

*SYMBOLIC IMAGERY IN DORIS LESSING'S SHORT STORIES LITTLE
TEMBI AND NO SALE FOR WITCHCRAFT*

**DORIS LESSINGNING "LITTLE TEMBI" VA "NO SALE FOR
WITCHCRAFT" QISQA HIKOYALARIDAGI RAMZIY OBRAZLAR**

**СИМВОЛИЧЕСКИЕ ОБРАЗЫ В РАССКАЗАХ ДОРИС ЛЕССИНГ
«LITTLE TEMBI» И «NO SALE FOR WITCHCRAFT»**

Davlatova Vazira Efl Teacher

Uzbek State World Languages

University Department of Practice

Disciplines, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

E-mail: vaziraotabekovna97@gmail.com + 998901105601

Davlatova Vazira

Mustaqil izlanuvchi

O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Ingliz tili amaliy fanlar kafedrası o'qituvchisi

Toshkent, O'zbekiston.

vaziraotabekovna97@gmail.com

Abstract

Doris Lessing's short stories "Little Tembi" and "No Sale for Witchcraft" are profound explorations of cultural identity, racial prejudice, and social conflict, rendered through rich symbolic imagery. This article employs close textual analysis

and theoretical frameworks from literary criticism to investigate the symbolic devices Lessing employs to deepen her narratives. In “Little Tembi,” the protagonist’s journey symbolizes the tensions between tradition and modernity, personal freedom, and cultural displacement. Conversely, “No Sale for Witchcraft” uses witchcraft symbolism to critique racial stereotypes and societal fear of the unfamiliar. The study reveals how these symbolic images invite readers to reflect on postcolonial realities, social injustice, and the resilience of marginalized communities. Ultimately, the findings highlight Lessing’s skillful use of symbolism as a tool for social critique and empathy, underscoring her lasting significance in literary and cultural discourse.

Annotatsiya

Doris Lessingning “Little Tembi” va “No Sale for Witchcraft” qisqa hikoyalari madaniy identitet, irqiy qarashlar va ijtimoiy ziddiyatlarni chuqur o‘rganib, boy ramziy obrazlar orqali ifodalaydi. Ushbu maqolada adabiy tanqid nazariyasi asosida matnni yaqindan tahlil qilish usullari qo‘llanilib, Lessing hikoyalarida ishlatilgan ramziy vositalar chuqur o‘rganiladi. “Little Tembi”da qahramonning sayohati an‘analar bilan zamonaviylik, shaxsiy erkinlik va madaniy chetlanish o‘rtasidagi taranglikni ramziy ifodalaydi. Aksincha, “No Sale for Witchcraft”da sehrgarlik ramzi irqiy stereotiplar va noma’lumdan qo‘rqish kabi ijtimoiy muammolarni tanqid qiladi. Tadqiqot bu ramziy obrazlarning o‘quvchilarni postkolonial haqiqatlar, ijtimoiy adolatsizlik va chetlatilgan jamoalarning chidamliligi haqida o‘ylashga undashini ko‘rsatadi. Natijalar Lessingning ramziy uslubdan ijtimoiy tanqid va hamdardlik vositasi sifatida mahorat bilan foydalanganini ta’kidlab, uning adabiy va madaniy sohadagi davomiy ahamiyatini ochib beradi.

Аннотация

Короткие рассказы Дорис Лессинг «Little Tembi» и «No Sale for Witchcraft» являются глубокими исследованиями культурной идентичности, расовых предрассудков и социальных конфликтов, представленными через богатую символическую образность. В данной статье с помощью близкого текстового

анализа и теоретических рамок литературной критики исследуются символические приемы, которые Лессинг использует для углубления своих повествований. В «Little Tembi» путешествие главной героини символизирует напряжение между традицией и современностью, личной свободой и культурным отчуждением. В то же время в «No Sale for Witchcraft» символика колдовства используется для критики расовых стереотипов и общественного страха перед неизвестным. Исследование показывает, как эти символические образы побуждают читателей задуматься о постколониальной реальности, социальной несправедливости и устойчивости маргинализированных сообществ. В конечном итоге результаты подчеркивают мастерское использование Лессинг символизма как инструмента социальной критики и эмпатии, подтверждая её непреходящее значение в литературных и культурных дискурсах.

