

Shift of Eco-Feminism towards Posthumanist Future: The Doris Lessing's Sci-fi Turn in Writing

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Abstract: *After more than two decades of literary endeavors, Doris Lessing embarked on a captivating odyssey into the realm of science fiction, delving deep into the intricate tapestry that intertwines women and nature which features Eco-feminism during the 1980s. It dawned upon her that eco-feminism's ultimate destination transcends mere admonishment of androcentrism and anthropocentrism; rather, it aspires to forge an idyllic utopia for both humanity and our fragile ecosystems for the future. Nevertheless, this visionary landscape is not easily forged and demanding meticulous consideration of myriad factors due to the fact that the "rampant" development of technology alters the way we live in and we perceive the world. Therefore, the Doris Lessing sensed the change in literary realm and explored the futuristic path for human society which worth our attention. The thesis is going to analyze Lessing's writing shift and her key sci-fi work *The Marriage Between Zone Three, Four and Five* to figure out her path of building up the harmonious future and the significance of posthumanist turn.*

Keywords: Sci-fi; Doris Lessing; Eco-feminism; Posthumanist turn; Posthumanism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Eco-criticism is hailed as literary criticism which takes a holistic view towards literature and nature as well as combats against anthropocentrism and androcentrism. According to Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell, "the study of the relationship between ecology and literature" [1]; while it is "a study of the relationship between literature and environment under the guidance of the practical spirit of a dedicated environmental movement" [2]. *Silent Spring* from Rachel Carson is one of the earliest ecological works which exerts great influence on the development of eco-criticism. In 1978, William Rueckert firstly took the phrase "eco-criticism" in *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment In Eco-Criticism* so as to connect the literature with ecology and exhort critics to embrace ecological view [1].

Doris Lessing, the Nobel Prize in Literature Laureate, who devoted her life to pursue the equal status of women and nature with her exquisite technique. The reason for Nobel Prize in Literature went below:

"THAT EPIC IS TO THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE, WHO WITH SCEPTICISM, FIRE AND VISIONARY POWER HAS SUBJECTED A DIVIDED CIVILISATION TO SCRUTINY"

From *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), *The Golden Notebook* (1962) to *The Memoirs of Survivors* (1974), Doris Lessing portrayed the eco-female image in those books to arouse readers' consciousness for women and nature. Around 1980s, starting from Romanticism and Sufism, a mystical sect of Islam, she explored beyond the realm of reason and self and wrote several "inner space" novels and her pen switched to sci-fi, such as *Shikasta* (1979), *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980), *The Sirian Experiments* (1980), *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982). Lessing's work often critiques the limitations of traditional humanist values and emphasizes the importance of embracing new technologies and ideas while also recognizing their potential dangers. Through her writing, she challenges readers to consider the ethical implications of technological advancements and to think critically about our place in a rapidly changing world.

2. ENLIGHTENED FROM THE PAST: THE LITERARY EXPLORATION TOWARDS ECO-FEMINISM AND THE RETHINK ON POSTHUMANISM

Eco-feminism has made significant contributions to literature, particularly in the areas of nature writing and environmental fiction. Here are some examples of eco-feminist literature: (1) Barbara Kingsolver's "The

Poisonwood Bible" - This novel explores the impact of human activity on the environment through the story of a family escaping the destruction of their Belgian missionary compound. The book critiques the harmful effects of colonialism and highlights the importance of conservation and sustainable living. (2) Octavia Butler's "Kindred" - Set in a post-apocalyptic world, this novel examines the relationship between two women, one black and one white, who share an unusual bond. It challenges traditional gender roles and explores themes of environmental destruction, social inequality, and the search for identity and meaning. (3) Kim Stanley Robinson's "Red Mars" - This series of novels follows the adventures of humanity colonizing Mars, offering a speculative take on the future of our planet. The series grapples with themes such as climate change, resource scarcity, and the ethics of space exploration, all while highlighting the importance of environmental stewardship and cooperation among diverse groups. (4) Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" - Set in a dystopian future where women have been stripped of their rights, this novel explores issues related to reproductive rights, gender equality, and environmental degradation. It raises important questions about the role of technology in shaping society and the ethical implications of creating a new world order. (5) Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Left Hand of Darkness" - This novel is set on a planet where the inhabitants have no hands or fingers, but possess advanced technology that allows them to manipulate objects with their minds. The story explores themes such as gender roles, power dynamics, and the relationship between humans and nature.

