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Note on the Text

Full bibliographical details on the particular novel focused on in a section are only given once. Subsequent references to this novel are not footnoted.

INTRODUCTION

> But soon there was new movement. Where the flies had broken the crust of the nearest dung-clot, two beetles were at work. [1]

In the short story "The Sun Between their Feet" Lessing describes in naturalistic detail the activity of beetles. The narrator watches, absorbed, as they create balls from dung pats and begin the strenuous task of pushing these creations up a steep hill onto a higher plane.

Theirs is an exercise in futility; again and again the balls roll back down the slope like Sysiphus's boulder. The narrator scorns their stupidity. There are easier slopes. Why must they attempt the impossible? But the reader cannot help admiring the beetles which are striving to overcome their limitations. The story is not a hopeless one any more than Lessing's other works are expressions of despair: it celebrates the individual battle against futility, the small struggle to progress. Anna says in The Golden Notebook:

> "We're back at the blade of grass again, that will press up through the bits of rusted steel a thousand years after the bombs have exploded and the world's crust has melted. Because the force of will in the blade of grass is the same as the small painful endurance. Is that it?".... [2]

The short story "Through the tunnel" presents a small boy determined to succeed in swimming through the underwater tunnel. The story is about his effort to overcome this personal

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[1] Doris Lessing, "The Sun between their Feet", in A Man and Two Women (London: Panther, 1965), p.60.

[2] Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (London: Panther, (1973), p.612.

obstacle. The futility of his suffering is shown through his mother's careless reaction.

> "Mummy," he said, "I can stay under water for two minutes - three minutes, at least." It came bursting out of him.
>
> "Can you, darling?" she said. "Well, I shouldn't overdo it. I don't think you ought to swim any more today." [3]

But, as with the beetles, one feels that his battle to make the impossible possible, his small painful endurance, is of significance not only to himself but to mankind as a whole.

"The Black Madonna" is similarly a story about futility, this time relating specifically to the artist. An artist has to create in a society that destroys, has to build a mock village so that it can be shattered by shell fire. Nevertheless, he creates forms disturbing to the community, and becomes so absorbed in his work that he paints the inside of the church and red crosses on the hospital. He is painting "The Black Madonna", not for money, but as an assertion of his will, as a rebellion against the futility of existence.

> "This is my Madonna" said Michele angrily. "Your German village and my Madonna. I paint this picture as an offering to the Madonna. She is pleased - I feel it." [4]

But, like the beetles which watch their work destroyed and turned into a formless debris, Michele suffers the blasting of his Madonna. And, like the beetles which will try again tomorrow, Michele returns with another painting. His recovery at the end

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[3] Doris Lessing, "Through the Tunnel", in The Habit of Loving (London: Panther, 1966), p.70.

[4] Doris Lessing, "The Black Madonna", in African Stories (London: Michael Joseph, 1964), p.19.

does not lessen the anguish of his moment in the burning church; it merely reflects the courage of the small enduring will that can continue in a vacuum.

Anna says in The Golden Notebook:

> All our lives, you and I, we will use all our energies, all our talents, into pushing that boulder another inch up the mountain. And they rely on us and they are right; and that is why we are not useless after all. [5]

These three short stories are about a certain type of courage, the courage of the boulder-pushers. And this courage is not only the subject matter of Lessing's works, but the impetus behind them.

The artist today is working in a climate of futility. From the dung of life he frantically attempts to create form, but his environment threatens the compact ball. Like Michele, he is working surrounded by violence: although his works may or may not be literally shelled, the chaos of life around him mocks and distorts any attempts to create form.

What constitutes the courage of the modern artist is that he does not protect his work from chaos, but exposes it to life. He encourages the reader to measure his art in relation to reality and risks self-destruction. Works such as The Golden Notebook, for example, are extraordinarily vulnerable. An open novel may flow into life, but life can also rush into and destroy the work:

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[5] Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook, p.596.

> The fact was that the things happening in the world, the collapse of everything, was tugging at the shape of events in this play and those like them, and making them farcical. A joke. [6]

"The Black Madonna" reveals Lessing's attitude to the artist and his role in life. Michele's Black Madonna may be a work of social defiance, but it is bound to society. His Madonna is a black woman, an expression of the society of his time. The image deludes the Captain into responding to the real, into thinking of his black mistress, Nadya. Like the mock village, it persuades men of its reality:

> At the end of a week, the space at the end of the parade-ground had crazy gawky constructions of lath and board over it, that looked in the sunlight like nothing on this earth. Privately, it upset the Captain; it was like a nightmare that these skeleton-like shapes should be able to persuade him, with the illusions of light and dark, that they were a village. At night, the Captain drove up his lorry, switched on the lights, and there it was, the village, solid and real against a background of full green trees. Then, in the morning sunlight, there was nothing there, just bits of board stuck in the sand. [7]

In the same way one can look at Lessing's novels as "bits of board" presented in such a light that one responds to them as to reality. Sometimes, however, she turns off the lights and the reader, like the Captain, is strangely disturbed. If what seemed like reality can be revealed as an illusion, how real is his own life? He is overwhelmed by a sense of futility.

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[6] Doris Lessing, The Summer before the Dark (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.147.

[7] Doris Lessing, "The Black Madonna", in African Stories p.17.

Despite this dissatisfaction with external reality, Lessing nevertheless shows in her first novels that she is a writer in the realistic-naturalistic tradition. In "The Novelist at the Crossroads"[8] David Lodge sees writing today as moving in two directions: towards non-fiction or towards fabulation. Initially Lessing moves in the non-fiction direction, reaching in A Ripple from the Storm "the self-defeating banality" that Lodge cites as the danger of this route. In The Golden Notebook she returns to hesitate at the crossroads, building, as Lodge says, the hesitation into the novel. The naturalistic style is, as Anna discovers, still secondary to life itself and subsidiary to cinematic techniques. The Golden Notebook calls for a new form to accommodate a new concept of realism. In her later novels, Briefing for a Descent into Hell and The Memoirs of a Survivor, she experiments with new form and moves in the direction of fabulation:

> ...influenced by developments in human knowledge, particularly in the field of psychology, the writer pursues the reality of individual experience deeper and deeper into the subconscious or unconscious, the common perceptual world recedes and the concept of the unique person dissolves: the writer finds himself in a region of myths, dreams, symbols and archetypes that demand 'fictional' rather than 'empirical' modes for their expression. "The mimetic impulse towards the characterization of the inner life dissolves inevitably into mythic and expressionistic patterns upon reaching the citadel of the psyche." [9]

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[8] David Lodge, "The Novelist at the Crossroads" in The Novel Today, edited by Malcolm Bradbury (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977).

[9] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

Her tendency towards fabulation accompanies naturally her growing interest in the internal world. But hers is still only a tendency. The Memoirs of a Survivor may contain remarkable expressionistic patterns but these are still juxtaposed to naturalistic detail. The novel is both a detailed study of the destruction of the natural world and a fantastic inner voyage to integration.

Lessing's is not a sudden change to new form, but a slow evolution through conflict between old form and her new vision of freedom. Behind all her novels, but more obviously behind her later ones, is a vision of integration. To allow the reader a glimpse of this formless dimension in which man is no longer limited by barriers between himself and the universe, Lessing has paradoxically to use form. She uses words to point to a dimension beyond words; reason to point to a realm beyond reason; form to point to freedom. As a result of the chafing between the opposites, her form changes. She no longer uses it as a vessel to contain ideas and concepts, but more as a launching pad to fire the reader into the limitless world of inner space. Form can never be freedom but it can open up into freedom, at the risk of disintegrating completely.

This thesis then is a detailed study of Lessing's novels in an attempt to show her development as a writer. Her short stories are handled briefly in connection with her novels. For, although the short stories are among her finest work, focus on the novels is sufficient to show her growth as a writer.

Hers is the small individual struggle to overcome the limitations of both her content and her form. To overcome the

limitations of her content means expanding her own consciousness and re-forming life itself. Only when she is free and the world is free can she overcome the limitations of her content. Then, of course, she need no longer and can no longer write. The task seems as impossible as that of the dung beetles, but she nevertheless continues. Like the sacred beetles with "the sun between their feet" she carries on rolling the muck of the world into symbols of the truth:

> If I could turn you on, if I could drive you out of your wretched mind, if I could tell you I would let you know. [10]

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[10] R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.156.

THE GRASS IS SINGING (1950)

The Grass is Singing assumes the form of a "whydunnit". A murder has been committed and Lessing is like a detective reconstructing what happened, accumulating the evidence with a keen Sherlock eye on detail. The working tone is, consequently, impersonal. One may feel pity for Mary, but then one also sees the other side, be it Dick or Moses. At no stage does the narrator allow total identification with Mary. This is the reason for "the Gap", the moment when Mary succumbs to Moses that is never shared with the reader. During Mary's breakdown one sees her through Slatter's eyes and Marston's and, by the time one zooms in on her, it is too late for total involvement. She has developed without the reader and he can only look on. This judging distance is necessary to sustain the form of the novel, for if the narrator is the detective, the reader is the judge and must remain impartial.

The form leads one to anticipate a solution and the shock of the novel is that the case is not closed. The judge, poised to pass judgement, can condemn the society, the obvious criminal, but does not know why Moses killed Mary. If one could say like the article, "It is thought he was in search of valuables", [1] then one could understand his motives and through rationalisation contain the vague terror the novel evokes. There is no neat reason to end-stop the novel and prevent the threat from endless expansion. Similarly, if one could despise Mary as an exception and not accept her as a

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[1] Doris Lessing, The Grass is Singing (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p.1.

weak but nevertheless typical member of her society, one could blame Mary and consider the problem closed with her death. The first chapter juxtaposes the narrator, anxious to get to the bottom of the problem and open it up, with the white settlers, whose main representative, Slatter, is equally anxious to control the implications of the murder and shut up the case. The chapter contrasts the narrator's tone of questioning, wonder and confusion with the confident, defined statements of the newspaper article. The reader recognises the article as one of the many that appear almost daily in a newspaper. The beginning of the novel opens the fiction out into the real world through the newspaper link. Between the two poles, the narrator who is attempting to reach and bear witness to the truth, and Slatter, who, fearing the chaos of the truth attempts to cover it up, is Marston:

> He would have liked to blurt out the truth in one overwhelming, incontrovertible statement; but the truth was not like that. It never was. The fact he knew, or guessed, about Mary, the fact these two men were conspiring to ignore, could be stated easily enough. But the important thing, the thing that really mattered, so it seemed to him, was to understand the background, the circumstances, the characters of Dick and Mary, the pattern of their lives. And it was not so easy to do. He had arrived at the truth circuitously: circuitously it would have to be explained. And his chief emotion, which was an impersonal pity for Mary and Dick and the native, a pity that was also rage against circumstances, made it difficult for him to know where to begin.
>
> (p.23)

Marston, the newly immigrated farm manager, not yet absorbed in the colonial society, is able to view the murder in perspective. His intentions parallel the narrator's: to tell the truth "circuitously". Because he is not a part of the society, his vision is not distorted by fear for its

destruction and his quest for truth is not hindered by unspoken social rules:

> ...'white civilisation' ... will never, never admit that a white person, and most particularly a white woman, can have a human relationship, whether for good or for evil, with a black person. For once it admits that, it crashes, and nothing can save it. So, above all, it cannot afford failures, such as the Turners' failure.
>
> (p.27)

Lessing here implies that white civilisation is based on the false premise of superiority over the Africans, and its identity is established in relation to the "amorphous" black group. Any admission that colour cannot automatically be used as a basis for definition is a chink in the social armour. White society must then re-define itself and, like Mary, it has no other basis for recreation. Slatter uses words to re-armour the group, while Marston, who does not understand the implications of the truth, struggles for words to break Slatter's defence. Up to this point Marston resembles the narrator, but then while the narrator continues as a truth teller, Marston shirks the responsibility. He is a Pontius Pilate figure who turns aside as witness of the truth: "He gave in; he washed his hands of it" (p.24). He lacks the courage to defy the system and he also yields to the futility of the situation. Like Mary and Dick he "gives up". Because no one is willing to hear, he does not speak.

Unlike the narrator, Marston is not prepared to storm barriers and break through limitations. He pays lip service

to the system, consequently identifying himself with it and becoming imprisoned in its sterility. His decision to turn away from the African reality bars him from the African experience. He joins Dick and Mary as one of the unfulfilled beings, casualties of the social system, whose growth is stunted by an inability to come to terms with life:

> So, in the end, he sat in an office and did paper work, which was what he had come to Africa to avoid. But it wasn't so bad really. One should take things as they came. Life isn't as one expects it to be - and so on; these were the things he said to himself when depressed, and was measuring himself against his early ambitions.
>
> (p.31)

Marston is trapped in verbal platitudes and his downfall, although less violent than Mary's and Dick's, is as significant. Moses has no need to kill him because he will be defeated by his own weakness.

By focusing on Marston in Chapter One, Lessing is suggesting from the beginning that Dick and Mary are not the only cases of social sickness.

But Marston plays another more subtle and more intriguing role in the novel by illuminating, through comparison and contrast, the narrator and his functions. He makes the reader focus on the importance and difficulty of telling the truth. The Golden Notebook is ostensibly an examination of the art of writing. The Grass is Singing is less obviously also a comment on itself as a form. Built into the story is the reason why it is being told and the same sense of frustration that characterises The Golden Notebook. Marston has two options: to make a statement of truth to deaf ears

or succumb to the futility of his task. He succumbs, while the narrator chooses to make the statement. True, Lessing is not the narrator, but by taking into account the fact that the novel was written by a white woman living in a settler society which closely resembles that described in the work, The Grass is Singing can be read as Lessing's own attempt to bear witness to the truth buried in the society around her. She shows the courage that Marston lacks: to speak to deaf ears. She shows the courage that Slatter lacks: to admit to the weakness of her own society and risk the crash.

The unfortunate side-effect of writing a novel with a social or political end in mind is a tendency to preach. Thorpe makes the following arguable comment:

> ... it is not an attitudinizing work. Lessing's method is to present relationships and an episode and allow readers the liberty of their own interpretation. In characterizing the settlers both in the novel and in her stories she knows that the subject-matter itself is explicit enough. [2]

Thorpe seems to be ignoring cynical asides of this nature, in which the narrator's attitude is blatantly shown:

> (Yet the fashion is changing: it is permissible to glorify the old way sometimes, providing one says how depraved the natives have become since.)
>
> (p.13)

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[2] Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa (London: Evans Brothers, 1978), p.11.

The reader does not hear only one voice in the novel. The narrator is a mimic and many a time adopts the self-righteous voice of society, mocking it through his mimicry:

> Living the way they did! That little box of a house - it was forgivable as a temporary dwelling, but not to live in permanently. Why, some natives (though not many, thank heavens) had houses as good; and it would give them a bad impression to see white people living in such a way.
>
> (p.10)

The different voices suggest that the novel is not attitudinizing. One expects a variety of viewpoints to enlarge the perspective. But the novel is not as unbiased as it pretends to be. The voice of society is obviously filtered through someone who is anti-society and the voice is thereby distorted. This is why it seems preferable to say there is one narrator who mimics; to claim that there is one viewpoint, rather than say that the narration occasionally changes hands.

Although it fails to be entirely the impartial gathering together of evidence it claims to be, The Grass is Singing is true to its distant relative, the detective story, in that it relies strongly on the manipulation of tension. The monotony of life on the farm, the ever increasing heat, the constant bickering with servants drive the reader along with Mary towards snapping point. Lessing is using a type of drip torture. The rhythmic regularity of existence becomes unbearable and violence is presented as the only outlet for pent-up emotions.

Moveover, the tension between order and chaos increases until explosion becomes inevitable. The Grass is Singing is a conscious shaping after the event. First one hears of the murder. Then one relives the events that developed into the murder. The story is told in the shadow of chaos, the murder, and as a result its shape is distorted by the surrounding formlessness. The reader first meets Mary as a nothing, a corpse described in harshly unsympathetic terms. This image haunts his later picture of her as a living person. The reality of death fills the spaces between words and one is constantly aware of chaos threatening to crash through the barrier of language.

The Grass is Singing is the only novel of Lessing's that climaxes in violence. In her later novels Lessing seems to deliberately avoid the sensational moment of explosion. In The Four-Gated City, for example, she chooses a gas leak and not a bomb to end the world. Similarly, The Memoirs of a Survivor presents the slow disintegration of the world. In the lives of her other heroines nothing much happens, or she deliberately defuses anything that does occur. Yet in this single violent act lies much of the strength of The Grass is Singing. Lessing's avoidance of the single conclusive act in her later works may be in accordance with her open-ended philosophy of fiction, but it also means that much of the energy of her novels leaks out. To the dual aims of realism and idealism Lessing has chosen to sacrifice excitement.

Yet, despite the murder, The Grass is Singing is no more closed a novel than The Golden Notebook. The action converges into the single moment but the moment explodes and

its dynamic force rips open the end. Mary's life may be ended and tension momentarily released but the implications of the murder are endless. The violence in the book is matched by a violence of response. The reader is not only aware of natural forces strong enough to overthrow order; he feels them too:

> An art and literature which celebrates the expansion of consciousness has established itself ...
> Psychedelic art, acid rock music, Living Theatre, and the Artaudian Theatre of Cruelty, with their emphasis on orgiastic communion and their attempt to submerge thought in physical action or sensation, are prototypical forms of this art of celebration. In this kind of art, the spontaneous release of sexual and psychic energy is the goal, replacing the endeavour of humanistic art to interpret and make sense of the world. Experience is seen as pure process, 'permanent revolution', and the goal of art is to reflect its endless dynamism. ...
> "Writing," says Richard Poirier, "is a form of energy not accountable to the orderings anyone makes of it and specifically not accountable to the liberal humanitarian values most readers want to find there." [3]

One need not argue the validity of this statement with reference to literature as a whole, yet the statement suggests why The Grass is Singing with all its faults and inconsistencies tends to succeed in a way none of her other novels does. Lessing believes in transcending the rational and yet this is the only novel in which, by controlling and releasing energy she attempts to "drive" the reader out of his "wretched mind". [4]

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[3] Gerald Graff, "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough" in The Novel Today edited by Malcolm Bradbury (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p.238.

[4] R.D. Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1967), p.155.

In maintaining a tightness of form unequalled in her other novels Lessing has been forced to leave things out. Part of the art of writing is, according to Oom Schalk Lourens, knowing what to leave out, when to keep silent. [5] It is this aspect of the art that Lessing seems to have mastered only in her short stories. In her later novels she makes all-embracing attempts not to leave anything out. However, in her first novel she leaves out the wrong things: the development of the relationship between Mary and Moses; the progression of her breakdown; and the transition from a hollow woman to a visionary.

In The Grass is Singing development takes the form of stripping Mary slowly of illusions until she is revealed to herself and the reader as empty. Certain moments can be pinpointed as crises in Mary's life when strategic veils are removed. Her self-image is destroyed when she hears friends discussing her and her reluctance to marry. Her dolly filmstar image crumbles as she recognises that she is aging and can no longer enjoy the young single life. So she marries Dick and the marriage itself is a puncturing of dreams. Her sterile relationship with Dick is ironically measured against romantic illusions: hers of the "sweet Prunella" in "white kappie over her dainty sweat-pearled face and close clustering ringlets" (p.66), much admired by the handsome man; and his of the chocolate-box lady and the child in the two pictures symbolically ripped off the wall at the beginning of the marriage (p.55).

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[5] Herman Charles Bosman, "Mafeking Road", Bosman at his Best (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau), p.26.

When life on the farm becomes insufferable, Mary dreams of her past and is brought to another identity crisis when her return to town brings her face to face with the reality of her age and changed situation. There is now only one illusion left her: her power over servants defines her as "mistress", as "somebody". This is all that stands between her and consciousness of her own nothingness, and the more she fears loss of self-identity the more hysterical becomes her need to assert power. Moses destroys her last facade by usurping her power and leaving her naked. His dressing and undressing her has symbolic implications. In this sense one could say that Moses kills Mary long before the murder.

As Moses progressively assumes command, the reader anticipates the final surrender. From the moment when Mary whips Moses and the couple is bonded in a tableau of tension, Mary's downfall is inevitable. But the reader is not around when the last and most important veil is removed. When Mary hands over power and acknowledges that she is doing so, the step is enormous. She is isolating herself from society and putting herself outside its security. This occurs during the reader's absence. When next she is met she is seen through Slatter's eyes as an alien. The reader does not make the transition with Mary, because he never sees her take the step that exiles her.

Perhaps, if he made this transition, he would understand how she manages to recreate herself. From the knowledge of her nothingness seems to come a new kind of strength. But the reader has to assume too much. If the

novel is to explore inner space, Mary's conflict with order and chaos needs to be examined in psychological depth. As it is, the novel seems inconsistent:

> It is terrible to destroy a person's picture of himself in the interests of truth or some other abstraction. How can one know he will be able to create another to enable him to go on living? Mary's idea of herself was destroyed and she was not fitted to recreate herself.
>
> (p.45)

Lessing's heroes and heroines tend either to recreate themselves or to commit suicide when faced with the onrush of reality. Mary does both. Although it is stated and supported by the action that Mary is not fitted to recreate herself, she nevertheless does and one wonders how. The day of her murder she awakens with a visionary power to probe into a realm beyond the normal level of consciousness. With the dawn comes a vision of paradise, of the dawn of the world before the Fall. She sees all things integrated and is herself in harmony with nature: "She was inside a bubble of fresh light and colour, of brilliant sound and birdsong" (p.203). This is significant, for throughout the novel Mary is alienated from nature, fighting a losing battle against the sun. As the day progresses Mary sees the wilderness and feels, like Adam and Eve, an exile from nature. The innocence that characterises the first part of the vision is yoked to an awareness of evil. She has a picture which unites creation and destruction. She sees man and the traces of civilisation surrendered to "the singing grass". The jubilance and energy of nature makes a celebration of the overthrow of order. This evocative extract contrasts with an earlier description:

> After that the Turners' farm was run as an overflow for Charlie's cattle. They grazed all over it, even up to the hill where the house stood. It was left empty: it soon fell down.
>
> (p.30)

In this earlier description the emphasis is on destruction and the mood is a sense of finality. In the final description the emphasis is on a new life in the future. There is an accompanying change in style from stark factual description to the rich symbolic language of the end.

As the last night falls, the terror, which is more an existential fear and guilt than fear of one man, climaxes in the murder. Or is it suicide? Marston evicts Moses and in this way seems to rescue Mary. But Mary needs Moses and searches for him at the same time as fearing him on the day of her death. This fear-fascination could be explored and made a focal point of the novel as it is of The Golden Notebook. To Mary Moses represents escape from order and, like Anna, she finds chaos both exciting and terrifying.

Fluctuating between attraction and fear she seeks help from Marston, but in her heightened state of awareness realises that he, and the empire he represents, cannot protect her from chaos:

> She looked at the titles: 'Rhodes and his Influence': 'Rhodes and the Spirit of Africa': 'Rhodes and His Mission'.
> "Rhodes," ...
> She knew he had conquered a continent ...
> "Rhodes sat on an inverted bucket by a hole in the ground, dreaming of his home in England, and of the unconquered hinterland."
> She began to laugh; it seemed to her extraordinarily funny. Then she thought, forgetting about the Englishman, and Rhodes, and the books: "But I haven't been to the store."
>
> (p.211)

The great African dream is, with bitter irony, juxtaposed with the African reality, the mysterious Dark Continent with the store. Mary sees that white society is founded on fragile myths, and that it is useless to seek protection because there is no protection to be had. The entire system is threatened by chaos. So she flings herself into the chasm. Moses's role is, for a murderer, surprisingly passive. She expects him to kill her and he does. He is the knife and metaphorically she throws herself on it.

Because Moses becomes a symbol of chaos Lessing faces a problem: how to define a character who is to represent a threat to definition. Her choice is not to define him but to present a "shadowy figure". He becomes more "the avenging spirit of the bush", [6] an embodiment of natural forces, than a recognisable character.

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[6] Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa, p.16.

Moses becomes an almost superstitiously conceived symbol of an abused African reality of which Mary approaches tragic understanding. [7] This vision of him is not only a distortion through Mary's own fears but Marston, for example, is also aware of a malignity within him. This aura of evil contrasts directly with the idea of his being an agent of truth, with the idea that this act is a cleansing. But the integration of opposites in one character is consistent with Lessing's belief in the interrelationship between Good and Evil. Martha is led by the devil along the Stations of the Cross, as Charles Watkins in Briefing for a Descent into Hell must eat flesh in the forest orgy in order to rise with the Crystal. Moses has to kill to cleanse. The murder can be viewed as a sacrifice, a ritualistic killing.

What is inconsistent is that the novel is saying that the black man must be treated like an individual, and yet Lessing herself tends to treat Moses like a force rather than a man. Dirk complains to Tommy in the short story "The Antheap", "Why must I always appear as part of the wood?" Tommy the white boy treats Dirk, the coloured, like an equal but when it comes to showing through art how he really sees him, he creates a sculpture which relates to Lessing's image of Moses in The Grass is Singing:

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[7] Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa, p.16.

> He sat on the trunk and Dirk beside him.
> After a while he said: "How should you be, then?"
> "If you made yourself, would you be half wood?"
> Tommy made an effort to feel this, but failed. "But it's not me, it's you."
> He spoke with difficulty, and thought: "But it's important, I shall have to think about it later." 8

As he is presented towards the end, Moses belongs to the settler myth of the Black Continent with its primitive men. Even during earlier parts of the novel when Lessing makes an effort to present a normal mission trained "boy", he exudes a primitive sensuality. Mary is not fascinated with Moses, the individual, but with the "noble savage" aura that surrounds him. Moses's mind is negligible but the reader is constantly aware of his body.

The sterility of Mary's relationship with Dick contrasts with the sensuousness, the physical nature of her contact with Moses. Their initial contact is made through her beating him. She startles him when bathing. He propels her to the bed in her moment of hysteria and she is obsessed with his touch. The sexual tensions build up to climax in her orgasmic-like death.

Moses fills the vacuum in her life that should have been filled by Dick. No matter how negative her relationship with Moses, it is still communication with another human being and not the nothingness and futility of her marriage with Dick. The novel is as much a study of a doomed marriage as it is of

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8 Doris Lessing, African Stories (London: Michael Joseph, 1964), p.381.

the relationship between black and white. Or, rather, the two are connected. The same reason that prevents Dick and Mary from responding to each other prevents black and white from communicating. The problem lies in the spiritual aridity of the individual. Each is trapped within his illusions and cannot see that "all things are one." Inner sterility is externalised in Dick and Mary's lack of sexual fulfilment, in their childless state, in the unproductivity of their farm, in the heat and aridity of all around them. The novel is, as the title suggests, about a Waste Land.

Apart from its role in the battle with civilisation nature provides a metaphorical comment on the internal and external action. Throughout the novel the storm is brewing and it explodes with the murder. The violence is expressed by thunder; the moment of revelation illuminated by lightning; and the release wet by rain and the promise of new growth.

This is Lessing's first novel and indicates the direction in which she is to expand thematically. Lessing claims that The Golden Notebook initiated her exploration of breakdown. Perhaps it is the first novel in which she examines it in detail but The Grass is Singing contains the same idea that breakdown or destruction is essential for renewal; that one must risk disintegration in order to earn a vision of integration; that one must destroy false form in order to attain freedom. But, at this stage in her development, her focus is more on external reality than inner exploration. The Grass is Singing is primarily an examination

of social conditions in Africa and a prediction of the downfall of the colonial system of which both black and white are victims.

THE CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE

The Children of Violence is a five volume series mapping out Martha's quest. The metaphor implicit in her name is the traditional image of man, the adventurer, journeying through life, broadening his horizon and developing in accordance with his experiences.

Martha's development is an expansion of awareness. She moves from partial self-knowledge to a greater understanding of who she really is, bravely seeking out and confronting the reality before which Mary Turner crumbles. Like the biblical sisters, after whom they seem to be named, Martha has more of a grip on reality than Mary. This ability to recreate herself has its source in her judging self. She says in The Four-Gated City that she has always been aware of two selves, the one watching the other. This watching self prevents her from immersion in a world of illusion, because it enables her to acquire an objective view of her role in life. At the opening of the series Martha, fired with anger, is still able to make the dispassionate observation that she is wretched with adolescent frustration. When giving birth in A Proper Marriage, she experiences this duality of self:

> There were two Marthas, and there was nothing to bridge them. Failure. Complete failure. She was helpless with rage. She heard the pain-gripped Martha cry out, "Oh, God, Oh God!" and she was curious at the ancient being in her that cried out to God. Damned liar, coward, idiot! said Martha to herself from across the gulf. [1]

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[1] Doris Lessing, A Proper Marriage (St. Albans: Panther, 1966), p.164.

This extraordinary self-consciousness creates a complexity of point of view and tone. The judging self adopts the distant stance of a narrator and this tempts one to draw autobiographical parallels. The reader is prevented from indulging in sympathy with the "doing" Martha because the "watching" Martha pulls him back to a judging distance. This accounts for the fact that, while one may recognise oneself in Martha, one seldom feels for her.

Unlike Mary, Martha is never plunged from illusion into reality. She moves cautiously and consciously through degrees of reality. There is, consequently, no dramatic confrontation, merely a growing awareness. As a result there is no single climactic moment in each novel, but a step by step rising. Even the Catastrophe is not an explosion but a diffusion. The pace is slow. The novels cover about fifty years and the reader, unable to leap from peak to exciting peak, must grope gradually upwards.

There are opposing movements in the series: Martha's growth and the world's disintegration. As Martha progresses from fragments of knowledge towards an integrated vision of herself as a part of the universe, so the world around her crumbles into more and more fragments. This increasing fragmentation leads to the sprawling quality of The Four-Gated City. Everything is in a different compartment; everyone is in a different room; and Martha, the housekeeper, is the integrating force. While the imagery in The Four-Gated City specifies this, one has a sense through the series of a growing population who are connected only insofar as they enter

Martha's circle of experience. The tension between fragmentation and integration is at the core of the series, provoking questions such as: To what extent is Martha an individual? And to what extent is she a product of her age and environment?

As emphasised by the title of the book, she is both Martha Quest and a child of violence, just as the novel is both a separate entity and an integral part of the series. Lessing is attempting to maintain a balance between two opposing approaches to life. Burkom presents the following argument in an article "Only Connect", the title of which focuses on Lessing's continual striving to present a unified vision of a varied life:

> With obvious oversimplification, she contends that the depiction of man in both socialist and democratic literature is "a falling away from the central vision" and argues that the antithetical visions of East and West are only
>
> > opposite sides of the same coin. One sees man as the isolated individual unable to communicate, helpless and solitary; the other as collective man with a collective conscience. Somewhere between these two... is a resting-point, a place of decision, hard to reach and precariously balanced... The point of rest should be the writer's recognition of man, the responsible individual, voluntarily submitting his will to the collective, but never finally; and insisting on making his own personal and private judgements before every act of submission.
>
> Lessing's repudiating the portrayal of man solely as an individual or solely as a member of the collective may be taken as an 'a priori' protest against "either/or" interpretations of her work. Further, it seems likely that she will strive to render the "point of rest." She specifically tells us this is her intention in identifying the theme of "Children of Violence" as "a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective."