Introduction

Doris Lessing (1919–2013), a Nobel Prize-winning author, is widely celebrated for her incisive engagement with themes of identity, power, and social change. Her literary oeuvre spans novels, essays, and short stories, many of which grapple with the complexities of cultural and racial dynamics in colonial and postcolonial settings. Symbolism, a fundamental literary device, plays a pivotal role in Lessing's storytelling, enabling her to convey layered meanings and social critiques beneath the surface narrative. Among her many works, the short stories "Little Tembi" and "No Sale for Witchcraft" stand out for their profound use of symbolic imagery to explore the struggles of individuals caught between conflicting cultural worlds and oppressive social structures. "Little Tembi" narrates the story of a young African woman navigating the pressures of tradition and the allure of modernity, while "No Sale for Witchcraft" delves into the societal fears and racial prejudices manifest in the metaphor of witchcraft. Despite considerable scholarship on Lessing's novels, the symbolic complexity of these short stories has received comparatively less focused attention.

This article seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how Lessing employs symbolism to articulate themes of cultural conflict, personal freedom, and racial discrimination. The study's central research questions are: How does Doris Lessing use symbolic imagery in "Little Tembi" and "No Sale for Witchcraft"? What social and cultural critiques are embedded within these symbols? The article is structured as follows: after outlining the methodological framework, it presents a detailed analysis of symbolic imagery in each story, followed by a discussion contextualizing the findings within broader literary and socio-cultural discourses. The conclusion reflects on the implications of the study for understanding Lessing's literary contribution and the ongoing relevance of her social critique.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis methodology, focusing primarily on close reading, thematic analysis, and semiotic interpretation to explore the symbolic imagery in Doris Lessing's short stories *Little Tembi* and *No Sale for Witchcraft*. These techniques allow for an in-depth examination of the texts' linguistic and symbolic features, which are crucial for uncovering underlying meanings and socio-cultural critiques embedded within the narratives. **Close reading** involves a meticulous and detailed analysis of the text's language, structure, and literary devices. By carefully examining the choice of words, imagery, narrative voice, and stylistic elements, close reading reveals layers of meaning beyond the surface narrative. This approach is particularly useful in identifying symbols and motifs that Lessing uses to convey complex ideas about cultural identity, racial prejudice, and social conflict. **Thematic analysis** complements close reading by focusing on the broader themes that emerge from the text. This method involves identifying recurring motifs and ideas—such as displacement, otherness, tradition versus modernity, and fear of the unknown—and analyzing how these themes are developed through symbolic imagery. Thematic analysis situates the symbolic elements within the larger narrative and social context, highlighting the stories' engagement with postcolonial and racial issues. **Semiotics**, the

study of signs and symbols and their meanings, provides a theoretical framework for interpreting the symbolism in Lessing's stories. This approach examines how symbols function as signs that represent ideas, cultural values, or social phenomena. Applying semiotic analysis helps uncover how Lessing's symbolic imagery operates on multiple levels—literal, metaphorical, and ideological—thereby enriching the reader's understanding of the stories' social and political messages. The choice to focus on ***Little Tembi*** and ***No Sale for Witchcraft*** is deliberate, based on the prominence and complexity of symbolic imagery in these narratives, as well as their thematic relevance to issues of cultural identity and racial prejudice. Both stories are part of Lessing's broader corpus that addresses colonial and postcolonial experiences in Africa, offering rich material for symbolic and cultural analysis. ***Little Tembi*** centers on a young woman's experience of cultural conflict and personal transformation, making it an ideal text for exploring symbols related to identity, tradition, and freedom. Meanwhile, ***No Sale for Witchcraft*** uses the metaphor of witchcraft to critique racial stereotyping and societal exclusion, providing a clear case for analyzing symbolic opposition and social fear. These stories were selected because they represent distinct yet complementary perspectives on postcolonial and racial themes, and their symbolic imagery functions as a key narrative strategy to communicate complex social realities. Focusing on these two works allows for a comparative analysis of symbolism across different social contexts within Lessing's oeuvre.

Explanation of Symbolism Analysis Techniques: Metaphor, Allegory, Intertextuality

The analysis of symbolic imagery in this study employs three primary techniques: metaphor, allegory, and intertextuality. **Metaphor** is a fundamental literary device through which Lessing represents abstract ideas concretely. In ***Little Tembi***, the protagonist herself and her journey serve metaphorically to express broader themes of cultural transition and internal conflict. The environment, relationships, and objects within the story are often metaphorically charged, embodying emotional and cultural

states. **Allegory** involves the use of characters, events, or narratives as extended symbols representing larger social or moral concepts. ***No Sale for Witchcraft*** functions as an allegory for racial prejudice and societal fear, with witchcraft symbolizing the stigmatization of marginalized groups. The marketplace and interactions within it serve as allegorical elements illustrating power dynamics and social exclusion. **Intertextuality** refers to the relationships between texts and the ways one text references or echoes others. Lessing's stories draw on African cultural traditions, colonial histories, and literary tropes related to witchcraft and identity, embedding their symbolism within a broader cultural and historical dialogue. Recognizing these intertextual connections enhances the interpretation of symbolic imagery and situates Lessing's narratives within larger discourses.