Just like Doris Lessing's works, they condemn Anthropocentrism and androcentrism which are two different perspectives on the place of humans in the universe [3]. Anthropocentric holds the belief that humans are the most important or central beings in the universe [4], while androcentrism is a belief that men (assuming male is the biological gender) are superior to women. Anthropocentrism has been present throughout human history, as it is a natural tendency for individuals to focus on their own experiences and needs. However, it can lead to negative consequences when people become overly focused on their own self-interest, ignoring the well-being of others and the planet. Androcentrism, on the other hand, is a bias that assumes that men are physically stronger and more capable than women. This belief has been perpetuated by media, popular culture, and even scientific research, leading to discrimination against women in various fields. Both anthropocentrism and androcentrism have been criticized for their negative impacts on society by Doris Lessing due to her literary support towards Eco-feminism. Furthermore, many other writers advocate for equality and social justice argue that these beliefs are harmful and should be challenged in order to create a more just and equitable world. However, Doris Lessing starts to think further and view the interwoven fabrics of Eco-feminism and posthumanism.

Honestly, Eco-feminism and posthumanism are two interrelated but distinct movements that share a focus on environmental justice and social change. Eco-feminism is a feminist theory that accentuates the intersectionality of environmental and gender issues, while posthumanism is a philosophical movement delving into the essence of humanity in an era characterized by artificial intelligence and biotechnology [5]. Both movements acknowledge the paramount significance of recognizing the non-human world [6] [7] as an integral component of our existence and comprehending our intricate relationship with it. However, eco-feminism places particular emphasis on the interconnection between environmental and gender issues, whereas posthumanism offers a more expansive perspective on the future of humanity in a world where technology is advancing at an unprecedented pace[8].

3. WHY FUTURE: THE RATIONALE OF SCI-FI AND DORIS LESSING'S SHIFT OF HER PEN

The essence of sci-fi is to portray the future which constructed in writer's mind. To the majority of feminist writers who are concerned over binary opposition (female & male; nature & human) turn to think about how feminist movement develops to how it ends in the future.

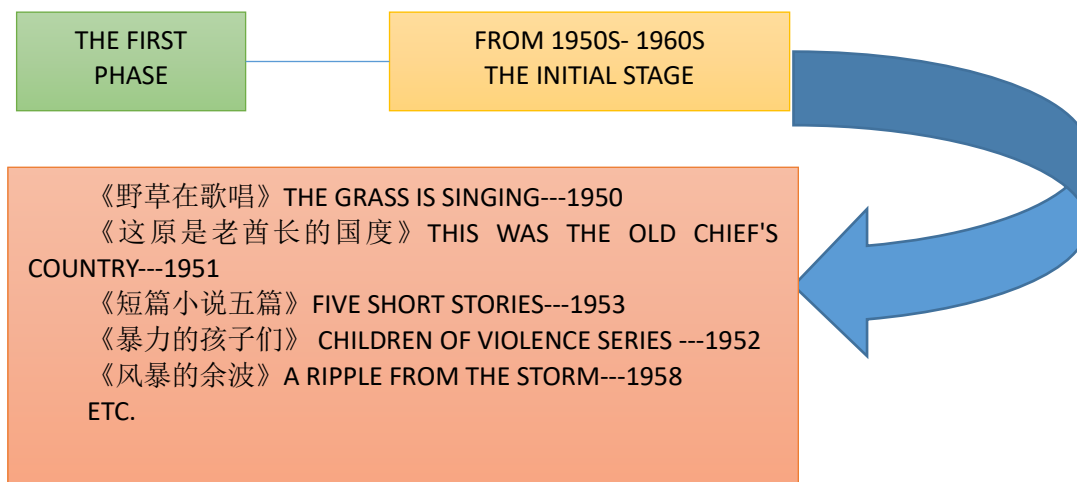
Feminist writers tend to be more conscious over the purpose of their objective of writing -- it does not focus on criticizing androcentrism & anthropocentrism but building an Utopia for every subject of the society, in particular, for women and nature. Plenty of Writers, such as Doris Lessing, Tony Morrison, Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen, Lousie Gluck etc took majority of life-time exploring the unequal status of women & nature (Eco-feminism).