Selma R Burkom, "Only Connect : Form and Content in the Works of Doris Lessing", Critique: Studies in Modern fiction 11(1) 1968.

Associated with this theme is the cycle of inevitability, seen revolving in The Grass is Singing. Martha must fit into a social pattern: a teenager is expected to suffer adolescent frustration; a young adult is supposed to rebel; a young woman is obliged to get married and have children; a parent must devote herself to the children. Against this background of expectation the action of the story takes place. Three generations are depicted, illustrating how the pattern works:

1st generation	Mr and Mrs Quest		Judge and Mrs Maynard	
2nd generation	Martha	Douglas	Binkie	Maisie
3rd generation	Caroline		Rita	

They are seen violently battling to avoid mere repetition of what their fathers were, and each generation is seen as trapped in the pattern:

> Here, at precisely this point, was the famous 'generation gap'; here it had always been. It was not that the young were unlike their parents, that they blazed new trials, thought new thoughts, displayed new forms of courage: on the contrary, they behaved exactly like their parents, thought as they had - and, exactly like their parents, could not listen to this simple message: that it had all been done before. [3]

The generation that does break away is the newly evolved at the end of the series. They are the salvation of the world.

Martha is an intermediary relating to both the old world and the new. The series is set at the turning point of the world. As the old world disintegrates, a new age is born in the form of the new miracle children. Martha is

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[3] Doris Lessing, "The Temptation of Jack Orkney", The Story of a Non-Marrying Man and Other Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.250.

vital as the link between the two epochs. She has one foot in the old cycle of inevitability, drifting through marriage and childbirth, seeing herself in relation to Caroline and, later, Jill and Gwen, as Mrs Quest is in relation to her, Martha. But her impulse is towards the freedom to choose who she wants to be. She wants to be fluid, not forced into a single role. If she cannot always get freedom of action, she claims freedom of reaction. Social pressures force her into marriage and childbirth, but she retains the right to be honest with herself, acknowledging intense irritation and often loathing towards her husband and child. While he can, to her disgust, sentimentally pretend he has a happy marriage, she has no illusions. Outwardly she may assume the role of wife and mother, but inwardly she is independent. What is so shocking about Martha is not what she does, because she does very little extraordinary, but the honesty of her confessed feelings.

The series was not written consecutively but at different periods of Lessing's development and a detailed examination of each novel can, to some degree, chart Lessing's growth as a novelist. It is most useful here to concentrate on Martha Quest because that novel introduces ideas that recur and are developed throughout the series.

Each novel is divided into four sections. Each section is made up of four chapters, except the sections in Martha Quest which are made up of three. This cube shape pattern (4:4) is too extraordinarily regular to have no underlying purpose. The predominance of the number four

relates to the four-gated city which is a constant symbol of perfection:

> There arose, glimmering whitely over the harsh scrub and the stunted trees, a noble city, set foursquare.... [4]

Lessing is approaching each novel through four gates in an attempt to reach perfection.

MARTHA QUEST (1952)

The novel opens, not with Martha, but with two elderly women and, similarly, ends with the older generation, Judge Maynard. Against this framework of her expected future Martha's rebellion is set. Throughout the novel she struggles violently against destiny, but the essential irony of the work lies in the discrepancy between her struggle and the shape of the novel. The work is encircled by the imprisoning destiny: opening with two resigned women gossiping and ending with an elderly man resigning himself to disappointment in his son. The core of the novel may be violence, but its shell is resignation and inertia.

Part One is a description of Martha on the farm; Part Two focuses on her introduction and adaptation to town; Part Three concentrates on the Sports Club and her first sexual experience; Part Four highlights Douggie and the marriage. Each part represents an extension of experience, a movement away from the farm, a "neat farmhouse in a pattern

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[4] Doris Lessing, Martha Quest (St Albans: Panther, 1966), p.17.

of fields" (p.8), in an effort to break free from the limitations of her environment, both physical and spiritual. But the movement away from the farm is, ironically, a "circular drive". As the novel approaches the end, Martha returns to the farm with her fiancé, and the physical return is symbolic of a spiritual return. Her resignation in marriage means that she is following the pattern of her mother and returning to a trapped existence.

The contrast in Chapter One is between the vastness of the landscape, the whole, and the limited nature of the farm, the part. This is a visual symbol of freedom and imprisonment and is a comment on the relative insignificance of the farm and those who live on it.

> The house, raised high on its eminence into the blue and sweeping currents of air, was in the centre of a vast basin, which was bounded by mountains. In front, there were seven miles to the Dumfries Hills; west, seven miles of rising ground to the Oxford Range; seven miles east, a long swelling mountain which was named Jacob's Burg. Behind, there was no defining chain of kopjes, but the land travelled endlessly, without limit, and faded into a bluish haze, like that hinterland to the imagination we cannot do without - the great declivity was open to the north.
>
> (pp.8 - 9)

Freedom and imprisonment are, in turn, related to integration and fragmentation. The farm's limitations lie in the fact that it is not an integral part of the landscape, but an impermanent alien, a separate entity, trying to impose itself on its environment and refusing to acknowledge its ineffectuality. This sense of fragmentation is related to the inhabitants, exiles in Africa, who receive their newspapers from "Home". Not only does a division exist between people

and environment, but also between the settlers themselves. Home for the Van Rensbergs is not home for the Quests. While one senses an essential similarity between Mrs Quest and Mrs Van Rensberg, as human beings, as aliens in Africa, as women, and as followers of tradition, the petty cultural barriers remain.

The first paragraph presents the women as separated from nature. They are sitting on a part of the veranda where they are screened from the sun. The sun is "dammed up against the creeper" and the creeper is a "coloured barrier". The lexical set "screened", "dammed" and "barrier" anticipates the wall image predominant in The Four-Gated City as a symbol of imprisonment. The women are refusing to be swept away by the life force, as suggested by the sun. Martha, in contrast, is first seen sitting, also on the veranda, but in full sunshine. Although Martha is not free, she seems to relate more to her natural environment than do the rest:

> Everything was the same; intolerable that they should have been saying the same things ever since she could remember; and she looked away from them, over the veld.
>
> (p.8) (my underlining)

Martha tends to see the whole, the veld, which throws into perspective the pettiness of the trivial concerns around her: the women talking about romance, the men about the weather, crops and the native problem. Her ability to see the whole enables Martha to examine herself, and gives birth to her judging self. This is the reason for her rebellion: once

aware of limitlessness she cannot accept limits, even if she is limited.

Not only does Martha see the farm in relation to the veld, but her life in relation to what she reads. Books become another symbol of freedom and Martha is, appropriately, first seen reading. Books enable Martha to integrate with the world, to relate to a general consciousness:

> The novel has become a function of the fragmented society, the fragmented consciousness. Human beings are so divided, are becoming more and more divided, and more subdivided in themselves, reflecting the world, that they reach out desperately, not knowing they do it, for information about other groups in other countries. It is a blind grasping out for their own wholeness, and the novel-report is a means towards it. [5]

But, just as the veld highlights the limitations of the farm, so books tell Martha of her own limitations. They persuade her that she is inexorably bound to her environment. Lessing integrates fragments of evolutionary and psychological theories to present this argument:

> There was the group which stated that her life was already determined when she still crouched sightless in the womb of Mrs Quest....
>
> (p.15)

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[5] Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (St Albans: Panther, 1973), p.79.

> Then there were those who said it was the birth itself which set Martha on a fated road .... It was during that birth, from which Martha emerged shocked and weary, her face temporarily scarred purple from the forceps, that her character and therefore her life were determined for her ...
>
> (p.15)

> And what of the numerous sects who agreed on only one thing, that it was the first five years of life which laid an unalterable basis for everything that followed?
>
> (p.15)

This passage, which anticipates the predominance of the evolutionary theory in The Four-Gated City, adds another dimension to the story. Although brief, the passage indicates that Lessing does not confine her examination of character to conventional approaches but is determined to find out who Martha is by approaching her from all angles: seeing her in relation to the farm, then in relation to literature, then in relation to evolution.

The evolutionary passage is followed by the dream passage. The link between them is only realised in the final book. Because of evolution man progresses towards a fulfilment of Martha's dream of a four-gated city. The dream is a dream of integration, the reconciliation of opposites, black with white, north with south. Along with this integration comes harmony and happiness. At this stage the dream, as a response to the sight of an illtreated black boy, seems limited to the reconciliation of races, but, as Martha grows, the dream grows to become a reconciliation of all opposites, an integrated vision.

Mrs Quest and Mrs Van Renberg indulge in romance. Mr Quest is a Dick Turner figure, wanting only to dream tranquilly of the future: "he was coming to have, for her, the fatal lethargy of a dream-locked figure" (p.31). And Martha is described as a romantic idealist. What then is the difference between Martha and those she despises for living in a world of illusion? Martha is an integration of the apparent opposites, idealism and realism. The discrepancy can be resolved by regarding Martha's dream as an imaginative penetration of reality into a realm of greater reality. The vision is, therefore, not to be confused with an illusion. Mr Quest has to some degree an imaginative penetration of reality and his dream world is not entirely condemned by Lessing. He looks at ants, for example, and compares them with humans, showing a comprehension of men as a part of a greater whole. He seems an obvious choice for Martha's guide through life, but he is too weak to assume this role and Martha has to explore alone. His weakness lies in the fact that, unlike Martha who has achieved some degree of balance, he has lost his grip on reality. He may have escaped from the world, but this "dream-locked figure" has only escaped into another prison.

In Chapter Two Martha threatens, for a moment, to sink into her father's fatal lethargy, reminiscent of Mary Turner's:

> But why was she condemning herself to live on this farm, which more than anything in the world she wanted to leave? The matric was a simple passport to the outside world, while without it escape seemed so difficult she was having terrible nightmares of being tied hand and foot under the wheels of a locomotive, or struggling waist-deep in quicksands, or eternally climbing a staircase that moved backwards under her. She felt as if some kind of spell had been put on her.
>
> (p.30)

The irony of this chapter is that, while she fights her father's inertia, furious because of the effort it takes to get him into town, she is, herself, sinking. The parallel between Martha and her father is pointed by the similarity between her revelation of integration on her walk home from town and his comment on the ants that concludes the chapter. Martha's revelation is an illuminating moment in the book, shared by both Martha and the reader.

Martha is walking home from the store in an act of defiance. Like the girl in "The Old Chief Mshlanga" she is walking where she should not, in both a physical and a spiritual sense. The walk is preceded by an argument with her parents on the proposed expedition, and by a visit to the Cohens. Both incidents highlight the theme of fragmentation. The argument focuses on the black-white racial division, while the Cohens suggest another racial division. The Jewish family represents a section of society alien to both the Van Rensbergs and the Quests. The description of town on mail day is one of a conglomeration of different peoples, "English and Scotch, Welsh and Irish, rich and poor" (p.53). Martha, standing on Socrates's,the Greek's, veranda tries to come to terms with her own sense of race:

> .... she could not remember a time when she had not thought of people in terms of groups, nations, or colour of skin first, and as people afterwards .... it was as if the principle of separateness was bred from the very soil, the sky, the driving sun;
>
> (p.56)

Having recognised the truth, Martha fights it, and this is an indication of her attitude to all limitations:

> Martha could feel the striving forces in her own substance: the effort of imagination needed to destroy the words 'black', 'white', 'nation', 'race', exhausted her, her head ached and her flesh was heavy on her bones.
>
> (p.56)

Martha and, perforce, Lessing acknowledge the power of words. They not only have the ability to release, to touch off images (p.32) but they can restrict: acting as indication of boundaries, they come between the person and the integrated vision.

She explores this verbal power in later works, not only through discussion but through her own use of words. At this stage, in Martha Quest, she is presenting only ideas and not relating them to form.

Martha's awareness of fragmentation is juxtaposed to her vision of integration:

> There was a slow integration, during which she, and the little animals, and the moving grasses, and the sunwarmed trees, and the slopes of shivering silvery mealies, and the great dome of blue light overhead, and the stones of the earth under her feet, became one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms .... during that space of time (which was timeless) she understood quite finally her smallness, the unimportance of humanity .... What was demanded of her was that she should accept something quite different; it was as if something new was demanding conception with her flesh as host; as if it were a necessity, which she must bring herself to accept, that she should allow herself to dissolve and be formed by that necessity.
>
> (p.62)

She slips into a timeless zone in which she recognises that she is one with the universe. This awareness is accompanied by an acknowledgement of her own insignificance. She is challenged to recreate herself, but it is only in the last book that she responds. At this stage she resists the flow returns to a state of mind in which even the incident is falsified by being placed in time, and the next day goes out and kills a duiker.

Chapter Three focuses on the Van Rensberg's dance and is an attempt to capture Martha's mood of expectation. She is like the girl in the short story "Flavours of Exile" waiting for the pomegranate to split. Lessing surrounds this bubble of expectation with reality but, strangely enough, does not prick the bubble. Martha is not disillusioned at the end of the chapter, even though she has rejected Billy. Instead, not prepared to accept the claims made on her by mundane reality in the form of Billy's clumsy hands, she determines to search further for the fulfilment of her fantasies. This process of rejection followed by further search is the pattern of Martha's life. The "temptation-rejection-continuation" pattern is typical of any quest.

There is a parallel, both ironic and sympathetic, between this incident and a traditional wedding. This, her first dance, is closer to the traditional portrayal of a wedding than any of her subsequent marriages. She leaves her parents and in a trance, "an expectant maiden in dedicated white" (p.80), moves out to meet Billy. She is assuming the ancient role of a woman on the threshold of new experience. The dance is but a tentative step towards her independent life in the city.

While the familiarly angry and exasperated Martha peeps out occasionally from the white dress and asserts herself in the final rejection of Billy, she seems, on the whole, to have submerged her personality in floods of sensation. She is not Martha, the individual, but Everywoman, the embodiment of her sex, responding to an instinct to leave her parents and dedicate herself to a man.

Although Lessing's delicate portrayal of Martha as vulnerable to these forces indicates sympathy, the situation is ironic. At this moment, when she is breaking free from her parents, she is seen surrounded by other forces that are moving her towards the inevitable marriage. At this stage she keeps them at bay, but the dance anticipates the marriage at the end of the book and explains it. Not only does environmental pressure in the form of codes of behaviour direct her towards continuing the circle of inevitability, but forces of nature working through her cause a traditional feminine response to situations. An example is her reaction after her first sexual experience:

> .... and afterwards she lay coiled meekly beside him like a woman in love, for her mind had swallowed the moment of disappointment whole, like a python, so that he, the "man", and the mirage were able once again to fuse together, in the future.
>
> (p.203)

She plays the role of submissive woman. As had happened at the dance, her expectations are disappointed but she does not stop hoping, or dreaming. The focus in Chapter Three is, therefore, on Martha as a woman:

> .... she caught sight of herself in a windowpane; she did not know this aloof, dream-logged girl who turned a brooding face under the curve of loose blonde hair;
>
> (p.83)

> She had never been alone in a room with a full-length mirror before, and she stripped off her clothes and went to stand before it. It was as if she saw a vision of someone not herself; or rather, herself transfigured to the measure of a burningly insistent future. The white naked girl with the high small breasts that leaned forward out of the mirror was like a girl from a legend; she put forward her hands to touch, then as they encountered the cold glass, she saw the naked arms of the girl slowly rise to fold defensively across those breasts.
>
> (p.89)

These passages relate to this incident in Chapter One:

> She spent much time, at night, examining herself with a hand mirror; she sometimes propped the mirror by her pillow, and, lying beside it would murmur like a lover, 'Beautiful, you are so beautiful.'
>
> (p.22)

The mirror image is dominant, as Patricia M Spacks notes.[6] A mirror, a typical woman's prop, emphasises the fact that Martha is a typical woman, narcissistically fascinated by her own appearance. The mirror is an appropriate symbol for Martha, who has the ability to observe herself objectively. The mirror highlights the two Marthas.

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[6] Patricia M Spacks, The Female Imagination (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976), p.89.

Martha resembles Lyndall in Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm. Both Lyndall and Martha attempt to break free from their environment in search of truth. Both use books as their means of escape, and both are fascinated by mirrors. Lyndall, too, has a dichotomy of self, emphasised by moments with the mirror. She, like Martha, has a judging self that enables her to watch herself from a critical distance.

Throughout the series the reader is forced to examine with Martha her own physical appearance and to recognise her as a woman and a sexual being. But why, in a series about the expansion of the mind, is such emphasis placed on the body? In terms of the overarching integration-fragmentation theory the body is a separate entity which separates the mind from the general consciousness.

The body tends to be seen in opposition to the mind. In The Four-Gated City Martha's moments of greatest awareness correspond to a lack of grooming. Similarly, Lynda's trips are accompanied by carelessness about physical appearance. When they are both well again, they dress up and present themselves under the guise of normality. The body is the appearance, the mind the reality and Martha's mind is trapped within the demands of her body. Her body is described as congealed, as opposed to fluid, for fluidity means freedom.

But, as is typical in Lessing's work, it is impossible to categorise concepts neatly. In one respect the body is Martha's prison; in another it is her weapon. Because she is pretty, she has access to the world and experiences. Moreover, she achieves some degree of freedom through sex as

an act of defiance; and through sex as an act of fulfilment.

Clothes are an extension of Martha's femininity. In the white dress she signals to her parents that she is now a woman. Her mother wishes to hide her maturing figure in the clothes of a child, but Martha defiantly insists on recognition of her physical growth. In Chapter One she launches into the battle of the clothes by adapting her dresses. She is rebelling against her mother's generation's attitude towards sex, and is first seen with a copy of Havelock Ellis. She refuses to be embarrassed by her body and her unashamed delight in her mirror image, whether clothed or naked, mocks Mrs Quest's attempts to hide her swelling breasts and hips. She wishes to break free from sexual taboos, and what may be considered narcissistic behaviour is an indication of her freedom from physical coyness. Coming to terms with her body and recognising herself as a physical being is a significant step towards freedom. The fact that Martha is not afraid of nakedness is symbolic of her honesty: she enjoys clothes, she is fascinated by role playing, but she is aware of the reality beneath the clothes.

Clothes and roles are closely related. Her mother wants her to play the role of child in a pink Alice-in-Wonderland dress. As the book progresses Martha is seen rebelling against Donovan's attempts to dress her. He, too, is trying to disguise her femininity and force her into the role, this time that of fashionable, elegant woman. She indicates her wish to break free from him and the role he has assigned her by her reckless attitude towards the outfit. In The Four-Gated City Martha notices how different types of clothes make her acceptable to different sectors of the community.

The climax of Chapter Three is the mirror scene in which the real Martha leans out in a vain attempt to touch the image of herself. Like Mary she has a self-image, but while Mary's is a delusion, Martha's seems to be a vision. She sees reflected in the mirror, her special potential for a "burningly insistent future" (p.89). Patricia M Spacks remarks on Martha's recognition of her "specialness".[7] Her ideals are related to a knowledge that she has within her the unique ability to realise them, and her self-image encourages her to stretch out towards her vision.

Lessing is exploring dream and reality. She presents no firm conclusions, merely examples and can therefore seem inconsistent. In one instance dream is progressive; in another it is destructive; in one instance it is in opposition to reality; in another it is so close they seem to merge. The ending of the series appears to be an integration of dream and reality. This sense of exploration rather than conclusion, of open-endedness, is characteristic of Lessing's work, which accordingly tends to the complex rather than the simple. She examines an aspect from all sides, whether it be, for example, clothes, the body or dreams, and presents this aspect as both imprisoning and releasing. As a result her symbols are not strait-jacketed but are released into a freedom of possibilities, and freedom is, after all, her object.

In Part Two Martha joins the tradition of Dick Whittington characters who move from country to town in search

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[7] Patricia M Spacks, The Female Imagination, p.103.

of fame and fortune, streets paved with gold. She is like Marie in the short story "A road to the big City". Fascination with the glitter is followed by a realisation that the neon lights hide a shabby daytime reality. In Part Two Matty Quest is born, a charming, brittle, fun-loving girl, adapted to the pleasures of the city. But the reality behind the illusion of freedom is that her situation is, in essence, the same as any found on the farm:

> .... her eyes remained on the trees and she unconsciously compared their shapes with those of the skyline on the farm; and soon it was as if the farm had stretched itself out, like a long and shadowy arm across the night, and at its end, as in the hollow of a large enfolding palm ...
>
> (p.105)

The link between the farm and the town is represented by Mrs Quest's constant interference in Martha's life, in her room and her match with Donovan. But the link is more an interior than an exterior one. Martha belongs to the farm, and breaking away from her spiritual ties requires an intellectual expansion rather than a physical departure:

> What a small town it was, seen thus from above! And its smallness defined in Martha's mind what had till then mazed and confused in streets, parks, suburbs, without limit or direction. They were all here, her experiences of the last few days, shrunk to a neat pattern of light. They were dismayingly shrunk and at once her mind tugged to soar away from Donovan and from the town itself; but he kept pulling her down....
>
> (p.119)

The image of the relatively small town surrounded by the limitless dark related to the image of farm and veld in Part One, the "neat pattern of lights" echoing the "pattern of fields".

The settler town, like the farm, is alien to its African surroundings. Instead of the Dumfries Hills (which was in fact inhabited by the Afrikaans community) and Oxford Range, Martha has Founders Street and Mc Grath's Hotel. Dubious boarding houses are at the core of the Great Settler Dream. The setting is similar to that in "A Home for the Highland Cattle".

Martha, with her appetite for adventure, is not unlike the settlers, and the failure of the settlers to realise their dreams is an ironic overarching anticipation of Martha's frustration. The circular repetitive quality of history emphasises the circle of inevitability. Martha, the new settler, comes into town and when she begins to be disillusioned, Marnie, the new settler, arrives to continue the tradition.

At this stage, her entrance into town, Martha seems to be given the choice between two ways of life: a compulsive good time or dedication to community concern. Her meeting with the Left Book Club is a success only insofar as it broadens her reading horizon. "The Observer" re-awakens her four-gated city dream. But she is not ready to surrender her fun and it is only later, in A Proper Marriage, that she recognises such organisations as a route to freedom. She seems to be given the choice, but actually, at no point does Martha reject the book club. She intends

contacting Jasmine, but circumstances, inevitability perhaps, interrupt her intentions. Martha has to go through the experience of swinging around on the circle before she is ready to reject the bourgeois way of life. Her rejection has more meaning because she has "suffered" the experience.

Part Three concentrates on the Sports Club, and creates the mood of the pre-war years in Zambesia. Lessing has the ability to convey the tides of popular feeling; to capture the essence of an age in her backdrops.

The wolves and kids of the club unite in response to the outside forces, the threat of war. They form the magic circle in an attempt to block out the realities of life, and plunge themselves into a period of hysterical pleasure:

> ... it was as if the Club had existed forever, that it would exist forever; "it was like a fairy story" drenched in nostalgic golden light, where everyone is young, nothing changes. The tranquil blue gums at the foot of the playing fields, the banked jacarandas at the back of the golf course, the hedges of hibiscus, splashed with vivid scarlet over the glossy thick green - these enclosed a magic circle, and inside it nothing could happen, nothing threatened, for some tacit law made it impossible to discuss politics here, and Europe was a long way off. In fact, it might be said that this club had come into existence simply as a protest against everything Europe stood for.
>
> (p.154)

For them security is the club and, as a result, the club becomes their lives. Rules, although unspoken, are important because rules are a part of the security, something definite in an uncertain existence. What they are doing is related to their forefathers. In a world of threatening chaos they, too, are clinging to patterns, and the club becomes a symbol that relates to the farm, "the pattern of fields" and the town, "the pattern of light".

But the club provides only an illusion of security. The frenzy with which they fling themselves into their activities betrays a growing panic that they do not wish to acknowledge. Their "live for to-day" attitude indicates an unconscious fear that there may be no to-morrow. They are like people dancing on the edge of a precipice, pretending that there is no drop. This ostrich attitude is, as Lessing often notes, a typical reaction of the human. Man refuses to acknowledge impending disaster in, for example, "Report of a Threatened City", and The Four-Gated City.

Martha becomes part of the circle, revolving in the social routine, but characteristically she keeps one foot outside. She reads "The Observer" and in the world of illusion she makes a feeble effort to locate reality; "I want to be accepted as I am", says Martha, peeping through Matty.

Lessing's tone hovers between understanding, amused tolerance, and cynicism, closely approximating Martha's attitude:

> There were no divisions here, no barriers, or at least none that could be put into words .... the harshest adjective in use was 'toffee-nosed', which meant snobbish, or exclusive; and even the black waiters who served them were likely to find themselves clapped across the shoulders by an intoxicated wolf at the end of the dance: 'Good old Tickey', or 'There's a good chap, Shilling', and perhaps even their impassive, sardonic faces might relax in an unwilling smile, under pressure from this irresistible flood of universal goodwill.
>
> (p.154)

Some of Lessing's most hard-hitting and effective social criticism comes to us via the wolves. By parodying their careless and patronising attitude, particularly towards the waiters, she is mocking the self-righteousness of white

Zambesians. They are not deliberately malignant; in fact, they mean well. A pity, she seems to say, that they are so stupid and self-centred.

Martha's refusal to become totally immersed in the group is indicated by her sexual rebellion. Their attitude of wildness is only an attitude, for in reality the wolves refuse to go "the whole way". They are restrained by sexual rules in the same way as their elders are. Martha, therefore, has to seek outside the closed circle for the freedom of what she considers to be honest sexual experience.

Martha chooses Dolly because he is available; Lessing chooses him because he is a repulsive character. She is deliberately puncturing the reader's illusions. Descriptions of initial sexual encounters are traditionally made palatable by a strong ingredient of romance if not love and, at least, desire. But for Martha the exercise is a fulfilment of curiosity and a stretching forward towards her ideal. It is ironic that Martha, "final heir to the long romantic tradition of love" (p.202), should have intercourse devoid of any emotional interaction.

But Martha cannot escape the club. Donovan and Stella interfere in the affair and Part Three culminates with its destruction in what Martha considers a humiliating scene. What Martha considers humiliating is an indication of her code of values. A deliberate ironic contrast is set up between the clubbers, who accept Martha's decline as appropriate remorse for her permissive behaviour, and Martha, whose misery centres on the shabbiness of the scene. This suggests that Martha's code of values differs from the norm. She does not

care what others think of her. Appearances are of little consequence. What does disgust her is dishonest, petty behaviour. She does not judge herself in terms of good and bad, but in terms of freedom and limitation, reality and illusion.

Part Four opens with Martha in her cocoon. A caterpillar on the verge of metamorphosis into a moth is an appropriate image of Martha.

After the Dolly incident she retreats into her world of books. This retreat succeeds most climactic experiences in her life. The retreat seems often more important than the experience. In her cocoon periods she concentrates on expanding her mind. Outer action seems important only insofar as it provokes inner action.

Ironically at the moment when she seems to be emerging into a new freedom, inevitability presents her with Douggie. She is attracted by appearances, by the fact that he does not seem a wolf. She regards him as a means of escape from a superficial life, only to find herself trapped by the superficiality. To an extent she is deluded but one has a feeling that, even while she is expecting to live happily ever after, she is realising her mistake. This is where one again becomes conscious of the two Marthas:

> She remembered a wild elation, under which dragged, like a chain, a persistent misery. She remembered (when time had sorted out what was important from what was not) that someone had been saying that Hitler had seized Bohemia and Moravia, while everyone exclaimed it was impossible.
>
> (p.269)

Martha is marrying because of pre-war marriage fever. Personal history and world history are juxtaposed, relating the individual to the community and placing Martha's marriage in perspective against the world backdrop. The narrator takes a step backwards from Martha and, at the end, Martha merges into the pattern of life.

A PROPER MARRIAGE (1954)

The dominant tone of Martha Quest is, as the title suggests, one of expectation, which is why the reader is shocked by the sudden marriage that punctures the expected climax. The book ends on a note of disillusionment relieved only by a faint and seemingly pathetic hope. Judge Maynard, the older generation, is disappointed in Binkie, but he still looks forward to his grandchildren. Nevertheless, this note of hope is overwhelmed by the sense of despair; thus the shape of the story can be compared with that of the short story "Flavours of Exile" in which expectation and disappointment are more powerfully conveyed in a concentrated form. The falling sense of disillusionment is sustained throughout A Proper Marriage:

> Two years ago, I was as free as air. I could have done anything, been anything. Because of the essence of the daydreams of every girl who isn't married is just that .... You'll imagine yourself doing all sorts of things in all sorts of countries; the point is, your will will be your limit. Anything'll be possible. But you will not see yourself sitting in a small room bound for twenty-four hours of the day - with years of it in front of you - to a small child.
>
> (p.228)

This rise and fall pattern indicates how Lessing as a writer hovers between the extremes of hope and despair.

The short story "Flight" from the collection The Habit of Loving, in which the old man regrets the approaching marriage of his granddaughter, climaxes with the symbolic flight of the pigeons:

> They wheeled in a wide circle, tilting their wings so there was flash after flash of light, and one after another they dropped from the sunshine of the upper sky to shadow, one after another, returning to the shadowed earth over trees and grass and field, returning to the valley and the shelter of night. [8]

This image contains the dark - light shades with all their connotations, the circular shape and the sense of rising and falling that unite in Lessing's work. The birds' flight, like Martha's, is not flight in the sense of escape, because they have been conditioned to return to earth after their circles in the sky.

The dominant image in A Proper Marriage is thus the fairground wheel, a circular pattern of lights in a dark night.

A Proper Marriage, as the title suggests, spans Martha's marriage from the beginning which is ironically itself an end - the end of the honeymoon - to the end, her departure.

It is proper that the marriage should be contained so precisely in a single novel. This suggests its limited nature. "Proper" experience is organised properly to fit into a proper form, unlike her unsuitable marriage to Anton which defies the boundaries of books and spills from one to the other.

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[8] Doris Lessing,"Flight" in The Habit of Loving (London: Panther, 1966), p.152.

"Proper" is an ironically used word. Lessing is suggesting that there are marriages which are not proper and this is an "improper" assault on the assumed sacredness of marriage. Proper is also used bitterly in an effort to make the reader question what is proper. This marriage, which everyone regards as a great success and which even Douggie is reasonably satisfied with, is, according to Martha, a disaster. In other words, "proper" refers to the appearance not the reality. Lessing is looking through the eyes of society when she names the book. Through her eyes the marriage is improper. But proper or improper are not words Lessing would use of her own accord. She refuses to make judgements of what is right and wrong, proper or otherwise, and by choosing this title she is mocking those who do, the Douggies and Judge Maynards of this world. The irony is extended insofar as the marriage fails because it falls into a category; because it seems proper, because Martha's individuality is crushed by the normality of her role, a role Stella plays to perfection. Proper is Stella. By marrying, Martha is placing herself in a world governed by judgements: guilty or innocent, proper or improper. She behaves with propriety, bearing a child, moving into a suburban house as is expected of her. But Martha does not want a proper marriage: "managing a large house, four servants, Caroline and a husband." (p.272). She attempts to escape into an integrated world where the dividing line "proper" does not exist. For the same reason the respectable mother and wife escapes in the short story "To Room 19" from her proper marriage, finding relief in an improper hotel room. Just as Douggie will not look into the nature of their marriage for the reasons why it failed,

but accepts the conventional reason of another man, so Matthew Rawlings would rather think his wife unfaithful than try to understand that his wife could not continue the role playing demanded in a proper marriage. Definite reasons provide the men with an excuse not to challenge the structure of social values. They would rather not interrupt their ordered existence with the acknowledgement that their wives' emotions and feelings cannot be accounted for with reference to expected behavioural patterns. In contrast to Martha, who refuses to satisfy the community by saying a proper good-bye to her child, Douggie plays the role of ill-treated husband, as expected of him.

