotal-NPSZ200703012.htm