On the basis of theoretical foundation of eco-feminist, Doris Lessing took part in the group of writers who explored the future by writing sci-fi. After 1980s, many writers are inclined to explore the problems of human society in the future. Such as William Gibson's Sprawl Trilogy (Newromancer; Count Zero; Mona Lisa Overdrive) build up "cyberpunk" to explore the field established by high end tech which impacts the human life in an in-depth way. British writer Ian McEwan publishes his newest sci-fi "Machine Like Me" (2019) to express the ethical dilemma between human and artificial intelligence. Japanese British writer Kazuo Ishiguro wrote two books (Never Let Me

Go & Klara and The Sun) took deep steps into the impact of clone tech and AI tech upon the human society and human itself in the future. Doris Lessing took steps from eco-feminist in contemporary era towards the future in order to clearly picture the future for women and nature because that's the ultimate purpose of feminist writers. Posthumanism, on the other hand, challenges the notion of humans as the most important or superior beings in the universe. Instead, it proposes that humans are just one form of life among many others, and that there may be forms of existence beyond human biology that are equally valuable. Posthumanists argue that we should strive to understand and coexist with these other forms of life rather than seeing them as inferior or expendable. Overall, while andropocentrism emphasizes the importance of men in relation to women, posthumanism seeks to redefine our relationship with other forms of life and challenge our assumptions about what it means to be human (no matter what sex you are born with). It suggests that there are multiple ways to understand and relate to the world around us, and that gender is just one aspect of who we are. In science fiction, posthumanism can take many forms, including depictions of advanced artificial intelligence, cyborgs, or even entirely new forms of life that transcend our current understanding of what it means to be alive. These creatures may challenge our assumptions about what it means to be human and how we relate to the natural world. Overall, posthumanism seeks to redefine our relationship with other forms of life and challenge our assumptions about what it means to be human[9].

Doris Lessing served as this type of feminist writer, her writing experience unveiled the feminist writers ultimate purpose --- constructing the utopia which is friendly to both women and nature in the future rather than revelling in reprimanding androcentrism and anthropocentrism.

To be more specific, Doris Lessing's works can be dissected by three phases:

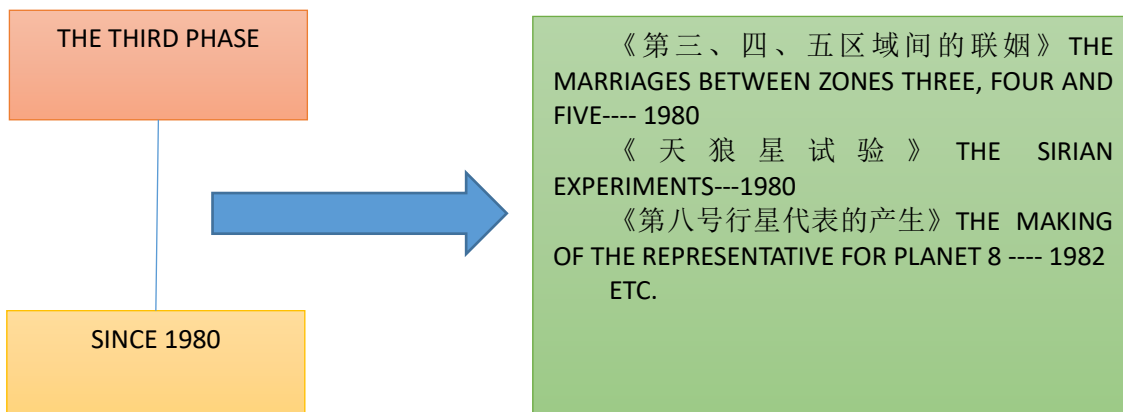


In her first phase, she demonstrated her initial talent in writing. Like in The Grass Is Sing, she took a white farmer's wife killed by a black manservant as the theme, the psychological depiction in the novel was delicate, reflected the African colonial racial oppression and racial contradictions.