According to a reviewer in The Sunday Times the novel is about "the dissolution of a society and the disintegration of a marriage". [9] This is partly true. To the outsider the marriage seems to dissolve, the final pending divorce being evidence of its crumbling. The reality is that Martha"s feelings for Douggie do not change much from beginning to end, for something that was never integrated cannot disintegrate. Martha's illusions crumble, and when the shell is shattered the marriage is seen as non-existent. Martha's divorce is, consequently, an honest acknowledgement of their separation throughout their apparently united life, and this divorce has more potential for a happily-ever-after than the wedding.

In the same way Mary and Dick Turner's marriage is examined as a failure. The frightening truth about their

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[9] Quoted on the cover of the Panther edition of A Proper Marriage.

relationship is that there is no relationship. The failure of Martha's marriage is like Mary's disastrous marriage, an expression of a social truth. Lessing's theme of integration-fragmentation is pared to the essentials: two people trying to relate. Her examination of the typical part, Martha and Douggie, is a reflection of the whole of society:

> From the moment she had said she would marry Douglas, a matter which concerned - and on this point she was determined - no one but their own two selves, some sort of machinery had been set in motion which was bound to involve more and more people. Martha could feel nothing but amazed despair at the thought of the number of people who were so happy on their account.
>
> (pp.45-46)

People are happy about the marriage because it is a social artefact and they are proud of their creation. Not only is Martha conforming to and, therefore, supporting social rules, but each new marriage, like each new child, has the potential for releasing society from repetition. One has a sense that the perfect union would have a saving power similar to that of the miracle babies. But the perfect union is impossible for any sustained length of time, as is shown in Landlocked. Consequently, all marriages are unhappy: the Maynards, the Quests, the Talbots, the Van der Bylts, Mark and Lynda, Francis and Gill, Maisie and Andrew.

> She, (Mrs. Van der Bylt) had been feeling hostile to me; it's the same sort of hostility I've been feeling for Maisie - well then, does that mean I let her down in some way; she wanted my getting married to mean something, and it didn't.
>
> (p.277)

Mrs Van der Bylt is disappointed when she realises the farcical nature of Martha's marriage to Anton, not because she feels

for Martha, but because Martha's careless attitude reveals the pretence of her own union. Martha, herself, wants to believe in Andrew and Maisie's love match and sees its future as relating directly to her, Martha. Its failure is the failure of the human condition.

Lessing rejects the family, not because she objects to the family unit but because she does not believe it is a unit. Families in her novels consist of separate, squabbling people. Moreover, the family is the means by which the wheel of inevitability revolves. Having proved this she approaches her goal of integration from another direction - Marxism. Judge Maynard concludes the novel with this summing up comment:

> I suppose with the French Revolution for a father and the Russian Revolution for a mother, you can very well dispense with a family.
>
> (p.380)

Martha has to sacrifice not only a meaningless marriage but also a child for the cause of Marxism. It is a symbolic gesture realistically integrated into the novel in the same way as symbolism and realism combine in the Catastrophe.

She is acting out her beliefs. She believes in freedom, therefore, she sets Caroline free. She believes in merging her own life with that of an entire world, therefore, she can have no personal ties. Her actions give a certain sense of validity to what would otherwise be regarded as nebulous idealism. Dreams seem anchored by hard work.

Her break with Caroline, although theoretically admirable, seems unnatural. The irony is that she can free Caroline from a mother, or more important, a mother from Caroline, but she cannot free her from the older generation. Elaine moulds Caroline and she is later seen, not as a free spirit, but as a typical Talbot. Similarly, Martha cannot free herself from the circle of inevitability but is doomed to act as adult mother figure to Paul and Francis. Until the whole world is free, Martha's gesture is pathetically in vain. Her refusal to play mother reminds one of Lynda's later rejection of Francis. Although Lynda has no idealistic reasons to give sanity to her bizarre actions, she is doing exactly the same as Martha; refusing family ties.

The question posed is: Is Martha's attitude towards Caroline unnatural? Lessing's shocking deflation of the pregnancy-motherhood myth is an attempt to expose the reality that lies beneath the role of mother. In Chapter One Martha is seen discussing birth control with the doctor and Part One focuses on the question of abortion, a subject freely discussed between Martha, Stella and Alice. A baby is such a threat to Martha that she chooses to ignore her pregnancy symptoms. When she finally acknowledges the truth, her reaction is not one of maternal pleasure but horror that leads to hot baths, gin and table jumping. Martha's responses to forthcoming motherhood are not seen as unique, far from it: the doctor is worried daily by women begging for an abortion and Martha is aware that her mother did not want her.

Just as Lessing does not debate the moral issues involved in pre-marital sex, so she does not enter into the expected abortion debate. None of the three women is concerned about whether it is right or wrong, merely whether it is effective or not. Their casual approach to a controversial subject has a shock effect.

Caroline's conception seems inevitable: Martha makes a mistake, but she still has the choice of whether to have the baby or not. Martha decides to keep the baby because it is too late to have an abortion and because she has one foot in the circle. Hers is not a free choice because she is not free. She is prey to the same natural, social impulses that propelled her towards marriage with Douggie. This incident shows two sides of Martha: Martha within the circle and Martha rejecting tradition:

> She sat, holding her in her arms, smoking over the soft nestling head. Mr Maynard saw that ancient symbol, mother and child, through a pale blue fog shot with sunlight .... He remarked, 'A charming picture'. Martha was at first puzzled, then embarrassed. She at once sprang up, and deposited the baby in a receptacle outside the door .... 'It's against the rules to cuddle a baby out of hours - the book says so.'
>
> (p.195)

The honesty of Martha's responses is contrasted with the stereotyped responses of Douggie. Flushed with paternal pride he returns home with an insurance policy.

Part Two focuses on pregnancy and birth, not exactly "proper" subject matter. This section can be regarded as a gynaecological - psychological case study of pregnancy. Lessing must examine in detail the facts about pregnancy and

birth in order to dispel the illusions. Lessing emphasises the fact that Martha is a typical woman by allowing Alice to echo her experiences, and is inviting all women to penetrate their nostalgia and remember the event as one not only of pleasure but pain, irritation and frustration. The experience is a complex one and with characteristic frank curiosity she explores the facets of its complexity.

Imprisonment and freedom are symbolically portrayed by the image of a child struggling within her mother's womb and finally fighting her way into the world. Caroline is continually seen as a battling figure, before and after birth:

> Martha sat feeling the"imprisoned thing moving in her flesh ..."
>
> (p.118)

The irony of the situation is that the world is yet another prison for Caroline. Caroline's movement from one prison to the next is like Martha's. She escapes her mother only to discover she is confined by marriage. She flees marriage to realise more gradually that, as a member of the group, she is still trapped.

Her step from one circle to the next is prompted more by a desire to leave an old life than an enthusiasm to start a new one. The same spirit that provokes her to beg admittance into Solly's "Utopia" moves her to pick up the phone to Jasmine. In neither instance is she fully aware of the nature of the organisation. She is spontaneously impelled by a need to change her way of life. At the moment when she telephones Jasmine she has reached a crisis point in her life. She is presented with a choice: to leave Douggie or to have another baby, to immerse herself still further in

proper life. This is her last moment to escape and she takes it. The Cohens, Solly, Jos and Jasmine, seem to have been pointing the way to possible freedom from the beginning of Martha Quest. Martha may have to make her quest without a guide, but she does have people who act as signposts and this is the function of the Cohens in the first two books. They are constant reminders that she does have another choice of how to live. They are symbols of "The Other Way of Life". Solly's "Utopia" is, for example, juxtaposed with Martha's cocktail party. The Cohens provide the means of escape from the farm, and, just as the farm reaches out into the town in the form of Mrs Quest, so the Cohens retain their link with Martha, symbolically represented by the fact that she works in their uncle's business. Once she becomes part of the group their symbolic function vanishes. Jos and Solly lose their elevated status and become members of a typical squabbling family.

A reviewer in The Sunday Times says that when"Martha's political consciousness begins to dawn the barriers between her and the frightening outside world finally dissolve". [10] When seen in perspective against the rest of the series, this is too optimistic an interpretation of the book. Although taking a step in the positive direction, she is merely moving from one circle to the next. While the group broadens her social interests and gives her a glimpse of a wider world, it is still isolated from that world. It comprises a small group of people limited by their inability to integrate their ideals with reality. I say "when seen in perspective against the series", because this novel A Proper Marriage does not

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[10] Quoted on the cover of the Panther edition of A Proper Marriage.

explore the limitations of the group. At this stage it is seen to have possibilities as an integrated body of people striving to realise Martha's ideal of integration. Only when one knows the entire series can one see the ineffectuality of their ideals, and paragraphs such as this have added significance:

> She had two clear and distinct pictures of that other part of the world one noble creative and generous, the other ugly, savage and sordid. There was no sort of connection between the two pictures.
>
> (p.315)

During the novel a world war begins and rages. But Zambesia is so isolated that war seems more a game than a reality. For Martha it means soldiers and dancing, and one of Lessing's humorous highpoints could be labelled "The Wolves go to War". The train pulls out with Binkie and Perry climbing on the roof. The Zambesians' ludicrous lack of understanding of war is an expression of their alienation from a suffering world. Significantly Douggie and Perry never reach the action. They are declared incapable of coping with the realities of war and are returned to the security of home. Perry, a product of his society, becomes a representative of it and his breakdown is the disintegration of an entire society structured on illusions.

When Douggie returns, he finds the club changed. In a novel about repetition one is constantly aware of change:

> Two years ago, the Russians had been dastartly and vicious criminals plotting with Hitler to dominate the world. A year ago they were unfortunate victims of unscrupulous aggression, but unluckily so demoralized that as allies they were worse than useless. Now, however, they were a race of battling giants.
>
> (p.307)

But the change is only superficial. At a cocktail party Martha is amazed to hear liberal views expressed on the controversial African question. Then she realises that the terms may differ but the intentions are the same: improvement is needed for the blacks, but only because this would be in the white man's interests. To point this accusation Lessing has an anonymous black in white ducks and red fez call the "progressive" Mr Player to the telephone, and Mr Maynard's first words to Martha are "If you young women change your hair styles ....". Just as the hair styles may change but the person is the same so public opinion may change but, because of the nature of humanity, repetition is inevitable. Consequently, one is not surprised when, in her later books, the pro-Russian attitude changes to anti-Russian once more. As Judge Maynard says, "If there's one thing my generation has learned it is that the more things change the more they remain the same." (p.67)

The novel ends with Judge Maynard and Martha going in different directions. This contrasts with the end of Martha Quest in which Martha is, unknowingly, going in the same direction as the Judge. He sums up Martha's situation with cynicism. One wonders why Lessing chooses to mould such an extraordinarily perceptive man into one of the villains of her series. When the battle over Rita progresses, he becomes more and more a cardboard 'baddie'. As a judge he is a symbol of authority, the man who places people in prison both literally and figuratively. Most characters are condemned for their illusions but Judge Maynard is condemned for having too few. Martha with her ideals is contrasted at the end with

the Judge, who uses the pin of cynicism to puncture her dreams. He is like Dr X in Briefing for a Descent into Hell, a man who relies on reason and ignores the spiritual life. He can see the repetitive nature of the world but he has no saving beliefs to give meaning to his existence. An understanding of the hopeless nature of the world must, according to Lessing, be compensated for by hope, a contradiction that lies at the core of the series. He is contrasted with the communist party, not because of conservative political ideals, but because they are idealists and he has no ideals. They understand the world and are prepared to act in order to change it. He understands the world so well that he knows normal action can never save it. Therefore he gives up, and that is his crime. Mr Quest has dreams but no grasp on reality; Judge Maynard has a grip on facts but no ability to dream. Martha is the figure between the extremes, integrating dreams with reality.

RETREAT TO INNOCENCE (1956)

Between A Proper Marriage and A Ripple from the Storm Lessing published Retreat to Innocence. Again the focus and attack is on the "proper" way of life but the approach is different.

Julia is a young girl, exceptionally neat and organised, determined to impose order on a chaotic twentieth-century existence. She wishes to shape her life into a "white-wedding-to-civil-servant-husband-happily-ever-after" - proper marriage and retreat into the illusion of this security. Julia contrasts with Martha in the sense that she

views this social structure as asylum rather than prison. She inclines towards retreat while Martha is determined to advance. This essential difference in the heroines is highlighted by the titles of the books: Martha Quest and Retreat to Innocence.

While the vision behind the Children of Violence series approximates Martha's vision of freedom, the vision behind Retreat to Innocence counterpoints Julia's dream. Martha has a vision; Julia has a dream. The reader is made aware of the ineffectuality, childishness and selfishness of Julia's limited desires by the contrast between her self-centred view of the world and the expansive vision of Jan Brod, the older experienced man with whom she has an affair. The affair is not psychologically explored, but is an obviously contrived clash between opposites in an attempt to achieve a balance: age and youth, man and woman, intelligence and beauty, a Marxist approach to life and a capitalistic approach. But the balance is never attained because to use D H Lawrence's image, the writer's thumb pulls down the scale in favour of Jan Brod. His voice predominates pedantically in the novel to the point where, while advocating an unselfish approach to the world, he is displaying an irritating self-righteousness, reminiscent of Anton in A Ripple from the Storm. He is Experience while Julia is Innocence.

But Lessing is using the term "innocence" with irony in the same way as she presented the term "proper". In accordance with Julia's code of values she is innocent. The sins of the world do not touch her, and she refuses to acknowledge any responsibility towards society. She inherited

her privileged life style in a capitalistic society and her perspective in life as Julia, daughter of Sir Andrew Barr, is so narrow that she is unable to see it as privileged. On a superficial level she senses the falseness of her parents' world but her revulsion towards the fashionable society takes the form of an urge to retreat into her romantic world of dreams, rather than an attempt to probe the falseness and reach the reality. She may think that she is repudiating their life-style with her white wedding assertions, but her rebellion is on a disappointingly petty level and only serves to highlight her narrow-mindedness. Moreover, the irony is, as Brod points out, that even this rebellion is fashionable. Like Martha, battling on a deeper level with her inheritance, Julia is faced with the fact that her squabble is part of the inevitable swing of the pendulum. Interestingly enough, both Julia and Martha claim to be pacifists, an extraordinarily naïve delusion, the reader realises, when he sees them in perspective against their age of violence. So Martha is not entirely unlike Julia. To an extent the early Martha shares with Julia the feeling that history is over and, therefore, unrelated to her life. Martha is bored with her father's World War I stories; Julia is irritated by Jan's life history. Her tendency to attempt retreat into innocence is illustrated in this passage, which is in reaction to Jan's explanation that the cost of her pearl necklace can be measured in terms of human anguish:

> "But you're always implying I am to blame for things."
>
> "If you don't choose to accept the responsibility, then you have no responsibility, but you aren't a human being either."
>
> She looked stubbornly angry. "I don't see it ... I don't want to hear it. I know it's all horrible, but I wasn't asked. It's not my fault."
>
> "All these things are being done in your name."
>
> "I wasn't asked", she repeated. [11]

Her responses are childish. She is not prepared to open up into an intelligent argument and merely attempts to shut out his views with denials. Hers is the language of retreat. She walls herself up in her own world where, along with Roger and her parents, she remains innocent. But the reader is encouraged to see her, her world and the whole world through Jan's eyes and to pronounce them all as guilty.

As the novel progresses, Julia, like Martha, undergoes a learning process. Her affair with Jan Brod is a step from sexual innocence to experience. Her attraction to him indicates a subconscious dissatisfaction with her predictable and sterile way of life, but this inner conflict is never fully explored. Her father hints at her dilemma, suggests that she is divided because her natural demands have counteracted her stated principles. Julia acknowledges this but, despite her psychology studies, does not care to lift her conflict on to the level of the conscious. This contrasts

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[11] Doris Lessing, Retreat to Innocence (London: Michael Joseph, 1956).

with Martha, whose second self is constantly ready to translate her unconsciously motivated acts into rational terms of judgement.

The destruction of Julia's sexual innocence is symbolic of the more important step from mental innocence or ignorance through degrees of mental experience or knowledge. Martha Quest fights for knowledge. Julia wants to impress Jan by expanding her knowledge, but her primary impulse is to resist knowledge and retreat from it. Martha's learning process is a self-motivated reaching out beyond the limits of herself; Julia's is an encroaching of the outer world on her self-contained existence. In this she resembles a later heroine, Kate Brown in Summer before the Dark. Both Martha and Julia learn through stories, which are seen as a means by which the individual can expand into sympathy with a world beyond her immediate experience. Martha seeks her own books, while Julia is made to listen to Jan Brod's stories and anecdotes. Martha is, consequently, affected by a broad spectrum of opinions, while Julia is moved by only Jan's view of the world. This leads to the preaching tone that weakens Retreat to Innocence.

Despite her resistance to Jan's teaching the cumulative effect of his influence provokes Julia's identity crises. By forcing her to review the world, he is forcing her to review herself in relation to the world. Her inability to shape the chaotic world is related to her inability to shape herself. Stripped of the illusion of definition she is, in reality, nothing. Walking through the streets of London at night, her aimlessness and the corresponding darkness reflecting her

state of mind, she recognises the fragility of her self-image. The same experience is explored in The Four-Gated City but because of the depth of Martha's character, the revelation is richer. Julia's inherent superficiality deprives her supreme moment of resonance and, to some degree, of authenticity.

Retreat to Innocence ends with Julia's retreat into marriage with Roger. She is unable to mould her affair into a manageable shape by persuading Jan to marry her or by having his child. She uses her imagination to enclose and end-stop reality as opposed to Martha who uses hers to reach out into greater reality. The consequences of her affair are too expansive for her to cope with, so she escapes by imagining "all made right" in marriage. Reality, unfortunately for Julia, does not oblige and the affair untidily trails off, inconclusive and unresolved.

Julia's marriage to Roger is inevitable, both in terms of the pattern of the book and in terms of the pattern of her life. The circle of inevitability is as thematically prominent in this novel as in her other works. But, while the proper marriage seems a closed happily-ever-after ending, the reader is left to ponder the fact that it is impossible to retreat into innocence. Once having eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, man cannot gain re-entry into paradise. Julia Barr cannot be the same after she has dreamt that she, too, is to suffer in the gas chambers. Her awareness of an integrated world can be relegated to the depths of her subconscious, but the knowledge is still implanted in her and cannot be removed. While she goes through the motions of a proper existence, she

is in essence an exile. The novel is consequently open-ended, the proper marriage unable to end-stop for Julia or the reader the sense of a chaotic world:

> She realized that the tears which filled her eyes were of passionate regret, and not because of the triumph she wanted to feel.
>
> (p.334)

This final sentence of the novel is ambiguous. In one sense it refers to regret that she had the affair and alienated herself from the proper life, in another to regret that the affair is over and in a third her regret is a superficial response to an understanding of the harsh realities of life. "Regret" is a watered-down substitute for an existential anguish, the quality of the word corresponding with the limitations of Julia as a character. Martha would never "regret".

Retreat to Innocence has been discussed in this chapter to illuminate, by means of contrast and comparison, the strength and richness of Martha Quest as a character. There may be aspects of Julia in Martha such as romantic dreams, absorption in her own beauty and a claim to innocence, but Martha is so much more. While Julia Barr is a simple character, Martha Quest is a complex one. And while Retreat to Innocence is a relatively simple book which does not match the complexity of the vision it is attempting to embrace, The Children of Violence series mirrors the complexity of the chaotic world.

A Proper Marriage ends with the Marxist vision offered as a possibility of freedom; Retreat to Innocence advocates this vision; and A Ripple from the Storm explores the

practicality of translating the theory into reality.

A RIPPLE FROM THE STORM (1964)

A Ripple from the Storm opens optimistically and, repeating the pattern of Martha Quest, closes pessimistically:

> She lay down on the bed, her back to Anton, who was already freshly analysing the situation, and allowed herself to slide into sleep like a diver weighted with lead. [12]

Fluidity, water, the sea, are associated with freedom, while solid, immobile lead suggests imprisonment. The leaden diver image is in essence similar to the farm-veld, wheel-dark night, images. A condition of restriction is contrasted with surrounding freedom.

The novel opens by evoking the integrated nature of the group. During its course the group swells and collapses, the closing note being one of disintegration. The continuous and developing faction fights are interesting as an expression of fragmentation, which contrasts with the harmonious ideals of the group. The novel focuses on the tension between fragmentation and integration that exists within such a group. As the title suggests they are a ripple from the storm, only a part of the whole, a group working towards a world revolution. Martha sums up the feeling she had as a member:

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[12] Doris Lessing, A Ripple from the Storm (St. Albans: Panther, 1966), p.281.

> .... Martha felt herself cut off from everything that had fed her imagination: until this moment she had been part of the grandeur of the struggle in Europe, part of the Red Army, the guerillas in China, the French underground, and the partisans in Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece.
>
> (p.278)

The ineffectuality of the group is less important than the span of its vision. It encourages Martha to see the world as a whole and herself as part of this whole. Therefore, the years "seemed more important than all the time she had lived before" (p.280).

Communism incorporates the essence of Lessing's belief that freedom is to be attained through unity. But the irony is that while the members of the group believe in integration, they are not integrated. Lessing is indicating the discrepancy between the ideal and the real. Because of this discrepancy, the Party is ineffectual. Dazzled by the image of the world revolution, the comrades do not become involved in the reality of the Africa around them and are rejected by the African Black Power movement. A sick man in the coloured quarters is regarded as insignificant in comparison with analyses of world situations.

At the heart of their structure lies the paradox: restriction for freedom. They restrict themselves, their own individuality, in the battle for the freedom of the statistical masses:

> We're all mad, she thought, trying to make it humorous. She recognized Marjorie's dry and humorous tone, and thought: Why is it I listen for the echoes of other people in my voice and what I do all the time? The fact is, I'm not a person at all, I'm nothing yet - perhaps I never will be.
>
> (p.279)

They expand their minds but repress their emotions and only as integrated beings, head and heart, can they hope to achieve integration.

The battle between head and heart is central to A Ripple from the Storm. Maisie stands in contrast to Anton and his extension, Martha, the communist. Maisie's instinctive emotional responses to life are in opposition to Anton's calculating reactions. He, for example, refuses to help Maisie because an individual's plight disturbs Party routine. Maisie is a fluid character moving easily to whichever tune is played, her passive compliance highlighting the rigidity of the communist's attitude. If Maisie is water, they are ice; and the two marriages are contrasted. The word "love" can be associated with a character like Maisie, while duty is the lot of Anton and Martha. Significantly, both Maisie's and Martha's worlds disintegrate simultaneously.

But Martha is not entirely within the communist ring. She has adopted her usual stance, one foot in and one foot out of the circle. The free foot enables her to feel for Maisie:

> The other members of the group were hostile to her; Martha defended her, even more heatedly because she felt the same hostility. But she knew why: she was mourning as if a happiness of her own had collapsed.
>
> (p.275)

Martha wants to believe in love and this inclination suggests that there is something missing in her life. Moreover, the following description of Maisie can, with important modifications, apply to Martha:

> If I stayed married to Andrew, then I'll be a communist. But if I take Binkie, then I'd never think about it again. Well, and so it makes me feel as if I'm nothing in myself.
>
> (p.235)

Both Maisie and Martha need a man to anchor them to a way of life. Maisie is attracted first to the man, then to the way of life; Martha is attracted to the way of life and only then the man. Fired with enthusiasm for communism, she has an affair with Willie. A dedicated communist, she has an affair also with Anton. The man and the ideal merge. Freedom for Martha comes when, in The Four-Gated City, she is no longer dependent on a man. Lessing is not striking a blow for women's liberation, but for the liberation of individuals. She is saying that while a person is dependent on another she cannot realise her full potential. Sarah Christie remarks that Martha becomes an extension of every man's personality. [13] But Martha is a complex, dual character. While she has a Maisie-like tendency to submerge herself passively in response to the masculine will or the communal will (first displayed at the Van Rensberg dance), a critical judging Martha ensures her re-emergence as an individual.

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[13] Sarah Christie in chapter "Doris Lessing" in Dream Life and Real Life by Don Maclennan and Sarah Christie, unpublished manuscript, Rhodes University, 1974, p.157.

Maisie says, "I feel as if I'm nothing in myself". Martha says, "I am nothing yet." (p.235) Lessing is flinging out the question: What is a person? Does a person exist only in relation to others? Or is the "I" important? She advocates self-development, but not in isolation from the community. The "I" and "we" must balance. Consequently, in a book about "we", she ends with a reminder to Martha not to forget "I". Appropriately, the closing moments of A Ripple from the Storm show Martha isolated from Anton, her back to him. While he analyses the situation, she feels for the situation, and mourns the disintegration.

Throughout the novel one is aware of repetition:

> .... it was inevitable that everything should have happened in exactly the way it had happened: no one could have behaved differently.
>
> (p.280)

The ripple can be seen as a repetition of the circle motif. As the wheel revolves, Martha becomes a Jasmine:

> She understood she had become for others what Jasmine had been for her when the pretty English schoolteacher, Marjorie Pratt, her fine blue eyes alive with admiration, had said: "I do admire you, Matty, for not being afraid of doing these things in public." [14]

In Landlocked Marjorie Pratt assumes the Jasmine-Martha role of efficient group organiser. Even Martha's marriage to Anton does not differ much from her marriage to Douggie. Lessing is again using shock tactics. Marrying for documents of naturalization is mocking marriage and seems as unnatural as deserting a child. Martha is flouting the expected social

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[14] Doris Lessing, Landlocked (St Albans: Panther, 1967), p.7.

code of values. But what she does not realise is that she is acting in accordance with another system of rules. Just as the community compelled her marriage to Douggie, so her new community, the communist group, forces her into a marriage with Anton. What Martha intends as an honest action, revealing the hollowness of the marriage ceremony, is distorted by Anton's Douggie-like sentimentality into becoming another pretence:

> Anton was waiting on the pavement outside it. He was wearing a flower in his jacket, and Martha was upset when she saw it, because if she were wearing a flower it would be dishonest. But she greeted him with a bright smile, noting that he was smiling with tenderness. But I didn't bargain for it, I didn't bargain for it at all, she thought: she was in danger of bursting into tears.
>
> (p.194)

Anton refuses to let his wife attend the conference. Martha is trapped, not by the marriage, but by the pretence; or, perhaps, Lessing is saying cynically that pretence is marriage.

Repetition is further reflected in the daily routine of meeting after meeting after meeting. The monotony imprisons the reader in the same way as it oppresses Martha. "Although the aim of the book may well be an accurate depiction of the events in the 'real world', the characters are two-dimensional and their conflicts tend to lack dramatic significance." [15] The reader shares in Martha's frustration. This is the ripple but where is the storm? The bulk of the novel comprises meetings so absorbed in protocol they have no meaning; arguments that go round and round in circles arriving nowhere; endless

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[15] Sarah Christie in chapter "Doris Lessing" in Dream Life and Real Life, p.158.

analyses of distant situations; petty rules on the importance of punctuality. Lessing's problem is that she evokes the boredom of her character and of life so well that she often runs the risk of boring her reader. Nevertheless, this approach is an experiment and, even if not successful, is an indication of Lessing's willingness to explore. She is doing the same thing as in "The Blue Notebook", trying to trap truth in a network of facts. But, unfortunately, the facts represent only surface reality, and truth is a reality that exists beneath the surface.

At roughly the centre of the novel is a cameo of Jimmy's abortive attempt at escape. His partial breakdown is significantly situated in the same place in the structure of the book as Perry's in A Proper Marriage and, like Perry's, depicts the fragmentation of society. This description of Jimmy has the visionary power, the resonance, missing in Lessing's factual accounts. It reminds one of Mary Turner's vision in The Grass is Singing, a dramatic highpoint of the novel and yet dislocated, fragmented from the body of the work. Jimmy, a minor character, is elevated to tragic hero.

But any lack of consistency in her focus on Jimmy is compensated for by the wealth of symbolism that makes this chapter transcend reality to become Lessing's vision of life. The description of Jimmy is juxtaposed with a communist party meeting dispute, and shows how irrelevant party attitudes are when compared with basic human needs. Party meetings are dead; this chapter is alive.

Images of freedom and imprisonment dominate Jimmy's escapade. The camp with its fences is seen in perspective

against the dark night:

> "Back to the concentration camp," said Murdoch ... Jimmy did not answer. The half-jocular "concentration camp" made him think of the great barred gates of the camp, the high wire fence.
>
> (p.144)

> He (Jimmy) felt, as Murdoch did, imprisoned, but the warm substance of his body insisted against the vision. There was a moment of painful striving between the two: the ugly mechanical regularity of the camp, that had the obstinate look of metal parts and tools, and the full hot insistence of his breathing body.
>
> (p.145)

> The camp held the lives of several thousand men within its tall taut encircling wires; held them close and tidy and confined. Jimmy thought that for all those months he had lived in a simple repetitive cycle of movement: sleep in hut; work by the air strip; jaunts into town in the camp bus from the gaunt gates on the main road. Yet here, ten yards from the camp, the trees stood dark and whole under the moon, the grass was tall and unflattened.
>
> (p.150)

The rules and routine of the army camp are a reflection of the imprisoning discipline of the communist party.

Jimmy, in mental torment, escapes the camp and experiences the threat of nature. The little black insects remind one of the boy's encounter with the horror of nature in the short story "A Sunrise on the Veld". Because Jimmy does not have the courage to face reality he runs to another prison, the location:

> Comrade Baas, that's us, with a fine fence. He saluted himself, the comrade baas. Fences, fences, everywhere you look, concentration camps everywhere and fences. He thought of the concentration camps in Europe and without any feeling of being alien. He felt identified with them, and with the people sleeping all around him in their little boxes and shacks. If we got to the moon, he thought, we'd put up fences and keep people inside them.
>
> (pp.153-154)

And the town is yet another prison:

> Then came the railway lines, a double line of whitely glittering steel. He stopped. The power station beyond raised cooling towers against the shoulder of a steep hill. The white towers curved finely inwards under the clouds of dark smoke that were solidified by the surrounding clarity of chill white light. Across the lines arising out of a mess of soiled grass, railway sleepers, old tin cans, was a small tree, white-stemmed, a cloud of fine leaves rising into the moonlight like a spray of a fountain.
>
> (p.159) (my underlining)

A tree, a symbol of hope, contrasts with buildings, modern prisons; the fluidity of the tree contrasts with the solid surroundings.

Both in the town and at the army camp Jimmy feels rejected by the party members and fellow airmen; in the location he is rejected by the jazz players and Elias; at the court he is rejected by the coloured people. Abandoned by all sectors of a diverse community, he is an exile figure, someone out of place, the leaden diver.