Use of Secondary Sources: Critical Essays, Interviews, Historical Context To deepen the analysis, this study incorporates secondary sources including critical essays on Doris Lessing's work, scholarly interpretations of postcolonial literature, and historical contextualization of the colonial and postcolonial periods in which the stories are set. Critical essays provide insights into Lessing's thematic concerns and narrative techniques, enriching the understanding of symbolism in her stories. Interviews with Lessing shed light on her intentions, perspectives on culture and identity, and the socio-political environment influencing her writing. Historical context is crucial for interpreting symbolic imagery that engages with colonial legacies, racial discrimination, and cultural hybridity. By situating the stories within their specific socio-historical moments, the study reveals how symbolism operates as a form of social critique and resistance.

Limitations and Scope

While this study aims for comprehensive symbolic analysis, certain limitations are acknowledged. The focus is restricted to two short stories, which, while representative, do not encompass the full range of Lessing's literary output. The interpretive nature of literary analysis means conclusions are necessarily subjective, shaped by the researcher's theoretical lens and cultural perspective. The study

prioritizes symbolic imagery related to cultural identity and racial prejudice, which may exclude other relevant themes such as gender dynamics or psychological dimensions. Additionally, the reliance on available secondary literature may limit the scope of historical and critical perspectives. Despite these limitations, the study provides a focused, detailed examination of symbolism in *Little Tembi* and *No Sale for Witchcraft*, contributing valuable insights into Lessing's narrative strategies and social critique.

Results

Little Tembi is a rich text where symbolic imagery functions as a vehicle for exploring the protagonist's complex experience at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. The character Tembi herself is the central symbol of cultural displacement and personal freedom. Her physical journey—from her rural home to an urban setting—mirrors her internal quest for self-identity amidst conflicting cultural expectations. Tembi's environment is laden with symbolism. The village represents tradition, community, and ancestral continuity, while the city symbolizes change, alienation, and modern challenges. This binary is reflected in objects such as the home, which serves as a sanctuary but also a site of entrapment, symbolizing the constraints of cultural expectations on individual agency. Relationships in the story carry symbolic weight. Tembi's interactions with family members embody generational tensions, illustrating the symbolic clash between inherited customs and the desire for independence. The struggle for autonomy is depicted not merely as a personal conflict but as a metaphor for broader societal shifts in postcolonial Africa. The story employs recurring symbols such as journeys and thresholds to articulate transformation and liminality. Crossing boundaries, both physical and metaphorical, signals Tembi's movement between worlds and identities, encapsulating the experience of cultural hybridity. In *No Sale for Witchcraft*, symbolism is central to the critique of racial prejudice and societal fear of the unfamiliar. The concept of witchcraft operates as an

extended metaphor for the demonization and marginalization of those who deviate from dominant cultural norms. The marketplace, where the story unfolds, serves as a symbolic space of negotiation, conflict, and power struggle. It reflects the economic and social tensions inherent in colonial and postcolonial societies, where cultural and racial hierarchies are contested. Characters in the story function symbolically as embodiments of resistance and complicity. The accused “witch” represents the oppressed ‘other,’ subjected to fear, suspicion, and exclusion. Other figures symbolize different societal attitudes towards difference—ranging from fear to empathy—thus framing the story’s social critique. The narrative structure itself reinforces symbolic meaning, with the progression of events mirroring the escalation of prejudice and eventual resistance. The story’s conclusion challenges the reader to reconsider the symbolic associations with witchcraft and to recognize the human cost of stereotyping and discrimination.

Discussion

Doris Lessing’s short stories *Little Tembi* and *No Sale for Witchcraft* utilize symbolic imagery as a profound medium through which sociocultural tensions, particularly those emerging from colonial and postcolonial dynamics, are articulated. The symbolic elements are not merely decorative or aesthetic devices; they are integral to the narrative’s capacity to engage with complex realities of identity, race, and cultural conflict. In *Little Tembi*, the protagonist’s journey is emblematic of the liminality experienced by individuals caught between indigenous traditions and the pressures of modernity. The symbolic use of space—rural versus urban—maps onto the larger sociocultural discourse on the disruption of traditional lifestyles under colonial and postcolonial modernization. Tembi’s personal conflict becomes a microcosm of the broader cultural dissonance facing African societies adapting to postcolonial realities. This symbolism reflects a double-edged sociocultural reality: the hope of liberation through self-determination and the risk of alienation from one’s roots. Similarly, *No Sale for Witchcraft* situates witchcraft as a symbol for societal