In this novel, she expressed her concerns over the ladies and eco-system in Africa: the resentment and condemnation against the colonialists' discrimination and exploitation of African Blacks as well as a white woman. From another perspective, she also expressed her hatred for the African natural ecology which was severely damaged by the colonialists' plundering. She gave the reader the first real picture of how white immigrants lived on the African continent under apartheid. From her first phase of writing, she started taking women and nature as her core theme so as to form a solid foundation of further exploration.

WORKS	TIME	THE SECOND PHASE
《金色笔记》 THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK	1962	FROM 1961- 1979 THE MATURE STAGE
《特别的猫》 PARTICULARLY CATS	1967	
《简述地狱之行》 BRIEFING FOR A DESCENT INTO HELL	1971	
《黑暗前的夏天》 THE SUMMER BEFORE THE DARK	1973	
《幸存者回忆录》 MEMOIRS OF A SURVIVOR	1974	
《希卡斯塔》 SHIKASTA	1979	

In the second phase, her writing turned to be much maturer than that in the first phase. Not only her masterpiece *The Golden Notebook* helped her to get the title of "Pioneer of Feminism" [http://culture.ifeng.com/renwu/special/lessing/content-3/detail_2013_11/18/31326926_1.shtml] but revealed her complex narrative techniques in describing the intertwining struggle between political reality and the emotional world.



In the third phase, Doris Lessing began her trip towards the future in that she realized the destination was not just depicting the catastrophic life condition of women & the miserable situation of eco-system but to portray the futuristic status for them. By doing this, there would shed some lights upon the development of eco-feminism and help to ward off going extreme in particular.

These works by eco-feminist authors challenge conventional narratives about gender, nature, and society, paving the way for more diverse and inclusive representation in literature and beyond. Posthumanism is a philosophical movement that explores the nature of humanity in the age of artificial intelligence and biotechnology. It challenges traditional notions of humanity by proposing that humans can be enhanced through technology, and that new forms of life may emerge in the post-human world[10].

In literature, posthumanist themes often explore the implications of technological advancements for human identity, consciousness, and relationships. For example, the novel "The Time Machine" by H.G. Wells imagines a future in which humans can travel through time and encounter other advanced civilizations, challenging traditional notions of humanity. The novel "Neuromancer" by William Gibson explores the relationship between humans and technology, and proposes that humans can be transformed into "cybermen" through cybernetic enhancement [11]. Overall, posthumanist literature offers a unique perspective on the future of humanity in a world where technology is advancing at an unprecedented rate.

4. THE PAST AS THE UNCHANGEABLE FUNDAMENTALS

In her two works (*The Memoirs of a Survivor* & *The Grass*), she laid a solid foundation of exposing the detriments of androcentrism & anthropocentrism upon women & nature. The exquisite depiction of eco-system and the oppression of women continuously consolidated the inner core of the theory of eco-feminism.

4.1 The Call Against Androcentrism in Doris Lessing --- Taking *The Memoirs Of a Survivor* As An Example

In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, Emily was subjected to abuse of her father due to her gender. For instance, her father incestuously gazed Emily's private area of her body. Therefore, she had to disguise herself with "bright impervious voice and smile"[12]. Only in her nook of bed could she take off her masquerade: "bare room would be better than this infinitely genteel shabbiness, the gimcrackery"[12]. Shame to androcentrism because not only it takes women as "the other" but even infringe on the basic human morality with the disrespect to women.