But he is not alone in his exile. His alienation is a dramatic portrayal of the alienation of Martha and Anton, Maisie and Andrew. His is the alienation of the communist party from the workers, the comrades they are supposed to be

helping; the alienation of all white people in Africa and of all the people in the world. He knocks on doors and begs for entry but is refused. Martha, in A Proper Marriage, hammers on her mother's door for refuge from Douggie and, in A Ripple from the Storm, has this significant dream:

> She went to sleep depressed, and dreamed she was with Maisie, who was due to have her baby, and they were hurrying from door to door trying to find a house which would take her in. But the doors remained closed against them both.
>
> (p.190) (my underlining)

LANDLOCKED (1965)

Significantly, A Ripple from the Storm and Landlocked are peopled by aliens: the R.A.F. from Britain; Athen from Greece; and Anton from Germany, seeking documents of naturalization. But no matter how many documents Anton gets he cannot belong in Zambesia:

> Anton Hesse was linked with the fate of his country so deeply and by so many fibres that the cataclysm which had engulfed Germany had also engulfed him who had fled from it and had been living so many thousands of miles away. And now the Communist Party in East Germany did not reply to his letters, to his demands to come home. They simply did not answer. Nothing. Silence. The old Germany which would have killed him, was dead; and the new Germany would not answer his letters.
>
> (p.220)

The prominent exile figure of Landlocked is Thomas, a Polish Jew, who left Poland to escape the concentration camps. But in a metaphorical sense he cannot escape them and is seen as a figure locked in his own torture chamber:

> Forty-odd million human beings had been murdered, deliberately or from carelessness, from lack of imagination; these people had been killed yesterday, in the last dozen years, they were dying now, as she stood under the tree, and these deaths were marked on her soul, and when Johnny Capetenakis from the Piccadilly restaurant (as it might very well have been) lifted Athen's head on a bayonet ... well, when that happened, it happened in Martha's soul and in Thomas's...
>
> (pp.202-203) (my underlining)

Thomas's first significant word is "Bastards". His anguish and guilt are too intense to be shared with a careless society. His daughter is seen running away from "what was too heavy". (p.171) Even Martha, he repeats, is too young and inexperienced to comprehend fully his agony and he stands alone as an exile figure:

> Against Martha's closed lids she saw descending miles of sunlit country, the blue mountains beyond, and, in the foreground, the big man squatting, holding out a pleading hand to the little girl.
>
> (pp.174-175)

The sense of space accentuates the loneliness of the figures in the foreground and the contrast in sizes, the physically strong, big man begging before the physically weak, small girl, adds pathos to Lessing's picture labelled "Exile". His sorrow cannot be particularized as being of the "I-love-my-wife-and-child-and-they-do-not-love-me" variety but a general grief "I-do-not-belong". He is an outcast, a peasant among the princesses. But while he does belong in the modern world, he belongs with nature: he is a natural man, a gardener.

> Suddenly Martha knew it was Thomas who would be hanged - she had known it all the time ... He walked through the great open doors of the barn and the people outside fell away on either side as he appeared ... He was isolated from this crowd of people, but he was not aware of them or of Martha or of anything: his red-eyed stare was introspective. He stood, waiting, with the heavy sunlight on him, in a sombre, savage ... but what? What was this mood, or way of thinking, or mode of being, she could not name? The look on his face -
>
> (pp.209-210)

In Martha's dream Thomas is walking to the gallows alone. He has chosen exile or, rather, he has accepted his destiny as exile. One does not know what crime Thomas has committed or in what age of violence he is being executed. He becomes like a figure in Camus' novels accepting the guilt of the world. This dream encourages one to see Thomas's death, not as an accident, but as a fulfilment of his personal destiny as a sacrificial victim. As a Pole and a Jew he is the archetypal victim:

> Having lived through a war when half the human race was engaged in murdering the other half, murdering more vilely, savagely, cruelly, than ever in human history, what does it mean to say: I don't believe that violence achieves anything? Every fibre of Martha's body, everything she thought, every movement she made, everything she was, was because she had been born at the end of one world war, and had spent all her adolescence in the atmosphere of preparations for another which had lasted five years and had inflicted such wounds on the human race that no one had any idea of what the results would be. Martha did not believe in violence. Martha was the essence of violence, she had been conceived, bred, fed and reared on violence.
>
> (p.202)

This passage is central to the series, explaining the title Children of Violence and showing man as an integral part of his age. And an integrated vision leads to a sense of guilt and responsibility. This is illustrated in, for example, the short story "Sunrise on the Veld", in which the boy realises that he is part of the natural world. The boy is guilty because of his carelessness, and carelessness personified in Sergeant Tressell becomes Thomas's enemy:

> But we don't begin to understand murder through good humour, murder through sheer bloody humoured carelessness.
>
> (p.194)

Sergeant Tressell is the successor to Binkie and the wolves. His carelessness is mirrored in every member of the Zambesian society, and it becomes obvious that Thomas is tilting at windmills. He can never exterminate Sergeant Tressell because all humanity is blind, even occasionally, the flippant Martha.

Binkie does not change to become Sergeant Tressell. Lessing's attitude changes, and this is an indication of an essential change in tone between the earlier and later novels of Children of Violence. She no longer buffers her blows in laughter or handles her Binkies with sympathy. Instead, regarding carelessness as a crime, she drains away her own Matty-like tendency towards flippancy and becomes a Martha writer, as intense and conscious as her character, Thomas Stern. She is often accused of lacking humour, an allegation that is certainly not true of her earlier novels but is valid in connection with her later ones. Nevertheless, she would not

regard this as an accusation. In terms of her philosophy the world is serious and any inclination to laugh away problems lightly is immoral. Unfortunately, the continual high pitch of intensity she maintains is emotionally exhausting and produces a slow-moving novel. Everything is of utmost importance, even the door of Mr. Robinson's office (p.11). There is little variation in mood, and because of the lack of light tones, the dark ones lose much of their impact. Even the affair between Martha and Thomas is a deep complexity of pleasure and pain, more pain than pleasure:

> Perhaps, when Thomas and she touched each other, in that touch cried out the murdered flesh of the millions of Europe - the squandered flesh was having its revenge, it cried out through the two little creatures who were fitted for much smaller loves, the touch only of a hand on a shoulder, simple hungers, and the kindness of sleep. Instead - it was all much too painful, and they had to separate.
>
> (p.167)

Sarah Christie says it is essential to know why Martha loves Thomas and that, by failing to explain this phenomenon, Lessing is producing a novel that tends to be incohesive.[16] Aside from the fact that one can understand that Martha would be attracted to someone as devastatingly honest as Thomas, Lessing deliberately does not give clear reasons for the match. The moment she says why Martha loves him she is limiting the nature of the love. It is, of course, significant

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[16] Sarah Christie in chapter "Doris Lessing" in Dream Life and Real Life, p.159.

that Lessing refuses to categorise the relationship between them under the name "love".

They are drawn together by the same forces of inevitability that present Martha with Anton and Douggie. She could have had an affair with Joss but she happens to have one with Thomas instead. From this beginning, a cynical deflation of the love at first sight opening to a romance, Martha and Thomas sink into deep whirlpools of feeling. Lessing is careful not to use the clichés of romance, deliberately destroying the expected rosy glow with honesty.

Martha and Thomas are two people who manage to plug into love. In The Four-Gated City Martha understands how the individual has access to a universal emotion by plugging in to a general consciousness. One has a sense that it is not so important that they feel for each other but that it is more important that they feel. Lessing is altering the usual focus on love affairs. Who Martha feels for, and why she feels for him, is less important than the experience itself:

> ... much easier to live deprived, to be resigned, 'to be self-contained'. No, she did not want to be dissolved ...
>
> (pp.103-104)

> ... their feeling for each other, the relationship - whatever was the right word for it - was in an altogether new dimension. They were in deep waters, both of them.
>
> (p.160)

Love is an integrating experience. It is not merely a union of two but, by dissolving the barriers of individuality, becomes a union of all. Martha is, during love-making, transported to a dimension where she is not a separate being but part of the flow of life. Water imagery is dominant, fluidity suggesting integration and its corollary, freedom. But having found their sea one wonders why they run aground and become once more landlocked:

> She dreamed, when she dreamed of herself, as standing on the high, dry place while ships sailed away in all directions, leaving her behind. On this high, dry plateau where Martha was imprisoned, for ever, it seemed, everything was dry and brittle, its quality was drought. Far away, a long way below, was water. She dreamed, night after night, of water, of the sea. She dreamed of swift waves like horses racing.
>
> (pp.205-206)

Mary Turner is also landlocked in a drought-stricken region. Zambesia, an inland arid country, externalizes the inner condition of man, as Lessing sees him.

Throughout the affair one is conscious that the end is inevitable. Martha has to go to England and Thomas to Israel, but these are only the superficial reasons for the separation. The real reason is Sergeant Tressell. Because of the nature of mankind, because of the imperfections of the world, anything approaching perfection cannot survive in the world. Until mankind has attained freedom Martha and Thomas, the children of violence, cannot love.

Thomas is the first character to understand that he is a child of violence and leads Martha towards this knowledge. He has the courage to face up to the reality of his relationship with a violent world, but he does not have Martha's strength to retain his self-integration. The chaos of the world is mirrored by his inner chaos and he, like Perry and Jimmy, fragments into a breakdown figure. But he is not supposed to be a two dimensional type character like Perry or Jimmy, and his breakdown is not just symbolic of social disintegration. Lessing is beginning her quest into the nature of breakdowns that continues in The Four-Gated City. Just as she explores writer's block to discover the nature of writing, so she explores breakdown to find the nature of man.

In Landlocked one senses significance in Thomas's experience without realising what the significance is, just as Martha keeps the documents without knowing why. Much of Thomas's behaviour can only be clarified with reference to The Four-Gated City. His self-dislike is explored in Martha's later "Stations of the Devil". His strange notes correspond with Martha's later realisation that there are different channels that man's mind plugs into. What is the link between Yiddish jokes and anthropological reports? Martha cannot see a link because she has a conditioned mind which relegates different ideas to different categories. But Thomas is entering a world where everything is integrated and Yiddish jokes and anthropological reports can be juxtaposed as all part of life. He places no barriers between concepts. He has a free flowing mind. The disturbing point is that Thomas, who seems to have achieved the Lessing-Martha ideal of freedom,

is accepted as insane.

Must one regard Thomas's breakdown as regenerative or destructive? Does his cracked mind "allow in sun" or is he to be dismissed, like Jimmy or Perry, as a character too weak to face up to reality? At this stage Lessing seems to be exploring insanity rather than presenting conclusions. At the end of Landlocked one tends to dismiss him as one of life's casualties, but The Four-Gated City re-opens the case and one re-examines him in the light of Lessing's further developed attitude towards insanity. Like Lynda he has the potential to be one of life's saviours, but also like Lynda he is never understood. Now it becomes clearer why Lessing's heroine, Martha, has to have one foot in the circle of experience; why she has to retain a grip on everyday reality, even though it may impede her search into greater reality. She cannot become an absolute like Thomas because she has to help free, not only herself, but all mankind. Martha has social responsibility and, as an individual committed to an asylum, would be unable to retain her link with society. Just as Martha may believe in freedom but cannot go under, so Lessing may believe in integration but cannot produce a Thomas-like integrated work. Both Lessing and Martha are communicators with a responsibility to make themselves understood. Thomas's death, while admirable, is futile; Martha lives to see and help in the beginnings of a new world.

Because Thomas's depths are suggested rather than conveyed, Sarah Christie claims that he is not an entirely satisfactory character. [17] She links him with Anton and

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[17] Sarah Christie in chapter "Doris Lessing" in Dream Life and Real Life, p.150.

Douggie, all, she complains, two dimensional characters. Anton and Douggie are deliberately created as two dimensional to convey their superficiality. They are types playing their respective roles. But Thomas is a different kind of character; he is supposed to be rounded yet, while Lessing hints at his unfathomable depths, she decides not to explore them, probably because she does not want to switch focus from Martha. And Martha, more concerned with the adventure than the man, too inexperienced to understand him fully, is unable to be vehicle sufficient to carry the full weight of what Lessing implies is such a complex character. Thomas is explored more in The Four-Gated City, a novel which barely mentions his name, than in Landlocked, a novel in which he is prominent.

> She had simply to accept, finally, that her role in life, for this period, was to walk like a housekeeper in and out of different rooms, but the people in the rooms could not meet each other or understand each other, and Martha must not expect them to. She must not try and explain, or build bridges.
>
> (pp.21-22)

> She had complained that her life had consisted of a dozen rooms, each self-contained, that she was wearing into a frazzle of shrill nerves in the effort of carrying herself, each time a whole, from one 'room' to the other. But adding a new room to her house had ended the division. From this centre she now lived - a loft of aromatic wood from whose crooked window could be seen only sky and the boughs of trees, above a brick floor hissing sweetly from the slow drippings and wellings from a hundred growing plants, in a shed whose wooden walls grew from lawns where the swinging arc of a water-sprayer flung rainbows all day long, although, being January, it rained most afternoons.
>
> (p.103)

> Because it is as if some part of me has died. What part? Or is it in another room, looking on.
>
> (p.224)

Separate rooms are symbolic of fragmentation and suggest divisions within Martha herself. Mark's house in London represents Martha, and her need to reconcile all the occupants of the rooms is suggestive of her need to reconcile all the facets of her personality. Martha's inner harmony is symbolised in the following passage by the one room - not a room in isolation but a room integrated in its natural surroundings, incorporated in the growth. The sense of totality is created by the fluidity of description, the same flow that combines light, tree, women and water:

> Six inches of marred glass in a warped frame reflected beams of orange light into the loft, laid quivering green from the jacaranda outside over wooden planks and over the naked arm of a young woman who lay face down on a rough bed, dipping her arm in and out of the greenish sun-lanced light below her as if into water.
>
> (p.102)

Trees feature prominently in Lessing's imagery:

> It was teak, showing the - how many? - years of its growth in irregular concentric lines. With half-shut eyes, the orangey-brown became sand over which water had ebbed, leaving lines of foam, or debris. Stared at, unblinking, with concentration, the door seemed to come closer, became cliffs of weathered sand-stone, weathered rock, eroded in patterns where water had run - or like the irregular concentric lines of growth in wood ...
>
> (pp.11-12)

> A large tree stood in the middle of the avenue, in an island of earth and grass around which the tarmac flowed in two streams that were almost as wide as the street itself. A hundred yards up, a fine clump of indigenous trees spared by the road engineers grew so near the street that a close look showed it made a slight bend South to accommodate them. On the map, though, and even in people's minds, North Avenue ran as straight and as measured as all the other streets in this grid of streets.
>
> (p.195)

> He would move slowly in to the tree until his long fingers met the rough bark, and he stroked the tree curiously, learning it, thinking: under this roughness and hardness moves the sap, like rivers under the earth. [18]

In the town trees are sole representatives of the veld and become symbols of nature. They contrast with tarmac, which, like the farm, is suggestive of man's futile attempts to make permanent mark on his environment. Trees are symbols of hope, reminders of Eden. Just as trees defy concrete so man, through growth, has a hope of breaking free from the limitations of civilisation. Yet there seems to be a contradiction:

> ... a child was born in a house that had a tree outside it. It was an elm tree ... and as an old man, he stood at his gate and looked at the tree and thought: that tree has been with me all my life, I'm smaller than that tree.
>
> (p.122)

In one instance trees represent freedom through nature. In another they are associated with security, with the repetitive

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[18] Doris Lessing, "Plants and Girls" in The Habit of Loving (London: Panther, 1966), pp.168-169.

rhythm of life, that is being disturbed by the star gazing freedom fighters. This contradiction, freedom and pattern, is resolved in the solution of the novel. Through the patterns of nature mankind, like the tree, grows upwards towards freedom. The circle does not stop revolving; it merely revolves on a higher plane.

The relative symbolic density of The Four-Gated City and Landlocked in comparison with the first three novels of the series shows a movement in the direction of the visionary. A parallel can be drawn between the evocative language of the last two novels and that of Mary Turner's vision; between the texture of the rest of The Grass is Singing and the first three novels. Martha's dream of a four-gated city jars with the quality of writing of Martha Quest, but it integrates in the richly woven fabric of The Four-Gated City.

In Landlocked and The Four-Gated City Lessing is encouraging the reader to transcend reality and explore the realm of greater reality. Quotes from the Sufis motivate the reader to elevate his thoughts onto this higher plane. Dreams become significant as messages from the other dimension. In Landlocked Martha dreams of the sea and of Thomas's forthcoming death. In this way Lessing introduces her theme of extra-sensory perception:

> Martha's dreams, always a faithful watchdog, or record, of what was going on, obligingly provided her with an image of her position.
>
> (p.20)

Not only does Lessing point to the importance of dreams, she also attempts to create a dream-like quality in the flow of her prose:

> They were alone under the trees that seemed to stand above the music and the movements of people like plants growing out of water.
>
> (p.151)

The Parklands Hotel incident is one of the highpoints of the novel. Lessing presents a drunken party and, by blurring the edges of reality to simulate the effects of drink, gives a sense of the free merging of images in a vision of integration. The vision seems more real than surface reality: Martha, for example, sees her hand as a beak or claw, symbolic of her guilt as a child of violence.

In the first novels Lessing is primarily concerned with puncturing illusions and this demands a pin pricking approach. It reaches extremes in the minutes of the communist party meetings. Now she focuses on a less tangible world, using symbols as evocative signposts.

Landlocked has as its backdrop the years immediately after the war but, despite Victory Day, Lessing makes one aware that war has not ended. Violence spills over into fighting in Greece and Israel and the rise of black consciousness anticipates future violence in Africa. The strike may be futile but it is important as a beginning. In another way the violence has not ended. The man responsible, the Sergeant Tressell who forms a part of everyone, continues his blind way.

Nevertheless, the novel ends on a note of anticipated freedom. The group has disintegrated and Martha is leaving for England. Zambesia is seen as the imprisoning circle Martha is stepping out of, and England holds the promise of escape from the circle of inevitability. As Martha and Jasmine go their separate ways they are contrasted with the new group, their younger selves, who are continuing the circle.

THE FOUR-GATED CITY (1969)

The Four-Gated City is a novel that opens out on either end. The reader drifts into London with Martha and floats out at the end, conscious of the freedom of possibilities for the human race. The novel can be divided into three sections. The first section focuses on Martha, the drifter, freely wandering London, retaining her right to choose a way of life. Section Two examines Martha trapped in the house, involved in the problems of the inhabitants, problems which are both Martha's problems and the problems of the twentieth-century world. Section Three is a collection of letters and documents describing the Catastrophe and suggesting that, like the phoenix from the ashes, a new free world is to be born out of the destruction.

Lessing's divisions differ, coinciding with fluctuations in mood. Each part opens on a note of change. One cannot pinpoint the moment of change but, somehow, between one part and the next, the atmosphere has altered. Lessing is trying to recreate in the reader the feeling dominant in a participant of the age. Things have surreptitiously changed, but how and when?

> When a very bad time is over there is no moment when one can say: this is it, now it's finished. In an atmosphere where everything is slow, dark, sluggish, where every event is soaked in suspicion and dislike and fear then suddenly there intrudes an event of a different quality. But one looks at it with distrust, distrust being one's element at the time, like being deep under filthy water. The river suddenly floats down flowers - but you wouldn't dream of touching them, they are probably poisoned, a trap. [19]

Because the novel contains a wealth of detail, a summary will show the lines of its development which tends to be lost in Lessing's attempt to embrace everything relevant to twentieth-century life.

Part One

This stretches from Martha's arrival in London to Sally-Sarah's death, ending with the words:

> Mark said: "I think it's going to be a bad time." It was already a bad time, all muddle and misery and suspicion and doubt.
>
> (p.164)

This incident is significant, not because one is particularly absorbed in Sally-Sarah but because the act is a bad omen; like the newspaper article that ends Part Four announcing that one man has been a victim of an R.A.F. gas explosion. Both incidents are "ripples in the storm".

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[19] Doris Lessing, The Four-Gated City (St. Albans: Panther, 1972), p.304.

Part Two

A bad time in the world coincides with upheaval in the house and Martha's personal crisis. This part concentrates on Martha's near breakdown on the arrival of Mrs Quest. Mother and daughter, chafing against the bond that ties them, fray each other's nerves. The visit climaxes on Martha's decision to expel her mother through Dr Lamb, and Mrs Quest's simultaneous denouncement of Martha. The bond broken, Martha is free. This unnatural separation of mother and child symbolically anticipates the interruption of the circle of inevitability. The background to Martha's disintegration is world disintegration:

> The bad time continued. It was expressed in a number of separate events, or processes, in this or that part of the world, whose common quality was horror; and a senseless horror ...
> ... The war in Korea was at the height of its danger for the world ... Throughout Africa various countries fought in various ways against the white men, but in Kenya there was a full-scale war, both sides (as in Korea) fighting with a maximum of nastiness and lies.
>
> (p.218)

This suggests the relationship between the individual and the environment. Martha is not isolated in her bad patch. Her breakdown is, for example, reflected in Patty Samuels.

Part Three

> 1956, as everyone knows, was a climactic year, a water-shed, a turning point, a cross-roads; ... now, looking back, the people who lived through it say, for the sake of speed and easy understanding: 1956, and what is conveyed is the idea of change, breaking up, clearing away, movement.
>
> (pp.303-304)

The period is essentially one of growth and its corollary, rebellion. The children are growing up and, in accordance with a revolution of the wheel, are rebelling against the older generation, Martha, Mark and Phoebe, just as Martha, when young, rebelled against her elders. Action in the house is once more mirroring action in the world. Just as the Hungarians are rebelling against their Russian masters, so the young are demanding their individual rights.

The section climaxes in an act of rebellion, the Aldermaston March, to put an end to nuclear weapons and war. The march is, in general, a protest against twentieth-century life; the individual asserting his right to choose a way of life and not have it imposed upon him by external powers. "Caroline says No" (p.423). The Aldermaston March is a journey associated with Martha's quest: a movement towards freedom.

The part ends with a discussion of the relative ineffectuality of the individual. Does it matter if Caroline says no? The name is that of Martha's child, and Caroline wheeling a baby as Martha did in A Proper Marriage can be seen as a younger version of Martha. What Lessing is saying is: Does it matter if Martha says no? How relevant is Martha's quest? Or, to take the idea further: How relevant is Lessing's statement of Martha's quest?

Brandon: I come here. I make a statement: Things stink in the States. You're doing us and yourselves a disservice by ignoring it. That's a statement. It could breed other statements, people who say things stink, etc. But then what. Do you see? The stating of it exhausts the possibilities ...

Martha: It's like Jimmy. He writes books about telepathy and so on - now its mutants. But having made the statement that's it ...

Lynda: Yes, but you take something for granted - where do the ideas come from? ... it's everywhere - all around you if you can look, from the Bible to poetry to every edition of every newspaper or if it comes to that how one is oneself ...

Brandon: And there's this room. What makes you think that stating it doesn't exhaust what you can do? ...

Lynda: I don't know if it 'is' just stating. Because you assume that to think something is the end of that - a thought being self-contained an end ... - because whether thought, or idea is ended, in this room - which is how you see it; or goes out - changes other thoughts, the way I see it, it's still if you like "stating a problem". The only way that would be of some use would be, not just throwing a pebble into a pool anyhow, so that ripples go out, but one doesn't know how, but knowing how to throw it is so that the ripples go out exactly as one foresaw. Do you see? ... You can watch a thought in your head. You see the impulse that starts it. Then the thought trickles across your mind, strongly or weakly according to the strength of the first impulse. But the impulse needn't necessarily have bred that particular thought. Perhaps it could have bred another thought.

(pp.456-458)

Lessing presents the argument in Mark's study, a room which is an integrated statement of the world. Lynda is spokesman for the concept of integration. Thoughts flow from one person to another. Martha and Lynda's ability to hear thoughts is a literal demonstration of the way in which ideas travel. An individual's protest sends out ripples and may evolve or change

form so as to become effectual. In this way Martha's quest is related to the final saving of the world. In this way Lessing hopes to make a positive contribution, not only to the world of literature, but to the world. She is not just stating, but stating to cause a reaction. She regards literature not as closed but as open, flowing over into life and having life flow through it.

While Part Three contains the optimism of the early sixties, Part Four expresses the pessimism of the succeeding years.

Part Four

Part Four opens with children and parents grown up. Martha is only now mature enough to continue the next and most important phase of her quest, and this part focuses on Martha's explorations in a realm beyond that of reality. The Aldermaston March becomes the "Way of the Devil"; the outer journey makes way for the inner one.

Once Martha has reached a degree of self-knowledge, which corresponds with self-integration, the walls of the house crumble. The family scatters; Mark and Rita go to Africa in search of a dream city. Rita has become fused into the family as wife of Mark, an attempt on Lessing's part to integrate Martha's African past with her London present; to integrate the African political situation with the general turbulence in the world; and to integrate the older generation with the younger.

The movement to North Africa, made possible by a financier who foresees the need to build a new world, suggests a crumbling of the old world. The Catastrophe, although an accident, is nevertheless an inevitable result of the modern way of life. Lessing's villain is not the traditional malicious destroyer who presses the nuclear button, but the careless Sergeant Tressell who causes a gas leak. Carelessness and the inability of a fragmented world to communicate and co-ordinate must lead to destruction. Martha's developing awareness of her guilt as a member of society combines with the signs of the times to create in Part Four a snowballing sense that mankind is doomed. The house is to be demolished.

The final direct glimpse of Martha and the family is caught at the farewell party. Fragments of society are gathered at Margaret's house. This suggests the diverse nature of the world, giving the impression of "things falling apart". When the family leaves, Martha, isolated at the end of the garden, experiences frustration at the limitations, which like the planet doom her:

> She walked beside the river while the music thudded, feeling herself as a heavy, impervious, insensitive lump that, like a planet doomed always to be dark on one side, had vision in front only, a myopic searchlight blind except for the tiny three-dimensional path open immediately before her eyes in which the outline of a tree, a rose, emerged then submerged in dark.
>
> (p.607)

She is an isolated exile figure standing in paradisiacal surroundings, searching for paradise: "Where? But where. How? Who?" The answer to Martha's question is all around her: "Here, where else, you fool, you poor fool, where else

has it been, ever ...?" (p.607).

This portion of the novel employing third person narration ends ambiguously with the answer given appropriately in terms of a question. Does Martha experience a revelation which releases for her the secrets of her surroundings; or does she merely resign herself to the knowledge that, although the answers are around her, she is unable to penetrate the surface reality to reach the entire truth; or is she tantalised by a partial understanding that the answer is "here" but that it eludes her: "Where? Here. Here?" Lessing is deliberately teasing the reader with the truth, so that, like Martha, he catches glimpses of it but is unable to pin it down.

The moment in the garden is juxtaposed with the ominous report of the gas leak which suggests another interpretation of Martha's words. Perhaps, she has foreseen the future and the rest of the novel is an expanding of her garden vision. The intensely personal is thrown into relief by the impersonal report. Again Lessing is trying to achieve a balance between the individual and the world, the specific and the general. Although she never meets Mr Cockayne, his tragedy affects Martha. In this way Lessing again demonstrates the interrelationship of all in the world.

The Appendix

Lessing takes a surprising leap into the future, presenting a realistic description of the end of the old world and the beginning of the new. The appendix seems an externalisation of Martha's inner action: breakdown that leads to re-creation. She chooses letters and official

documents to give the stamp of realism to convince a sceptical public. Up till now she has explored the past; now she is predicting the future but by presenting it as if it, too, were the past. One has the sense that these are snippets of letters and documents discovered after the event. In this way she adds verisimilitude to what could easily be the bizarre, encouraging her reader to suspend disbelief. She also manages to defuse the sensationalism of the Catastrophe by distancing it in the perspective of the past and filtering information through several sources. One cannot identify too closely with any particular individual. The lack of sensationalism gives a sense of integrity to the events, and prevents the appendix from being more than an appendix and throwing the novel off balance. Perspective is the key word. The Catastrophe is only part of the pattern of the world, and has to be handled as dispassionately as possible in order to keep the poise of the novel and the series. The world is not suddenly destroyed, "it falls apart" and the entire series is about the crumbling. The Catastrophe is just the pulverisation of the final brick. The end is "not with a bang but a whimper": [12] the new beginning is not a resurrection but the result of an evolutionary process that has been continuing throughout Martha's life span and for millions of years before that. The event for Lessing is not important, the process is. In other words, the quest is of prime significance.

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[12] T S Eliot, "The Hollow Men", Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber, 1974), p.87.

The Four-Gated City is set mostly in London, because London is the generator of twentieth-century life, though in essence London is not so different from Zambesia. Oxford Street does not differ so much from Oxford Hills. By puncturing the colonialist's illusion of Home, Lessing is putting the finishing touches to her ripping apart of the great colonial dream. A chamber pot on the statue of Rhodes in Martha Quest is part of Lessing's demolition process that ends with Martha's disappointment on seeing Piccadilly Circus, the reality of the legendary heart of the Commonwealth. Just as Martha finds the town as claustrophobic as the farm, so she finds in England the same characteristics as Zambesia. In each instance she moves to a larger, commonly regarded as less isolated, place only to find that even this broader circle has its limitations. The shadow of the farm that holds Martha in the palm of its hand stretches overseas. Even Mrs Quest does not find this too great a distance to prevent her interfering in her daughter's life. One begins to see the whole world as a prison, as a multi-storeyed house which has to be demolished for the prisoners to find a way through its walls to freedom.

Initially Martha, wary of immersion in conditioned ways of life, slips from circle to circle: the harbour world, Iris and Jimmy's "Fish and Chips", a brief lunch hour in Henry Maynard's middle class society. She refuses to become trapped in any group and the novel opens with Martha extricating herself from the claims of Iris and Jimmy. Instead, she joins the tide, eddying through the London streets. Liquid imagery is used to describe Martha's London quest, an extraordinary quest because she is going nowhere.

London is seen as a divided city, fragmented by invisible social barriers and their corresponding sets of rules. Martha walks from one part of the city to the next, integrating the separate worlds in her consciousness. Iris's world and Henry's world have one common factor: Martha. The same movement takes place in the house when she moves from room to room. Martha can blend into all these worlds, which indicates that there are various sides to her character, each coming to the fore under different circumstances. Consequently her movement through London, and through the house, is an outer movement which reflects an inner exploration of, and an attempt to integrate the different facets of her personality. Stripped deliberately of home, family, friends, Martha can see herself. These fragments are represented by the various names she chooses:

> Something (a sense of self-preservation?) could not tolerate much longer her walking and riding and talking the time away under this name or that, this disguise or that; calling strange identities into being with a switch of clothes or a change of voice - until one felt like an empty space without boundaries and it did not matter what name one gave a stranger who asked: What is your name? Who are you?
>
> (p.28)

Martha is free until she makes her choice. She is in limbo and cannot remain unclaimed for long. The irony about the relationship between choice and freedom is that the moment choice is made, any choice, some degree of freedom is surrendered. She is given the choice to select her prison and her only freedom is in the choosing.