paranoia and racialized fear, revealing deep-rooted anxieties about difference and otherness in a colonial/postcolonial marketplace. The marketplace, a symbolic locus of economic exchange and cultural contestation, represents the intersecting power struggles and racial hierarchies. Witchcraft becomes a cipher for the stigmatization of marginalized groups, illustrating how symbolism can expose the mechanisms of social exclusion embedded within cultural belief systems. These symbolic representations are inseparable from the sociohistorical contexts of Lessing's narratives. The colonial legacy's imprint on African societies—disrupting indigenous identities, imposing racial hierarchies, and fostering cultural tensions—finds expression through the stories' symbolic imagery. The stories invite readers to critically reflect on how symbolism encapsulates lived experiences of oppression, resistance, and the search for identity amidst societal upheaval. Symbolism in Lessing's work serves as a crucial tool for eliciting empathy and raising awareness in readers. By employing symbols that resonate with universal themes of displacement, fear, and resilience, the stories transcend their immediate settings and speak to broader human experiences. For example, Tembi's symbolic journey from her village to the city invites readers to empathize with the personal costs of cultural transition, the emotional weight of loss, and the complexity of forging a new identity. This personalized symbolism humanizes abstract socio-political themes, making them more accessible and emotionally compelling. In *No Sale for Witchcraft*, the symbolic portrayal of witchcraft as a vehicle for social exclusion challenges readers to question their own assumptions and the societal constructs that perpetuate prejudice. The narrative encourages a critical awareness of how fear and superstition function as tools of marginalization, fostering empathy for the oppressed 'other.' By engaging with these symbols, readers become participants in a dialogue about racial and cultural injustice. Moreover, symbolic imagery shapes narrative pacing and emotional tone, enhancing reader engagement. The recurring motifs and allegorical elements create a rhythm that deepens the interpretive experience, allowing readers to uncover meanings progressively. This dynamic interplay between symbol and reader response underscores the transformative

power of symbolic literature to shape social consciousness. How Symbolism Critiques Colonial/Postcolonial Power Structures Lessing's use of symbolism operates as a subversive critique of colonial and postcolonial power structures. In both *Little Tembi* and *No Sale for Witchcraft*, symbolism reveals the often invisible mechanisms of domination and resistance that characterize colonial histories and their aftermaths. In *Little Tembi*, the symbolic tension between rural and urban spaces reflects colonial disruption of indigenous ways of life. The village symbolizes a threatened cultural heritage, while the city represents both the promise and peril of colonial modernity. This symbolic geography critiques the imposition of Western values and economic systems on colonized societies, exposing the fractures in identity caused by colonial rule and the challenges of postcolonial adaptation. *No Sale for Witchcraft* uses the symbol of witchcraft to interrogate the racialized power dynamics embedded in colonial and postcolonial societies. Witchcraft accusations metaphorically expose how colonial authorities and local elites employ fear to control marginalized populations. The marketplace's symbolic function highlights the commodification of cultural practices and identities under colonial capitalism. By embedding these critiques in symbolism, Lessing foregrounds the structural violence of colonialism and the enduring legacies of exclusion and racial discrimination. The stories' symbolic critiques extend beyond colonial power to encompass postcolonial challenges, including internalized racism, cultural hybridity, and social fragmentation. Symbolism thus becomes a tool for both unveiling and resisting hegemonic narratives, offering alternative perspectives rooted in marginalized experiences. Lessing's symbolic imagery aligns with key tenets of postcolonial literary theory, which emphasizes the representation of colonial histories, hybridity, and identity struggles. The symbolic elements in *Little Tembi* and *No Sale for Witchcraft* echo the postcolonial emphasis on liminality and cultural negotiation. Tembi's journey epitomizes the postcolonial subject's negotiation of identity between colonizer and colonized cultures, mirroring concepts of hybridity articulated by theorists like Homi Bhabha. The symbolic use of space and cultural conflict encapsulates the "third space" where new identities emerge

amid dislocation. The stories also resonate with feminist literary criticism, particularly in their portrayal of female protagonists navigating patriarchal and colonial structures. Tembi's symbolic struggle for autonomy intersects with feminist themes of agency and resistance against cultural and gendered oppression. Symbolism thus not only critiques colonialism but also challenges gendered power relations, enriching the narratives' complexity. Furthermore, semiotic theories underpinning the analysis highlight how symbols function as cultural signifiers that both reflect and shape social realities. The stories' symbolic imagery operates within a network of cultural codes, inviting interdisciplinary interpretations that bridge literature, sociology, and cultural studies.