Emily took a brave step of joining the male community at the pedestrian crossing voluntarily: "She had not challenged them as a child, no; but as a young girl, an equal that must have been it, and they had not accepted her" [12]. Even Doris Lessing wanted to expose to the world with the difficulties of women to be standing squarely in male community (the flaws of androcentrism).

Androcentrism takes women as the object who can be exploited by men. It is oppression brought about revolt, feminist movements are deeply rooted in feminist writers which act as the core motif to fight against androcentrism as well as enlighten and encourage women to fight for their own legitimate rights.

4.2 The Call Against the Anthropocentrism in Doris Lessing---Taking the Memoirs of a Survivor & The Grass Is Singing as Examples

The root structure of Doris Lessing was to call for the legitimate right of female and status of nature in conflicts of her works. Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), the originator of the Earth Ethics, told readers in his *A Sand Country Almanac* that "wilderness has never been the raw material for the finished product of civilization"[13]. As he pointed out that human took for granted that land (nature) was the commodity which could be exploited by anyone. In *The Grass Is Singing*, Charlie Slater was the richest Englishman was southern Africa whose wealth came from the exploitation of the fertile land. Anthropocentrism regarded wealth more significant than eco-system, that's why in this novel, Charlie accumulated his wealth from 500 acres of fertile land and cut down all trees on his farm to sell them for money which brought about increasing barren lands. What's worse, Charlie not only exploited the land but criticized other citizens who protected farms.

"of course, such contriving and patching and making do begin to parallel our ordinary living, our affluence and waste and overeating, at a very early stage, long before the time of which I am writing now. We were all experts at making a great deal of very little, even while we all still had a lot, and were still being incited by advertisement to spend and use and discard"[12]. Lessing presents the reader with the scene after nature destroyed mankind: "all gone, nothing left, the bush grown over all! Her mind was filled with green, wet branches, thick wet grass, and thrusting bushes. It snapped shut: the vision was gone" [14].

All these served as the evidence for Doris Lessing in concerning the ecological problems in our contemporary time --- anthropocentrism. People took themselves as the center of the universe which was the "ideological legacy" of humanism so as to take nature as "the other". Hence, "the other" should serve "the center"; however, this ideology laid down the hidden danger for mankind.

5. THE FUTURE AS THE CONSTRUCT-ABLE UTOPIA --- TAKING THE MARRIAGES BETWEEN ZONES THREE, FOUR AND FIVE AS AN EXAMPLE

As what Lessing expressed in an interview:

Whenever women make imaginary female kingdoms in literature, they are always very permissive and easy and generous.... They make each other little presents, and they have little feasts, and nobody punishes anyone else. This is the female way of going along where there are no men about or when men are not in the ascendant.... whereas the natural male way of going about things is this pompous discipline and lack of subtlety in relations. [15].

Clearly, Lessing wanted to explore the futuristic society which is friendly to women, men and nature. Furthermore, she was utterly sober that women alone could not build up an utopia since men was still a significant role in the development of our human society, so to nature. In *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four And Five*, she pictured three zones in the future which were impossible to be found in real world. Her sci-fi was destined to help sort out the possible pros and cons of current development of eco-feminism so that the better utopia for every actant will be constructed.

5.1 The Devastation Of Patriarchy And Radical Feminism In Her Imagination

To the majority of feminist writers were inclined to reprimand the devastating land ruled by patriarchal society. Like the comparison between Zone Three (matriarchal society) and Zone Four (patriarchal society):

"Three comes before Four.

Our ways are peace and plenty.

Their ways ---- war!" [16].

This doggerel exposed the landscape of lives in Zone three and Zone Four. In the novel, the life in Zone Three was

"below them now lay a wide plain, behind them were the mountains. The plains still lay yellowed by the evening sun, and the high peaks of the mountains sun-glittered..."[16]. She attached importance to the depiction of utopian life in Zone Three so as to portray the harsh living condition of Zone Four. Feminist utopias are characterized by "the elimination of all hierarchies, and the ability to see even the natural world as profoundly equal and similar to the human world"[17].