Jack is a symbol of the free life, but Martha chooses to turn her back on this life. After her experience with Jack, Martha walks into Mark's house, abandoning Jack's total

freedom for some degree of commitment. She is placed in the position of caring for others. Jack, like Thomas, is an absolute while Martha is a moderate.

The house is an enlarged symbol and objective correlative of Martha's individual consciousness, and at the same time a microcosm of the world. Not only are its inhabitants representatives of different factions of the world but there is a continual stream of colourful people in and out of the house.

While Martha is telescoped into the house, the world is funnelled into it, and the house becomes an integrating symbol, blending the individual with the general, Martha with the world. It becomes impossible to separate the two. Lessing is not just propounding her theory of integration but showing it. Consequently, one may say that Martha does not emerge as central to The Four-Gated City but as one of many characters on a vast canvas. And yet she seems to grow to enclose the entire novel: all the other characters are Martha and the action of the book is Martha's internal action. External and internal action are fused in the symbol of the house, which makes clear the relationship of the individual consciousness with the general:

> She went up the stairs, through a house separated with the people who inhabited it, into areas or climates, each with its own feel, or sense of individuality: Mark's rooms, unmistakable, even with one's eyes shut, even with sound shut off, because of their atmosphere of something closed in, enduring, stubborn; Francis's room, which was kept as it had been for years - a boy's room, with cricket bats and butterflies in cases; Martha's room, inside the sycamore's microclimate which acted like a room-stat, adjusting from outside the house rather than in, setting the flow of air, moisture, heat, light; then Paul's area. But even the flight of stairs that approached Paul's floor emanated electric storm, for here not even silence, or sleep could be the quiet of peace ... For, approaching Paul one needed this degree of attention; approaching Francis, that one; and for Lynda and for Mark, quite different switches or gauges set themselves going, but automatically ...
> And, standing here, feeling herself (or rather, the surface of herself) to be a mass of fragments, or facets, or bits of mirror reflecting qualities embodied in other people, she looked at the ascending stairs, much narrower and steeper here than lower in the house, and at the edges of each stair, and noted that the carpet needed renewing ...
> All the house was like this, nothing obviously breaking or peeling, but everywhere was shoddiness and shabbiness, and there seemed to be no centre in the house, nothing to hold it together (as there had been once when it was a real family house?)
> It was all a mass of small separate things, surfaces, shapes, all needing different attention, different kinds of repair.
> This was the condition of being a middle-aged person, a deputy in the centre of the house, ...
> This was the real truth of what went on not only here but everywhere; everything declined and frayed and came to pieces in one's hands ... a mass of fragments, like a smashed mirror.
>
> (pp.365-366) (my underlining)

The mirror image, introduced in Martha Quest, is thus developed in The Four-Gated City.

Lynda, in the basement, is the character who most fascinates Martha and Lessing, and is another of the characters, too weak to be a guide, who points out to Martha the vague direction in which to travel. A woman who cannot bear the responsibility of ties she, like Martha, wants escape from day to day reality. She is seeking for a weakness in the walls. On first introduction Lynda is dismissed by the reader as insane, but as Martha becomes engrossed in Lynda's mental wanderings, the question "What is insanity?" is posed. Lynda is gifted with extra-sensory perception but, unable to be understood by humanity, is subjected to shock treatments and medication. The careless Sergeant Tressell is held responsible for Lynda's inability to come to terms with her supernatural power. Lynda is different and Lessing is hitting at the society that insists on categorising, that regards all variants as abnormal rather than supernatural. As a result of the damage done by those who claim to cure, Lynda is a fragmented, ineffectual being unable to use her talents to advance mankind, unable to communicate. This attack on methods of psychological treatment is continued in Briefing for a Descent into Hell.

Lynda cannot explain her trip. Martha can write it down because she can record and communicate. Not only does Lessing regard the experience as important, but also the communication of that experience. Through communication the individual is integrated with the general.

Martha's conscious quest, her inner journey in the land where sanity and insanity merge, is her most important quest. Lessing's imagery points continually to the quest motif. Areas of Martha's mind tend to be referred to as lands, and her exploration climaxes with "the Stations of the Devil".

> Bosch country. If I could paint, and I painted this I would be a forger ... This is a Dali landscape ...
>
> (p.557)

Martha's experience can be summed up as a revelation of integration. She plugs in to a general consciousness and feels the world flow through her. Martha and the world cannot be divided. She is, therefore, made to suffer for the world. Bearing its guilt, she walks to the cross. This reminds one of her dream of Thomas walking to his execution. It is also an image of Christ who similarly suffered for the sins of the world. However Martha's spiritual guide is not Christ but the devil. And her spiritual journey is the "Stations of the Devil" not the Cross.

What Lessing seems to be suggesting is that an understanding of goodness can only be reached through an understanding of evil. Reward can only be given after the purgation of punishment. Martha has to be led by the devil to meet her "God". In order to hope one must suffer the hopelessness of the "Stations of the Devil". The world has to be destroyed in order to be saved. Martha has to explore herself as an individual in order to integrate with the community. What one is left with is a set of opposites; not

contradictions, but complements. The resolution of the novel lies in the reconciliation of opposites, only possible if one breaks down the walls between categories and experiences the flow of one concept into another. The difficulty in trying to pin down Martha's quest is that Martha is seeking not to be pinned down. She wants the freedom attained through the balance of apparent contradictions. So the reader reaches the point where he cannot pigeon-hole an elusive Martha, but sees her standing poised between black and white. Martha's quest is "to connect":

> A lightning flash is only a spark which bridges cloud and earth or cloud and cloud. But in order for this spark to happen, one place must be negatively charged and the other positively charged.
>
> (p.301)

The dedication to The Four-Gated City is a Dervish teaching story showing that things do not exist when separated. Reality is integration, while separation is illusion.

The quotations leading into each part are all chosen to illustrate fragmentation and integration. All aspects of life are seen as connected: earth, water, air and fire are linked in her notes from a school textbook. And all theories, she suggests, are connected. From a school's broadcast, from the Master Rumi of Balkh, from the Sufis she gleans the same information: that an organ comes into being as a result of a need for a specific organ.

Martha's dream of an harmonious four-gated city is resurrected in Mark's imagination, further emphasising that Mark is a part of Martha. His communist activities and growing idealism are a constant reminder of the younger Martha. He writes his book about the perfect city destroyed

by the "encircling shadow city of people who looked enviously in at the privileged one" (p.151). The secret of the inner city cannot be bought, it has to be earned. The shadow city resembles the world which is just a shadow and illusion. This is the desert wilderness while the original city is the Eden from which mankind has been expelled. The world, longing for perfection, ransacks the city but perfection is elusive. The people are gone and their secret with them. The octagonal room may be found, but the new inhabitants do not have the code to release its mystery.

The four-gated city dream approaches realisation when the miracle children are born, when dream and reality fuse. Brought up in natural surroundings without modern conveniences, the children are also reminiscent of natural man of the past. Once more man grows up under the elm tree. Joseph, like Thomas, is a gardener. He is a mixture of black and white. Lessing does not point the connection but, if corruption overran the legendary cities of the past, is not the future four-gated city similarly doomed? Has mankind escaped the circle of inevitability or is this merely another revolution of a larger circle? The question is: How positive is Lessing? Fluctuating between hope and despair, she herself is not sure of her standpoint. One has a sense of a woman wanting to hope but tending to despair:

> ... we are left with two opposed interpretations: the last sceptical words of Mark, the worn-out idealist who can only ask what point there has ever been, or the faith in the future of the race and the possibility that its most highly evolved members and envisioned 'people from the sun' may yet build a new earth carried on after Martha by his son Francis. [21]

The heroine of the series dies unobtrusively. Her death is irrelevant because, as an integral part of the world, she continues to live on in the new era. Martha's quest is not over but continues in a different form as humanity strains towards freedom. Thus the novel remains open-ended. The individual becomes part of the general consciousness, and the single voice of the narrator becomes a chorus of voices as different narrators bring the novel to a close.

From Martha Quest to The Four-Gated City one can trace an expansion in range, as Lessing attempts both breadth and depth of vision, variety and intensity. In the form of the traditional "bildüngsroman" she is trying to include as wide a spectrum of life as she can and, at the same time, to sink shafts down through illusion into reality. She moves from reporting to prophecy, determined not only to explore to the horizon but to investigate beyond the horizon into "that hinterland to the imagination we cannot do without". [22] The series is an attempt to chart the history of the twentieth-century world. As such it tends towards "non-fiction". But it is also a search for an eternal reality that exists beneath the surface of external reality:

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[21] Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa (London: Evans, 1978), p.85.

[22] Doris Lessing, Martha Quest, p.9.

> ... this close to the series is itself an opening into the new country of 'inner space fiction' that Lessing was about to explore in later works ... [23]

Robert Scholes comments on Lessing's development as a writer:

> What, then, is one to make of the conclusion of her five-volume chronicle of the life of Martha Quest, Children of Violence, which in the last pages of the last volume calmly moves into the future, after the atomic catastrophe, and accepts as realities various kinds of extra-sensory perception which are forbidden to realism by our current standards of scientific probability? What indeed? My reading of Ms Lessing's move into the future is a simple one. She has moved with the times and sees that the future is the only lever with which we can hope to nudge the present in a better direction - which is what Stapleton saw, what Orwell saw, what Wells saw, what Huxley saw, and what the best contemporary writers of science fiction also see. Robert Coover once wrote that we must use "the fabulous to probe beyond the phenomenological, beyond appearances, beyond randomly perceived events, beyond mere history. What Doris Lessing has discovered and I honour her for it, is that we must use the future in precisely the same way as a probe into the truth of the present." [24]

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[23] Michael Thorpe, Doris Lessing's Africa, p.86.

[24] Robert Scholes, "Structural Fabulation. An Essay on Fiction of the Future", Lectures in English Language and Literature (London: University of Notre Dame, 1975), pp.23-24.

THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK (1962)

The Golden Notebook is, like The Children of Violence series, an examination of the individual consciousness and its relation to the general. It is a study of Anna Wulf and her world:

> Whereas, before, her reading had been to form a picture of what was taking place all over the world; now a form of order familiar to her had disappeared. It seemed as if her mind had become an area of differing balances, she was balancing facts, events, against each other. It was not a question of a sequence of events, with their probable consequences. It was as if she, Anna, were a central point of awareness, being attacked by a million unco-ordinated facts, and the central point would disappear if she proved unable to weigh and balance the facts, take them all into account. [1]

The novel is about Anna's attempts to weigh and balance the facts, taking them all into account, about her efforts to re-define herself in relation to the outside pressures that are pressing inward, threatening her with self-disintegration. She has to remould herself so as to accommodate the world because her old shape, which was designed to enclose her from the chaos, is crumbling: "Now a form of order familiar to her had disappeared" (p.623).

However, this statement also describes the reader's dilemma when approaching The Golden Notebook: "a form of order familiar to her had disappeared". Form has not disappeared but familiar form has:

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[1] Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (London: Panther, 1973), p.623.

> But my major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a worldless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped.
>
> (p.14)

Instead of "a sequence of events, with their probable consequences", one has Anna, "a central point of awareness, being attacked by a million unco-ordinated facts" (p.623). The impression is one of unleashed chaos. The reader does not have his sense of security re-inforced by a neatly presented picture of the world that organises and thereby limits the energies, destructive and creative, of mankind. Instead, he is disturbed by an attempt to define chaos in a way that conveys it rather than contains it, by an attempt to name on another level. Anna commends Saul for his ability to name Molly "on a level that would please her if she heard it" (p.533). Anna, therefore, does not condemn the process of naming. What she does condemn is naming on a level that limits reality by presenting only one facet of a complex whole:

> Why aren't you angry? You ought to be - I'm naming you, Saul Green, and I'm naming you on such a low level that you ought to be angry. You should be ashamed, at the age of thirty-three, to be sitting there taking this kind of banal over-simplification from me.
>
> (pp.561-562)

Saul's description (p.533) would please Molly because it is approaching truth. And that is what Lessing is doing in this novel: naming on a level that is as true to reality as she can get. She is trying to come to terms with a vision of life

through a novel that expands into reality and, by evolving this new form, she is exposing the faults of a shape that crams and distorts a twentieth-century reality to fit into a glass slipper:

> To put the short novel 'Free Women' as a summary and condensation of all that mass of material, was to say something about the conventional novel, another way of describing the dissatisfaction of a writer when something is finished: "How little I have managed to say of the truth, how little I have caught of all that complexity; how can this small neat thing be true when what I experienced was so rough and apparently formless and unshaped."
>
> (p.14) (my underlining)

Lessing is shattering the reader's expectations and challenging him to adapt to the new form. Like Anna, with whom he is invited to identify, he is presented with a quest: to re-define himself in accordance with the "million uncoordinated facts" (p.623) of life; to hear:

> ... I blacked out and revisited my nightmare where I knew, but really knew, how war waited, me running down the emptied street of white dirtied buildings in a silent city but filled with human beings silent with waiting, while somewhere close the small, ugly container of death exploded, soft, soft, it exploded into the waiting silence, spread death, crumbling the buildings, breaking the substance of life, disintegrating the structure of flesh, while I screamed, soundless, no one hearing, just as all the other human beings in the silent buildings screamed, no one hearing.
>
> (p.606) (my underlining)

The novel consists of a "frame" called "Free Women", which is, according to Lessing, a "conventional short novel" that "could stand by itself". [2] This description is misleading. Firstly, the novel is not enclosed and does not have a frame. "Free Women" can be seen as a false, deliberately transparent attempt at framing, designed so that one can see through the imposed order to the chaos beneath. Secondly, the short novel does not stand by itself and, therefore, is not conventional. Because of the pressure of the diaries, the shape of "Free Women" changes. The reader, acutely aware of Anna's personal conflicts, can see the characters in perspective against a chasm. Their petty arguments, trivial conversation, day to day banality, acquire meaning when seen as an attempt to ward off, ignore or contain the threatening chaos. Through understanding Anna one begins to understand the other characters, and see their games and illusions as pathetically ineffectual attempts to defend themselves on "The Frontiers of War". One approaches them from a different angle, interpreting not what they are saying but querying why they are saying it. In "Free Women" Molly phones Anna:

> "And how about your American?"
> "Well I had an affair with him."
> "Not the most sensible thing you ever did,
> I should have thought."
> Anna laughed.
>
> (p.637)

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[2] Doris Lessing, Preface, The Golden Notebook, p.7.

Anna has been waiting for this conversational formula to "button up" and contain her confusing relationship:

> "I'm ringing Molly. She'll say: How's your American? I'll say: I'm having an affair with him. An affair - that's the word. I always did love that word, so sophisticated and debonair! Well, and she'll say: That's not the most sensible thing you ever did in your life? I'll say no. That'll button this one up."
>
> (p.602)

When Anna and Molly talk intimate gossipy girl chat, it is an attempt to defuse their experiences by transferring and, thereby, transmuting them on to a level they understand. Richard and Marion's marriage break-up is rendered harmless in the line: "He wouldn't say what it's about - another crisis with Marion, I suppose" (p.25). The word "another" mocks "crisis", reshaping it as a melodramatic word, while the casual words "I suppose" add to a sense that the matter is really unimportant. The crisis, she is implying, does not affect their lives. The underlying irony is that it does. The conversation continues:

> "Both he and Marion wrote - ever such 'bonhomous' letters. Odd isn't it?" This 'odd isn't it?' was the characteristic note of the intimate conversations they designated gossip.
>
> (p.25)

The complexity of the individuals, Richard and Marion, is limited to the phrase, "odd isn't it?", which being a habit of expression lends an element of security to the unknown. The phrase is repeated at the end of the final conversation with Molly:

> A small silence. "It's all very odd, isn't it Anna?"
> "Very."
>
> (p.638)

Again they are using language to contain, but the onrush of the book, of their experiences, is so powerful that "odd, isn't it?" is washed away in the tide, becoming a mockery of an enclosing comment, of a closed ending. Instead of affording security, the habit of talking is exposed as ludicrously ineffectual when seen in perspective against chaos. Similarly, the book opens with "too neat" a summing up statement, which is an obvious attempt on Anna's part to crystallise what cannot be crystallised. She is trying to protect herself from the disintegration by making clever, glib comments about the chaos. This is not Lessing's level of naming, and the success of the book lies in the fact that it does not fit that initial opening statement:

> "The point is," said Anna, as her friend came back from the telephone on the landing, "the point is, that as far as I can see, everything's cracking up."
>
> (p.25)

The novel is too large; it cannot be summed up in a statement of theme which would satisfy a conventional closed novel. Instead, the closest one can get to what the novel is about is this:

> "Men. Women. Bound. Free. Good. Bad. Yes. No. Capitalism. Socialism. Sex. Love..."
>
> (p.63)

As with Children of Violence Lessing opens by presenting her characters objectively from a distance. From the stance of dramatic observer the narrator zooms in and the narration becomes third person. The zoom-in process continues until, with first person narration, the focus is on the individual. The process is inverted at the close. The reader is gradually distanced from Anna and the final line, "The two women kissed and separated" (p.638), parallels the opening line, "The two women were alone in the London flat" (p.25). The overall effect is a balancing of the individual and the general. These are two women, any two women, and the reader is given a privileged glimpse into their lives and characters. In the process he realises their uniqueness. They are not any two women; they are Anna and Molly. At the end the narrator leads the reader away from them and they become, once again, any two women. This is the appearance which is undercut by the reader's knowledge of reality, of the hundreds of details that constitute the special nature of each person.

The effect of the narration is also to open and close the novel without opening and closing Anna's experiencing life. The reader is allowed an intimate glimpse into their world which he enters cautiously, tiptoeing from third person into first. And it is his visit that starts and ends, not their experiences. Consequently, the initial effect is of the reader walking into action that is already in process:

> "The point is," said Anna, as her friend came back from the telephone....
>
> (p.25)

One has the sense of conversation continuing. Similarly, at the end the women carry on with their everyday routine while the reader leaves. This feeling of continuity, of a life before and after its existence as fiction, meshes the novel into reality.

The relative objectivity of the third person narration is juxtaposed to the relative subjectivity of the first person. The reader has two pictures of Anna: Anna as the narrator sees her and Anna as she sees herself, which is an accumulated impression from all the diaries.

The difference between the two Annas is made obvious by factual discrepancy designed to make the reader query the reliability of both narrations. For example, the I-Anna's affair with Saul is shown in "Free Women" as a more superficial experience, a fleeting relationship with an American named Milt. The reader is also alert to the use of diaries. Saul and Anna have not always been using them as records of personal experience, but as weapons in the experience. His diary is designed to taunt her, and the reader, like Anna, is left confused, not knowing how much of the diary is true feelings and how much what he wants Anna to believe he feels, the image he wishes to project. This is the same dilemma the reader faces when reading Anna's diaries.

On the other hand, the third person narrator may be reliable insofar as he will not distort facts, but he is limited. Anna's inner reality, her private response to the world, is not explored by him. Yet, as Lessing equates limitations with falseness, one may question this narrator's reliability. He is only presenting half the story. The

question is posed: What is reality? If it is made up of facts, then it matters that Saul is actually Milt. Or does the reality lie in the response: Anna responds to a man in such a way that she experiences breakdown. Whether the man exists or not, or in what form he exists, is irrelevant. What does matter is that within a certain fictional dimension he takes form (her diary), and his relationship with a fictional Anna (her self-image) suggests a truth about the real world.

The manipulation of narration is one facet of a technique through which Lessing is deliberately blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. The reader is supposed to be confused, to doubt his own ability to organise information and make neat divisions between what is real and what is not. The play on names is designed to trick. Ella's son, Paul, has the name of Anna's lover, Paul, and the name Paul reminds one of fictitious Anna's lover, Saul. Even the names Anna and Ella are simultaneously similar and different. One has a fleeting impression of similarity which, on investigation, proves false. One associates Paul with both Anna and Ella but, on pausing, has to make a conscious and constant effort to remember that he is the son of the one and lover of the other. The result is confusion between the different levels of fiction and, ultimately, between fiction and reality. Lessing thereby creates an impression of the relative nature of fiction. The reader cannot hold onto reality because in this novel it is a shifting concept. In comparison with Ella, Anna is real until the reader is invited to take a step back and see Anna as a fictitious creation, no more alive than her own creation, Ella. The reader is

constantly moving in and out among the layers of illusion, so that one moment he is seeing the book from within as reality and the next he is allowed the perspective of seeing it as a multiple illusion. What he thought existed is actually a mirage. This is Lessing's comment on life. When involved in it, it seems real; when examining it in perspective as a whole, the world is an illusion.

Lessing is not just describing chaos; she is, by disturbing the reader's definitions, throwing him into chaos. She seems to be teaching in the manner of a Dervish teaching story.

Instability is a key concept in the novel. In describing Anna one can define her only in terms of what she is not. Tommy's words echo Anna's feelings: "I know what I don't want, but not what I do want" (p.56). Anna is not Richard. Richard is important as a constant, a relatively static character with congealed values:

> "I preserve the forms," said Richard ...
>
> "Yes darling, we know you do," ...
>
> (p.46)

The function of the first chapter is to give an essentially negative description of Anna and her values by indicating how she attacks Richard's world. The two ways of life are compared implicitly and explicitly by Tommy, who has to make the choice. But, in fact, there are not two ways of life; there is one, Richard's,and Tommy has the choice whether to accept it or free himself from it. Molly and Anna's claim

to freedom comes, not because of what they represent but because of what they reject: false form. To define them as free women is in fact not defining them at all. They wish to be free from definition. That is why Lessing objects to a women's liberation interpretation of the novel:

> But this novel was not a trumpet for Women's Liberation. It described many female emotions of aggression, hostility, resentment. It put them into print. Apparently what many women were thinking, feeling, experiencing, came as a great surprise.
>
> (p.9)

Women's liberation and The Golden Notebook may have a common source, the impulse to release the feminine reality from the feminine image. But to identify Anna and Molly with a movement is to strait-jacket them and limit their freedom, to judge them according to the expectations and values of the movement. And Anna and Molly are not to be judged but accepted for what they are. They are fighting for this freedom.

In The Turn of the Novel Alan Friedman says that in the works of D H Lawrence the open-ended quality relates to a "new conception of character":

> "You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego," Lawrence insists. "The effect of the book," Virginia Woolf notes critically, "is that stability is never reached." Can we draw at once the apparent connection between a new conception of character - the unstable ego - and a new conception of form - the unstable novel? [3]

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[3] Alan Friedman, The Turn of the Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.131.

Like Lawrence's characters Anna Wulf is not consistently conceived because she does not exist within a definite moral scheme. She is as fragmented as the world around her, a fact made obvious by the need to accommodate the four Annas in the four diaries. But there are more than just four Annas. One is conscious of the fluctuating ego of a woman so sensitive to stimuli, to both her own thoughts and her environment, that she is constantly changing in response. Her relationship with Saul, for example, shows the jealous woman, the loving woman, the pitying woman, the hating woman, the understanding woman emerging in rapid succession:

18 A Short Story

> Same theme as Chekhov's 'The Darling'. But this time the woman doesn't change to suit different men, one after another; she changes in response to one man who is a psychological chameleon, so that in the course of a day she can be half a dozen different personalities, either in opposition to, or in harmony with him.
>
> (p.523)

Another example of Anna's malleability is shown in her description of a day ("The Blue Notebook"). She moves from being Michael's lover, to Janet's mother, to Comrade Anna:

> I shrink, in affection, to Janet's size, and become Janet ... Then I make myself be Anna: I see Janet, ... Now it is nearly eight o' clock and another pressure starts; ... The two personalities - Janet's mother, Michael's mistress, are happier separated ...
>
> (pp.330-332)

Anna's character is, therefore, an impression created by an accumulation of all her thoughts and responses, of all the fragments of her personality. That is why it is so important to see Anna in such a variety of situations, with such a variety of people and from such a variety of angles. Each incident does not, as in most novels, reinforce or predictably develop what one already knows about the character but re-shapes it. Many people wander in and out of Anna's life, but each one is significant insofar as he relates to and illuminates a different aspect of Anna.

> ... once I say that words like good/bad, strong/weak, are irrelevant, I am accepting amorality, and I do accept it the moment I start to write 'a story', 'a novel', because I simply don't care. All I care about is that I should describe Willi and Maryrose so that a reader can feel their reality. And after twenty years of living in and around the left, which means twenty years' preoccupation with this question of morality in art, that is all I am left with. So what I am saying is, in fact, that the human personality, that unique flame, is so sacred to me, that everything else becomes unimportant. Is that what I am saying? And if so, what does it mean?
>
> (p.89)

Although Anna is not Lessing, her approach to literature can be applied to the novel The Golden Notebook. The characters are not simplified through moral straitjacketing but allowed to express the complexity of their reality. The human personality is shown as a flame, flickering destructive energy, and the emphasis is on "unique". Each character is free to be himself and not "good/bad, strong/weak ...". Typical of Anna, she undercuts the certainty of her remarks with questions "Is that what I am saying? And if so what

does it mean?"

These questions evoke the tone of the entire novel: a sense that nothing is conclusive. When The Golden Notebook approaches a definite statement of any variety the tendency is to leave the idea open, often by Anna confessing uncertainty or contradicting it.

Anna's approach to life is significantly shaped as a question and not a statement: not "I will do that" but "So that's what I'm going to do, am I?" She may be a woman of extraordinary intelligence, but she drifts along with the tide in the lethargic manner of Martha. This peculiarly passive quality tends to characterise Lessing's heroines. Anna's mind interprets her actions but something else, instinct, possibly, rules.

The interpreting mind is the only consistent feature of Anna. She wishes to shape her experiences, but in such a way that the shape is as true to the experience as possible. What she is attempting through writing is equivalent to Martha's efforts to create order in Mark's many-roomed house. Therefore, although their professions are different, housekeeper and writer, Martha and Anna are in essence involved in the same quest: to find a meaning in life that does not limit the vision of life. The difference between her search for form and Richard's respect for form is that Anna is honest. She is not trying to pretend that the chaos does not exist, but is attempting to organise the chaos. And her honesty prevents her from succeeding. The notebooks flow into one another and finally end. They are more a reflection of formlessness than form, and Tommy's hysteria

and attempted suicide result more from the fact that Anna is unable to keep out the chaos than from the fact that she is categorising:

> I stood looking down out of the window. The street seemed miles down. Suddenly I felt as if I'd flung myself out of the window. I could see myself lying on the pavement. Then I seemed to be standing by the body on the pavement. I was two people. Blood and brains were scattered everywhere. I knelt down and began licking up the blood and brains.
>
> He looked at her, accusing, and Anna was silent. "When you had written that, you put heavy brackets around it. And then you wrote: I went to the shop and bought a pound and a half of tomatoes, half a pound of cheese, a pot of cherry jam, and a quarter of tea. Then I made a tomato salad and took Janet to the park for a walk."
> ... "Why did you put brackets around the first bit, about licking up the blood and brains?"
> ... you take care to divide yourself up into compartments. If things are a chaos, then that's what they are. I don't think there's a pattern anywhere - you are just making patterns, out of cowardice. I think people aren't good at all, they are cannibals, and when you get down to it no one cares about anyone else.
>
> (pp.271-273)

While she brackets off the expressions of violence in order to protect the everyday from the chaos, while she can be accused of cowardice, she is, nevertheless, more honest than the rest of her world, and braver. Richard would never acknowledge the chaos, as is shown by his attitude towards Marion. He peoples his world with glossy "nut brown maids" and, should they expose their messy humanity, gets rid of them. Anna is prepared to recognise not only "the war", but her own "nostalgia for war"; not only cannibalism, but her own desire to overthrow the order of the civilised world and revel in savagery.

Anna's "cowardice" prevents her from suicide, a bid to totally succumb to the chaos. If this step into chaos is what Lessing is advocating, Tommy would be presented as a more admirable character. Instead, his approach to life is immature and he is seen as a pathetic victim of twentieth-century existence, rather than a hero. The "heroine" is Anna who, despite her understanding of the nature of life, chooses to carry on living. Unlike Tommy who rushes rashly into the unknown, Anna cautiously attempts to come to terms with the forces of darkness and, in so doing, develops a strength that allows her to recreate herself in the throes of disintegration.

Tommy's suicide raises the question of the irresponsibility of Anna's diaries:

> "That's what I feel too - people aren't taking responsibility for each other ... You said that, didn't you - well then. But you write and write in notebooks, saying what you think about life, but you lock them up, and that's not being responsible."
>
> "A very great number of people would say that it was irresponsible to spread disgust. Or anarchy. Or a feeling of confusion."
>
> (p.59)

But, while the argument in favour of preserving form or not writing at all is interesting, it is superficial because it runs against the flow of the book. The entire book is an expression of chaos, which indicates the social responsibility to be, not to hide but to express and explore. Anna is condemned not for writing the diaries but for hiding them and she is excused by the fact that she is sharing them with the reader. So, while one can understand the sense of guilt and

shame which causes her to conceal her works and which she uses as an excuse for writer's block, one cannot condone her opinion. To do so would be to come to the sterile conclusion, reached through writing, that it is preferable not to write; and this would be tantamount to denying the book its existence.

The interesting aspect of Anna's "writer's block" is that her block is presented to the reader through her own writings. To name her dilemma not on the level of the "proper" world, but on the level of the book, Anna is not suffering from writer's block at all, but from an inability to write conventionally. Hers is a personal struggle against chaos which tends to approach deadlock, and to call this a "block" is misleading. She is moving forwards from the conventional novel Frontiers of War into a different dimension of writing, not back-tracking into stagnation. Her dilemma resembles Sam's in The Man who studied Yoga:

> Marvin asks Sam if he has given up his novel, and Sam says, "Temporarily". He cannot find a form, he explains. He does not want to write a realistic novel, because reality is no longer realistic. [4]

Not only does the act of writing indicate Anna's sense of responsibility, the responsibility of telling the truth; but her subject matter shows an acute awareness of her responsibility for the state of the world:

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[4] Norman Mailer, The Man who studied Yoga. Quoted by David Lodge "The Novelist at the Crossroads" in The Novel Today edited by Malcolm Bradbury (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p.84.

> It all turned into farce, flickering and grotesque, I was a character in my own play. I opened the box and forced them to look. But instead of a beautiful thing, which I thought would be there, there was a mass of fragments, and pieces. Not a whole thing, broken into fragments, but bits and pieces from everywhere, all over the world - I recognised a lump of red earth that I knew came from Africa, and then a bit of metal that came off a gun from Indo-China, and then everything was horrible, bits of flesh from people killed in the Korean War and a communist party badge off someone who died in a Soviet prison ... But the group of businessmen or money-people hadn't noticed ... At last I looked and I saw that there was something in the box. It was a small green crocodile with a winking sardonic snout. I thought it was the image of a crocodile, made of jade, or emeralds, then I saw it was alive, for large frozen tears rolled down its cheeks and turned into diamonds ...
> I saw myself in a shop window: a small, rather pale, dry, spiky woman, and there was a wry look on my face which I recognised as the grin on the snout of that malicious little green crocodile in the crystal casket of my dream.
>
> (pp.253-254)

In this dream Anna identifies with the crocodile which is a changing shape. The fragments of the world are transformed into an image of spite, a live crocodile, and the crocodile itself seems to solidify. Its tears become diamonds. The movement in the dream is from formlessness towards solidity. The horror is gilded over and presented in exquisite form. The businessmen think they have made a profit, while Anna is aware of the reality that exists in the guise of wealth. This dream can be seen as criticism of a capitalist society in which diamonds are attained at the expense of another's tears. But its attack is not limited to a particularly destructive social system. Anna does not

transfer the guilt, which is hers merely by being alive. Her awareness of responsibility is shown by the fact that she becomes the crocodile. The "sardonic, malicious" quality found in society relates to her destructive potential as an individual. She is the crocodile and the cannibal. Every person who enters Anna's orbit is in some way sick, emotionally and/or physically; for example Tommy, Saul, Paul, Marion, Ivor. And every person reminds one of Anna's guilt as a member of the inflicting world. But she is also the crying crocodile, and the blood and brains she licks up are her own. She is also a member of the suffering world, her sick friends reflecting her own sickness. Consequently, the bond between Anna and her world places her in the dual role of victimiser and victim.