Implications for Understanding Identity and Resistance in Lessing's Work

The symbolic imagery in these stories offers nuanced insights into identity formation and resistance within colonial and postcolonial contexts. Symbolism enables Lessing to portray identity as fluid, contested, and deeply embedded in sociohistorical forces. Through symbols such as journeys, witchcraft, and marketplaces, the stories depict identity as a site of negotiation, conflict, and transformation. Resistance emerges symbolically through characters' defiance of imposed identities and social roles. Tembi's movement toward self-definition symbolizes personal and cultural resistance to colonial legacies. In ***No Sale for Witchcraft***, the challenge to witchcraft accusations metaphorically represents resistance against social exclusion and racialized violence. These symbolic portrayals complicate simplistic narratives of victimhood, emphasizing resilience and agency. Lessing's symbolism thus contributes to a richer understanding of postcolonial identity as dynamic and resistant rather than static or passive. This study's analysis of symbolic imagery in ***Little Tembi*** and ***No Sale for Witchcraft*** enriches literary scholarship by foregrounding Lessing's use of symbolism as a strategic narrative device to engage with pressing social issues. It highlights how symbolic analysis deepens comprehension of thematic concerns, narrative structure, and socio-political critique in her work. Moreover, the study contributes to social

justice discourse by demonstrating how literature can expose and challenge racial and cultural injustices through symbolism. Lessing's stories offer powerful reflections on marginalization, identity politics, and the legacies of colonialism, fostering critical awareness and empathy. By bridging literary analysis and social critique, the article underscores the transformative potential of symbolic literature in advancing conversations about equality, cultural understanding, and resistance.

Conclusion

This article has examined the symbolic imagery in Doris Lessing's *Little Tembi* and *No Sale for Witchcraft*, revealing how symbolism operates as a multifaceted narrative tool to address cultural identity, racial prejudice, and social conflict. Through close reading and semiotic analysis, the study has shown that Lessing employs symbols such as journeys, witchcraft, and marketplaces to encapsulate the complexities of postcolonial experience and the ongoing struggle for self-definition. The analysis demonstrated that symbolic imagery in *Little Tembi* expresses the tensions of cultural displacement and personal liberation, while *No Sale for Witchcraft* critiques societal exclusion and racialized fear through allegorical representations. Together, these stories articulate a potent critique of colonial and postcolonial power dynamics and contribute to discourses on identity, resistance, and social justice. Lessing's adept use of symbolism enriches her narratives by providing nuanced layers of meaning that engage readers intellectually and emotionally. Symbolism serves not only as a literary technique but as a form of social commentary that challenges dominant narratives and invites critical reflection. By embedding cultural and racial issues within symbolic imagery, Lessing makes abstract social critiques tangible and relatable, fostering empathy and awareness. Her stories highlight the intersections of personal and political identities, revealing the human dimensions of broader historical and societal struggles. This study underscores the value of symbolic analysis in literary scholarship

as a means of uncovering deeper thematic and ideological currents in texts. Symbolism, as demonstrated in Lessing's work, is integral to understanding how literature mediates between individual experience and collective social realities. The interdisciplinary approach combining literary criticism, semiotics, and cultural theory enriches interpretation and situates texts within their historical and sociopolitical contexts. Symbolic analysis thus offers vital tools for exploring literature's role in reflecting and shaping cultural consciousness. Future research might extend this symbolic inquiry to other works by Lessing, exploring recurring motifs and their evolution across her literary career. Comparative studies could examine symbolism in Lessing alongside other postcolonial writers, illuminating shared thematic concerns and diverse narrative strategies. Further interdisciplinary research incorporating psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies could deepen understanding of how symbolism functions in articulating identity and resistance. Additionally, more attention to gendered symbolism in Lessing's stories would enrich feminist critiques of her work. Doris Lessing's short stories remain profoundly relevant, their symbolic imagery continuing to resonate amid ongoing global conversations about race, identity, and social justice. Through her masterful use of symbolism, Lessing not only tells compelling stories but also fosters critical dialogue about historical legacies and contemporary challenges. Her work stands as a testament to literature's power to illuminate hidden truths and inspire empathy across cultural divides. The enduring impact of *Little Tembi* and *No Sale for Witchcraft* lies in their ability to engage readers with the complexities of human experience through rich, evocative symbolism—ensuring Lessing's place among the most important literary voices of the twentieth century and beyond.

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