In terms of animal's status from the human gaze, " in their zone the rideless horse gave birth to songs death and sorrow; in ours to songs about loving friendship"[16]. Those animals were only regarded as emotionless tools for war and other purposes. All those served Zone Three as an eco-utopia in that human and animals (Nature) were getting well rather than taking them as "the other". Dabeeb, the maid, in Zone Four was regarded as a person of leadership by Queen in Zone Three that: "this handsome female who in her own Zone would have been put in positions of the most responsible and taxing kind" [16]. Women were regarded as soulless sexual tools with no independent and integrated personality in self-centrism of men.

"you will not find anything beyond a knife or an axe for household use or the use of a herdsman, in any home in our country"[16]. but in Zone Four: " three hundred men could become one --- that individual wills could cease to be entirely, absorbed in this larger, terrifying will"[16]. Feminism is a form of fantasy, and its proponents have frequently sought a sex-role reversal society or a model of non-sexist society, which therefore looks to the future and which must be constructed first as an utopia [18]. Therefore, making the comparison help readers to better understand the pejorative and adverse respect of patriarchy in the future if we let it grow now.

Radical feminism turned out to be an extreme for " feminist movement" which only jeopardized the positive construction of utopia. Like the queen of Zone Five who was so radical that: "Zone Five is a barren desert land sparsely covered with shrub, in which the nomad tribes constantly move their tents and animals in order to find scarce water and food"[16] " people usually slit each other's throats because of a stolen sheep, or kill the men who is lying asleep in the sand wrapped in the tattered cloaks on account of the water carried by them" [16] " the girls in Zone Five were always so dusty and gritty to the touch"[16]" Vahshi sat sprawling, and lounging, raising her arms to yawn and stretch, moving and swinging her legs" [16].

Lessing reminded us that the radical feminism was the extreme which needed our attention. There was a strong message sent by Lessing, some extremists in feminism did not care much about eco-system but their own interests when they were pursuing rights.

5.2 The Utopia Of Women And Its Limitation

Zone Three was the utopia established by Doris Lessing in her sci-fi and every tiny corner of Zone Three seemed so peaceful and cosy not only for women but for men and nature. After staying with The king of Zone Four for certain days, AI Ith returned to her land of Zone three: " Life had been as it always was, delightful, with the children, her friends, her lovers, the amiable pace of this realm setting the rhythms of the body and the mind into good humor, kindness....."[16]

The Zone Three provided freedom for women to choose the clothing they like: "usually, at such moments of relaxation the women would have petted each other, done each other's hair, tried on each other's dresses, planned new ones, discussed what innovations and developments they had noticed in the clothes of the girls and women had been present that day, in case any might be useful to clothing generally,"[16]. Virginia Woolf argued that "it was the costume that dressed us up, rather than we dressed in it" [19]. The reason for putting up clothing was to make female become a prey to male desires instead of letting female express her independent personality [20].

However, cloaked with utopia, Zone Three featured more limitations in the matriarchal ruling like containing negative emotion. There should not be any containment over people's sentiment since it was an inhumane social code. "weep, wail, suffer... sorrow at bereavement, at personal loss, has become formalized, ritualized.....it is not that we don't feel--- but that feelings are meant always to be directed outwards and used to strengthen a general conception of ourselves and our realm...."[16]. Therefore, the sorrow felt by AI Ith due to the forced marriage with Ben Ata was never able to be felt by the people in Zone Three. All those negative feelings seemed unacceptable in Zone Three: " never had our Zone known so many tears, accusations, irrational ill feelings"[16].

When the queen returned to Zone Three after the marriage with the king in Zone Four, she was alienated from her people who could no longer echo with her grief: " pain and suffering were signs of illness, to be treated with

patience, compassion, and determination that this foreignness would not infect others"[16]. " it was a rule that people anywhere refused to open their minds to the damaged, the hurt, unless they are forced to" [16]. Getting back from Zone Two, AI Ith begins to realize the complacency of her realm, in which everything seems abundant, safe and cosy, but all those has brought about stagnation of Zone Three: " she cannot understand why her people can live all their lives through without pursuing anything more[16].