The title "Free Women", if looked at from this angle, becomes somewhat farcical. With this cord tying them to an imprisoned world, any sense of freedom can only be an illusion. Their claim to independence becomes more and more ironic and superficial as one realises that, no matter what image they present, Anna and Molly cannot divorce themselves from their fellow human beings and their society. Anna's inability to forget Michael indicates that she can never be self-sufficient. She cannot experience "internal orgasm" without love, so that, no matter how promiscuously she may behave, she remains in a sense faithful to the man she loves, emotionally and physically dependent on him. This confession is not meant to aim a blow at women's liberation, although it is another reason why the book cannot identify with the movement. It does not show women as the weaker sex, but asserts the importance of relationships. A discrepancy seems

to emerge in a book that is ostensibly about freedom but essentially about relationships, ostensibly about independence but essentially about interdependence: Ella and Paul; Anna and Michael; Anna and Saul; Anna and Molly; Julia and Ella. These contradictions are balanced in the inner "Golden Notebook" where freedom is equated with integration. The individual finds freedom through communication with the universe. The idea of freedom is reshaped. The concept is no longer associated with an individual's selfish desires to do his "own thing" but is expanded to suggest limitlessness through a submerging of self in the flow of life.

Consequently, the action of the entire novel can be discussed by focusing not on the conventional idea of freedom but on bonds, human relationships. The description of the Mashopi Hotel group that constitutes "The Black Notebook" is an examination of human interaction. At the same time as Anna describes the differences and conflicts between the individuals, one is aware of a whole, of irrational, invisible bonds that hold the group together in loose tension. No relationship is simple or the same as any other; each is as unique and fluctuating as the responding individuals. For example, Anna's feelings for George, her response to Paul, her relationship with Willi, her reactions to Maryrose, and, similarly, their links with each other create the impression of a fragile and complex network. This web extends to include owners, guests and workers at the hotel. Isolated on the veld the crowd at the Mashopi Hotel becomes a microcosm of African society, in particular, and the world, in general. While they have ostensibly little in common, the people are flung together by circumstance and become inevitably involved in each other's

lives. Round this cocoon of relationships is the veld which becomes a visual symbol for chaos. Lessing's veld contains the harsh reality of the grotesque copulating insects as opposed to a Maryrose-like view of nature filled with butterflies. Moreover, nature is not perfectly ordered. The insects behave with the perversity of man, a big insect mating with another, the wrong size. The people, characteristically, try to organise the situation but their interference leads to greater chaos. Eventually, Paul stamps on the insects in a sudden violent gesture of destruction. His impulse towards cruelty, his need to destroy as displayed by his baiting of Mrs Boothby and shooting of the pigeons, suggests something of the nature of man. He relates to the veld and its corollary, war. Consequently, the group cannot escape war by getting away from it all at the Mashopi Hotel. The violence is a part of them and explosion is inevitable. The ugly scene with Mrs Boothby and the cook, a reminder of the disintegrated nature of Zambesia, triggers off a sense of madness that has been building up. Because of the complexity of relationships the whole structure crumbles. The one fight leads to the collapse of the entire group. Anna and Paul significantly abandon themselves to the veld and the darkness, and experience along with the chaos a sense of freedom and along with the destruction a crazy sense of ecstasy. This sensation is what Anna calls "nostalgia for war":

> ... the emotion it came out of was something frightening, the unhealthy, feverish, illicit excitement of wartime, a lying nostalgia, a longing for license, for freedom, for the jungle, for formlessness.... Nothing is more powerful than this nihilism, an angry readiness to throw everything overboard, a willingness, a longing to become part of dissolution.
>
> (p.82)

Anna and Paul use the sexual act to dissolve themselves into chaos. The experience is a shared and not an independent experience. Soon after this Paul dies but the facts of his death are somewhat anticlimactic. The night on the veld is, in a sense, a death plunge.

"The Red Notebook" is another description of a group of people. They are clinging together to preserve the security of a shared dream, the dream of shaping the world. They, too, are on the "Frontiers of War", battling to protect their ideal from the chaotic reality, from the violence that exists, not only around the party, but within the party and within the individuals:

> Three of Michael's friends hanged yesterday in Prague ... The Rosenbergs electrocuted. Felt sick all night.
>
> (pp.168-169)

The members of the party come together through a need to belong to a group and have a purpose in life:

> I came home thinking that somewhere at the back of my mind when I joined the Party was a need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live.
>
> (p.171)

They use a group language which gives them a unity and shuts them out from the rest of the world:

> This both pleased me - being back in the fold, so to speak, already entitled to the elaborate ironies and complicities of the initiated; and made me suddenly exhausted. I'd forgotten of course, having been out of the atmosphere so long, the tight, defensive, sarcastic atmosphere of the inner circles.
>
> (p.165)

But they are unable to contain the chaos and, like the group in A Ripple from the Storm and the group at Hotel Mashopi, this group crumbles. "The Red Notebook" is, consequently, a description of uncertainty, growing dissatisfaction and disintegration.

"The Yellow Notebook" and "The Blue Notebook" concentrate on the relationships between Ella and Paul, Anna and Michael and Anna and Saul. Just as the Mashopi Hotel episodes are shaped by knowledge of the end, and consequently seen as surrounded by chaos, so Anna and Michael's relationship is approached through awareness of its disintegration. The focus is more on the end of the "affair" and Anna's attempts at coming to terms with herself, than on the affair itself. Conscious "analysis after the event" (p.231), cloaks the episode in a sense of foreboding, threatens its shape with knowledge of the encircling shapelessness, and reveals the shadow that grows to obliterate the relationship. She is concentrating on the shadows, recognising their potential for destroying a seemingly secure way of life.

In moments of novelistic nihilism Anna frustrates herself and the reader by suggesting that literature is a bad translation of life. "Analysis after the event" (p.231) means reshaping through knowledge of the shadows. Therefore, her interpretation of what happened reveals the reality of the situation, a reality of which she was unaware at the time. By means of her expanded vision she is able to see what was then unknown. So, while literature may not be true to the surface reality of life, it is a means of exploring the truth that exists beneath the surface.

Anna remoulds the events of her life into the Paul-Ella story:

> It struck me that my doing this - turning everything into fiction - must be an evasion.
>
> (p.232)

This is only partly true. What she seems to be doing is attempting to reshape the pain in order to find meaning in it, and to distance it through greater objectivity. But she is often unable to achieve this distance, breaking emotionally into the story: "And so now looking back at my relationship with Michael ..." (p.216). Because she, as a writer, is unable to step back from her work and cannot divide fiction from reality, the reader is placed in the same position. Anna, while recognising Ella as a character, cannot quite release her into a life of her own and, therefore, neither can the reader.

Anna's exploration of the relationship between fiction and reality leads her to investigate the film medium. She is attempting to evoke life in naturalistic detail, and finds herself in competition with films:

> ... when it comes to representing the "things", one picture is worth a thousand words, and one motion picture is worth a million. [5]

But while Anna wrestles with her cinematic opposition in an attempt to justify her writing of novels and short stories, both Lessing and Anna "invoke", as Lodge says, cinematic technique to "reinforce a verbal communication":

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[5] Robert Scholes, Quoted in The Novel Today edited by Malcolm Bradbury, p.87.

> The main character of Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook - that anguished account of a writer's effort to fix, identify and express reality - finds herself constantly alluding to the cinema to indicate the completely truthful, mimetic quality she is seeking in her writing; and her final, most satisfactory insight into her own experience comes in the form of a hallucination in which she seems to see her life as a film which she has directed herself ... the visual medium is invoked to reinforce a verbal communication. For this purpose the film is made to stand for a highly mimetic art. [6]

The inner "Golden Notebook" is the climax of the novel. As in The Four-Gated City in which Martha's breakdown corresponds with the destruction of the house, so Anna's breakdown corresponds with the end of the notebooks. And just as the demolition of the house is a prerequisite for the Golden Age, so the end of the notebooks is necessary for the evolution of "The Golden Notebook":

> ... sometimes when people 'crack up' it is a way of self-healing, of the inner self's dismissing false dichotomies and divisions, ...
>
> (p.8)

Lessing's characters do not just break down; they break down into a new state of being:

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[6] David Lodge, "The Novelist at the Crossroads", in The Novel Today edited by Malcolm Bradbury, p.99.

> Throughout the Notebooks people have discussed, theorised, dogmatised, labelled, compartmented ... But they have also reflected each other, been aspects of each other, given birth to each other's thoughts and behaviour - 'are' each other, form wholes. In the inner Golden Notebook, things have come together, the divisions have broken down, there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation - the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity. Anna and Saul Green the American "break down". They are crazy, lunatic, mad - what you will. They "break down" into each other, into other people, break through the false patterns they have made of their pasts, the patterns and formulas they have made to shore up themselves and each other, dissolve ... In the inner Golden Notebook, which is written by both of them, you can no longer distinguish between what is Saul and what is Anna, and between them and the other people in the book.
>
> (pp.7-8)

The essential difference between Anna's and Martha's breakdown is that Martha explores alone. Anna experiences through Saul in such a way that Anna and Saul become indivisible. When she dreams, not of one figure, but of two figures holding hands, the dream significantly becomes positive. In the inner "Golden Notebook" it is difficult to distinguish between Anna's waking world and her dream world. Throughout the notebooks the dreams explore a level of reality that is not revealed in Anna's waking world. She is aware that her dreams are a significant comment on her life, but she is unable to integrate the two states of being. In the inner "Golden Notebook" a sense of continuity exists between the two worlds. They seem to feed each other and are so interdependent that it does not matter to the reader where the division between dreaming and waking occurs. Anna tends to

exist in a state that is neither sleeping nor waking but an integration of the two, and this gives the inner "Golden Notebook" the necessary blurred quality:

> It was the kind of sleep I have known only when ill: very light, as if lying just under water, with real sleep in bottomless layers beneath me. And so all the time I was conscious of lying on the bed, and conscious of sleeping, and thinking extraordinarily clearly ... I was myself, yet knowing what I thought and dreamed, so there was a personality apart from the Anna who lay asleep; yet who that person is I do not know. It was a person concerned to prevent the disintegration of Anna.
>
> (p.592)

When disintegration is seen as necessary for integration it seems inconsistent that Anna should feel the need to "fight". The inner "Golden Notebook" is as much a description of an attempt to pull back from the chaos as it is an abandonment to the flow of the universe. This two-way pull gives rise to a heightened tension. Lessing is advocating the experience of breakdown without actually breaking down. Neither Martha nor Anna takes the final step into the abyss but, like Marlow in Heart of Darkness, remains poised precariously on the edge:

> ... he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot.[7]

Lessing's definitive statements in her preface about cracking up and rebuilding are slightly misleading. The fact that she is definite suggests a discrepancy between what the book is trying to say and what she is doing in the preface. She is

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[7] Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (London: Dent, 1974) p.151.

containing and thereby limiting her book through her own certainty. She is suggesting that the reality of her characters is subsidiary to the theme of fragmentation and integration: "there is formlessness with the end of fragmentation - the triumph of the second theme, which is that of unity" (p.7). But if Anna had a true vision of formlessness she would not be Anna; if her experience of integration was complete there would be no inner "Golden Notebook". She is able to recreate herself because she has the strength to not quite crack; to preserve form in the face of freedom; to keep a balance between her sense of self and her sense of identity with the world.

The inner "Golden Notebook" opens in a manner reminiscent of "The Black Notebook":

> It is so dark in this flat, so dark, it is as if darkness were the shape of cold. I went through the flat turning on light everywhere, the dark retreated to outside the windows, a cold shape trying to press its way in. But when I turned on the light in my big room, I knew this was wrong, light was foreign to it, so I let the dark come back, controlled by the two paraffin heaters and the glow from the gas fire.
>
> (p.589)

Anna is no longer afraid of the darkness but relates to it and accepts it. And this suggests a change in her approach to life. In "The Golden Notebook" she no longer tries to create artificial light, to categorise, but explores the dark, the chaos; and she and the reader through her come to an understanding that the complement of destruction is creation and of chaos integration.

The crumbling-regenerating movement occurs throughout the book, but in the inner "Golden Notebook" it is intensified. The action and the language of the novel and of the various diaries are accumulated in an effort to find meaning through a new shape: no longer through separation but through juxtapositioning. Events are released from the fixed shape in Anna's mind and swell and contract, merging in fluidity:

> 'Get it?', said the projectionist. Then the film went very fast, it flicked fast, like a dream, on faces I've seen once in the street, and have forgotten, on the slow movement of an arm, on the movement of a pair of eyes, all saying the same thing - the film was now beyond my experience, beyond Ella's, beyond the notebooks, because there was a fusion, and instead of seeing separate scenes, people, faces, movements, glances, they were all together, the film became immensely slow again, it became a series of moments where a peasant's hand bent to drop seed into earth, or a rock stood glistening while water slowly wore it down, or a man stood on a dry hillside in the moonlight, stood eternally, his rifle ready on his arm. Or a woman lay awake in darkness, saying No, I won't kill myself, I won't, I won't.
>
> (p.611)

The fluidity is evoked through the flow of prose. The conventional sentence divisions have disintegrated and there is an accumulation of images that propels the reader forwards with increasing momentum. While the form of the last sentence resembles the previous listing, it is separated from the flow by the fact that it is a sentence. Just as Anna pulls herself out of the flood and becomes conscious of herself, the woman contemplating suicide, so the sentence approximates the rest of the passage but is not quite submerged into the general. It retains its identity.

Anna discusses this dream with Mother Sugar:

> "We're back at the blade of grass again, that will press up through the bits of rusted steel a thousand years after the bombs have exploded and the world's crust has melted. Because the force of will in the blade of grass is the same as the small painful endurance. Is that it? ..."
> "But the point is, I don't think I'm prepared to give all that much reverence to that damned blade of grass, even now."
>
> (p.612)

Unlike her preface, the inner "Golden Notebook" shows Lessing refusing to contain the experience in summing up platitudes; refusing to extract the moral: the small will endures. She suggests a moral, but immediately undercuts the reader's sense of security: "I don't think I'm prepared to give all that reverence ..." (p.612). If the reader is looking for answers he has to relate to Mother Sugar and he does not wish to do so.

The attacks on the psychotherapist, Mother Sugar, are attacks on the conventional sugaring-over-the-reality approach to mental stability. The limitations of Mother Sugar are reflected in her"dedicated room":

> The point is, that nothing in my life corresponds with anything in this room - my life has always been crude, unfinished, raw, tentative; and so have the lives of the people I have known well. It occurred to me, looking at this room, that the raw unfinished quality in my life was precisely what was valuable in it and I should hold fast to it.
> She came out of her brief meditation and said: "Very well, my dear. We'll leave your dreams for a while, and you will bring me your waking fantasies."
>
> (p.239)

Mother Sugar's sugared tone relates to the tone of her room, and her compartmentalising approach is revealed by "leave... a while". Even her quiet air of command, "you will bring", contrasts with Anna's "tentative" life. Mother Sugar is, as her name suggests, a pleasant person but that does not exonerate her. Saul cuts brains in half; Paul is a witch-doctor; and Mother Sugar completes the formidable trio who represent society's attempts to create order at the cost of the something infinitely precious that escapes rationality.

The inner "Golden Notebook" is meant to be experienced rather than explained, because it attempts to evoke the dimension of the irrational. The effect is one of fleeting images and fluctuating emotions, so that the reader is left with a vision and not a series of ideas or a logical progression of thoughts.

Anna's game (p.531), which is an attempt to balance a simultaneous knowledge of vastness and smallness, whole and part, relates to her revelatory experiences. Just as she is able to see her life in its entirety and, at the same time, the peasant's hand, so she grasps a picture of the universe at the same time as she imagines a green leaf:

> Then, having reached that point, with the stars around me, and the little earth turning underneath me, I'd try to imagine at the same time, a drop of water, swarming with life, or a green leaf. Sometimes I could reach what I wanted, a simultaneous knowledge of vastness and of smallness.
>
> (p.531)

Anna is fusing opposites, "vastness" and "smallness", and, in so doing, elevates the experience to a dimension that

cannot be rationalized. This is what Lessing is attempting in this and other novels: to integrate a sweeping vision of the world with an understanding of and appreciation for detail; to show that the small is as important as the large; to present the individual and the world as indistinguishable. If this is understood, Martha's and Anna's quests are both justified. Their efforts may be small, but have a universal significance.

Both Martha Quest and Anna Wulf are beetles with "the sun between their feet". [8] They resemble each other, not only in essence, but in the details of their lives. Both have an African past; both move to London; both become involved in and later disillusioned with the communist party. Both find marriage unsatisfactory and opt for a life as free women. Willi resembles Anton, and Thomas can be seen in both Paul and Saul. Anna, like Martha, is critical and, at the same time, capable of naïvety, one foot in and one foot out of the circle of inevitability. She, too, possesses an extra-ordinary self-consciousness that becomes a world consciousness. Both women are aware of and explore dimensions beyond the sensory. And both almost break down.

The difference between The Children of Violence series and The Golden Notebook lies more in shape than in content. Integration is taken one step further than in The Children of Violence series. In those novels a writer writes about integration; in this novel the writer appears integrated

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[8] Doris Lessing, "The Sun between their Feet", A Man and Two Women (London: Panther, 1965), p.60.

into the work. The opening sentence of Lessing's The Golden Notebook corresponds with the sentence Saul gives Anna, making it difficult to distinguish between the reality in the book and the reality of the book.

The fact that Anna is a writer whose works display an honesty and approach reminiscent of the works of Lessing herself, and the similarity between Anna's life and Martha's, encourage one to leap the gap between reality and fiction. Anna's experience of integration is significantly a fusing not only of real experiences but real and fictional experiences: Ella with Anna, Michael with Paul. Ironically, a book which is theoretically about the impossibility of engaging reality in fiction is, in practice, an attempt at closing the gap between fiction and reality. The more Anna's voice says "This is false. I cannot produce reality", the more the reader believes in the reality of the voice. Anna's ready acknowledgement of the faults of the writer, the limitations of herself and her form leave one unconscious of the successes of the writer: the fact that Lessing is making one believe in the reality of Anna.

In trying to uncover truth Lessing is making herself master of illusion. While the conventional novel may hold one mirror up to reality, reading The Golden Notebook is like entry into a Hall of Mirrors, each presenting some distorted reflection of the object. In each notebook Anna is holding up a different mirror, the difference in notebooks being not so much the content as the approach; and in "Free Women" Lessing is holding up another mirror. With all these mirrors held at different angles, she manages to get and give as complete a picture of reality as possible.

BRIEFING FOR A DESCENT INTO HELL (1971)

> Can we not see that this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality?... In this particular type of journey, the direction we have to take is back and in, because it was way back that we started to go down and out. They will say we are regressed and withdrawn and out of contact with them. True enough, we have a long, long way to go back to contact the reality we have all long lost contact with. And because they are humane, and concerned, and even love us, and are very frightened, they will try to cure us. They may succeed. But there is still hope that they will fail.[1]

Briefing for a Descent into Hell is "inner-space fiction" in which Charles Watkins, like his namesake Jesse Watkins in "A Ten-day Voyage", is making a journey "back" and "in" in search of "the reality we have all lost contact with". He is moving from alienation, the normal condition of mankind, to a sense of belonging, of integration with all things; and his journey is in essence the same quest as that made by Martha, Anna Wulf, Kate Brown, and the "I" in The Memoirs of a Survivor.

The irony inherent in the novel is suggested by the ambiguity of the title: "... descent into Hell". The "normal" world, which fears madness and equates chaos with Hell, would and does regard a "schizophrenic condition" as a descent into hell. Doctor X, Doctor Y, Felicity Watkins and Charles's friends, who are representative of mankind and express the standard viewpoint on psychiatric matters, accept without

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[1] R D Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp.136-137.

questioning that cure would be a return to normality, which is, ironically, a return to abnormality. Ranging from the ultra efficient, inhumane Doctor X to Doctor Y, who tempers science with feeling, to Felicity, who plays the role of typical wife caring for the perhaps non-existent Professor Watkins, all the characters in the novel, except Violet and to some extent Rosemary Baines, have one desire in common: to save Charles Watkins from what they consider "a descent into hell". One can sum up each of these characters, apart from the exceptions, in a few words because they are types. Their two-dimensional quality is a comment on their incompleteness as people. Charles Watkins is, in a sense, unique, but Dr. X as his name implies is not only attempting to dehumanise Charles; Dr. X has dehumanised himself. As Charles notices, the essence of Dr. X does not exist. The reader, although a member of the "normal" world, is invited to decide what is hell: the nothingness of Dr. X or the richness of experience that Charles enjoys and suffers. The form of the book accommodates both points of view and there is no obvious attempt at weighting the decision, but one nevertheless feels for Charles in a way that one cannot feel for the others.

Charles's descriptions and evocations of his voyage produce a response at a level that cannot be entirely rationally accounted for. As with Martha's and Anna's experience the reader is not invited to understand but to share, for understanding as the rational world knows it is an attempt at limiting and categorising. The real meaning of the book is elusive:

> ... It was to do with ...
>
> Go on, catch it - to do with what?
>
> It went. How can I not remember? How? It's just there, always. I feel I could catch it by suddenly turning my head, it's so close. Like a shadow out of the corner of my eye. [2]

This novel reaches out towards reality through archetypal symbols that motivate the reader's search; but it does not claim to contain reality and, as such, is open-ended. The "Free Women" false frame of The Golden Notebook relates to the false frame in Briefing for a Descent into Hell. At the beginning Charles Watkins is found wandering mentally and physically and the case is opened: "Admittance Sheet Friday, August 15th, 1969" (p.11). At the end he returns to rationality and the case is closed. The false frame is that of a case history. It is the continual interruption of Watkins's flow of thoughts by the superficial conclusions of the normal world in attempts to reduce what it cannot understand to a form which it can contain. Charles Watkins's illness is a threat, not only to himself but to the entire structure of normality: "because ... they are very frightened, they will try to cure us". [3]

Before his breakdown he is feared because he does not pay lip service to "ordinary feelings" (pp.188-189).

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[2] Doris Lessing, Briefing for a Descent into Hell (St. Albans: Panther, 1972), p.240.

[3] R D Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise, p.137.

Jeremy Thorne is, in this letter, implicitly suggesting that he, Jeremy, has the capacity to define ordinary feelings and has a right to expect everyone to conform. What is remarkable is not his criticism of Charles, but his implicit confidence that the world will understand the basis for his criticism: Charles is not ordinary. In a subdued and apparently reasonable voice of self-righteousness, Jeremy describes Charles's lack of gratitude at his, Jeremy's, sacrifice of a holiday for his sake, and follows this with a description of his wife's reaction when Charles showed lack of concern about the marriage breakdown.

Jeremy is significantly not prepared to acknowledge chaos in marriage, but sums it up in a sensible phrase "give us both a rest":

> Afterwards my wife said to me that the real crisis that summer was not her leaving me to give us both a rest, but the four or five days in Charles's company. Any more of him and she would have cut her throat, she says, or could have done if she had been able to believe it mattered whether she did or not.
>
> (p.189) (my underlining)

Charles Watkins is dangerous because, in searching for reality he is destroying the world's false concept of reality, its neat system of values. He is stripping the others of their security and must be made harmless, even if it is only in words like "schizophrenic". The implications of his attitude must be dammed up in terms like "abnormal". Charles's treatment of his mistress Constance, for example, is in terms of the world's values frighteningly heartless; but Charles does not see love in limiting terms like romance and cannot commiserate with an individual's heartache when the whole

world is in hell. Charles is searching for something greater than the love the world can offer him. He rejects it with an indifference that in his terms such triviality deserves and, instead, yearns after another form of love, another relationship, integration with all. Conchita and the sirens may call from land but Charles's journey is not in that direction. Charles is like many of Lessing's characters, for example, Martha, Anna, and Julia in "Winter in July", who are disturbing, not because they behave in a shocking manner, but because they are unaware that it is shocking. They do not demand acceptance for their difference but take it for granted:

> But perhaps I would respect him more for his attitude if I believed there was conflict involved, if he had ever thought it out, or even suffered over it, instead of its being his nature.
>
> (p.189)

If this behaviour is natural to Charles, on what grounds can Jeremy condemn it as unnatural? He does not pursue the matter as he is afraid to do so, and his relief is evident when he welcomes Charles back to the ranks of normality:

> "Felicity tells me you are restored to yourself. It goes without saying that I'm delighted."
>
> (p.249)

The "problem" may be solved for the characters but not for the reader. The unknown has been named but on an unsatisfactory level. The novel significantly opens "Name... Unknown" and closes "Yours sincerely, Charles Watkins". The

man who is God-Jonah-Jason-Ulysses-Dante-Adam-Everyman is reduced to Charles Watkins. But he is only reduced by the characters in the novel, not by the novel itself and not by the reader. The vision is sufficiently large and powerful to make a mockery of the "Yours sincerely, Charles Watkins" conclusion. Just as "Free Women", seen in the light of the preceding vision, is revealed as a transparent end, so the truth in Briefing for a Descent into Hell lies not in the final letters but in the silences between the words.

Notice is drawn to the silences by the spacing of the dialogues after the descent into hell:

> I'm Doctor Y.
>
> I've never known anyone of that name.
>
> Don't you remember me?
>
> That's not what I have to remember.
>
> No. Not if you don't want. But who are you?
>
> Why, can't you see me?
>
> I can see you very well indeed.
>
> Then there you are.
>
> Can you remember your name now perhaps?
>
> My name! But I've had so many names.
>
> (p.132)

The order of the words is seen in perspective against the formlessness of the silence. They are speaking on the "Frontiers of War". The surrounding chaos mocks Dr. Y's attempts to name Charles and suggests that words should be reviewed. What do they really mean; how do they relate to

reality? If the reader is encouraged to question accepted definitions of reality, he must then question accepted words:

> What do you remember then? .....
> (The answer is in the silence.) Charles?
> ..... You don't answer ...
> Tell me, what you remember might link up somewhere with the truth.
>
> Truth is a funny word, isn't it?
>
> Oh, Charles, you never used to be philosophical!
>
> Philosophical? What's .....
>
> Why is it that some words you know quite well, and at others you look blank?
>
> I'll tell you, if you like. Some words - match. A word falls out of your mouth and matches with something I know. Other words don't fit in with what I can see.
>
> But what do you see? Charles? Tell me? ..... (The answer is again in the silence)
>
> (p.180) (my brackets)

Comments on philosophy and truth are, as Charles recognises and the writer shows through punctuating with long silences, superficial and glib. They are false words attempting to contain rather than match the experience or, in The Golden Notebook's terms, they do not name the experience on a level related to it:

> I was looking for something. Somebody.
>
> Yourself?
>
> Words. That's a word. To you that means one thing, but it's different to me.
>
> (p.237)

I have a wife?

Yes. Her name is Felicity ... is that funny?

Ha ha ha, I have absented myself from Felicity. Ha ha ha.

...

I think I am my friends. And they are - in the name of the Crystal. Yes. A Unit. Unity.

Your name is Crystal?

That's crystal clear. Ha ha ha ha.

You're very jolly this morning.

Words are so funny. Felicitously funny.

(p.145)

"In the name of the Crystal" one suspects is a parody of "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost". Yet the deviation from the norm makes one question the norm. "God" is a name for something beyond words. The Crystal is a name serving the same function as the name, "God". What sounds like nonsense to the doctor is no more or less nonsensical than the accepted blessing. This extract is a play on words. Like Feste, Charles Watkins, "the corrupter of words", reveals wisdom while appearing to play the fool. The foolishness, he indicates, does not lie with him but with the people who use words carelessly, unaware of their function and meaning:

Clown. I would therefore my sister had had no name, sir.

Viola. Why, man?

Clown. Why, sir, her name's a word, and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton. But indeed, words are very rascals, since bonds disgraced them.

Viola. Thy reason, man?

Clown. Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words, and words are grown so false, I am loathe to prove reason with them. [4]

The reader is encouraged to see both the limitations and power of words:

> There is really nothing more to say when we come back to that beginning of all beginnings that is nothing at all. Only when you begin to lose that Alpha and Omega do you want to start to talk and to write, and then there is no end to it, words, words, words. At best and most they are perhaps in memoriam, evocations, conjurations, incantations, emanations, shimmering, iridescent flares in the sky of darkness, a just still feasible tact, indiscretions, perhaps forgivable .... [5]

They cannot crystallise a situation and any attempt to have them do so is a misuse of language. What they can do is act as symbols or deputies pointing to the reality that lies beyond them. The book is significantly titled, not Descent into Hell but Briefing for a Descent into Hell. It claims to point the way to, rather than contain, a knowledge of reality. When Dr. Y says "yourself?" (p.237) he is

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[4] Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Act III, Sc. I, lines 14-25.

[5] R D Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.156.

offering the word as a solution. What Charles understands by "yourself" is something completely different. He is searching for the reality behind, not in, the word "yourself". He is looking for "what the word is a symbol for":

> We may suppose that ancient astronomers did not necessarily believe that the world was created on a certain day four thousand odd years before their own time, and by God in person.
>
> That they understood that words had to be used for their benefit - and understood what the words were symbols for.
>
> That long before the Roman Gods and the Greek Gods and the Egyptian Gods and the Peruvian Gods and the Babylonian Gods, astronomers listened to Jupiter and his family or to Saturn, and knew that Thoth (however he was called then) served Amen the Father (and here again comes in the idea of deputy, of substitution, for Thoth created the world with a word); and that there were names for planets, suns, stars, and crumbs, blobs, and droplets of earth and fire and water; and that their patterns and sounds and colours were understood, and tales were told of them, instructive of Times and Events - why not?
>
> (pp.110-111)

Words are deputies. To illustrate this concept Lessing gives the same message, a warning of the Catastrophe, translated into different names. Firstly, it is told in the form of a classical myth. Secondly, it is re-told in modern science fiction jargon. Minerva becomes Minna Erva. The device is a playful attempt at mocking a world that will accept Merc Ury but pushes aside Mercury as classical whimsy, that will scorn the pantheon and make Superman a hero. She is exposing the world's blindness and awakening the reader to the fact that all these myths and stories are not ends in themselves

but point to a truth, the same truth. As Watkins discovers, separation is an illusion and all things are in essence connected. Whether the reality is named as eating the apple or stealing the fire, the words point in the same direction:

> "All I'm saying is that knowledge brings a penalty with it - of course, it was enterprising of him - what's his name, Jason, Prometheus, that fellow - in his place I might have done the same. Eating the fruit when I was told not to ..."
>
> "Stealing the fire," says Minerva, always with a tendency towards pedantry.
>
> "Come now, don't be so literal-minded, that's to be like them," says Mercury.
>
> "... With such blood, or rather, fire, in his veins, he was not to be expected to live like a mole in earth knowing that Light existed, and yet never reaching out after it."
>
> "There was reason to believe", says Mercury, "that he was in it all the time."
>
> (pp.112-113) (my underlining)

In this squabble between Mercury and Minerva, products of Watkins's imagination, Lessing shows as laughable the world's attempts to categorise and to divide the classical from the religious myths when they are in essence the same. She is both mocking the world's beliefs as limited ends in themselves, and using them to point to the common source into which all myths flow. The wealth of allusions opens the novel up into a collective literary awareness, which creates the impression of framelessness, dominant when reading the novel. It is not shut in on itself but refers outwards to Adam, to Ulysses, to Pilgrim, to the Ancient Mariner, to the pantheon ....

> Words ... City lights at night, from the air, receding, like these words, atoms each containing its own world and every other world. Each a fuse to set you off ...[6]

In a novel in which the individual finds himself a part of a greater whole it is appropriate that the echo-style should suggest that the novel is part of a greater literary whole. The allusions, tending to be implicit rather than explicit, are integrated into the description of his experience, opening an intensely personal journey out into an archetypal quest. In the words of Arthur Koestler:

> ... the ultimate spring of aesthetic experience is the archetypos. The literal meaning of the word is 'implanted' (typos = stamp) 'from the beginning'. Jung described archetypes as 'the psychic residue of numberless experiences of the same type' encountered by our ancestors, and stamped into the memory of the race - that is, into the deep layers of the 'collective unconscious' below the level of personal memories. Hence, whenever some archetypal motif is sounded, the response is much stronger than warranted by its face value - the mind responds like a tuning fork to a pure tone.[7]

The argument between Minerva and Mercury is about the price paid for knowledge and suggests the other interpretation of "descent into hell". Watkins's experience is a hell as well as a heaven. He has to become aware of the frustration of going "round and around" before he sets sail on his own. He has to sink to the bottom of the ocean before he can be

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[6] R D Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.156.

[7] Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation (London: Pan, 1966), p.355.

rescued and transported to land. The white bird takes him on two journeys: the one showing the beauty and the other the ugliness of the world. Before he reaches harmony Watkins discovers savagery in himself and his environment (if the two can be divided). While waiting for the crystal, he succumbs to the savage, destructive ritual in the forest. The description is grotesque, shockingly harsh, a refusal to soften the ugly reality for the reader. He, the reader, is forced through the powerfully evocative language and the emotions it arouses to glimpse evil:

> They were all laughing at me, laughing with malicious pleasure because I had joined this bloody feast, and later I saw that it was over, the women were walking soberly away, leaving the fire burning, and the piles of stinking bloody meat lying to one side of it. I looked for the baby, but it was not there. Then I saw that it was dead and had been thrown on the heap of meat that was waiting there, quite openly in the glade, all purply-red and bleeding, for the coming night's feast. The baby was naked now, a little reddish newborn babe, smeared with blood, its genitals, the big genitals of a newborn boy baby, exposed at the top of the bloody heap. I understood that I was naked ... Presumably I had landed naked on the beach off the porpoise's back, but I had not thought once about being naked, but now I needed to cover myself. (Lessing is trying to strip away Adam's cover.) The bloody hide of the dead cow lay in its rough folds to one side of the glade, where the women and the boys had thrown it. I ran to it, and was about to wrap myself in it, all wet and raw as it was, when I chanced to look up, and saw that the sun (God) stood over the trees and the treacherous moon had gone.
>
> (p.64) (my underlining and brackets)

This experience or knowledge changes the paradise into a wilderness, which strongly resembles the world at present.

Charles, it seems, is able now to see the world as it really is and recognise his nakedness; to see man as a pack of rat-dogs, lusty, violent and pathetic in their fears, uncertain in their superior upright position. The battle between the rat-dogs and their less advanced servants, monkeys, is a dreadful parody of power struggles between men. Charles is rescued from submersion in this evil by the white bird who, like the porpoise, is an embodiment of a miracle or Act of Grace. In his elevated state as part of the crystal Charles understands that an acceptance of evil is necessary for an acceptance of good. Just as Martha is led by the devil to God so Watkins has to leave paradise, move from innocence to experience, drink the body and the blood, in order to be resurrected and ascend:

> I knew, though dimly enough at that time - for so many 'knowings' began then - that those frightful nights when I had been compelled away from the city's centre to the murdering women had become a page in my passport for this stage of the journey.
>
> (p.91)

But this hell is not considered a "descent":

> Nor was it a question of higher or lower, for just as my having drunk blood and eaten flesh with the poor women had been a door, a key and an opening, because all sympathetic knowledge must be that, in this spin of fusion like a web whose every strand is linked and vibrates with every other, the swoop of an eagle on a mouse, the eagle's cold exultation and the mouse's terror make a match in nature, and this harmony runs in a strengthened pulse in the inner chord of which it is a part.
>
> (pp.92-93) (my underlining)

The key word in this experience is "harmony"; harmony is a feature of Charles's language, which is different in quality from that of those around him. He points to reality, not only through symbols, but sounds. His language responds, not to formal grammatical rules, but to a rhythm of its own. A structure does not appear to be imposed upon it, but a sound pattern emerges from it and the prose frequently moves into poetry. The poetry is not separated from the prose. Instead the rhythm and symbolic density of the prose flows naturally into and from the verse:

> Will you say too
> How first we kissed with shut lips, afraid,
> And touched our hands, afraid,
> As if a bird slept between them?
> Will you say:
> "It was the small white bird that snared me?"
>
> And so she sings, each time I pass, around
> and around, and on and on.
>
> (p.28)

Rosemary Baines remarks on Charles's language:

> While his remarks may have been scattered, there was an inner logic to them, a thread, which sounded at first like a repetition of certain words or ideas. Sometimes it seemed as if the sound, and not the meaning, of a word or syllable in a sentence gave birth to the next sentence or word. When this happened it gave the impression of superficiality, of being 'scatty' or demented. But we have perhaps to begin to think of the relation of the sound of a word with its meaning. Of course poets do this, all the time. Do doctors? Sounds, the function of sounds in speech ... we have no way yet of knowing - have we? - how a verbal current may match an inner reality, sounds expressing a condition?
>
> (p.200)

This hypothesis suggests how the reader can approach an interpretation of Charles's words. A line such as "The wave curls and furls in its perfect whirls" (p.30) (my underlining) illustrates what Rosemary is saying. It seems as superficial as a jingle and yet one is aware of a verbal current in response to an inner rhythm, as in the following:

> Fuddled. Fuddddled. Fudddled. Fudd ... that word sounds like what it says. That's strange. Words ... sounds. A dull heavy word. Fudd. Thud. Thud thud, thud thud, thud thud. Fudd, fudd, fudd, fudd. Its colour is. What? I knew. But not now. (When all things integrate light and sound become one.) Sound - that's important ... yes ...
>
> (p.139) (my underlining and brackets)

Much emphasis is placed on sound in the novel. Not only does the novel discuss the importance of sound, the novel is in effect an experiment with different language scales, an attempt to tune the reader's ear to the music of the words. The incantatory effect of, for example, exotic sounding names charms the reader onto a plane of experience that cannot be rationally accounted for:

> ... I'd find the South Equatorial at last, at last, and safe from all the Sargassoes, the Scyllas and the Charibs, I'd swoop beautifully and lightly, drifting with the sweet currents of the South down the edge of the Brazilian Highlands to the Waters of Peace.
>
> (p.13)

"The Waters of Peace" has a dignity, music and rhythm missing from the norm: Pacific. The elevated tones of incantation

associated with myth imply the exalted nature of Charles's experience and fill the reader with the sense of awe and reverence invoked by a religious ceremony.

The harmonious orchestration of the novel relates to the importance of the concept of harmony in the novel:

> And perhaps, or so I thought as I saw the dance of the Sun and its attendants, Mercury the Sun's closest associate was the only one which could maintain steadily and always the consciousness of the Sun's underlying song, its need, its intention, Mercury whose name was, also, Thoth, and Enoch, Buddha, Idris and Hermes, and many other styles or titles in the Earth's histories, Mercury the Messenger, the carrier of news, or information from the sun, the disseminator of laws from God's singing centre. (alliteration of "s" sounds helps create the harmony of song.)
>
> (pp.100-101) (my underlining and brackets)

> And this was the truth that gave the utter insignificance of these motes their significance: in the great singing dance, everything linked and moved together.
>
> (p.96)

The truth is significantly expressed in terms of singing and dancing. The world out of time in the dance of the planets needs to become once more part of the universal rhythm. Charles's vision of integration is an experience of harmony before the discord. Music, the novel implies, has saving powers. The following extract, playful and yet wise, suggests that music on earth relates to the music of the planets. When Charles descends into hell, his briefing takes the form of "brainprinting". This extract suggests that the "briefing" is music:

> ... they (man) have little belief in the effectiveness of words by themselves, because these talks, or lectures, are introduced by, accompanied by, interrupted by, concluded by, a variety of sounds, usually musical. It is my belief that their use of music in this way, if we could understand it, would be the key to their civilization. It is probably to do with indoctrination or brainprinting. To my mind there is no explanation for the entirely arbitrary, casual, fragmentary nature of this heightening or accompanying music except that it must be part of the technique used by a hidden priestly or technically superior caste to control the plebs.
>
> (p.159)

The start of Jesse Watkins's journey is significantly related to music:

> ... suddenly I looked at the clock and the wireless was on and then the music was playing - um - oh, popular sort of bit of music. It was based on the rhythm of a tram. Taa - ta - ta-taa - taa - something like Ravel's repetitive tune. And then when that happened I suddenly felt as if time was going back. [8]

It is not surprising, therefore, that Lessing should so consciously play with the music of words, relying more on the harmonies than the meanings to communicate the truth. Her briefing (and since Lessing is playing with words "briefing" could be both a participle and a noun, "little brief") is a brainprinting through sound rather than extensive explanation. This is the essential difference between R D Laing's and Lessing's handling of the same material. Laing reports and explains; Lessing evokes.

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[8] R D Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.121.

Her teaching is subtle for instead of supplying answers she is instead warning the reader against limiting concepts and encouraging him to find the answers in himself. Because Charles's urgency permeates the entire novel the following extract seems a statement not only of Charles's but of the novel's intention:

> "There's something I have to reach. I have to tell people. People don't know it but it is as if they are living in a poisoned air. They are not awake. They've been knocked on the head, long ago, and they don't know that is why they are living like zombies and killing each other."
>
> (p.248)

While Charles Watkins returns to his Flying Dutchman hell "round and around and around" on the inevitable wheel of life, the reader is left to search for the something Charles cannot reach, for the something both Charles and the reader cannot remember:

> But in the poor sad monkeys' damaged brains there's a knowledge half buried. They sometimes think that if they only knew how, if only they could remember properly, then they could get out of the trap, they could stop being zombies.
>
> (p.249)

The concept of memory is crucial to the theme. Mankind, ironically, believes that Charles has lost his memory because he is unable to recall the, for him, trivial details of life. Instead, he is remembering the essentials of existence. And when, in the world's terms, he recovers his memory, the reader mourns the loss of memory. The memory that counts is not

Charles Watkins's memory but the memory of mankind and all things, for, in Laingian terms, Charles Watkins has immersed his "ego" in the general and therein discovered "self". Charles's experience shows that:

> This journey is experienced as going further 'in', as going back through one's personal life, in and back and through and beyond into the experience of all mankind, of the primal man, of Adam and perhaps even further into the being of animals, vegetables and minerals.[9]

> True sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self competently adjusted to our alienated social reality: the emergence of the 'inner' archetypal mediators of divine power, and through this death a rebirth, and the eventual re-establishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer. [10]

When Charles returns to hell, comes into the world to save mankind, he is persecuted and forced into shock treatment. The treatment is voluntary and yet inevitable. Sympathetic Dr Y grants him extensions but the social pressures seem to be forcing him into this act. He realises the hopelessness of his present "in limbo" situation, belonging neither to the normal plane nor to the elevated plane of existence. He needs a guide and Dr Y, though helpful, is eager for him to become normal and is not qualified to lead him to that which he desires. The inadequacy of the medical system is highlighted. In desperation he selects shock treatment in the hope that it will open up a new area in his mind. Instead, his potential for saving the world, which is that of all children, is obliterated. Charles and children are alike.

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[9] R D Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise, p.104.

[10] Ibid., p.119.

After his purging experience his return to hell is described as a birth:

> If he had lost his memory, if he really didn't know who he was, then he'd be like a - newborn baby.
>
> (p.177)

Both the children and Charles lose their memory of the other world through shock treatment in some form or other: if not literally, metaphorically in the guise of education. Charles's speech as quoted by Rosemary Baines suggests a new approach to teaching:

> Everybody in this room believes, without knowing it, or perhaps without having formulated it, or at least behaves as if he believes it, that children up to the age of seven or eight are of a different species from ourselves. We see children as creatures about to be trapped and corrupted by what trapped and corrupted ourselves. We speak of them, treat them, as if it were possible to make happen events which are almost unimaginable. We speak of them as beings who could grow up into a race altogether superior to ourselves ...
> Can we prevent these children from being trapped and spoiled as we have been, what can we do ...? Who has not at least once looked into a young child's eyes and seen the criticism there, a hostility, the sullen knowledgeable look of a prisoner? This happens very young, before the young child is forced to become like the parents, before its own individuality is covered over by what the parents say he is. Their "this is right, that is wrong, see things my way".
>
> (pp.150-151)

This concept of children excites Rosemary Baines. Or, rather, not so much the idea, but the interaction between the words and her own feelings thrills her. The words match a reality within her and the energy from Charles generates an exhilaration in her. The truth in what he is saying is verified by her response.

Rosemary Baines and Frederick Larsen remind the reader and Charles that he is not alone on his voyage and suggest that in the world there are a few like Charles making the journey, some travelling the entire distance, others venturing cautiously and slowly into the New Land:

> "There are people in the world all the time who know," the professor said. "But they keep quiet. They just move about quietly, saving the people who know they are in the trap. And then, for the ones who have got out, it's like coming around from chloroform. They realize that all their lives they've been asleep and dreaming. And then it's their turn to learn the rules and the timing ..."
>
> (p.249)

This sounds a note of hope. Charles Watkins's journey may be over, but there are others on the voyage: "... they will try to cure us. They may succeed. But there is still hope that they will fail". [11] Charles's last letter is, significantly, to Miss Baines. Charles's rejection of her suggests his alienation from all those who are awake or wakening. The tone of the novel is one of both despair and hope: despair at man's general lack of understanding and hope because of the understanding of the few; despair because of the impending doom of the world and hope that the special people can avert the doom; despair because the time has not yet come for the special people to save the world and hope because it is only a matter of time:

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[11] R D Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise, p.137.

> ... The further growth of the honeysuckle made it possible to reach the camellia.
> But the element in which this process exists is - Time.
> Time is the whole point. Timing. The surfer on the wave. The plant swinging in the wind. And it's just the same with - well, everything, and that's what I have to say, Doctor.
>
> (p.245)

The novel presents both a gloomy picture of the divisions of the world and asserts the inate unity of man. The Charles-Frederick-Rosemary relationship suggests that, divided though people are, there are similarities that cannot be accounted for rationally. Rosemary says of her feelings for Frederick:

> I can't remember a time when I've felt so powerful a kinship with someone, as if I really knew someone through and through, and was linked deeply with him.
>
> (p.156)

The novel traces man back to his before-the-fall state to show that most barriers between people are false. The unity these people feel, distorted and imperfect though it is, relates to the integration of the universe. Charles, Frederick and Rosemary are alike because, to varying degrees, they draw from the collective unconsciousness.

Briefing for a Descent into Hell is a novel of powerful ideas and as such is exciting but, as Joan Didion notices in The New York Times "Book Review", the characterisation suffers in favour of the philosophy:

> Her ... novel Briefing for a Descent into Hell is entirely a novel of ideas, not a novel about the play of ideas in the lives of central characters but a novel in which the characters exist only as markers in the presentation of an idea. [12]

Charles Watkins is an "everyman". One is not aware of an individual responding to and interacting with the external world. And this is an infringement of Lessing's earlier stated intention to balance the individual with the general. Anna, for example, undergoes an experience similar to Charles's. But one can identify with Anna and feel for her, whereas in Briefing for a Descent into Hell one responds to ideas, sounds and symbols but never to the person Charles Watkins.

In "The Small Personal Voice", Lessing praises the realists Tolstoy, Balzac, Dostoievsky, Stendhal and Mann for their "warmth", "humanity" and "love of people":

> ... the warmth, humanity and love of people which is essential for a great age of literature. [13]

Briefing for a Descent into Hell is not infused with enough warmth and love of people to breathe life into the philosophy of R D Laing, the warmth that creates the tenderness of tone remarkable in the short story, "Lions, Leaves, Roses ....".

"Lions, Leaves, Roses ..." presents the same idea as Briefing for a Descent into Hell, "that a cracked mind lets in the sun". The old woman, like Charles Watkins, understands her relationship to the universe and is thwarted in her attempts

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[12] Joan Didion, "New York Times Book Review" (March 14, 1971), pp.138-9.

[13] Doris Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice" quoted by Michael Thorpe in Doris Lessing's Africa (London: Evans, 1978), pp.102-3.

to communicate her knowledge. Dr X finds his counterpart in the policeman:

> Still grinning, still tugging at her red-spotted kerchief, apparently brimful of glee, she stood near, or rather under, a huge policeman who looked down at her, quite expressionless, his features determined to make no comment. But "Is that so?" his pose said, or even "Fancy that!" to her news of her relationship with the sun, the moon, and this our wet planet. [14]

But the policeman is handled with a sad understanding, missing in the treatment of the stereo-typed villain Dr X. The woman in her red-spotted kerchief evokes pity and something stronger; love, perhaps, in a way that Charles Watkins does not.

Iris Murdoch says that literature today requires a "much stronger and more complex conception of real people":

> Real people are destructive of myth, contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination. Think of the Russians, those great masters of the contingent. Too much contingency of course may turn art into journalism. But since reality is imcomplete, art must not be too much afraid of imcompleteness. Literature must always represent a battle between real people and images; and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex conception of the former. [15]

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[14] Doris Lessing, "Lions, Leaves, Roses ..." in The Story of a Non-Marrying Man and Other Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.112.

[15] Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness" in The Novel Today edited by Malcolm Bradbury (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p.31.

The vision behind "Lions, Leaves, Roses ... " is as bright and powerful as that behind Briefing for a Descent into Hell, but the revelation is made more accessible to the reader through interaction between the objective and the subjective worlds. As A.Friedman says:

> It is the narrative interaction ... between the subjective and the objective worlds that creates what we call the novel (and short story). 16

This interaction is faulty in Briefing for a Descent into Hell and accounts for the fact that parts are unintelligible and hence the reader struggles to accompany Charles on his journey.

Nevertheless, even if it is not an entirely successful novel Briefing for a Descent into Hell is an important experiment, showing Lessing's willingness to break free from traditional novelistic forms and explore the realm of fantasy.

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16 Alan Friedman, The Turn of the Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.xiv.

THE SUMMER BEFORE THE DARK (1973)

The Summer Before the Dark is about Kate Brown growing old:

> Sometimes, if you are lucky, a process or a stage, does get concentrated. It was going to turn out for Kate that that summer would be such a shortened, heightened, concentrated time.
> What was she going to experience? Nothing much more than, simply, she grew old: that successor and repetition of the act of growing up. [1]

Lessing is examining the period of change, the moment of freedom while Kate is stepping from one circle of experience into another, from one phase of life to another. She is trying to examine in slow motion the transition moments in the life of a woman whose existence is clearly too well ordered. Change as a "process" is what interests Lessing: be it the change from the Old Era to the New as in The Children of Violence, from childhood to maturity or from youth to age. Martha Quest's moments, wandering about London in transit between her old life in Africa and her new life in London correspond to Kate Brown's "in limbo" experience. Both women, suspended between the security and definition of Point A and Point B, Martha voluntarily and Kate involuntarily, find their self-definition threatened. In this pause in the flow of their lives, like the power failure that disturbs Kate's organisation in Chapter One, they have time to examine themselves, and through themselves the world around them. After significant moments in her life Martha retires to her books in an attempt to analyse, re-assess and

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[1] Doris Lessing, The Summer Before the Dark (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.9.

recreate herself. The Summer before the Dark is an entire novel about such moments of self-analysis and readjustment, a novel concentrating, not on the events in Kate's life, but on the pauses.

At the end the reader is left with the sense that nothing has really happened. Her family scattered for the summer, Kate is offered a job with Global Food. Promoted from translator to public relations officer she becomes once more the mother figure. She leaves for Spain with a much younger man, who is trying to escape definition. He, like Kate, is in transit. Neither young nor old, he belongs nowhere. He gets sick. She gets sick. Back in London she recuperates in a hotel, then moves into a flat with another "in limbo" figure. Maureen is, similarly, trying to escape the respectable life that is her inevitable future. She is a younger Kate, and when she succumbs to social pressures there is no hope for Kate who returns home to her old pattern of life. End of story. The fragmentary nature of the outer action relates to the theme, highlighting the triviality of day to day living. If the inner action were as meaningful as it claims to be, Kate's wanderings would not be irritating but understandable in their inconsistency. But, because "the seal dream" lacks resonance, one looks for a compensating story.

The seal series is a quest which is similar to Watkins's journey in Briefing for a Descent into Hell. Both are journeys through fragmentation to integration. Here, as in Briefing for a Descent into Hell, Lessing is attempting evocation through archetypal imagery, appealing to the reader

through the language of fairy tales. She wishes to bring him to a vision of integration by drawing him into the realm of collective unconsciousness. Unfortunately, her symbolism is not powerful enough to reach and react in the reader's mind, so that Kate achieves her vision of integration and the reader realises she has reached a resolution, but cannot share in the moment of illumination.

The Summer before the Dark can also be compared with "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" which is about a man growing old:

> During that night he could feel his face falling into the lines and folds of his father's face - at the time, that is, when his father had been an elderly, rather than an old, man. His father's old man's face had been open and sweet, but before achieving that goodness - like the inn at the end of a road which you have no alternative but to use? - he had had the face of a Roman, heavy-lidded, sceptical, obdurate, facing into the dark: the man whose pride and strength has to come from a conscious ability to suffer, in silence, the journey into negation. [2]

Jack's ordered life is interrupted by the death of his father. The power cut in Kate's life corresponds to this metaphor in Jack Orkney's:

> ... they were in a position not allowed for by their habits of living. Jack had a vision of rapidly running trains - their lives; but they had had to stop the trains, had had to pull the emergency cords, and at great inconvenience to everyone, because of this ill-timed death. [3]

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[2] Doris Lessing, "The Temptation of Jack Orkney", The Story of a Non-Marrying Man and Other Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.280.

[3] Ibid., p.221.

For both Kate and Jack the "habits of living" are interrupted and the structures they accepted as permanent are revealed as temporary and false. In "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" as in "A Sunrise on the Veld" life is brought suddenly and dramatically into perspective by death. The Summer before the Dark lacks this perspective. It attempts to show the impermanence of the Kate-Jack way of life by illustrating the futility of Kate's attempts to keep her household together. Kate Brown like Martha and Anna is an integrator, and tries to co-ordinate the household's various activities as does Martha in Mark's home. Her partial success is momentary and the various members of the household disperse to different parts of the world for a variety of reasons. Just as Martha sees her house demolished and the family scattered, so Kate is at a crisis point in her life when she realises that her house is let, about to be sold, and her family unit is dissolving. Her family is destroyed because it never was a unit but, like Anna's diaries, false form. The crumbling process is repeated on a larger scale at Global Foods. Representatives of all countries come together for a brief moment then part, so that one is left with a simultaneous sense of the similarities that bring them together and the differences that make parting inevitable. Kate's structure of harmony and universal goodwill collapses and the failure points to the fragmentation of the world in general. Like Anna's diaries, Global Foods is a microcosm of the world and a macrocosm of Kate. But, unlike Anna's diaries which are an attempt to come to terms with the world in its complexity, Global Foods evokes only the jet-setting world of the privileged, Kate's world and Geoffrey's and Maureen's. While "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" describes

the impermanence of life, The Summer before the Dark stretches no further than a way of life. Kate's old way of life is juxtaposed with her new way; her ordered household with her now muddled existence. In essence, order is juxtaposed with chaos and man is seen as living on the "Frontiers of War". But the terror of annihilation, the fear of death, does not threaten to engulf Kate or the entire novel to the extent that it does Jack and the short story. The Summer before the Dark hovers on the frontiers of an irritating muddle, "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" on the frontiers of chaos.

Both Kate and Jack explore a dream world. But Jack's dreams with their source in the reality of death have a haunting quality that permeates the entire story, while Kate's seal series is not integrated into the novel. True, Lessing is making the point that life in the real world has become divorced from the dream world and that therein lies the disease of the twentieth-century. But in Jack Orkney she conveys this disintegration without presenting a disintegrated story. One is aware that the story's vision is wider than that of the characters; that built into the story is an underlying knowledge of another world beyond "the sceptical". [4]

"The Temptation of Jack Orkney" opens:

> His father was dying. It was a telegram, saying also: YOU UNOBTAINABLE TELEPHONE. [5]

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[4] Ibid., p.281.

[5] Ibid., p.213.

The short story starts on a note of chaos, "His father was dying". In the light of this statement the triviality of the words in the telegram is mocked and his way of life, described as it is after the announcement of death, is shown as hollow. Before Jack experiences death through his dream, the reader has already been made aware of the superficiality of his existence and has smiled wryly and with pity at his pompous air of self-importance. Death "tugs" at the "shape" of daily events and makes them "farcical":

> ... as if a parcel of well-born maniacs were conducting a private game, or ritual, and no one had yet told them they were mad. It was a farce, and not at all a high-class and sensitive comedy filled with truths about human nature. The fact was that the things happening in the world, the collapse of everything, was tugging at the shape of events in this play and those like them, and making them farcical. A joke. Like her own life. Farcical.
>
> The Summer before the Dark
>
> (p.147) (my underlining)

This powerful statement may be a statement of what The Summer before the Dark intends to convey, but it relates more to "The Temptation of Jack Orkney". The Summer before the Dark does not evoke a strong enough, bleak enough, terrifying enough sense of collapse to "tug at the shape of events" in Kate's life. The Summer before the Dark makes claims it cannot fully support. The novel claims to come to an understanding of life. Once Kate has finished her dream she can return home, complete. She rescues the "landlocked" seal and carries it overland through terrible wintry conditions until she reaches the sea. The seal seems to be a part of Kate. The big brown eyes of the seal are Kate's

brown eyes and by rescuing the seal she is rescuing a part of herself for she, like the seal, is "landlocked". Like Martha Quest she is trapped in roles and much of the novel is devoted to Kate's efforts to explore her roles:

> For she was conscious, very conscious, as alert to it as if this was the most important fact of her life, that the person who sat there watching, shunned or ignored by men who otherwise would have been attracted to her, was not in the slightest degree different from the person who could bring them all on again towards her by adjusting the picture of herself: lips, a set of facial muscles, eye movements, angle of back and shoulders.
> This is what it must feel to be an actor, an actress - how very taxing that must be, a sense of self kept burning by so many different phantasms.
>
> (p.45)

> But Mary's frown did not change. Like Iris Hatch, she glanced at the woman standing there, looked again because of the creature's eccentricity - what was a tramp doing in this respectable street? - and walked on ... Kate was thinking: they didn't know me, they see me every day of their lives, but they didn't know me. Only the dog did. (Melodramatic)
>
> (pp.141-144) (My brackets)

> She had not at first realised she was again Mrs Brown, but then she noted glances, attention: it was because she wore Maureen's properly fitting shift, in dark glossy green, because she had done her hair with the twist and the lift that went with 'piquant' features - because she was, as they say, "on the mend", and the lines of her body and face had conformed.
>
> (pp.175-176)

The three extracts illustrate the degree of repetition in the novel. Kate self-consciously conducts her little experiments and neatly proves that man responds to appearance and not reality. Throughout her experiments she seems fascinated by her own appearance. However, although the novel says reality is more important than appearance, it shows Kate Brown thoroughly intrigued with the art of dressing up, and thereby implies that role playing can be fun. "... the twist and lift that went with piquant features" may be mocking a world that concentrates on fashion, but one is not entirely sure whether such women's magazine language is a deliberate parody or not. A writer who can say, "Only the dog did", can also speak about "piquant features".

The truth behind Kate's games is that when she neglects her appearance people neglect her. In a sense they have always neglected her, the reality that is Kate Brown. But how much reality is there to Kate Brown? This is one of the questions asked in the novel and is the reason for Kate's distress. Stripped of appearance she seems hollow. When Maureen accepts her inevitable role in the "play", a farce, she carries on her arm her hair doll, symbolic of what she and Kate as human beings have been reduced to.

Kate does have one saving grace and in this she resembles Martha and Anna. Although she abuses her talent by making false forms, Kate does have the ability to make parts work together to approximate a whole. Her lubricating sense of caring, her strong sense of responsibility, characterises her relationship with the seal, and allows her to bring it to the sea.

The end of her dream claims to be, like the inner "Golden Notebook", a revelation of integration. Prior to this final instalment in her series, Kate relates stories of her life to Maureen. Like Anna she makes a journey through her memory in an attempt to come to terms with her life. Kate is particularly concerned with understanding Mary, a woman whose casual rejection of social codes makes her more a Lessing character than Kate. Kate complains that it is not what she does but her lack of concern about her behaviour that makes her so disturbing. This is Jeffrey's objection to Charles Watkins and the town's objection to Martha. This is why Julia, the brother and sister in "Each Other" and the couples in "Not a Very Nice Story" shock the reader into questioning his own values. Lessing is working with a "closed" character, with a character who disapproves of the Annas and Marthas of the world. Like Kate, Anna and Martha may not be free from social pressures, but the codes have not become an integral part of their world vision.

Kate has to accept Mary before she can break free from her limitations and have her vision of integration. But, firstly, her acceptance of Mary is not convincing; secondly, one feels that this is only the first step of a journey and should not earn her a revelation; and, thirdly, one wonders why the novel is not about Mary.