Feminist utopia is a society in which "women could feel at home and manifest their potential" [17]. Zone Three contained people's personal emotion in order to picture a scene of utopia in which every one lived happily; nonetheless, things turned out not going your way if the society is to contain not liberate sentiments. Eco-feminism is supposed to liberate women and nature rather than being constricted by the flaws of its own limitation. However, Doris Lessing views it from a broader perspective as in the future (posthumanist turn). The shift of eco-feminism towards a posthumanist future is a complex and nuanced topic that requires an interdisciplinary approach. Eco-feminism, which emphasizes the intersectionality of environmental and social justice issues, seeks to challenge dominant power structures and promote sustainability. On the other hand, posthumanism explores the potentialities of human evolution beyond our current form and challenges traditional notions of humanity. As we move towards a posthumanist future, eco-feminism will need to grapple with questions about what it means for humans to exist in a world where technology has advanced beyond our wildest dreams. Will we still be considered "human" if we are enhanced through genetic engineering or artificial intelligence? How can we ensure that these advancements are accessible and equitable for all, particularly marginalized communities?

One possible outcome of this shift is the emergence of a new kind of activism that combines eco-feminist principles with posthumanist perspectives. This movement could leverage emerging technologies to advocate for sustainable development and social justice, while also challenging our assumptions about what it means to be human. It could involve creating virtual communities that transcend physical boundaries, exploring the ethical implications of uploading consciousness into machines, and reimagining the relationship between humans and the natural world.

However, this shift also raises important concerns about privacy, autonomy, and control. As our bodies become increasingly integrated with technology, how can we maintain our personal sovereignty and prevent the exploitation of our data? How can we ensure that these advancements do not exacerbate existing inequalities or create new forms of oppression? In conclusion, the shift of eco-feminism towards a posthumanist future presents both opportunities and challenges. By embracing interdisciplinary approaches and engaging in critical dialogue, we can work towards creating a more sustainable and just world for all.

6. CONCLUSION

The posthuman turn is a literary and cultural movement that emerged in the late 20th century and early 21st century. It is characterized by a focus on the non-human world, artificial intelligence, and the potential for humans to be transformed through technology. The posthuman turn has been discussed extensively in literature and philosophy [21], with many authors exploring the implications of these developments for human identity and society. Doris Lessing, as a British author, has written extensively on posthumanism and other philosophical topics. In her novels, she often explores the relationship between humans and technology, questioning the boundaries between the two and exploring the implications of advanced artificial intelligence and biotechnology for human identity and society in the future.

Why future? Probably because there is nothing we can do to subvert the past; there are fewer things can a novel do to change the current! However, there is a tremendous impact upon readers' ideology so that the property of teaching and leading of prominent novels can give a full play. Therefore, eco-feminist writers like Doris Lessing attempts to construct images of the future to expose the positive respects of harmonious interaction between women & men; nature & human; the negativity of radical feminism, androcentrism and anthropocentrism; the limitation of matriarchal utopia. Lessing holds the viewpoint that future is the mirror and metaphor or character and is important for human development [22]. "Those fantasts who are telling us what is happening now in an unprecedented way that is to outline a future world for us" [23]. Processing a mythical feature, *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four And Five* conveyed Lessing's good expectations on the human future by creating a feminist utopia. The future projected in Sci-fi is much clearer than the depiction of the past or the current because it goes directly to the ultimate goal of eco-feminism [24]. Portraying the futuristic matrix of utopia. Doris Lessing's literary works often explore the posthuman turn, a cultural and philosophical movement that emerged in the late 20th century. In her novels, short stories, and essays, Lessing grapples with questions about the relationship

between humans and technology, the implications of advanced artificial intelligence [25] , and the potential for humans to be transformed through technology. Lessing's exploration of the posthuman turn is characterized by her use of science fictional elements and futuristic settings to explore complex philosophical issues. Her work challenges readers to think critically about our relationship with technology and to consider the ethical implications of technological advancements. Through her writing, Lessing offers a nuanced and sophisticated exploration of the posthuman turn and its impact on society.

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