Nevertheless, the seal is returned to where it belongs, and becomes part of a whole, incorporated into the flow of the Universe:

> She saw that the snow had gone from underfoot: she was walking over spring grass, a bright thin green with soil showing dark and wet between. The grass was full of spring flowers. Ahead the ground rose sharply. She climbed it, and stood, the seal in her arms, on a small promontory, looking down into a sea that reflected a sunlight sky, blue deepening on blue. On the rocks seals lay basking ... There, on a flat rock, she let the seal slide into the water. It sank out of sight, then came up, and rested its head for the last time on the edge of the rock: its dark soft eyes looked at her, then it closed its nostrils and dived. The sea was full of seals swimming beside each other, turning over to swim on their backs, swerving and diving, playing. A seal swam past that had scars on its flanks and its back, and Kate thought that this must be her seal, whom she had carried through so many perils. But it did not look at her now. Her journey was over.
> She saw that the sun was in front of her, not behind, not far far behind, under the curve of the earth, which was where it had been for so long. She looked at it, a large, light, brilliant, buoyant, tumultuous sun that seemed to sing. She turned, knowing that she had finished the dream.
>
> (pp.227-228) (My underlining)

"The Temptation of Jack Orkney" is open-ended, pointing to further experiences beyond the scope of the story. The Summer before the Dark "claims" to have captured the reality, brought the dream to a close, and the smug announcement "she had finished her dream" is so un-Lessing that one suspects a joke. By using words such as "end" and "finish" she is limiting, defining, and thereby negating the experience. She is committing the very crime that in her other novels she attacks so vehemently: using language for the purpose of containing. This is why the vision sounds false: she is talking about freedom but in imprisoning words.

Kate has her dream which seems to spell hope not only for her, but for a doomed world:

> "Do you think dreams are just for the person who dreams them? Perhaps they aren't?"
>
> (p.228)

Another disturbing fact about this novel is that Kate is not a truth seeker of the same calibre as Anna and Martha and judging by their standards does not deserve her reward. Kate stumbles upon reality; she does not seek it:

> But Kate Brown was going to get the <u>whole thing over with</u> (Is this all the experience is? Something to be got over with?) in a few months. Because - while everything seemed so personal, and aimed at her, her patience, her good humour, her time - in fact it would be pressures from the other, the public, sphere, pressing on her small life, that would give what she experienced its urgency? However that might be, the <u>summer's events</u> (Events are limited so neatly to a summer) <u>were not going to be shaped through any virtues or capacities of her own</u>.
>
> (p.10) (My underlining and my brackets)

Kate has little option but to re-define herself in the face of her crumbling structures. She does not voluntarily explore the breakdown world in a little room like Martha; she just happens to get sick. Her sickness is symbolic of an inner disease. Just as her other structures fall, so her body disintegrates as indication of a spiritual hollowness. But Kate never analyses her illness or consciously attempts to use this physical breakdown for the purposes of recreation. Kate does not deliberately abandon a "proper" marriage as does Martha or her sophisticated counterpart, Susan in

"To Room Nineteen", a short story in the collection A Man and Two Women. The proper marriage abandons her. Kate does not actively strive to co-ordinate, create and organise. She is just fortunate enough to ooze, unconsciously, a quality that connects. While Martha and Anna are screaming "No" from beginning to end of their novels, Kate says "No" twice. She refuses to return home when Tim comes earlier and stays instead with Maureen, and she refuses to dye her hair. Certainly, this is an important step for Kate:

> She had lived among words, and people bred to use and be used by words. But now that it was important to her, a matter of self-preservation, that she should be able to make a statement, that she should be understood, then she would, and would not, do certain things to her hair: ...
> The clothes, hair-style, manners, posture, voice of Mrs Brown (or of Jolie Madame, as the trade put it), had been a reproduction the slightest deviation from which had caused her as much discomfort as the scientist's rat feels when the appropriate levers are pushed. But now she was saying 'no: no, no, no, No - a statement which would be concentrated into hair.
>
> (pp.230-231) (My underlining)

Certainly, the hair colour is an outward sign of an inner change. But one cannot help feeling that it is a petty gesture; a touch of bathos that Kate's vision of integration should result in her not dyeing her hair. If one compares Kate's responses with Susan's, her reactions seem even more ludicrous. When she realises the hollowness of her world, Susan commits suicide.

"To Room Nineteen" is another short story that can be compared with The Summer before the Dark:

> This is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: [6]

Kate's marriage, like Susan's, is grounded in intelligence. If one views their lives in rational terms, neither woman could want for more. But there is something missing that cannot be accounted for in rational terms: their individuality. Susan and Kate are both cast into the mould of the same type of woman. They are both clichès in "Madame Jolie" fashions. To escape this imprisonment Susan hires a room in a seedy hotel, not the type of room for a woman of her class. She does nothing but sit and be conscious of nothingness. In order to find her true self she has to sink into anonymity:

> What did she do in the room? Why, nothing at all. From the chair, when it had rested her, she went to the window, stretching her arms, smiling, treasuring her anonymity, to look out. [7]

But her imposed identity tracks her to the room in the form of a detective, and her husband attempts to understand her actions and bring them into the accepted code of behaviour through rationalisation. Susan is cornered and, not having access to a dream world, selects suicide as the only method of escape. The final image is that of integration through death, of a fluidity that contrasts with Susan's

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[6] Doris Lessing, "To Room Nineteen" in A Man and Two Women (St. Albans: Panther, 1965), p.253.

[7] Ibid., p.278.

compartmentalised life: "... as she drifted off into the dark river". [8] As in "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" the story is thrown into relief against a backdrop of death, and the limitations of rationality are mocked when order is seen in perspective against chaos. Susan does not have the ability to recreate herself; neither does Kate. And while Susan's suicide is consistent with her character, Kate's re-creation and re-definition are not.

Even the bizarre Maureen has more potential to break free from definition than Kate. Maureen's constant change of clothes is an attempt to reflect her real feelings in her appearance, to integrate appearance and reality. If Maureen is feeling rebellious she indicates this in a bizarre outfit. Ignoring the rules of what matches and what does not by juxtaposing any number of peculiar items, she is like Anna in her diaries, attempting to create a new form which reflects the chaos of reality. Maureen is unconscious of people's reactions to her appearance, while Kate is absorbed in the matter. Kate dresses for response, to please others; Maureen to please herself.

Maureen represents youth. When she capitulates, the world seems doomed to repetition:

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[8] Ibid., p.288.

> This endless cycle, of young people able to come to maturity only in making themselves into a caste which had to despise and dismiss their parents, insisting pointlessly on making their own discoveries - ... Every middle-aged person (exactly as his or her parents had done) swallowed the disappointment of looking at all the intelligence and bravery of their children being absorbed in - repetition, which would end, inevitably in them turning into the Old Guard. [9]

Maureen is like Jack's son. But in "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" the repetition is more powerfully evoked by focusing on the three generations: Jack's father; Jack, who is growing old and becoming like his father; Jack's son, who resembles Jack as he was.

The novel ends on the same peculiar note of hope and hopelessness that ends most of the other novels and "The Temptation of Jack Orkney". Repetition is inevitable, but Kate's and Jack's dreams suggest that escape can be made through exploring the irrational world.

Kate becomes old, not in terms of years or grey hairs but, like Jack, and Julia in "Winter in July", in terms of growth of understanding. The Summer before the Dark is a cliché title, deliberately ironic. To the world which sees only Kate's grey hair she is now entering the darkness of age. But Kate has entered the light of knowledge. She knows that the sun is ahead of her and not behind: "She

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[9] Doris Lessing, "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" in The Story of a Non-Marrying Man and Other Stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.250.

looked at it, a large, light, brilliant, buoyant, tumultuous sun that seemed to sing" (p.228). Appearance and reality are purposely opposed. If one takes the dream to be the reality, Kate is moving through winter conditions towards summer; but the title, the appearance, indicates that she is moving through summer to winter. External and internal action are in conflict.

The mockery, evident in the choice of the title, makes one wonder how much of this novel is, like "Free Women", a parody of conventional novel forms. To regard it as a complex joke, an exercise in pastiche, would be a relief to a reader. Accustomed as he is to the depth and breadth of vision in Lessing's other works, he is shocked by the superficial treatment of Lessing's barely recognisable themes. She may be making a statement about a life that has no substance but, unfortunately, The Summer before the Dark is one of her least successful books, because it approximates the hollowness it describes.

THE MEMOIRS OF A SURVIVOR (1974)

The Memoirs of a Survivor is, as Lessing claims, an "attempt at autobiography". [1] This assertion suggests a new approach to autobiography for The Memoirs of a Survivor is, of all her novels, the one which seems the most fantastic. While Lessing denies that the naturalistically inclined Children of Violence series is autobiographical, [2] she challenges the reader to accept a combination of science fiction and fairy-tale as the most faithful to reality. She is daring the reader to accept a fictive experience as "non-fiction". Her re-definition of "autobiography" pivots around her re-definition of reality. If reality is subjectively experienced, an autobiography can well be a fairy-tale:

Once upon a time a little girl and a dog-cat called Hugo stepped out of the looking-glass, or the wall, into the world. And then Emily, the little princess, and the now handsome Hugo and Gerald, her prince, and all the children, restored to purity, walked through the wall and lived happily ever after. The fairy-tale ribbon of fantasy is the unique quality surrounding this novel. Like fairy-tale princesses, Emily just appears, an abandoned child cloaked in an air of mystery, but while she mingles with reality Hugo is the constant reminder of the fairy-tale sphere, Beast to her Beauty:

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[1] Doris Lessing, preface to The Memoirs of a Survivor (London: Picador edition, 1976)

[2] From A Library of Literary Criticism, Modern Commonwealth Literature, ed. Ferres Tucker (New York: Ungar, 1977), p.56.

> The girl was entirely wrapped in furs, so it was hard to tell where her own glossy hair began and ended, and the poor beast, with his rough and yellow hide - Beauty and her Beast, in this guise, but Beauty was so close to her Beast now, wrapped in beast's clothing, as sharp and wary as a beast, surviving as one. Yes, Beauty had been brought down, brought very low ...
>
> (p.173)

Emily's consideration for Hugo and his devotion to her prevents her total immersion in the outside world. Much as she longs to migrate she remains with her beast. Hugo prevents Emily from becoming typical, and the threat to roast Hugo is more than just cruelty to a beloved animal. If Hugo is killed, the fairy-tale world is destroyed by the real; without Hugo, Emily cannot re-enter the looking-glass. In a sense, Hugo is a part of Emily just as the seal was a part of Kate, the side to her nature which must be rescued to enable her to attain access to a new paradise.

The hint of fairy-tale, the traditional world of children, contrasts vividly with the harsh realism of the world, the modern world of children, and intensifies Lessing's criticism of society. Although filtered through an adult mind, the novel focuses almost entirely on children. Lessing is juxtaposing two attitudes towards children: that children are innocent until corrupted by the adult world, an attitude implied in the strand of fairy-tale, and that children are bestial, needing to be tamed, which is suggested by the four-year-old murderer. When stripped of the trappings of civilisation one is left with pure man or beast, perhaps even a touch of purity in the beast. The Babes in the Wood

attitude towards children is juxtaposed with that expressed in William Golding's novel, The Lord of the Flies. The notion of children as pure is juxtaposed with children as inheritors of original sin. And, as is usual with Lessing, the truth is a balance of innocence and experience. The adult stands back, assuming a role similar to that of grown-up watching children play games. She, the narrator, is the outsider excluded from the children's world, the observer occasionally providing refreshment between games. But in this novel the game is for real. Lessing, like Pinter in his play The Birthday Party, is ripping the mask off the game and presenting the illusion as reality. Emily and Gerald are not just playing at house; the murdering kids are not just pretending with their bows and arrows; "bang, bang you're dead" no longer belongs to games of cowboys and Indians. The "I'm the king of the castle" chant has a peculiar menace because of the discrepancy between its normal harmless associations and the present harsh reality. There is this continual reminder of what children ought to be, contrasting with what they have become. Or, perhaps, Lessing is saying that they have always been like this. The circumstances have not changed the children, merely torn down the illusion and exposed bestiality.

The question persists: Why children? Lessing is making her usual statement about the world falling apart, revealing the reality behind the illusion. The game motif provides a new and exciting vehicle for the old message; while the yoking of children, normally regarded as innocent, with experience is an explosive juxtapositioning of opposites with extraordinary emotive force. Murder is more terrifying when committed by a cute freckle-faced "Denis the Menace".

Lessing is puncturing illusions. Children are supposed to love pets; yet these wish to roast Hugo. Most of Lessing's children display a tendency towards sadistic action. Paul in The Four-Gated City takes a malicious delight in tormenting Martha. Caroline is attracted by death in A Proper Marriage and enjoys flouting her youth and health before a dying grandfather. But, on the other hand, in The Four-Gated City children are seen as Saviours of the world. Stripped of the veneer of civilisation they begin to respond to healing forces. The world hopes that each new generation will release it from the circle of inevitability. In The Memoirs of a Survivor the bestiality of the children is an indication that there is no hope for the human race, because those who should save are busy destroying.

In this topsy-turvy world people approximate animals and animals people:

> The yellow beast, melancholy, his sorrow swallowed - I swear this was so, though he was no more than animal - in the determination to be stoic, not to show his wounds, sat quietly either at the window ...
> Perhaps the only emotion not known to a cat or a dog is - romantic love. And even then, we have to wonder. What is the emotional devotion of a dog for his master or mistress but something like that sort of love, all pining and yearning and "give me, give". What was Hugo's love for Emily but that? ...
> I think that all this time, human beings have been watched by creatures whose perceptions and understanding have been so far in advance of anything we have been able to accept, because of our vanity, that we would be appalled if we were able to know, would be humiliated.
>
> (pp.74-75)

Hugo displays emotions man thinks that he alone possesses: love, devotion, loyalty, responsibility. His love overpowers his instinct for survival:

> Hugo was vividly there, illuminated by a flare from the late sunset, and by the candles. She was shocked, knowing at once why he should have chosen to disobey the instincts of self-protection ... He licked her hand at last and laid himself patiently down, saying to her by the way he did this: It is to please you. I don't care to live if you don't care for me.
>
> (pp.148-149)

Hugo's attitude contrasts with a humanity driven by instincts and the survival law of the jungle. The title The Memoirs of a Survivor focuses on the basic need of all living things, to ensure survival. Stripped to the essentials, man is seen as an animal. People do not hear of the disaster but instinctively know it, reacting like animals who have sniffed the air. They form herds for protection, each herd fiercely protective of its territory. When Emily wants to join there is a rejection-acceptance ritual. These herds migrate, again reminiscent of the animal world. They leave one day, all of a sudden, like departing birds impelled by some natural force. Each herd has its leader, who protects the herd and who is fiercely proud of his position and who services the females to establish his territory:

> "... he just has to - make the rounds, I suppose. Like a cat marking his territory."
>
> (p.128)

This is the role of Gerald. Each herd is concerned with the essentials of life: food, warmth, safety, and they will kill to survive. In The Four-Gated City Martha walks down the street and sees animals instead of people. In The Summer before the Dark Kate looks into the mirror and sees a monkey. She looks around and sees in the cloakroom a variety of beasts. In The Memoirs of a Survivor Lessing continues to explore this theme, showing not only the bestial reality behind the attractive appearance, but also, in the form of Hugo, the attractive reality behind the ugly appearance.

Lessing presents a view that mankind has not yet evolved to a level higher than the beasts. Emily's exonerating quality is caring. Her devotion to Hugo, her feeling for June and her risking of her life for Gerald suggest that, while many of her reactions are instinctual, she nevertheless does not succumb to the chaos around her. She resists the temptation to migrate. Like the other Lessing heroines she is both typical of her species and special in her own right.

Emily's portrait is instantly recognisable as a character sketch of a teenager: frighteningly self-assured and yet insecure; penetratingly critical yet strangely vulnerable; impelled by sudden impulse from one phase to another; lavish in her love for Hugo and yet coldly distant in her relations to the narrator, representative of the older generation; careful and considerate with the children and yet indolent and careless at home. She is enclosed in a shell, an iron egg, so, while the narrator can hear the child crying, she cannot get beyond the wall into the right room. The narrator's quest is not only to explore beyond

the wall, but to understand Emily. They are one and the same quest. The shell and wall imagery is predominant in this novel as expression of imprisonment. The wall is a typical Lessing symbol relating back, particularly, to The Four-Gated City, in which Lynda's quest is to find a weakness in the wall. In The Memoirs of a Survivor the narrator does find that weakness: a yellow stain (p.189).

Her journeys behind the wall are often revelations of Emily's childhood, a childhood riddled with guilt and a sense of being unwanted. Again, Lessing is puncturing the illusions of fairy-tale childhoods with descriptions of reality: a boy eating excrement, a child feeling neglected by parents doting on the son. The overwhelming sense evoked by these moments is that of isolation and the claustrophobia of isolation; of being shut in on oneself, the same feeling dominant in Lessing's other works. Emily is not unique in her prison. Looking for the crying child, the narrator finds the mother. Even at an older age the mother is glimpsed as alone, not communicating with her husband. He, in his turn, is frustrated by the sterility of their relationship. Not just the child but the entire family is imprisoned in a shell. Only through communication, Lessing believes, can a person be freed from the confines of self. And her ideal of communication is not just being a part of a group. Despite her membership in the herd Emily is locked inside herself, an observation relevant to today's society. Once more Lessing is attempting to fuse two opposing views on the nature of man: man as indistinguishable from his social and

historical environment and man as "by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings". [3] Kate, for example, in The Summer before the Dark is popular, one of the crowd, and yet she still feels the outsider. Lessing's concept of communication is the same as her vision of integration. Freedom is attained when the barriers of self break down. When the walls disintegrate, they are not just the walls of the house, but the walls which divide the narrator from Emily and the wall which divides the narrator from the world. Her bid to understand Emily is also a yearning for integration. Her quest is the same as Martha's, Anna's and Kate's.

In essence the novel conveys the same message as her previous works. The fact that she is setting it in the future does not blind the reader to its relevance to the present. The irony of this novel is that while one regards these future predictions from what one regards as the safety of the present, one begins to realise that the future bears a disturbing resemblance to the present. Lessing is not so much presenting a warning of what is going to happen as an expression of what is happening. Her realistic approach, apart from the occasional bizarre touch, anchors the novel in the present. The future provides her with an extreme situation where she can dramatically strip the world of the facade of civilisation, and examine the harsh reality. But this reality exists today and she is inviting the reader to

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[3] Georg Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London: Merlin, 1963), p.50.

recognise "it" (p.9). Her choice of "it" is in accordance with her belief in not categorising. She cannot limit the chaos to a neat term without distortion. It is important that this reality is not defined.

The main characters attempt to ward off the chaos by trying, in vain, to create order. The narrator keeps her little flat clean and neat, and organises her life with Emily. Emily is also an organiser, attempting to create a home for the children based on the family structure. Just as Kate's home disintegrates, so Emily's collapses. The younger children are included and disrupt the order. The novel narrows down to the narrator's flat, threatened by the chaos around. At the moment when this form threatens to be ineffectual, they walk through the wall into another world and the novel concludes with a vision of integration.

Prior to this climactic breakthrough, the narrator has made brief excursions in the other world. There are two strands of action in the novel: action in the disintegrating outer world, which is finally concentrated on the block of flats in which the narrator lives, and the narrator's exploration behind the wall. This pattern resembles The Summer before the Dark in which Kate's seal dream runs parallel to her external experiences.

The narrator discovers sets of rooms behind the walls. The significance of rooms in Lessing's works has been shown with particular reference to The Four-Gated City. The rooms in Mark's house are representative of the divisions within Martha herself and of those within the world. Similarly, these rooms in The Memoirs of a Survivor reflect the chaos

both within the narrator and the world. Her own surface reality may be neat and tidy, but the rooms beyond the wall are as chaotic as the world outside. Her attempts to clean up this inner mess are indicative of man's vain efforts at ordering chaos.

The narrator's journeys through the wall can be seen as "inner-space travel". She is exploring her own consciousness. She enters rooms that are personal and describes what in the world of time would be the past. But this is a timeless world. Strangely, the personal tableaux depict, not the narrator's youth, but Emily's. This suggests that in many respects Emily is the narrator's younger self. Lessing tends to see people as overlapping. Barriers between individuals are false and if one can break down these walls, then there is nothing to divide Emily from the narrator.

The narrator is searching for the presence that lives in these rooms, the integrating presence. This could be interpreted as the narrator's search for herself as an integrated being. The moment of revelation for the narrator is the moment when she sees "her":

> ... But the one person I had been looking for all this time was there: there she was.
> No, I am not able to say clearly what she was like. She was beautiful: it is a word that will do. I only saw her for a moment, in a time like the fading of a spark on dark air - a glimpse: she turned her face just once to me, and all I can say is ... nothing at all.
>
> (p.190)

The introduction to the novel speaks about "beings not human who watch over us". But the fact that the "One" is a woman

suggests that she is the narrator herself. Not that these two interpretations differ in essence: the moment the narrator becomes integrated within herself she recognises herself as a part of the universe and part of God. The narrator describes what happens to the other characters, Emily, Gerald, Hugo, Denis, Emily's mother and father, but she says nothing of herself. She does not do; she observes. This suggests that the action is occurring within the narrator. The other characters are facets of the narrator and, when they gather together in harmony, the walls creating partitions within the narrator dissolve. The sense that this is inner-space fiction is further created by first person narration. Everything related is filtered through the consciousness of the "I" because it is occurring within the consciousness itself. One is left with a problem: Is the point of view first person peripheral or central? In one respect she is merely an observer, and yet the entire action is within her. What really happened and what is imagination cannot be easily divided. The suggestion that Emily comes from behind the walls implies that Emily is what in the normal world would be called a figment of the imagination. But for Lessing the imagination is a realm, revealing not delusion, but truth.

The narrator is a female Charles Watkins. The difference is that this novel does not have a false frame. Unlike Charles she is allowed to complete her journey, and Briefing for a Descent into Hell becomes The Memoirs of a Survivor. She has survived the hell that is the world.

Lessing is deliberately exploiting the confusing possibilities of first person narration to blur the reader's sense of a distinction between the tangible and intangible worlds. Apart from an occasional short story, this is the first time she uses "I" to frame the story. The previous avoidance of this point of view is an attempt to balance an objective and subjective approach to the world. The individual must be seen as one of many, and third person narration enables her to create this perspective. Her abandonment of this third person technique does not indicate so much a change in philosophy, or increased subjectivity, as the need to build into her form the questions asked in Briefing for a Descent into Hell. How reliable is one man's perception of the world? Because Watkins's visions do not conform, are they any less real than the tangible? How sane or insane is Watkins? The sanity-insanity dilemma is implicit in the form of The Memoirs of a Survivor. The reader is placed in the same position as the doctors in Briefing for a Descent into Hell, listening to "I" describing her voyage through the wall.

The description of the vision of integration is an attempt once more to use fragments, words, to explain the whole. Recognising the limitations of words, Lessing, or the narrator, relies on verbal breakdown, on the silences, to point to something that cannot be contained in language. Also reminiscent of Briefing for a Descent into Hell is the sense of flow created by the juxtaposing of images. One image unfolds smoothly into another and the build-up of images is accompanied by an increase in pace. The reader surges through a kaleidoscopic sphere towards the climactic moment:

> Emily took Gerald by the hand, and with Hugo walked through the screen of the forest into ... and now it is hard to say exactly what happened. We were in that place which might present us with anything - rooms furnished this way or that and spanning the tastes and customs of millennia; walls broken, falling, growing again; a house roof like a forest floor sprouting grasses and birds' nests; rooms smashed, littered, robbed; a bright green lawn under thunderous and glaring clouds and on the lawn a giant black egg of pockmarked iron, but polished and glassy, around which, and reflected in the black shine, stood Emily, Hugo, Gerald, her officer father, her large, laughing, gallant mother, and little Denis, the four-year-old criminal, clinging to Gerald's hand, clutching it and looking up into his face, smiling - there they stood, looking at this iron egg until, broken by the force of their being there, it fell apart, and out of it came ... a scene, perhaps, of people in a quiet room bending to lay matching pieces of patterned materials on a carpet that had no life in it until that moment when vitality was fed into it by these exactly answering patches: but no, I did not see that, or, if I did, not clearly ... that world, presenting itself in a thousand little flashes, a jumble of little scenes, facets of another picture, all impermanent, was folding up as we stepped into it, was parcelling itself up, was vanishing, dwindling and going - all of it, trees and streams, grasses and rooms and people. But the one person I had been looking for all this time was there: there she was.
>
> (pp.189-190) (My underlining)

"That place which might present us with anything" (p.189), an enchanting fairy-tale name, reveals the contraries of growth and destruction, innocence and experience, brought into balance. The two opposing strands in the novel, the "The Babes in the Wood" and the "The Lord of the Flies" strands, are brought together and integrated in the conclusion. The image of integration, a cross between a patchwork quilt and a magic carpet, belongs also to the realm of fairy-tales.

But the image is elusive, for Lessing does not wish to limit the vision in a concrete form. She uses words like "perhaps" and negates the scene like a true magician who waves a wand and makes it vanish. Perhaps, it never existed.

The egg image suggests rebirth. It cracks to reveal new hope for the individual and her world. A black, leaden, pockmarked egg is a symbol both of creation and destruction, reminding one of a bomb. Its cracking, "it fell apart", indicates that the world inside or outside the individual has to be destroyed before a new order can triumph.

At the final moment Emily and Hugo wait for Gerald, and Gerald for the children. Their concern and care for each other are highlighted at this climax. Loyalty, love and responsibility are seen as the integrating factors which triumph over a chaotic world. As in fairy-tales, the qualities of goodness enable the main characters to overcome evil and live happily ever after:

> And then, at the very last moment, they came, his children came running, clinging to his hands and his clothes, and they all followed quickly on after the others as the last walls dissolved.
>
> (p.190)

The novel is deliberately open-ended as the climactic moment is not the last sentence, which is the last wall, but the last pause, which is infinite.

The Memoirs of a Survivor generates excitement through the yoking of the bizarre with the mundane. A girl arrives with a dog-cat and the narrator is, like any hostess, concerned with the size of the guest room. The narrator's acceptance of

the fantastic encourages the reader to suspend disbelief. This is Lessing's challenge: to make a sceptical adult reader accept the reality of fantasy. Any writer who can produce a dog-cat called Hugo in a novel which describes the dissolution of the world in naturalistic detail; anyone who attempts to create of that dog-cat a character approaching hero status has courage and skill. Lessing's characteristic bravery is in prominence in this novel. The success of the experiment lies in the integration of theme and method. The theme is that destruction of a misleading surface reality is necessary to reveal the truth locked within the appearance. The method is to make the reader doubt his own ability to define reality; to break down the walls in the reader's neat categorising mind and leave him in a world which might present him with anything. The novel is about children and it appeals to the child in everyone. For, "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven". [4] Lessing may not limit herself to the Christian belief. The essential difference between Lessing's belief and the Christian doctrine is that her children have an instinctive knowledge of both good and evil and are, at once, savages and saints. But Lessing does suggest that children contain the potential for saving the world, and to return to the realities of existence man must resurrect the child in himself. The Memoirs of a Survivor is prompting a journey back into childhood in search of something the world has forgotten.

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[4] Matthew: 18: 3.

CONCLUSION

Whether they are about the liberation of black servants from white oppressors, women from their traditional shackles, intellectuals from the strait-jacket of reason, all Lessing's works have their source in the same vision of freedom. Freedom for Lessing means the fluid flow of all things into each other.

Her fiction is an attack on prisons, ranging from the imprisoning rules of society to an individual's self-imprisonment, to the use of words to imprison concepts. Hers is not an attack on reason, unless reason is used to hide rather than as a means for liberation. Nor is hers an attack on words, unless they are misused to contain rather than free; nor an attack on form, unless it is closed form designed to shut the novel off from chaos rather than release it into infinite possibilities. Her attitude to form is articulated by Samuel Beckett:

> What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos, and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else.... to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now. [1]

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[1] Samuel Beckett quoted by B S Johnson in "Introduction to 'Aren't you rather young to be writing your Memoirs?'" in The Novel Today, Ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), p.156.

Lessing is responding to this challenge "to find a form that accommodates the mess". She chooses to juxtapose naturalism with fantasy so that reality becomes infused with a sense of wonder and fantasy is made credible and relevant. The Memoirs of a Survivor, for example, presents a life-like portrait, a masterpiece of Emily side by side with a dog-cat. Detailed naturalistic descriptions of social collapse are combined with symbolic evocations of an inner world.

The relative failure of Briefing for a Descent into Hell in comparison with The Memoirs of a Survivor lies in the fact that the balance between outer and inner reality is not attained. The reader reaches a stage of incredulity and lack of comprehension. He may be responding on an emotional level but his reason, which is too powerful to ignore, is not satisfied. In The Memoirs of a Survivor the reader is lured by the subtle interplay of naturalism and fantasy into accepting and understanding what he previously thought impossible. Everyday life becomes enriched with visionary possibilities.

In her latest work Shikasta, which has only just been reviewed in Time and has not yet reached the Republic of South Africa, Lessing seems to be continuing in the direction of space fiction. But what is more important is that she still seems to be trying to combine a vast vision with the small details of life:

> "The lowest, the most downtrodden, the most miserable of Shikastans will watch the wind moving a plant, and smile; will plant a seed and watch it grow; will stand to watch the life of the clouds. Or lie pleasurably awake in the dark, hearing wind howl that cannot - not this time - harm him where he lies safe. This is where strength has always welled, irrepressibly, into every creature of Shikasta."
>
> This recognition is the source of Lessing's strength. As interested as she has become in grand designs or configurations of enormous powers, she does not forget the here and now. [2]

When Lessing's work does not succeed it can be because she is forgetting the "here and now". She evokes the universe but ignores "the peasant's hand" [3] in Briefing for a Descent into Hell. At the other extreme A Ripple from the Storm is so grounded in everyday details that the reader feels claustrophobic, trapped in the "here and now".

The balance is precarious and lapses are inevitable, but when she succeeds in uniting the world of form with a vision of freedom; when, in the words of Arthur Koestler, the "Tragic and Trivial Planes meet", her work is great:

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[2] Paul Gray, Time (October 22, 1979)

[3] Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (London: Panther, 1973), p.611.

... the miracle of the loaves and fishes was a true miracle.

Where the Tragic and Trivial Planes meet, the Absolute becomes humanized, drawn into the orbit of man, while the banal objects of daily experience are transfigured, surrounded by a halo as it were. The meeting may have the majesty of an incarnation where the logos becomes flesh; or the charm of Krishna's descent to dally with the shepherdesses. On a less awesome scale, the tragic and the trivial may meet in golden lads and chimney-sweeps; in the petrified boot which the Pompeian boot-mender holds in his petrified hand; in the slice of pig's kidney which Bloom fingers in his pocket during the funeral service. Laplace regarded it as the ultimate aim of science to demonstrate from a single grain of sand the "mechanics of the whole universe".

The locus in quo of human creativity is always on the line of intersection between two planes; and in the highest form of creativity between the Tragic or Absolute, and the Trivial Plane. The scientist discovers the working of eternal laws in the ephemeral grain of sand, or in the contradictions of a dead frog's leg hanging on a washing-line. The artist carves out the image of the god which he saw hidden in a piece of wood. The comedian discovers that he has known the god from a plum tree.
This interlacing of the two planes is found in all great works of art, and at the origin of all great discoveries of science. The artist and scientist are condemned - or privileged - to walk on the line of intersection as on a tightrope. At his best moments, man is "that great and true amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live, not only like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds". [4]

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[4] Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation (London: Pan, 1970), p.367.

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